Economic powers encompass the largest cultural buildings: market, culture and equality in Stockholm, Sweden (1918–2023)

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Ingrid Campo-Ruiz
School of Architecture, ABE School of Architecture and the Built Environment, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden

Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this research is to understand the relationship between cultural buildings, economic powers and social justice and equality in architecture and how this relationship has evolved over the last hundred years. This research seeks to identify architectural and urban elements that enhance social justice and equality to inform architectural and urban designs and public policies.

Design/methodology/approach – The author explores the relationship between case studies of museums, cultural centers and libraries, and economic powers between 1920 and 2020 in Stockholm, Sweden. The author conducts a historical analysis and combines it with statistical and geographically referenced information in a Geographic Information System, archival data and in situ observations of selected buildings in the city. The author leverages the median income of household data from Statistics Sweden, with the geographical location of main public buildings and the headquarters of main companies operating in Sweden.

Findings – This analysis presents a gradual commercialization of cultural buildings in terms of location, inner layout and management, and the parallel filtering and transforming of the role of users. The author assesses how these cultural buildings gradually conformed to a system in the city and engaged with the market from a more local and national level to global networks. Findings show a cluster of large public buildings in the center of Stockholm, the largest global companies' headquarters and high-income median households. Results show that large shares of the low-income population now live far away from these buildings and the increasing commercialization of cultural space and inequalities.

Originality/value – This research provides a novel image of urban inequalities in Stockholm focusing on cultural buildings and their relationship with economic powers over the last hundred years. Cultural buildings could be a tool to support equality and stronger democracy beyond their primary use. Public cultural buildings offer a compromise between generating revenue for the private sector while catering to the needs and interests of large numbers of people. Therefore, policymakers should consider emphasizing the construction of more engaging public cultural buildings in more distributed locations.

Keywords Equality, Swedish architecture, Cultural buildings, Architectural design, Public buildings, Stockholm

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to a novel understanding of social justice and equality in architecture, by addressing how cultural buildings in Stockholm interrelated with economic powers between 1920 and 2023 and how this relationship has evolved over the last hundred years.

Public buildings are an important part of urban life. Cultural spaces support interactions between people from different backgrounds (Paydar and Kamani Fard, 2021). Understanding public buildings and their relationship with socioeconomic powers is important because it can unveil inequalities in access to public assets. This understanding can be relevant for policymakers, practitioners and other researchers who aim to achieve greater social justice and equality. Describing the relationship between public buildings and key economic powers in Sweden reveals novel insights about the ability of public buildings to influence social justice and equality. At a global level, understanding public buildings within their economic context is key because governments can make decisions for the benefit of citizens as opposed to private investors, who are mostly interested in profit (Raadschelders, 2015).

Knowledge about public buildings and their relationship to economic powers has largely focused on museums. Through museums, the social elites exerted power by influencing public opinion, defining cultural taste and promoting values (Duncan, 1995). In Europe and after Second World War, governments used culture and cultural centers to promote their policies (Cupers, 2015). More recently, museums have diversified their reach to diverse audiences, competing against other cities for tourism and investment, and fostering public engagement (Lord, 2015). In fact, museums can reflect global markets rather than local interests (Shelby *et al.*, 2022). In the past 40 years, an average of a thousand new museums have been opened globally per year, and with this increase, museums have become business-oriented (Guerzoni, 2015). In this regard, art and art centers helped investors in 1980s' New York City to create new forms of revenue and to transform into a global hub for finance (Miller-Davenport, 2022). Museums can also exert social influence with other media (Oberhardt, 2001).

Despite valuable prior research, there is an insufficient understanding of an integral view of different types of cultural buildings and their relationship to economic powers and their societal impact over time. Here I explore the relationship between case studies of museums, cultural centers, libraries and economic powers between 1920 and 2023 in Stockholm. For this purpose, I conduct a historical analysis and combine it with statistical and geographically referenced information in a Geographic Information System, archival data and in situ observations of the selected buildings in the city. I leverage the median income of household data in 2020 from © Statistics Sweden, maps from © Lantmäteriet with the geographical location of the main public buildings and headquarters of main companies operating in Sweden.

Regarding the methodological approach, I address the relationship between public buildings and economic powers from two perspectives: first, in terms of their location in the city, and second, in terms of their architectural layout and its connection to commercial activities. I begin with a historical analysis of how different powers beyond public administrations have had a relevant role in the production of cultural spaces in the city, influencing this system of cultural buildings and how these powerful actors have also changed over the years. Then, I delve into how cultural buildings reflect, take part in and influence other networks of power. For that purpose, I develop a map showing the location of each building and the headquarters of the main companies operating in Sweden, and the median income of citizens in each district.

I restrict the scope of this paper to a selection of major public buildings built in the Stockholm metropolitan area between 1920 and 2023, a group of cultural hubs which has grown and included different political and economic actors in power. The cultural buildings

analyzed are public buildings, such as libraries and cultural centers, and private institutions, such as foundations and art galleries, which also contribute to a city's cultural scene. In this study, I do not analyze religious, sport, transport or healthcare buildings; public squares are also excluded.

