

# A HUNDRED YEARS LATER STREETCARS ARE STILL RATTLING IN BALTIC CITIES

**A young geographer by the name of Sten De Geer mapped the cities around the Baltic Sea in an article published in 1912. As an attempt to capture the urban structure of Baltic region cities, his paper is unique. In this article, we comment on his meticulous descriptions of these cities, with a century-long perspective.**

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In recent years, Sweden has once again begun to cast its glance towards the countries east and south of the Baltic Sea, if only in the interests of trade and traffic. The cities surrounding the Baltic are again becoming neighbors to Stockholm, increasingly able to command our attention.

This up-to-the-minute summary was written in 1912 by a 26-year-old newly minted doctor of geography, Sten De Geer. De Geer grew up in a Swedish noble family with roots in the Walloon duchy of Brabant. The De Geers had been heavily involved in the mining industry since the 1600s. His father, Gerard De Geer (1848–1943), was one of the most celebrated geologists of his day and undertook, together with his wife Ebba Huldte De Geer, epoch-making studies of the ice recession. It is perhaps no coincidence that the geologist's son was named Sten ("stone"), and that his first works and doctoral dissertation dealt with physical geography.

The introduction to De Geer's article "Storstäderna vid Östersjön" [Cities on the shores of the Baltic Sea] addresses general perspectives in urban geography:

Anthropogeography is the modern name for the branch of geography that studies how man has adapted to conditions on the surface of the Earth. This study leads to applied geography, which is of the greatest common interest to all mankind, as it must often pass the final judgment in matters concerning traffic, trade, and policy – provided, that is, that it works with scientific clarity and methodically.

He then discusses the problem of describing a city, especially its functional boundaries with the countryside. Using examples from the United States, he shows how the political/administrative division can provide an utterly misleading picture of what is urban and what is rural. In Sweden, urbanization had led to often uncontrolled suburban sprawl outside the formal city limits. Based on an explanatory map of Stockholm from 1910, he shows how uneven the distribution of the city's population was and how it began to concentrate outside the city limits. The new and extremely densely populated workers' streets and industrial city districts can also be seen on the map as a crowded "fly swarm".

**We must recall** the state of society and technology in the early 1900s: powered by steam and electricity, heavy industry had been able to move in towards the large cities. Tramlines and local railways were essential to the relation between home and workplace:

Cities whose populations have exceeded one hundred thousand are usually regarded as large cities. The figure is often characteristic: the rapid population rise has begun. The area built upon has become so widespread that local transport has acquired a greater significance. The tramlines converge with increasing clarity on a city center.

In connection herewith, the distribution of work among city districts has become increasingly defined. Commerce is concentrated in a small, central district, where the population is declining.

A ring of the most densely populated city districts arranges itself around the city center. Outside it, the newer districts follow with wide streets, and furthest out the sprawling suburbs, which take on the character of the residential enclaves of the rich only in one particular quarter.

This is an early description of what later came to be called the spatial differentiation of the city. A description follows of the spatial growth of the large city:

The zonal growth of the large city is an interesting and impressive geographical phenomenon. It shows a tendency to obey its own laws, despite all obstacles.

The city always strains towards circularity. The development of a radiating network of tramlines and local express railway lines results in the star shape, with finger-like suburbs extending along the transport routes. Secondary growth centers often arise near the local railway stations. Suburbs will then appear in clusters, or at least in rows.

[. . .]

The normal growth of the large city is thus concentric; compact nearest the periphery of the inner city, more sparsely populated and linear or dot-like outside this. The regularity of growth, the very shape of the city, may to a certain degree and at a given point in time be determined by disrupting factors. These are either natural barriers, such as steep plateaus, rivers, marshy ground, and ocean bays, or else the doings of city councils, civilian or military authorities, or large companies.

Ultimately, however, the expansive force of the city is victorious and new city districts break out in formerly neglected areas, filling out the circular shape of the zones.

In language whose old-fashioned flavor may not be as evident in translation, De Geer puts into words some of the most important factors in urban growth: how physical, transport technical, economic, and political possibilities and constraints steer development towards a spatial structure.

De Geer notes in particular that "the innermost and smallest zone is the nucleus of the large city, from which it has grown out, and its heart, where the main daily traffic flows in and out. In terms of interest and importance, no other city district is comparable to the commercial center".

How should the extent and change of the central business district be measured? De Geer examines various measurements. In 1890, at least 80 percent of all space in Stockholm was used as housing, but the proportion was 67 percent in the "City Between the Bridges" (Gamla Stan/Old Town), which was the central business district of the day, while the proportion of housing in the Klara district, the nascent central business district, had declined to 77 percent. Gas consumption was another measure, where the outcome per inhabitant was even more striking: consumption was high in areas with many retail stores and offices and few residents, and the new central business district near Central Station had taken the lead by 1907. Land prices also provide input, but statistics are more difficult to obtain for Baltic region cities.

[L]and in the urban centers is extraordinarily precious. It is therefore desirable to save space and make the streets as narrow as possible. Likewise, it is necessary for banks, offices, and many other commercial enterprises to be concentrated so tightly that one can traverse the commercial center in a few minutes during the brief working day.

This concentration can be achieved in various ways, depending upon historical and physical conditions. Older European cities, in particular those in the Baltic network of the Hansa

