

# ETERNAL EMPLOYMENT

## **Proposal:**

A person is employed at Korsvägen.

The position holds no duties or responsibilities, other than that it should be carried out at Korsvägen. Whatever the employee chooses to do constitutes the work.

The employment contract is full time and of indefinite duration. Should the employee resign or retire, a new employee is recruited.

Employment conditions correspond to that of an average public sector employee; including working hours, holiday entitlement, pension provision, notice period, etc. Annual wage increases aim to follow collective bargaining agreements.

The endless duration of this employment is feasible because money pays better than work. As long as we live in a society where the return on capital is substantially higher than the average increase in wages, Eternal Employment is kept afloat.

## **Realization (Summary)**

Eternal Employment is realized through long-term strategic investment of the allocated production budget. To facilitate employment and capital management over time, a foundation is set up specifically for this purpose.

The station at Korsvägen has a time clock where the employee is expected to check-in and check-out every working day. (The employee is not required, however, to stay within the premises of the station throughout the day). The time clock is connected to the lights above the platform, turning on a stronger fluorescent light – “working light” – whenever the employee is at work.

The Eternal Employment Foundation is also responsible for collecting and making accessible secondary mediation, such as news stories, reportages, rumors, jokes and urban legends that the project generates over time.

## **Relation to the site: Korsvägen**

### Anti-Performance in the Event City

Gothenburg is an event city. It is a leisure economy. It is a place to experience sports, music, arts, entertainment. If previously the city's economy was based on shipping cars and ball bearings all over the world, now it is time for the world to come to Gothenburg; to go for a ride, to sing along, to have a drink, to meet a friend.

This is the official narrative. Since the mid 1990's the city of Gothenburg and their subsidiary marketing companies GotEvent and Göteborg&Co have made it a priority to tell the story of the event city. Not only tell the story, but make it happen. Build it.

At the heart of the event city lies the event district ("Evenemangsstråket"). In the area between Heden and Mölndalsån (a short stretch of 1,5km), the city planners and politicians have gathered landmarks of culture and entertainment. Here we find the biggest outdoor arena in Scandinavia, hosting mega-concerts with audience numbers exceeding 70 000 in a single evening; Sweden's biggest amusement park and by far most hash-tagged site on Instagram; the biggest science museum in Scandinavia; a museum of world culture; a major exhibition and convention center; and one of the biggest hotels in Europe, boasting the largest prawn sandwich you've ever seen.

In the middle of all this lies Korsvägen. In the middle of the middle of the event city.

What Eternal Employment proposes for Korsvägen is an anti-performance of indefinite duration. A single person with no script, no climax, no crescendo. Forever.

### An Urban Legend

Gothenburgers are known for telling stories and cracking jokes. Most areas of the city have a history that is kept alive through this oral tradition. Many of these stories relate to political struggles and Gothenburg as a workers' town.

If you come to Haga, people will tell you about the punk scene and the squatting of the 1970's and 80's; in Masthugget they'll tell you about the Sailor's church, where sailors used to wait for work in the harbor; and Hisingen defines itself by the Volvo factory with the old Torslanda headquarters being called "Pehrstorp" in popular speech (a wordplay on the name of the former Volvo director Pehr G. Gyllenhammar).

Although there are urban legends about Ullevi (its near collapse during Bruce Springsteen's 1985 concert) and puns on the Gothia Towers called "Högmässan" ("high mass", a play-on-words with the high tower by the convention center), the event city is yet to make its way more deeply into the subconscious of Gothenburgers.

As for Korsvägen itself, it seems strangely devoid of any historical narratives or urban legends. Korsvägen of today is really just a traffic solution, a place to change between buses and trams, a place to cross while heading elsewhere.

A key aspect of Eternal Employment is its potential to produce secondary mediation. Stories told about the person employed forever with nothing to do. This may take the

form of newspaper articles, TV reportages, and social media hashtags. Jokes about working “as though you were at Korsvägen”. Although almost invisible at first, over time Eternal Employment has the capacity to make its way deeply into the oral history of Gothenburg.

## Relation to theme: Chronotopia

### History: Enacting Employment Protection

“The worker” is arguably the most important figure of Swedish 20<sup>th</sup> century politics.

The labour movement has been the driving force behind the rise of Social Democracy, the women’s movement and the political project known as the Swedish model. Even the right-wing government of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marketed itself as the new “worker party” in coming to power.

As a political project, the labour movement reached its peak in the mid 1970’s: A rare historical period in which the trade unions were able to negotiate higher increases in wages than the increase of productivity within industry. For a brief moment in history, work paid better than money. At this time a series of labour market regulations were also enacted. Most emblematically Sweden introduced permanent employment – or contract of indefinite duration – as regulated through the Employment Protection Act (“Lagen om anställningsskydd”, LAS) of 1974.