Regarding the time frame, cultural buildings produced a fundamental shift in public space in Swedish cities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The early 1920s laid the ground for unprecedented aspirations around welfare and equality and optimistic ideas to transform society through science and technology. After the 1980s, globalization and neo-liberalization have gradually transformed the framework for action. Politicians and private individuals have responded to economic crises by including private actors in new ways.

Sweden has been an international reference in social equality and the provision of public services since the 1930s (Kent, 2008; Sejersted, 2011, p. 101). For this analysis, Stockholm has been selected because it is Sweden's largest city and provides a wealth of examples of public buildings built since the implementation of democracy in 1918. Stockholm County has 2,414,139 inhabitants (Statistics Eurostat, 2022). Around 1,256,773 people in the city work mainly in business, trade, healthcare and social services, with an unemployment rate of 6.7% at the end of 2022 (European Commission Eures, 2022). These data depict the framework in which the analyzed buildings are situated, along with the profile of many of the users: Stockholm is a large city, and many people work in services. Stockholm County is formed by a diverse, dense urban center surrounded by sparse suburban nuclei (Adolphson, 2022).

To analyze the relationship of cultural buildings with economic powers in Stockholm, I focus on the following research questions:

RQ1. What elements shaped the historical relationship between cultural buildings and key economic powers?

RQ2. In each cultural building, how do the location, inner layout and management, and the role and median income of users relate to the economic powers?

RQ3. Is there any relationship among the different case studies?

RQ4. What are the consequences of these relationships for social justice and equality, architecture and policymaking?

The way to equality 1920–1950

Until the early twentieth century, in Stockholm meeting in public buildings other than parish churches was possible after purchasing an entrance ticket or paying a membership fee. That is, anyone wishing to visit a museum, or attend the theater or opera house either had to buy a ticket or pay a membership fee of an educational or professional association.

In early twentieth-century Stockholm, the National and the Nordic Museums were public), including the National and the Nordic Museums. People could also meet in sports centers like the Centralbadet and the stadium. Other buildings, like markets, restaurants and hotels, were devoted directly to economic exchanges. Workers' unions began promoting places where workers could meet and become educated.

Early twentieth-century Swedish society was originally very segregated, with votes depending on wealth (Piketty, 2020, p. 865). In the late 1920s, the introduction of universal and equal voting rights for all marked the beginning of a world-leading democracy.

In parallel, the economy had been growing in Sweden, due to companies such as Ivar Kreuger Matches, Volvo, Scania, SAAB and Ericsson (Scott, 1988, p. 466). Sweden also exported raw materials mainly to the United Kingdom and Germany (Scott, 1988, p. 491). Injections of capital also came from the USA, including remittances amounting to 25% of Sweden's balance of payments, and grants from the Rockefeller Foundation (Scott, 1988,

p. 460). However, unemployment episodes ensued throughout the 1920s and early 1930s (Scott, 1988, p. 488).

In 1920s Stockholm, two major central streets, Sveavägen and Kungsgatan, were developed to lend a more monumental character to the northern side of the city (Hall, 2009, p. 87). This transformation included new public buildings with the support of private investments. Swedish lawyer Carl Lindhagen, Mayor of Stockholm (1903–1930), supported Georgist policies, which promoted the broader interests of a community rather than individual and private speculation (Johansson, 1991, p. 345). The city aimed to use the available space along Sveavägen to erect a library and a new school of economics (Wohlin, 2006).

Private investments supported the construction of key new public buildings in Sveavägen: the concert hall (1923–1926) designed by architect Ivar Tengbom and renowned architect Gunnar Asplund's city library (1924–1928) (Figure 1). Estate executors Walter Philipson and Ernst Davison donated funds for the new concert hall (Bergström, 2001, p. 158). Knut and Alice Wallenberg donated 1,130,000 kronor for a new city library. Knut Wallenberg was one of the sons of André Oscar Wallenberg (1816–86), a powerful politician and founder of the Stockholms Enskilda Bank, connected with the electrical, timber and iron industries in Lappland (LKAB).

In the design of the concert hall, Tengbom made references to Norrmalm, the urban area where it stands (Bergström, 2001). He oriented the hall's main entrance toward the Hötorget market square on one side, establishing a strong connection with outdoor commercial activities and backing onto the main avenue Sveavägen (Plate 1). Tengbom explained this situation as "everyday life and commerce should find a place at the foot of the 'temple'" (Powers, 1983). The concert hall is a space for knowledge because it is where people can play and listen to music, which is an important part of the culture of any given society. Hötorget market square is known historically for its temporary market stalls that generate considerable commercial activity in Stockholm and promote strong social interactions and activities.

The city library was strategically located closer to the northern edge of the city at that time, providing access to books for people living in the city center and on the northern edges. The donation for the library facilitated access to knowledge for the more vulnerable members of society, in line with the interest of public administrations (Hirdman, 2012, p. 19). The library hosts commercial spaces in the basement annex, on either side of the entrance staircase (Plate 2). The city library introduced the innovation of allowing readers to directly access books without intermediaries. This model was inspired by American libraries that Asplund had visited to prepare for this building (Bergström, 2019). The direct access to books reflects a will to democratize access to culture.