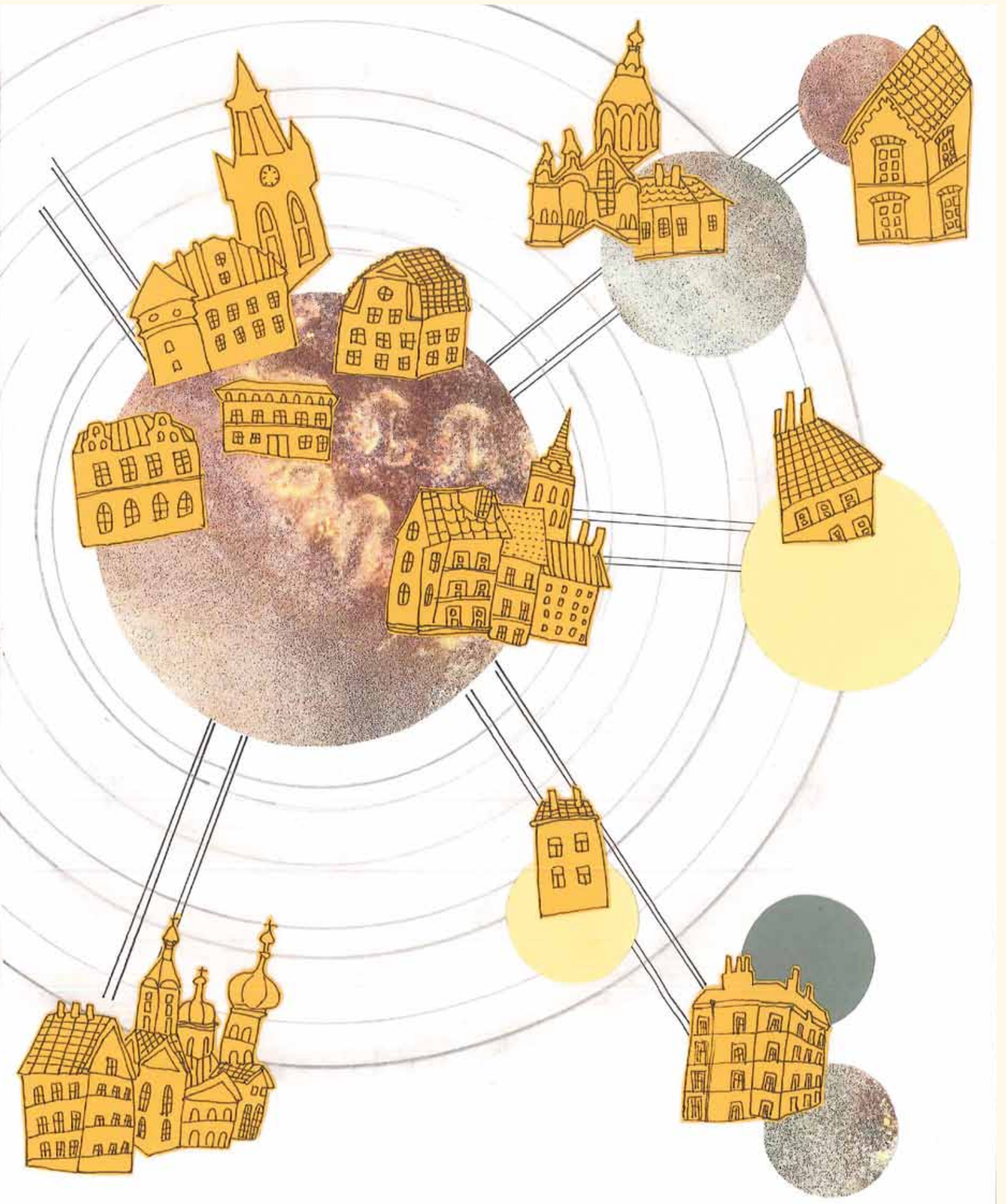
League, often have an *Altstadt* (Old Town) surrounded by a city wall, which exacerbates the need for density. If this area is central, the transformation leads to new construction and densification within the existing street network. The American solution, unconstrained by an old street and property network, is to build skyscrapers: "While Europeans have mainly sought to extract the most possible out of both horizontal dimensions in the city center, Americans have to a greater extent resorted to the third, the vertical dimension."

After this discussion, De Geer moves on to discuss how the spatial differentiation of the city should be described in map form. The most important aspects are the boundary between the commercial center and the rest of the city, and the city's functional boundary with the countryside, regardless of the political division. De Geer encounters certain problems in data collection: "Even in our time, there are cities whose governments are so little interested in the city's development tendencies that it is actually difficult to obtain maps showing administrative boundaries with corresponding population figures, which are needed to produce a statistical representation of the outer limits of the city." Making use of available maps, statistics, and personal observation, De Geer was still able to draw the maps that illustrate his texts about the spatial structure of the larger Baltic region cities.

**The maps are clear** and simple. Central business districts are delineated in bright red. The stock exchange and main post office, two key elements in early twentieth-century cities, are marked. Boundaries have been drawn for the city area outside the center based on various urban activities like factories, rail freight yards, and ports. Railway lines and tram lines, like port approaches, are clearly marked, although it was difficult to discern the importance of the individual lines. At this time, the tram lines were probably experiencing the peak of their importance before the more versatile buses began to fill in the gaps.

And so De Geer transitions from the realm of the theoretical to the examination of the urban Baltic region map. Cities with populations of at least 100,000 are very different in "location, size, building style, social status, language, and religion of the population, and in respect of the cities' commercial, industrial, and administrative tasks and overall character". At that time, no cities north of the Stockholm-Helsinki line had attained the lower limit for designation as a large city. Those two cities, however, were surrounded by old trading cities within a distance of 200–300 km: Gävle and Norrköping for Stockholm, and Turku and Vyborg (Finnish: Viipuri) for Helsinki. De Geer discusses the cities' locations in relation to the hinterland. St. Petersburg, with its sparsely populated hinterland and "this population's low position", would probably only be able to count about 300,000 inhabitants, but as the gigantic capital of the Russian realm, it rapidly approaches a population of two million, plus the military suburb of Kronstadt with its more than 60,000 inhabitants. Reval's hinterland is intersected by Riga and St. Petersburg, but may function as an outport for the capital. Riga, on the other hand, with its large and populous hinterland in the Russian realm, is seen as enjoying the best location of all cities on the Baltic.

The cities of Memel, Königsberg, and Danzig on the borders of the German realm lie in the southeastern gulf of the Baltic, cut off from the Russian-controlled Polish inland. The coastal cities near the southern estuaries of the Baltic enjoy a better position with proximity to Berlin and busy ferry traffic towards Scandinavia. Stettin benefits from an inland location that makes the city a railway hub in all directions. Lübeck is



mentioned as the “historic point of attachment of the Baltic region countries in Europe”, while Kiel benefits from the canal to the North Sea and the presence of the German Navy stationed at the Kiel fjord. Copenhagen is in a better position than Malmö in relation to population and transit traffic, as well as in its role as a capital city.