Since then, we have lived through almost half a century of intense globalization and neo-liberal deregulation. Although Sweden still has a highly regulated labour market, including LAS, such regulation is under increasing pressure. For more and more people employment has become flexible, project-based, gig-based, or simply undocumented.

Eternal Employment enacts “permanent employment” as living history. It projects this historically specific contractual form into the future. The meanings it will amass over time depend, among other things, on how work and employment are conceptualized over the next century. Eternal Employment could become a nostalgic memory, a future ruin, a utopian premonition of a post-work society, or all of the above.

### Futurity: When $r > g$ the Past Eats the Future

The central thesis in Thomas Picketty’s bestselling book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2013) is that in a society where the rate of return on capital ( $r$ ) is greater than the economic growth ( $g$ ) inequality will grow exponentially. Old money eats new money. Or, in other words, our future is sold at a discount to those who already have.

What is unique in Picketty’s book is his empirical data, allowing him to look at the relationship between ( $r$ ) and ( $g$ ) over long time-series, showing that the period between 1930 – 75 in the Western world was an historical anomaly in which inequality was temporarily reversed. Today we are heading once again toward extreme concentration of wealth and possible oligarchy.

For Eternal Employment the continued high rate of return on capital is a premise. The fact that  $r > g$  keeps the project afloat. In this sense the artwork can function as a measure of our growing inequality.

Paradoxically, while offering a tribute to the history of employment protection, this very employment is made dependent on the continued concentration of capital for its survival.

### Presence: Time Embodied

Eternal Employment is proposing employment without labour. Work without duties, responsibilities or projected outcomes.

The employee may come to suffer from severe “boreout” (stress caused by understimulation), may invent his/her own projects or creative ventures, or may simply embrace a state of perpetual leisure.

As such, Eternal Employment not only offers a different understanding of work and the worker, but questions the very notions of growth, productivity and progress which are at the core of modernity.

The non-productive is of course a central trope of art. Some would argue that the *use* of art is precisely its uselessness. In the face of mass automation and artificial intelligence, the impending threat/promise is that we will all become productively superfluous. We will all be “employed at Korsvägen”, as it were. Some suggest that this transition has already begun, that more and more jobs are producing meaningless output. Or as an artist colleague once put it “everyone is an artist, but only the artists know”.

What remains in an employment without productivity is time. In this sense we can understand the employee as a witness of time. Even an embodiment of time itself. This connects to a rich art historical tradition of the durational performance. But whereas historically, durational performance has been tied to the endurance of the individual artist, Eternal Employment makes possible duration beyond the endurance – or even life expectancy – of any individual.

### Future Ruin: When the Lights Go Out

Should the money run out after 25, 50, or 100 years, that would imply an historical shift in the relation between return on capital and wages. A sustained period in which work pays better than money.

If this happens, the employment comes to an end. The “working lights” go out over the platform at Korsvägen, never to be lit again.

What remains are the narratives generated by the employment.

## **Realization (Technical Description)**

### The Foundation

A Foundation is set up to facilitate the artwork “Eternal Employment” over time.

The main goal of the foundation is to secure the continuance of the employment.

The foundation is responsible for managing the funds. (See Financial Feasibility below).

The foundation will act as the employer. And will be responsible for recruitment whenever an employee resigns or retires.

The foundation will also take on mediation, archiving, and the production of discourse around the work, as the board sees fit in different periods.

The foundation should at all times strive to include board members with the following roles/competencies:

- Representative of the artist
- Juridical competence
- Capital management competence
- Art historical competence
- Cultural practitioner
- Communication competence
- Other competencies deemed important by the board members at any time

The foundation is set up for “public good” within the field of culture, and therefore has limited taxation obligations. (For further details see Financial Feasibility below).

### The Employment

The employment position is announced a few months prior to the inauguration of the Korsvägen Station. A draft announcement is included in the Material Samples, see files:

*2A-Eternal\_Employment-MaterialSample-Announcement-Mockup-SWE.pdf*

*2B-Eternal\_Employment-MaterialSample-Announcement-Mockup-ENG.pdf*

The only obligations of the employee are:

- to check-in and check-out at the Korsvägen Station at the beginning and end of each working day. (Not required, however, to stay within the premises of the station throughout the day)
- to keep to the working hours agreed upon between the employee and the employer (the Eternal Employment Foundation)
- not to take on other paid employment during the working hours of the Eternal Employment position

Apart from the above, the position holds no duties or responsibilities. Whatever the employee chooses to do constitutes the work.

The recruitment process is the responsibility of the Eternal Employment Foundation (see above). Recruitment criteria are yet to be defined.

The employment contract is full time and of indefinite duration. Should the employee resign or retire, a new employee is to be recruited.