As a result, the concert hall and city library are large, monumental spaces for knowledge and have a strong connection to economic transactions. The significant role of economic transactions for these buildings reflects the importance of these activities for urban life from the perspective of the architects and the commissioning authorities.

Consolidation of equality 1930–1970s

After the 1929 crisis, economists like John Maynard Keynes influenced Nordic policies to boost employment and welfare through public expenditure (Brandal *et al.*, 2013, p. 46). The Social Democrats reached power in Sweden in 1932 and began their battle against the major economic crisis, low birth rate and unemployment.

At the turn of the twentieth century, modern museums in Sweden aspired to being monumental and organized rationally (Bergström, 2005, p. 114). Stockholm's museum of national antiquities (today Historiska Museet) (1928–43) was designed by Bengt Romare

Source(s): Påhlman, August Emanuel (1880-1947), Hanzon, Nils (1884-1966), Stockholms stadsingenjörskontor. Stockholms stadsarkiv. Stockholms stadsarkivs kartsamling NS 442, SE/SSA/0234/J4 A:23 Karta över de centrala delarna av Stockholms stad, Stockholms Stadsingenjörskontor genom A. E. Påhlman och Nils Hanzon 1930

Figure 1.
Plan of Stockholm (1930–1933). Private investments supported the construction of the concert hall designed by Ivar Tengbom (1923–1926) and Gunnar Asplund's city library (1924–1928) within an urban plan to make the avenue Sveavägen more monumental. Red star: Stockholm city library and green star: concert hall. (Red and green stars added by author)

(1902–1978) and Georg Scherman (1899–1978), in a similar style to the Vasa castle towers (Bedoire, 2015, pp. 150–151). The castles of the Vasa period represent a prosperous part of sixteenth-century Swedish history. The connection between museums and buildings from a glorious past grant these new buildings an aura of prestige and prosperity.

In the 1930s, Sweden became a global benchmark for implementing child support, maternity aid, compulsory holidays, the Institute of Health Insurance, the regulation of working hours and housing for pensioners (Sejersted, 2011, p. 101). The Riksdag established loans, national pensions and unemployment insurance for all wage earners in order to foster the birth rate. The government's main goals were to eradicate poverty (Åmark, 1999, p. 265) and to support production and exports for building a welfare society (Giertz, 2008, p. 118).

Suburban centers were created in the 1940s across the Swedish suburbs, with shops, leisure centers and public services arranged around squares (Hall, 2009, p. 99). Årsta suburban center,

Plate 1.
Architect Ivar Tengbom oriented the main entrance of the concert hall (1923-1926) toward one side of the market square, thereby establishing a strong connection with outdoor commercial activities, and backing onto the main avenue Sveavägen

Source(s): Photographer: Unknown. ARKM.1962-101-0771, Stockholms konserthus exteriör, entrésidan, torghandel, ArkDes, the Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design in Stockholm

Plate 2.
Architect Gunnar Asplund planned commercial spaces on the ground floor, on either side of the main staircase, to access the Stockholm city library (1924–1928)

Source(s): Photograph by the author

for example, was built with social facilities around a central square. However, the resulting economic hindrances in Årsta led to public meeting places such as libraries or art halls being dramatically reduced in subsequent suburban area design (Hall, 2009, p. 99).

After the Second World War, Sweden's economy thrived with the production and export of machines, cars, trucks, construction equipment, medical and telecommunications equipment, furniture and plastics. Sweden also received aid from the Marshall Plan. Industrial growth eventually required more workers, who mainly came from abroad (Scott, 1988, p. 516).

The strong mobilization of workers contributed to the transformation of Swedish society into a global egalitarian model in the late 1950s (Piketty, 2020, p. 865). Nordic countries expanded the welfare state, education, housing, social services and public industries (Brandal *et al.*, 2013, p. 63). In this context, the public administrations in Sweden supported workers, their education and welfare, and the thriving economy boosted the construction of new public buildings. Public buildings were one more tool for governments to achieve extended education, which would help to eradicate poverty and promote equality.

Two public buildings in 1950s Stockholm reflect the increased power of workers: the ABF-huset designed by Helge Zimdal (1958–61) and the Folkets hus, or "People's Home", by Sven Markelius (1951–60). Markelius had begun working for the Folkets hus already in 1933, but mass unemployment delayed plans. The Folkets hus is a center for public meetings with its theater, congress hall, restaurant, committee rooms and rental office spaces (Hultin, 1998, p. 93). The modern office-like character of the façade has less monumentality than the previously analyzed buildings, avoiding references to styles from the past and instead interconnecting with the international arena. The offices financed the project and have a privileged placement near the façade. Additionally, the larger auditorium is located at ground level connecting people, business and cultural activities.

In the 1960s, Swedish society aimed for full employment, housing and an extensive welfare system (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022). The workers' party received the solid support of educated voters (Piketty, 2020, p. 863).