Despite all the dissimilarities in economic and political status, all of the larger Baltic region cities demonstrate similar demographic trends. Around 1850, a state of near stagnation transitioned into growth, which after 1870 reaches an “almost explosive rate of expansion”, and De Geer predicts that the upturn will continue “over the next few decades”, unaware of the upheavals that would soon change and damage the geopolitical and economic situations of the Baltic Sea countries.

De Geer then provides a description of each of the cities, moving clockwise around the Baltic Sea, starting in Stockholm.

**For Stockholm,** he begins with a few defining topographical elements, an east-west fault scarp and a north-south boulder ridge, which at the time still had a strong impact on the expansion and spatial variation of the city. Three hoists at the fault scarp are even noted on the map. Building good approach roads was a necessity, given that street grades higher than 6 percent were insurmountable for horse-drawn carriages and trams (Lundén 1999:38). The topography of the southern city districts also explains why “since days of old, Stockholm has [...] had an easier time expanding northwards. The focal point of the city is constantly moving in a north-westerly direction”. The northeastern inner city districts “are mainly wealthy residential areas”, bordered by large military grounds and parks. North of these, there is an affluent residential zone, connected to the inner city by an electric express rail line. In the northwest, the city is growing with compact residential blocks, very densely populated. De Geer mentions the “Siberia” district, given its sobriquet as a reference to the miserable housing conditions in Eastern Russia.

“Despite its regular, concentric growth, Stockholm is still split between two lakes, Mälaren and Saltsjön, in two separate halves. The large and salubrious city center in a setting of great natural beauty, however, makes the city an organic whole. One can within this significant central part discern a remarkable division of labor”, with separate centers for banking, newspaper publishing, rail and mail services, shipping, and public administration.

A great deal of attention is devoted to rail, tram, and shipping facilities, along with their impact on the structure of the rest of the city. “Characteristic of Stockholm is the previously



noted circumstance that completely undeveloped and even uncultivated land takes over immediately outside the unusually compact built-up zone of the most densely populated city districts.” The developed agglomeration has an estimated median population density of 21,100 inhabitants per square kilometer.

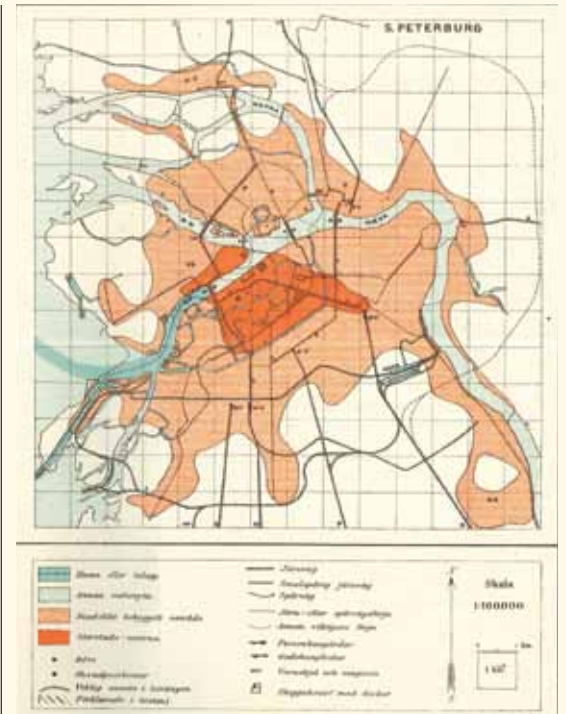
Upon leaving Stockholm, De Geer begins his review of the other Baltic region cities. The descriptions are uneven, partly due to poor statistics and varying availability of maps, but he analyzes all cities with total populations around 100,000 or higher, including Libau (Liepāja), Lübeck, and Kiel, which are not discussed in this article. For the other cities, I have asked urban geographers and sociologists with local expertise to comment on De Geer’s writings and share their views on the most important developments during the intervening 100 years.

Helsinki resembles Stockholm in its situation on an Archaean flatland, but it lies on a peninsula near the coastline. The formal and functional center of the city is on and adjacent to Senate Square. De Geer sees the city’s location on a peninsula as unfortunate in view of rail connections. The city is growing very rapidly, concentrically, and the former equilibrium between Swedish-speakers and Finnish-speakers is changing to the advantage of the latter. Remarkably, De Geer does not mention the drastic change that occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century from idealistic planning to market-adjusted growth, a subject explored in a thesis by Sven-Erik Åström about the Helsinki of the tsarist epoch.

## HELSINKI: MARI VAATTOVAARA

About the maps – it is interesting to see not only how the city has grown to become a pocket-sized metropolis, but also the focal point – the CBD of Helsinki – has moved. Within the very limited possibilities on the peninsula, the former governmental center has gained a business and shopping center that has moved towards the central or even western part of the city center. The administrative center has not changed; the buildings are the same, as are the institutions (government, church, and university). But urban planning has fostered additional centers to the city.

Finland remained a poor country dominated by agriculture and forestry up until the 1950s, as structural change had been hampered, especially by the wars. An economic upswing related to rapid urbanization can be seen from the 1950s onwards. At first, public industrial investments were prominent, but the 1960s saw spectacular structural change in the form of urbanization and suburbanization. Not only Helsinki, but also its urban region, experienced a substantial influx of migrants from the countryside as the fastest urban growth ever was predominantly channeled into suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s. Over two decades, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the share of the regional population found in the neighboring cities of Espoo and Vantaa grew from 8 to 20 percent, from around 40,000 inhabitants to over 170,000. Today, the fastest-growing areas in the region are located in the surrounding municipalities. After the realization of the extensive suburban developments in the 1970s, a new wave of suburbanization came about. Many of the surrounding municipalities have had spectacular growth rates and their aggregate population is now more than 300,000. If they were amalgamated, they would be Finland’s second-largest municipality. In the meantime, Helsinki proper’s share of the regional population has fallen from 73 to 43 per cent. Our city region is growing into a metropolis. Several studies have shown how – in this process – important changes take place in the structural devel-



opment of city regions. From the point of view of structural development, one of the crucial development features then is a shift from a monocentric metropolis towards a network of city centers. As a part of the relatively late but rapid – by international comparison – urbanization process, the Helsinki region has become a city region or metropolitan area that by virtue of its growth has begun to be differentiated in terms of social and spatial structure.