Employment conditions should as far as possible correspond to those of an average public sector employee; including working hours, holiday entitlement, pension provision, notice period, etc.

Starting salary will be set at the time of recruitment, but should as far as possible conform to that of other public sector employees. Age and experience of the employee should be taken into account. Annual salary increases will aim to follow collective bargaining agreements. If this is not feasible they will follow the rate of inflation. Under certain circumstances, when continuance of the employment is threatened, the Eternal Employment Foundation can negotiate the salary and/or working hours with the employee and any union representative s/he might have.

#### The Work Place (Korsvägen Station)

The station at Korsvägen will have a time clock where the employee is expected to check-in and check-out every working day.

The time clock can be placed in connection to one of the service entrance doors at the far end of the platform. See location specified in file:  
*4-Eternal\_Employment-LocationVisualizationA3.pdf*

This door will be marked with the text “Eternal Employment”. The employee will be provided access through this door and a space for changing clothes and leaving personal belongings during working days.

The time clock is connected to the lights above the platform and will turn on a stronger fluorescent light – “working light” – whenever the employee is checked in at work.

According to the design guidelines received, the brightness and temperature of the lighting at platform level would change over the course of the day (this has already been budgeted for).

The “working light” proposed here would be a defined additional increase in light temperature (kelvin) and brightness (lux), experienced as qualitatively brighter than other train stations along Västlänken.

According to guidelines for “office lighting” given by the Swedish Work Environment Authority (“Arbetsmiljöverket”) working lights can range from 200 to 1500 lux. The appropriate increase in brightness will be defined relative to the proposed “normal” light range for the station.

The “working light” marks the presence/absence of the employee. Light of this intensity is only turned on when the employee is checked in. Should the employment end, this light will go out forever.

According to the design guidelines received, custom-made light fixtures are budgeted for. The proposal is to change the design of these fixtures to look like a scaled up version of archetypical office lights. It is assumed that this change of fixture design can be kept cost neutral. See design proposal in file:  
*4-Eternal\_Employment-LocationVisualizationA3.pdf*

### Financial Feasibility

A financial feasibility study has been conducted by Erik Penser Bank. See Material Sample, file:

*2C-Eternal\_Employment-MaterialSample-FinancialFeasibilityReport.pdf*

This study makes the following assumptions:

- 6 MSEK will be invested
- There is a 7-year investment period prior to the first wage payment (2018-2025)
- The starting salary in today’s monetary value has been set to 21 600 SEK.
- According to verksamt.se the total annual wage costs at this salary level today would be 350 416 SEK

Two different benchmarks are used to project annual return and standard deviation:

- the Stockholm Benchmark Index (SBX Index) over the past 20 years
- AP7 Equity Fund (the default fund of the Swedish premium pension system) since its inception in 2010

Two different wage structures are assumed:

- salary increases consistent with outcomes of historical wage negotiations (3,2% annual increase)
- salary increases consistent with central bank inflation goals (2% annual increase)

This generates four different probability values for succeeding to finance the employment for eternity (defined as more than 120 years), ranging from 57% - 78% probability.

The bank’s report also outlines a time sustaining matrix, showing the number of years the employment can be sustained at different levels of annual return.

To secure the continuance of the employment the Eternal Employment Foundation can further:

- Adjust salary level at entry after the first 7-year investment period
- Negotiate salary increases with the employee (and his/her union representative if applicable)
- If necessary negotiate part time employment (as opposed to full time) with the employee (and his/her union representative if applicable)

The Eternal Employment Foundation is set up for the “public good” within the field of culture. Its taxation obligations are therefore limited. However, it has not been fully established whether capital gains taxes can be completely avoided within a foundation of this kind.

If capital gains taxes are required, an endowment insurance would be set up to minimize taxation obligations for the foundation. At present endowment insurance would limit the tax on the invested money to an annual 0.375% of total assets under management (AUM).

### Budget Allocation

6 MSEK

Money invested to cover employment costs.

Also covering:

- A yearly artist fee of 0.1% – 0.3% of total assets under management (AUM)
- A symbolic yearly fee for the members of the board of the Eternal Employment Foundation (fee size to be determined).

300 000 SEK

Time clock and “working light” at the Korsvägen Station.

200 000 SEK

Fixed artist fee.

### Material Samples

Mock-up employment announcement. Text commissioned from a Gothenburg based poet:

2A-Eternal\_Employment-MaterialSample-Announcement-Mockup-SWE.pdf

2B-Eternal\_Employment-MaterialSample-Announcement-Mockup-ENG.pdf

Financial Feasibility Study by Erik Penser Bank:

2C-Eternal\_Employment-MaterialSample-FinancialFeasibilityReport.pdf