The political program to facilitate access to education and culture for all members of society in the 1960s and early 1970s also crystallized with the construction of various libraries in the Stockholm suburbs, commissioned by the City of Stockholm: Vällingby bibliotek, Farsta bibliotek, Blackebergs bibliotek and Spånga-Tensta bibliotek. In parallel, the Million Homes Program (1965–1974) provided high-rise apartment buildings in Swedish city suburbs at a time of considerable housing shortage.

The 1960s saw the construction of Kulturhuset (1968-1974), a major cultural building in the center of Stockholm, which provided infrastructure for meeting and learning. Kulturhuset was the result of a competition of 1966 won by architect Peter Celsing and part of the extensive reconstruction of Stockholm city center. Kulturhuset is located on the southern side of Sergel Square, and its cultural program was an intentional counterpoint to the commercial character of the office towers north of Hötorget (Plate 3). The Department Store Åhléns had been built across the square in 1960–1964 to a design by architects Backström and Reinius, with a completely opaque façade.

By contrast, Celsing envisioned his winning entry with vast glass walls facing the square, to expose the content to anyone standing there. This building innovatively represents ideals of an open, democratic appearance.

Reformulation of equality 1970–2000s

In the 1970s, companies like Volvo, SAAB Scania, ASEA (currently ABB), Electrolux, L.M. Ericsson, SKF and Svenska Tändsticks expanded with exports and government support. Sweden became the world's largest importer of oil per capita.

Plate 3.
Kulturhuset, to the left, was built on top of an underground commercial area, facing a new urban office development and opposite one of the largest department stores in Stockholm. Kulturhuset was designed by architect Peter Celsing

Source(s): Photograph by the author

Despite major advances in the Swedish welfare state in the 1960s, the mid-1970s signaled a turning point toward liberalism in the Swedish economy. Workers became involved in company management after 1977 (Scott, 1988, p. 518), and yet they grew increasingly dissatisfied with capitalism, Western imperialism, Taylorist work organization and gender inequalities (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022). The Swedish employers federation and powerful elites leveraged on workers' dissatisfaction to propose changes toward a neoliberal economy (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022).

Further aggravation came when Sweden underwent a major recession and thousands of workers lost their jobs in the mid-1970s. To address the crisis, the new Conservative governments (1976–1982) introduced economic austerity. After 1982, the Social Democrats returned to power implementing further austerity measures, supporting neoliberalism with currency devaluation, lowering labor income and shrinking the public sector through fiscal restraint (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022).

Market deregulation in the 1980s was backed by the government and other civil society groups. Some feminist architects, environmentalists and neoliberal marketers criticized regulations because they were perceived as restrictions to individual freedoms (Mattsson, 2020, pp. 168–169). Architectural guidance for taking decisions from administrations became only optional by law (Gabrielsson, 2020, p. 81).

In the early 1990s, real estate underwent major turmoil, causing high levels of public debt and extensive unemployment. The Conservative governments addressed these challenges with further neoliberal policies (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022). Housing in central Stockholm became less affordable due to a significant 64% rise in property prices (Edvinsson *et al.*, 2021, pp. 92–94). Public authorities stopped supporting public housing initiatives, leading to scarcity of housing, an increase in property prices and a rising personal debt. New policies enabled private companies to gradually operate buildings for public use, such as schools, homes for elderly care and healthcare centers.

Despite cuts in public expenditure between the 1980s and 90s, public administrations supported the opening of important new public museums in Stockholm through open architectural competitions: the Vasa Museum and Moderna Museet.

The Vasa Museum was designed by Göran Månsson and Marianne Dahlbäck between 1986 and 1990, as a 34-m-high volume that hosts King Gustavus Adolphus' warship dating from 1,628. Authorities and civil society action groups protested against the general outlook of the museum: a complex roof and a façade with angled surfaces, located on Djurgården (Gabrielsson, 2020, p. 81). For some, the free forms of the museum rebelled against the oppressive character of the administration and its "serious" architecture (Gabrielsson, 2020, p. 81).

The original Moderna Museet had opened in 1958 in Skeppsholmen. In 1990 a competition was launched to design the new building to host Moderna Museet and Arkitekturmuseet. Architects form around the globe were invited to participate: Tadao Ando from Japan, Frank Gehry from the USA, Kristian Gullichsen from Finland, Rafael Moneo from Spain and Jørn Utzon from Denmark (Ingemark Milos, 2010, p. 133). Moneo's winning design kept the existing building for the Arkitekturmuseet and added a new building based on the topography of the island in the form of interconnected galleries.

Into a new century 2000–2020s

Between 1994 and 2006, many privatizations took place in welfare systems across Europe, increasing social inequalities under the guise of stimulating economies (van Ham *et al.*, 2016, p. 377). The Swedish social democratic governments consolidated the neoliberal transformations, reducing public expenditure, privatizing welfare services, and lowering taxes for companies, inheritance and properties (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022).