## ST. PETERSBURG: ZHANNA KRAVCHENKO

De Geer focused primarily on population density. His main conclusion about Saint Petersburg was that “the need for concentration of modern city life” had not arrived by that point. Otherwise, he discusses the geographical features – which remain essentially the same. But his argument about concentration no longer applies. The Soviet government considered high population density to be a serious problem and all city planning after World War II was aimed at limiting the inflow of workers and localizing industry and housing outside the city limits.

## ST. PETERSBURG: THOMAS BORÉN

In broad strokes, one could say that over the last 100 years, St. Petersburg has gone from being the center and capital of an empire and arena for one of the watershed events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the October Revolution of 1917 – to being an important but peripheral city in a country that has lost at least some of its global claims to power. The city lost its function as capital to Moscow in 1918. During the Soviet era, St. Petersburg’s political influence was far below its ranking in the Russian city hierarchy, despite major industrial production, numerous seats of higher learning, a high level of education among the populace, and several large and important cultural institutions. Nevertheless, the city is still by far the largest around the Baltic, with an official total population of just under four million. When it comes to these population statistics, however, “official” is the operative word: it is likely that many

more people live in the city, considered as an administrative unit or as an urbanized country's main population center. Apart from this, St. Petersburg is one of the largest cities in Europe.

World War II, yet another of the earth-shattering events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had a wide-ranging impact on the city. In terms of urban geography, large areas of low wooden buildings were destroyed, but so were the palaces of the old nobility when the front line was dragged over them – first when the Germans attacked and again when they were pushed back. Today, there are only small areas of wooden buildings left in St. Petersburg, partly due to the devastation of war, partly due to Soviet urban planning policy, especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg, which strongly discouraged housing in private, single-family dwellings. During the post-war era, the priorities of the planned economy were, more than before, aimed at resolving the housing shortage and providing for other basic living conditions. Large housing developments of high-rise apartment buildings now define the peripheral areas of the city. Since the buildings are characteristic of the time they were built, it is easy to distinguish areas developed in the 1950s from those built in the 1960s and 1970s. The same applies to housing developments built during the Stalin epoch before and after World War II. Also, developments of the 1990s and especially the 2000s are characterized by high-rises built very closely together in both old and new housing areas. Private homes and palatial residences for the affluent have been built on the outskirts of St. Petersburg since 1991.

**The subway whose** construction began under Stalin is one of the city's most important modes of transport. It goes under the Neva, which means that it lies deep underground. Commuter trains are routed to various main stations around the city, and there is still no central station. There are tram lines, but they have declined in relative importance and must jostle with buses, trolley buses, and a minibus system on the streets of the city, where the use of private cars has increased markedly in the last twenty years. In short, the congestion on the streets means the subway is often the fastest way to get around town. The bridges over the Neva and its various tributaries in particular are bottlenecks for car traffic and, although more bridges have been built since 1912, they still lack the necessary capacity. In addition, traffic is stopped for a few hours every night to let through the ships moving up or down river and further inland or out into the Gulf of Finland. The open bridges during the white nights of summer are today something of a symbol of the city. Construction of a motorway bypass has begun outside the city center, which may also connect the southwestern and northwestern areas of the city across the Kronstadt district on the island of Kotlin and the embankments built in the innermost part of the Gulf of Finland to prevent flooding in the city. Just south of the city lies Pulkova and the international airport, which must be regarded as small in relation to the size of the city, although the airport has been modernized in recent years.

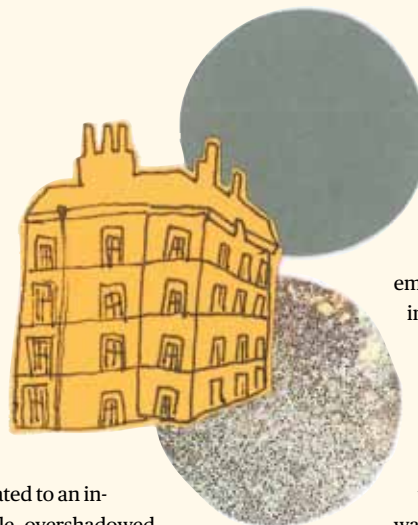
St. Petersburg is still an important port, but it does not have sufficient capacity for current flows of goods. A new port, primarily for passenger traffic, was recently completed on Vasily Island, nearest the sea. This must be considered an investment in international tourism. The city center is on the UNESCO World Heritage list and many of the buildings mentioned in De Geer's article still stand, some with the same names, such as St. Isaac's Cathedral, while the names of others have been changed.

## REVAL/ TALLINN: MICHAEL GENTILE

Sten De Geer portrayed Reval as a relatively small and technically backward city that had been relegated to an increasingly peripheral role, overshadowed by the rapid growth, favorable location, and higher connectivity of Saint Petersburg and Riga. The city was small in terms of population (albeit large in area) and its buildings lacked the characteristic hallmarks of the other Baltic region cities. After a hundred years of experience as a capital city, a half-century under Soviet rule, and twenty years of post-communist revival, the city has undergone massive expansion, even though its relative importance has not appreciably changed.

During the interwar years, Tallinn expanded in all directions in relation to De Geer's Reval; nevertheless, the spread was characterized mainly by small-scale development with large elements of wooden buildings. Of particular note is the rise of the garden suburb of Nõmme southwest of the city, which was built according to the accepted precepts of the time, in keeping with trends around and beyond the Baltic Sea region, especially in Stockholm but also Riga, Danzig, and Stettin. Nõmme is still a prestigious neighborhood in the Tallinn housing market, despite its long period of decline during the Soviet era, when the city underwent major expansion driven by a wave of industrialization. The population increased markedly, pulled by the locomotive of immigration from elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The ethnic dimension of population growth entailed a dramatic change in the makeup of the city; by the end of the Soviet era, the population was composed of roughly equal numbers of Russian-speakers and Estonians.

The population explosion of the postwar era created a crying need for housing space, something which was not prioritized by the Soviet powers, who saw housing as a consumer good unable to contribute to the nation's (future) prosperity. Consequently, Tallinn became an increasingly overcrowded city, even as the overcrowding was exacerbated by the municipalization of the housing stock. As a result, several families sharing one apartment was the norm. The situation gradually improved in connection with the "Khrushchevian Revolution" ("Khrushchevian" is used to designate a certain type of apartment building characterized by low construction quality combined with modern conveniences like private kitchens and bathrooms). A striking transition in thinking about the role of housing in the national economy began in the late 1950s, triggered by the insight that worker productivity was not promoted by the prevailing – and extreme – overcrowding. The Khrushchevian Revolution was made permanent and its building paradigm was replicated for the rest of the Soviet era, with gradually improved housing plans. At the same time, the city was expanding rapidly in various directions. The first branch spread towards the southwest with the construction of the Mustamäe district, which was followed by the Väike-Õismäe district to the west. With its conspicuously circular form, this district came to be distinguished internationally (within the socialist bloc). Last but not least, the Lasnamäe district was built to the east. It was never finished and thus suffered from inadequate infrastructure far into the post-Soviet era; over time, it became home to about one third of the population of Tallinn, the majority of them Russian-



speakers. This was (and still is) the case because access to modern housing often depended upon employers. The industrial companies that participated in the building of Lasnamäe – and many other city districts – imported much of their workforce from Russia. Mustamäe and Väike-Õismäe, on the other hand, have more ethnically diverse populations.

Vanalinn (Old Town Tallinn) lost its commercial functions during the Soviet era and was gradually transformed into a capitalist relic whose main function was housing. The area was not targeted for any appreciable renovation until it was confirmed that Tallinn would host the maritime events of the Moscow Olympic Games in 1980. An attempt at comprehensive renovation was begun, but for the most part efforts were concentrated on the most visible milieus in the city. At the same time, isolated flagship projects were built that would put Tallinn on the global architecture map. The most prominent of these was the city hall (Linna-hall), an all-purpose groundscraper of unbelievable proportions that connected, or rather disconnected, Vanalinn from the sea. With just a little imagination, the outlines of Linna-hall might be likened to a Mesopotamian ziggurat.

The city's commercial functions were thinned out; consequently, there was for all intents and purposes no central business district during the Soviet epoch. If one were nevertheless to try to identify a commercial center from that time, it would doubtless be the single large department store *Kaubamaja* (a classic example of a Soviet *univermag*, a communist high-class department store with a limited selection). Spread out behind *Kaubamaja* were the elite neighborhoods where prestigious homes built during the Stalin era were interspersed with buildings that housed the republic's and the city's political, economic, and judiciary institutions.

The area that circled the inner city during the interwar period gradually turned into a slum as a result of Soviet policy, which was almost never to tear down buildings in order to maximize the net production of housing space. This had two all-pervading consequences. First, these valuable environments are preserved to this day, albeit in poor condition. Second, a socio-ecological landscape was formed of a kind that could be found in the United States, where the less affluent population lived in poorer conditions closer to the inner city, while the more fortunate could enjoy the more modern housing stock found in outlying areas and the most attractive neighborhoods in the inner city (with the difference being that both groups had to settle for a considerably lower standard than their transatlantic counterparts).

**The post-Soviet epoch** entailed a dramatic break with the past. Municipal and state property was privatized or returned to former owners or their descendants. Foreign stakeholders created demand for certain types of urban environments that brought a powerful functional change of the central parts of Tallinn within the space of only a few years. Vanalinn gradually lost its housing function in favor of commercial interests, rooted partly in the strong upturn for tourism (especially short visits from Finland). The port area, closed to the public during the Soviet era, was opened and gradually deindustrialized, beginning with the area next to the passenger terminal where there is great need for border trade retail stores (in particular purveyors of alcoholic beverages to highly taxed Scandinavians).

Other than the port area in particular, most of the changes in the 1990s had to be incorporated within the Soviet-built or pre-Soviet environment. This was due partially to the severe financial crisis that followed the collapse of central planning

and partially to the lack of modern credit institutions. Significant changes occurred at the end of the decade. To begin with, the economy definitively threw off its dependence on Russia in connection with the August Crisis of 1998, which attracted investments from the West. The banking system was modernized and the availability of long-term home mortgages improved for people of average or better income. Within just a few years, the cityscape inside the ring (a street called Liivalaia) was dramatically altered. In developments spearheaded by the controversial Italian property magnate Ernesto Pretoni, the Tallinn skyline, formerly defined by Vanalinn's thicket of church spires, began more and more to resemble that of Frankfurt.

At the same time, there was highly conspicuous development on the outskirts of the city. With the spread of private car use and access to home mortgages, the 2000s became the decade of suburbanization. New housing developments are sprawling, virtually uncontrolled, in almost every direction, along with a North American lifestyle in which most things revolve around life in suburbia. The retail trade has arrived, with a vengeance, while the geography of the labor market is becoming increasingly "wreath-like". At first, the new construction consisted only of single-family homes, but these have recently been joined by terraced houses and apartment buildings. The latter are aimed at the group of relatively well-off Estonians who want better quality than they can find in a typical apartment in Lasnamäe but cannot afford a single-family home.

The impact of suburbanization should not be overstated: even though it makes a strong visual impression, it does not involve very many inhabitants. The population of Tallinn, currently about 400,000 people, is despite everything relatively stable.

The city's market for residential and other types of real property has utterly collapsed since late 2007, especially in suburbia. This is manifest in the huge numbers of unfinished buildings that can be seen everywhere. At the time of this writing, the market has yet to rebound. Recovery will not happen without a change in attitude among foreign banks, especially Swedish banks, which have moved from easily available euro-denominated mortgages to a severely restrictive lending policy.