Sweden has inspired social equality worldwide (Kent, 2008) and stands as a world-class reference for equality standards in many international listings However, Swedish cities are experiencing rapidly rising levels of spatial and socioeconomic segregation (van Ham *et al.*, 2016, p. 377). In particular, Stockholm shows significant poverty segregation with high levels of polarization compared to other capital cities in Europe (Haandrikman *et al.*, 2023; Musterd *et al.*, 2017).

Neighborhood segregation is connected to the location of cultural buildings in the city. The so-called vulnerable areas in the Stockholm suburbs concentrate households with lower incomes, higher unemployment, a higher number of inhabitants of non-European origin (Andersson and Bråmå, 2018) and lower education levels (Granvik Saminathen *et al.*, 2019), with little chances of finding a job (Patias *et al.*, 2023) in Sweden's post-industrial economy, which requires highly skilled and educated workers (Hedin *et al.*, 2012).

Access to housing in certain neighborhoods depends largely on income (Musterd *et al.*, 2017). The rich flee vulnerable neighborhoods, intensifying the socioeconomic contrasts between districts (Andersson and Bråmå, 2018). Citizens also usually remain in their districts even when public transport improves, for reasons such as familiarity with an area (Adolphson, 2022).

Furthermore, urban segregation reflects the growing political polarization across Europe. Reasons include neoliberal policies, which produced discontented voters, the perception of immigrants as a threat to employment and national security, and the perception of lack of control of national borders (Sandrin, 2021).

The nationalist party Sweden Democrats attained more votes than ever before in the 2022 elections, a 20.6% share, with their critical discourse about immigration and crime (The Economist, 2022). In parallel, a narrative across different newspapers in Sweden has oversimplified phenomena relating immigrants to bringing patriarchal "un-Swedish values" and becoming a threat to the Swedish gender equality and welfare model (Norocel *et al.*, 2020, pp. 101–103). Areas with high unemployment rates register increased crime and riots (Musterd *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, previous and current governments in Sweden have reduced the previously welcoming immigration policies.

I will discuss here how the location and quality of cultural buildings are also connected to urban segregation. In Stockholm, the city center has the highest concentration of exhibition halls and households with a higher median income. I have devised a map (Figure 2) combining geolocated data from Lantmäteriet (©Lantmäteriet, 2019) and © Statistics Sweden SCB about the median income of households in Stockholm in 2022 (©Statistics Sweden SCB, 2020), and the location of the landmark museums, cultural centers and libraries built between 1920 and 2023 (represented with stars). This map shows that higher-income households agglomerate around the central areas of Stockholm, whereas poorer households are in the suburbs. In parallel, large libraries, museums and cultural centers built in Stockholm between 1920 and 2023 are in the high-income neighborhoods of central Stockholm.

Private institutions of rich entrepreneurs have built and opened many of these new exhibition spaces and museums in the city center, such as the Nobel Prize Museum, Bonniers Konsthall, Fotografiska Museum, ABBA Museum and Sven Harrys Konstmuseum. These private institutions have transformed the system of cultural buildings in Stockholm by strengthening the cultural offer of central and wealthier districts of the city.

The entrance fee to these private institutions is expensive. These fees therefore filter access to these places. Additionally, these cultural centers curate the cultural services and products they offer and have an impact on the content of "culture" that is offered to higher-

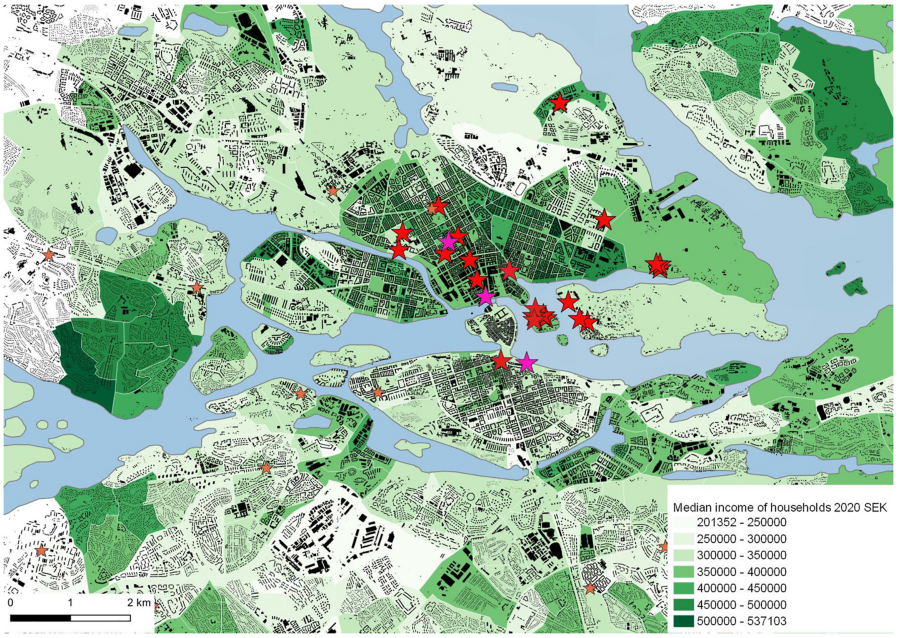

Figure 2.
Map of Stockholm, showing how areas with a population of median higher income live near large cultural buildings: large red stars indicate the location of a newly constructed cultural building and large pink stars indicate old buildings transformed into large cultural buildings. Smaller stars indicate suburban cultural buildings