To sum things up, Tallinn in the 1900s and early 2000s has begun to assume the shape of a North American city with a medieval city center and three large Soviet concrete islands, in what might be a new – and definitely hybridized – contribution to the global urban typology.

## RIGA: JONAS LINDSTRÖM

De Geer emphasizes the importance of the Dūna (Daugava) to Riga's geography and expansion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and notes that Riga seems irregular and rather disjointed. He leads one to believe that this created a certain disconnection between city districts, even though Riga already had eight electrified tram lines by 1910. Why did he perceive Riga's urban space as "fragmented"?

He ignores the strict zone division in effect in Riga until the removal of the moats and the city wall in the late 1850s. Until then, the areas outside the old city center (the present Old Town) were divided into five distinct zones. The zone nearest the moats and earth embankments could be used only for walking. The second zone was for vegetable farms. Zones three and four also had strict restrictions and were set aside for military purposes,

among other things. Housing construction was not permitted before the fifth, outermost, zone. Thus we are talking about an inner, fortified Riga (controlled by the German-Baltic nobility) and an outer built-up Riga with a vast empty space in between. During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fifth zone was more rural than urban in nature. At that time, the building of stone houses was prohibited outside the moats and earth embankments. The lifting of this restriction in 1857, along with several other restrictive statutes that were thought to be passé and obstructive to Riga's development, was the starting shot for a thorough and dramatic change of the city's spatial structure.

De Geer's fieldwork in Riga coincided with the epoch in which the city was in the midst of what the Latvian architect Andris Roze has called the city's first widespread metamorphosis. Around 1910, both production and the labor force had doubled in only a decade or so, creating a cosmopolitan environment as well as one of the most vibrant industrial cities in northern Europe. When the First World War broke out, internal combustion engines for battleships, tanks, rail freight and passenger cars were produced in Riga, along with motor vehicles like tractors and automobiles. In addition, Riga was the world's largest port for timber exports: the Russian realm's exports via the Port of Riga went mainly to Germany, Great Britain, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, and the United States. One fourth of Russia's imports came in the same way. But it was the Baltic-German and Jewish businessmen who controlled most of the city's leading trading companies. Riga also had a British mayor during the years of 1901–1912 in the person of George Armistead, which itself was proof of the city's cosmopolitan identity.

In the period leading up to the First World War, Riga was an autonomous Baltic-German city situated within the Tsarist Russian Empire. It is interesting that all city districts and street names in De Geer's text are in German. In the years around 1910, most street signs in Riga were trilingual and it was no coincidence that the German name was at the top of street signs, followed by the Russian and finally the Latvian names. If De Geer's ambition was to make some kind of contemporary diagnosis of Riga, he should perhaps have mentioned the intensive Russification campaign that started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Tsarist Russian rulers' primary aim here was to break down the Baltic-German influence in Russia. Beyond switching the official language of public administration and education from German to Russian, attempts were made to induce Russians from other parts of the empire to move to the city. A chauvinist attitude developed and the Russian population was guaranteed privileges: the consequence was a rapid influx of a Russian population to Riga in the bridge period between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Several conflicts were lurking around the corner: between the Baltic-German aristocracy and Russian authority and between the Baltic-German aristocracy and the Latvian population. There was an emphatic increase in the proportion of Latvians in Riga in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which brought unequivocal demands for reformation of local administration, Latvian participation in the affairs of the city, basic education in Latvian, and stronger linguistic rights for Latvian-speakers. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ethnic composition of the city had undergone a striking change, primarily due to the rural denizens of Livonia and Kurland, along with other nearby Russian provinces, who had made their way to Riga in hopes of a better life. What makes Riga particularly interesting is that the city's development after 1850 can be divided into four distinct periods in which each transition has entailed a rejection of the preceding period, which in turn influenced (and still does to a great extent) the urban space (see Table 1).

Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4
1850—1918	1918—1940	1945—1991	1991—2011
Riga is part of an autonomous Baltic-German noble republic under Tsarist Russian hegemony.	Riga is the capital city of the Republic of Latvia.	Riga is the "capital city" of the Soviet Republic of Latvia.	Riga is once again the capital city of the Republic of Latvia.

Table 1: Four periods of urban development policy in Riga since 1850.

Riga's past is characterized by irregular balances of power wherein various constellations laid claim to the city in different epochs. During period two, there were distinct efforts to make Riga a Latvian city, partially as an antithesis to the preceding German-Russian-Jewish cosmopolitan epoch. In period three, there were concerted attempts to erase all things Latvian and make Riga a Soviet city. The efforts in period four have been aimed at erasing everything Soviet and creating something new, which may be seen as a hybrid between period one (the cosmopolitan or global, as it is now called) and period two (the first Latvian period of independence).

As a result, every new epoch has led to a revision of the urban space and a new perspective on how the city should be built. In Soviet housing policy of the 1960s, Stalin-era cities were considered overpopulated and thus disproportional. Since 1991, Riga has once again come to be understood as disproportional, albeit from the opposite angle: the city's structure and scope are considered too comprehensive and overgrown. To put it another way, the urban renewal plans of fifty years ago that were intended to make Soviet cities more proportional have resulted in Riga again being considered far too disproportional, which has led to a new disorder that must be managed. Different epochs are being renegotiated in both a Latvian and global context in post-Soviet Riga. The city has undergone several dramatic changes – or perhaps turnarounds would be more apt – since De Geer was there 100 years ago. There is however one commonality between De Geer's visit and my own: the city still seems disjointed and irregular.

Exactly as in De Geer's day, the city is still defined by its duality, with the global (cosmopolitan) and the Latvian (provincial) as thesis and antithesis. This makes Riga a singular and complex case which, with a nod to Marshall Berman, has come to engender a "unity of disunity". The autonomy that characterized Riga in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that distinguished the post-Soviet epoch. The difference is that Riga is now Latvian, at least officially – but many Latvians still see Riga as a city for foreigners.