Source(s): Map 1:40 000 with vector data on the property map, the overview map, and place names (fastighetskartan, översiktskartan, ortnamn) from © Lantmäteriet. Source of median income of households in 2020 © Statistics Sweden. Source of location of cultural buildings: author Map 1:40 000 with vector data on the property map, the overview map, and place names (fastighetskartan, översiktskartan, ortnamn) from © Lantmäteriet. Source of median income of households in 2020 © Statistics Sweden. Source of location of cultural buildings: author

income citizens. The addition of private institutions to the system of cultural building results in a section of the cultural offer only being available to wealthier citizens.

Opened with funding by the Nobel Foundation, the Nobel Prize Museum (2001) is located in the historical building of the Stock Exchange in Stockholm Gamla Stan. The Bonniers Konsthall (2006) is an art gallery designed by Johan Celsing in the central district of Kungsholmen. This space for contemporary art and exhibitions was funded by the Bonnier family as an annex to the Bonnier headquarters, one of the largest media companies in the Nordic region (Plate 4). The Fotografiska Museum (2010) is housed in a historic building in the Södermalm district, in central Stockholm. The ABBA Museum (2013) was built with support from the ABBA The Museum AB, a company founded by several members of the ABBA pop group. Designed by Gert Wingårdh in Vasastaden, Stockholm, the Sven Harrys Konstmuseum (2011) is privately funded by the Swedish art collector and entrepreneur Sven Harrys (Plate 5).

Therefore, current private philanthropes in Stockholm have mainly sponsored exhibition halls, in contrast to the 1920s when philanthropes sponsored the Stadsbibliotek and the Konserthus. Nowadays, private exhibition halls have a strong commercial component, where shops and restaurants enjoy a prominent location inside the building, to secure a constant source of revenue.

By contrast, public administrations have supported cultural buildings in the suburbs, such as Rinkeby-Kista bibliotek and Hägersten, which lack an evident commercial focus, but which also host cultural events and exhibitions (Plate 6). These centers are part of various policies aimed at reducing segregation in vulnerable areas through enhanced education, employment opportunities and healthcare services in these areas.

Additionally, this system of cultural buildings is strongly interrelated with the location of the headquarters of the main companies in Stockholm. In Figure 3, yellow squares illustrate the location of leading companies' headquarters, most of them concentrated around the high-income central districts. This shows the geographical concentration of wealth and power in the center of Stockholm and its proximity to larger or private cultural buildings. Previous

Source(s): Photograph by the author

Plate 4.
Bonnier Art Gallery occupies the basement of a new office building extension to Bonniers' offices in Stockholm, with the entrance to the art gallery through the shop. Bonnier Art Gallery was designed by architect Johan Celsing

Plate 5.
The entrance to the Sven Harry Art Gallery is organized through a central corridor, with the restaurant on the left and the shop to the right; access to the art gallery is through the shop. Sven Harry Art Gallery was designed by architect Gert Wingårdh

Source(s): Photograph by the author

Plate 6.
Hägersten Cultural Center in the southern suburbs of Stockholm. A café is located to the side of the ground floor entrance. Inside the building, there are no other spaces with evident commercial activities, such as shops

Note(s): A café is located to the side of the ground floor entrance. Inside the building, there are no other spaces with evident commercial activities, such as shops

Source(s): Photograph by the author

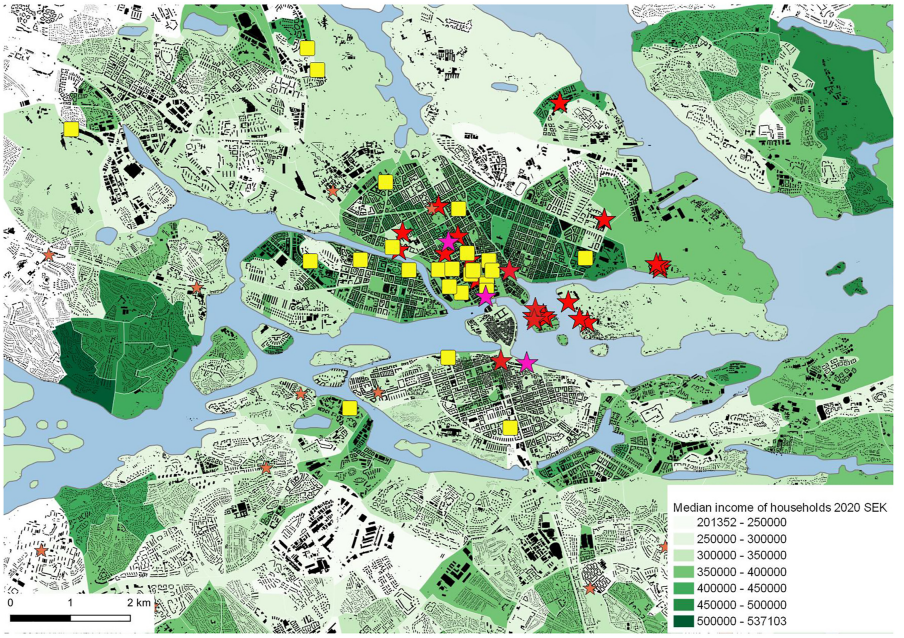

Figure 3.
Map of Stockholm, showing how the headquarters of the largest companies operating in Sweden (yellow squares indicate their location) are in approximately the same areas as districts with median higher income population households and the largest cultural buildings in the city (large red and pink stars indicate location of large cultural buildings)

Source(s): Map 1:40000 with vector data on the property map, the overview map, and place names (fastighetskartan, översiktskartan, ortnamn) from © Lantmäteriet. Source of median income of households in 2020 © Statistics Sweden. Source of location of museums and companies headquarters: author

studies have shown how proximity to landmark museums revitalizes a neighborhood. However, if these museums are in already prosperous areas, it makes them even more exclusive (Patterson, 2022). In this regard, the development of many cities has been driven by entrepreneurial elites, aiming to make a profit (Logan and Molotch, 2007).

This concentration of wealth is consistent with data about economic inequalities in Sweden and revolves around global corporations and 15 financial family dynasties, managing companies worth an equivalent of 112% of the Swedish gross domestic product (GDP) (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022). The scale of this power system transcends national boundaries, because these companies operate in the Northern Europe or globally (Region Stockholm, n.d.).

An international comparison of wealth inequality ranked Sweden as the eighth most unequal country in 2020 (Grimm *et al.*, 2020, p. 49). While in 1980, the best-paid CEOs earned equal to nine industry wage earners, in 2019, CEO earnings equaled up to 60 wage earners (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022, p. 14). The wealth of Swedish kronor billionaires in Sweden amounted to 47% of the GDP in 2017 (Skyrman *et al.*, 2022).

Cultural buildings change how people interact with each other, providing new frameworks for interaction. People from different locations and socioeconomic backgrounds can meet and discuss ideas at cultural centers. Especially today, when society is increasingly individualized and polarized into groups of interests, cultural centers still work as unique hubs to host those with different interests.

Cultural buildings, such as libraries, cultural centers and concert halls, reflect societal changes and are also active agents that affect lives socially and economically. Cultural buildings should be understood as a system of institutions that coexist with each other, each

catering to different groups of interests and agendas and without unified management. Cultural buildings form a system that is gaining different qualities over time. This system serves as a framework to curate culture, education and social interactions, where powerful actors have a decisive role in choosing their contents and activities. Furthermore, the system is part of other networks of power, such as financial real estate operations and the control of urban space by global companies.

This system affects neighborhoods and entire cities, transforming the framework of social interactions, and has a social, political, and economic role beyond the buildings' educational or artistic purposes. Cultural centers are designed, curated and led not only by architects, curators and public administrations but also by market and financial operations which influence how and what content is presented.

Conclusions

Stockholm City has become a structure where socioeconomic and cultural power is increasingly concentrated in the center and surrounding suburban satellites. The system of cultural buildings is closely interrelated with this distribution of power in the city.

Legally, "The Right of Public Access", or Allemansrätten in Swedish, gives the right to freely roam across all natural spaces in Sweden. New public libraries and cultural centers were built and often understood as a right for people, granting free access to knowledge and culture. However, some cultural buildings might require an entrance fee, and yet others have restricted areas for security reasons. In practice, access to cultural buildings is also limited by long traveling times. People living in the suburbs would spend at least half an hour on public transport to access these buildings. Therefore, access is easier for residents of Stockholm city center, who have a higher median income, to take advantage of large cultural buildings in the center. Additionally, entry fees also limit access of those with lower purchasing power. All these restraints create a basis for inequalities.

The main cultural buildings in the city center have been absorbed by neighborhoods with higher-income households and global companies' headquarters. The causes of these interrelations merit further research.

The relationship between cultural buildings in Stockholm and economic powers has evolved in the last hundred years. I propose that this transformation has produced a set of effects:

First effect, the rise in privately managed cultural and exhibition spaces since the 2000s. Public administrations have gradually limited the provision of new public buildings for meetings, and the dissemination and discussion of ideas. Instead, privately managed spaces for more commercial aims have flourished in recent decades.

Between the 1920s and the 1990s, authorities and private investors sponsored buildings as infrastructures for the dissemination of knowledge and culture, supplementing other places of knowledge transfer such as schools and universities. In the 1920s, key public buildings originated from private donations. Later, between the 1950 and 1980s, public administrations sponsored the construction of new buildings in central and suburban Stockholm, which provided extensive space for the organized, curated and institutionalized dissemination of knowledge in history and arts, and which also functioned as social hubs, offering formal and informal meeting spaces.