## KÖNIGSBERG/KALININGRAD: TATIANA CHEKALINA

It is difficult to find errors in De Geer's description of Königsberg, since the city changed so tremendously during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during both the subsequent German period and the Soviet and contemporary Russian periods. I would rather focus on the most important changes in the spatial structure of the city.

First of all, in 1910 the city administration decided to eliminate the old fortification walls along with three of the ten city gates. The remaining seven gates were preserved as historical monuments. After reconstruction in 2005, the King's Gate be-





came one of the main historic attractions in Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg). While De Geer compares Königsberg and Stockholm in terms of spatial structure, contemporary Kaliningrad has very little in common with the capital of Sweden. The historic city center was destroyed by the British RAF in 1944 and the Soviet Army in 1945. As a result, the only building left on the previously densely built island of Kneiphof is the cathedral, which was recently partly restored. Demolition of buildings of the German epoch continued in the Soviet period when, most notably, the castle was destroyed. These days, however, there is widespread opinion in favor of at least partial reconstruction of the castle. Nevertheless, the city thus far lacks a traditional city center, that function being fulfilled by the major avenue of Leninsky Prospect. The street begins at Victory Square (*Ploschad Pobedy*) in the northern part of the city and continues through the southern part of the city down to the main railway station (*Juzhny Vokzal*).

Revitalization of the city's waterfront areas on the banks of the Pregel River has recently begun. The complex of the World Ocean Museum and the Fishing Village are examples of these developments. The old residential areas of single-family homes mentioned in the article have been largely preserved. In the northern and western parts of the city, these areas have become popular as luxury neighborhoods. Some renovated German buildings in these areas have also been converted to commercial premises for large corporations. While the old industrial areas mentioned by De Geer still fulfill their function (the contemporary Baltiysky District), nowadays most new businesses established in Kaliningrad are located in the southern and southeastern districts near the city bypass. In addition, a number of industrial businesses that make professional equipment and home electronics are located in the central parts of the city in premises built in the Soviet era.

## DANZIG/GDAŃSK: DOMINIKA V. POLANSKA

De Geer's map is highly detailed. I do not think there is anything superfluous in his description; he made use of the information that was available about the city at the time. One can see that the Dolne Miasto fortifications have impeded the city's growth towards the east, and that remains partially true today, as the neighboring district of Olszynka is still in

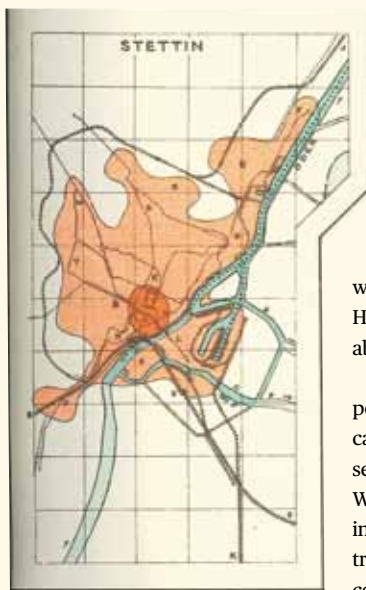
a rural phase. With regard to the two elevations mentioned (Bischofsberg, now Biskupia gorka, and Hagelsberg, now Grodzisko), both have been urbanized as far as possible (primarily green areas, but also residential). The Langfuhr district of the city refers to modern-day Wrzeszcz, which extends alongside the busy Aleja Grunwaldzka road and is now mainly a residential area with some commercial functions (Galeria Bałtycka, the largest mall in northern Poland, is there, along with other smaller shopping centers). Wrzeszcz is also the most densely populated city district in Gdańsk. The Ohra district is the one in Orunia to the south, which is now a fairly rundown residential neighborhood. The Schidlitz district is probably what is now called Siedlce and lies alongside the Kartuska road that extends westward from the city center. As De Geer observed, the city and its center were growing towards the west and have done so ever since. Parts of the railway tracks still remain, in addition to the parts that cross the present shipyard and the tracks in Dolne Miasto, which are no longer in use. Urbanization seems to have followed the main thoroughfares, and this is also true today: they are the same. The road network has, however, significantly expanded and branched out. De Geer's red line around the city center aligns with what is now called Glowne Miasto (the central city), but the central area is not as distinct as it was then.

Otherwise, the estuary is still used today, but the shipyard is considerably larger. I discuss the planned development and partial decay of the shipyard in my doctoral thesis. Deindustrialization has left its mark here and new plans call for the area to be converted to a "waterfront development" of offices, homes, shopping centers, and other services. The project is called *Gdańsk Młode Miasto*: The Young City.

## STETTIN/SZCZECIN: PÉTER BALOGH

In his analysis of urban development, De Geer's preoccupation with the topography and the relevance of physical distance is hardly surprising, considering that he wrote before the age of civil aviation. That De Geer sees Germany as the center of Europe may seem geographically determinist at first glance, but gains legitimacy if we remember that this was a time when the balance of power in Europe had begun to shift from Great Britain towards Central Europe. It is against that backdrop that one should consider Stettin's rapid development over four decades.

Stettin experienced explosive population growth from 75,000 inhabitants in 1870 to 235,000 in 1910 – a development that ran in parallel with the demographic trend in Berlin. De Geer writes that "The Oder interest encompasses Silesia and Berlin especially", and Stettin functioned precisely as the port city of the capital until the Second World War. In 1945, the city and its eastern environs were annexed to Poland, which sharply constrained contacts with the west.



Szczecin, however, maintained its role as a hub between north and south: cellulose and coal from Silesia were exported to several countries via Szczecin, and in the other direction, iron ore was imported to Central Europe. Along with the shipyard, Szczecin became the most important port city in Poland after the Gdańsk-Gdynia agglomeration.

The peripheral location, only 12 km from the East German border, combined with West German revisionism led the Polish administration to put off investments in Szczecin until the 1970s. One of the key projects at the time was the building of a bridge straight through the Old Town and eastwards over the Oder, as confirmation of the city's affiliation with the rest of Poland. Whether deliberately or not, this made it impossible to rebuild the old inner city as it looked during the German era. After the system change and recognition of the border with Germany, some attempts at reconstruction have been made with varying results, more successful in some places, less so in others.