By contrast, since the 2000s, private investors have entered the scene, extending the offer of public space and changing the dynamics of these spaces, endowing them with a commercial character. Private institutions sponsored by rich entrepreneurs have been founding multiple exhibition spaces and museums in Stockholm. The rise in private management has led to the increasing commercialization of cultural space for public use, including entrance tickets to shops and restaurants.

Second effect, the commercial spaces have gradually moved inside cultural buildings and are in a leading position within their layout. Analysis of all the case studies reveals that commercial activity has always been an essential aspect in the organization of cultural buildings. However, the way in which commercial activities have been envisioned has transformed dramatically. Between the 1920 and 1960s, commercial activities were planned outdoors or outside the main buildings. However, after the 1990s, shops and restaurants were embedded within buildings. After the 2000s, shops became the entrance to buildings and restaurants inside duplicated in number. The survival of these public buildings strongly depends on the profit-making ability of these commercial spaces. The curation of art and the transfer of knowledge to society have transformed over time from depending on public authorities to depending on market forces. Accordingly, the impact of the value of culture, art and knowledge is increasingly dependent on short-term, quantifiable economic terms and benefits.

Third effect, these cultural centers have become part of large global networks of real estate operations. Between the 1920 and 1940s, new public buildings were built as part of new urban operations to raise the real estate value of avenues in Stockholm. Between the 1950 and 80s, the real estate market stagnated because the government increased the offer of public housing. However, after the deregulation of the market in the 1980s, real estate value in the city center rose dramatically in relation to income. Existing libraries and cultural centers in the city center have also been absorbed into areas of high-income households and global companies' headquarters. Therefore, the cultural buildings analyzed serve as amenities to enhance the real estate value of the areas around them, beyond their initially envisaged primary functions. This phenomenon is not so evident around suburban cultural centers.

Fourth effect, the filtering of users through commercial activity. This research reveals that access to the public buildings analyzed in central Stockholm is filtered by two mechanisms: first, with an entrance fee, and second, with the distance from homes to these buildings. Regarding entrance fees, buildings staging live entertainment and cultural shows like theaters have traditionally required users to pay entrance fees. In the past, the concert hall differentiated audiences according to the price of their entry ticket, whereas the city library was the first library to allow equal and open access to its book collections.

The increased value of the real estate around the buildings in central Stockholm is extending the limitations of use to the privileged few who live nearby. Public buildings located far from homes dissuade potential visitors. For those living in the suburbs, the lengthy transport time and the payment of an entrance fee hamper their opportunities to use the building and further increase inequalities.

Fifth effect, the transformation of the role of users in these buildings. From the perspective of building programs, in the 1920s, users were seen as individuals who could be educated through access to literature, music and other cultural activities. In the 1950–60s, workers' unions acquired considerable power, and public buildings became places of assembly. The standard user became a person in need of meeting places. In the 1970–90s, the standard user of these buildings was someone with basic education for whom institutions curated cultural and entertainment content, while providing a casual meeting space. After the 2000s, the user became a client to whom museums and other cultural centers in the city center can sell products and services including experiences, information, objects and food. Alternatively, suburban cultural centers often increase local engagement, offering user participation in their program of activities.

In the last hundred years, newly built cultural buildings have kept a close connection with commerce. However, this relationship has gradually transformed, putting equality at stake. The commercialization of the areas inside cultural spaces segregates people by facilitating access to culture for the rich. The inclusion of these buildings in real estate operations segregates people by facilitating access to those with higher incomes who can afford to live

closer. On the one hand, publicly managed cultural buildings like Kulturhuset and Stadsbibliotek are hubs of public activities amidst an environment of very expensive real estate transactions. On the other, in the new privately sponsored cultural centers, the users themselves seem to have become the new commercial product.

The implications of this research for the future include policymaking decisions about public buildings. Public cultural buildings offer a compromise between generating revenue for the private sector and catering to the needs and interests of large numbers of people. Therefore, policymakers should consider emphasizing the construction of more engaging public cultural buildings in more widely distributed locations.

As societies are at the crossroads of numerous socioeconomic transformations, citizens and policymakers should openly discuss whether they want to keep on emphasizing the commercial character of public cultural spaces. Private institutions operating with the support of public funds also fall within the scope of this debate.

Private investors offer a significant range of spaces for exhibiting culture to the public; they promote private interests. By contrast, public institutions can increase equal access to knowledge and meeting spaces beyond market laws.

Public institutions should promote democratic principles such as equality of access and opportunities. If access to culture continues to be limited by economic constraints like entrance fees and geographical distance, society at large risks perpetuating the segregation of users and increasing inequalities. Furthermore, if culture becomes increasingly curated according to the dictates of market interests, citizens may face growing inequalities. Voices outside the mainstream discourse become more vulnerable, and this situation can easily lead to the polarization of opinions that do not fit in the mainstream democratic framework. Individuals who feel excluded and disenfranchised are less likely to engage with society and embrace democratic values. Every person continues to support the commercialization of cultural space whenever they consume products or services in these places.

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Corresponding author
Ingrid Campo-Ruiz can be contacted at: icr@kth.se