The same applied to the resumption of the city's contacts with its western hinterland and Berlin, which these days has better links to the port cities of Rostock and, increasingly, Hamburg. Residents of Szczecin use the Berlin airports frequently, however, and some of them have moved to the increasingly sparsely populated German villages across the border. Today's Szczecin can, however, be characterized as an economically and demographically stagnating city (with a population of about 400,000). After protracted hemorrhages, the shipyard was recently shut down. The port of Szczecin-Świnoujście is well-linked with Copenhagen, Ystad, and Rønne, but traffic volumes cannot be compared to the German ports. De Geer noted that the city "has been made accessible to the large ships plying the Baltic Sea by dredging the Oder, Papenwasser, and Haff, as well as by building the Kaiserfahrt canal through Usedom to the coastal town of Swinemünde" (today's Świnoujście), but such measures are costly and may be unrealistic for modern large ships.

## COPENHAGEN: CHRISTIAN WICHMANN MATTHIESSEN

From the 584,000 inhabitants of De Geer's time to the almost 1.8 million of today, Copenhagen has become a metropolis that also encompasses the old neighboring cities of Helsingør, Hillerød, Frederikssund, Roskilde, Køge, and Dragør, and which has a functional connection with the Swedish neighboring cities of Malmö, Lund, and Helsingborg. Combined with these cities, the area is home to about 2.3 million people.

Copenhagen's structure mirrors the old terminals: the port and the central station. The port is no longer a significant fixed point, even though it still handles cargo and passengers. The city has, however, especially since the Second World War, seen a new terminal develop into a significant infrastructural fixed point: the international airport in Kastrup. Taken as a whole, Copenhagen and Southern Sweden combined make up a vast junction for the Nordic countries:



motorways, railway lines, air traffic, and maritime transport make possible prodigious flows.

The internal structure of the city has developed via the new traffic lines and the major terminals. The “tram city” along with the rail connections with neighboring cities shaped development until the 1930s. The city grew in layers, with the formation of suburbs near stations outside the compact city. A new rail system was introduced in 1934 according to the Berlin model: S-trains. These lines lead from the city center towards the neighboring cities, and the S-train network eventually structured the major growth of suburbia starting in the 1960s: suburbanization, first of housing and later commerce. As of 2012, S-trains and commuter trains reach all of Sjaelland as well as Malmö and Lund. The internal railways have been augmented with metro lines in the inner city since 2000. Motorways have been expanded since the 1950s in a ring road between the neighboring cities and beyond over the Öresund Bridge (in 2000) to Sweden.

The so-called “finger plan” came about in 1949 and has, in various versions, set the direction of development. The palm of the hand – the compact city – extends 10–15 km out from the old city center and holds government, business services, cultural activities, entertainment, retail trade, universities and research, and transport and traffic terminals. Compared to 1912, the city center has grown outwards into adjacent districts, but Copenhagen is still a monocentric city. Outside the palm of the hand, the fingers reach out to nearby neighboring cities within a radius of about 40 km from the city center. There are city center formations that function as parts of Greater Copenhagen and others that are independent. Between the fingers, there are green wedges, divided between agriculture and recreation. Wide swathes of vacation homes are laid out along the northern coast of Sjaelland, which are also part of urban life.

## CONCLUSION

De Geer's article concludes with a few comparisons of the demographic and economic development of the Baltic region cities. Largest in population and even more so in area were the major cities of the Russian Empire, St. Petersburg and Riga, with their sparse but overcrowded wood-built suburbs. Helsinki showed the fastest population growth by far, while the German Baltic region cities (Königsberg, Danzig, Stettin, and Lübeck, though not the maritime city of Kiel) were characterized by stagnation. Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Malmö were the leading merchant ports figured in tonnage, followed by St. Petersburg, Riga, and Stettin; De Geer, however, notes that Lübeck probably had more valuable cargo than the large bulk ports.

How has time treated De Geer's cities? The researchers' comments show how development has impacted the cities to varying degrees. Three of the cities – Stockholm, Helsinki, and Copenhagen – have, despite occupation and bombings of the latter two, maintained and developed their positions with no major upheavals. St. Petersburg was stripped of its capital city function and subjected to devastating civil war and German

occupation, but its imperial luster was recreated as a freezing-in-time of the revolutionary era, although with an expansion of concrete suburbs at the expense of the picturesque but wretched wooden settlements. The same can be said of the Sovietized cities of Tallinn and Riga, whose brief interwar periods as capital cities never left any major impression on the urban landscape. The three South Baltic cities of Königsberg, Danzig, and Stettin underwent a total demographic and national territorial change, paradoxically enough with the retention – or in the case of Gdańsk, restoration – of an exterior form that was nearly obliterated during the Second World War.

De Geer's analysis of the Baltic region cities is limited in part by the inconsistent availability of facts, but also by the undeveloped social science of the time. His emphasis is on the city as an economic phenomenon, which results in a concentration of urban market functions. What is forward-looking in De Geer's work are the attempts to analyze this economic structure and its impact on the situation and topography of the city. He was a contemporary of the social ecology of the Chicago School and often makes comparisons with developments in North American cities. As an attempt to capture the urban structure of the Baltic region cities, his article is unique.

De Geer continued his academic work in urban geography with articles about Swedish and American cities. In one noted article, he described the subject of geography as “the science of the [...] distribution of phenomena on the surface of the earth”. In an attempt to blend scientific and humanist aspects, he characterized the geological Fennoscandia and the anthropogeographical Baltoscandia as “a penetrating distinction between an anthropogeographical and a geognostic province”. Lithuanian geographers and historians have taken up his interest in Baltoscandia in recent years. As a newly appointed professor at Göteborg University in 1928, he sought to open the institution towards the world, with particular focus on the English-speaking countries, but he died in 1933 at the age of just 47. In an American obituary, it was said that his work had “won for him a unique place in the geographic science of the twentieth century”. ❌

Note: All essays are scholarly articles and have been peer-reviewed by specialists under the supervision of Baltic Worlds' editorial advisory board.

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