

# **ENVOI**

**Some Preliminary Thoughts  
on a Built Environment at Skeppsbron**

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## BETWEEN EMERGENCE AND DESIGN

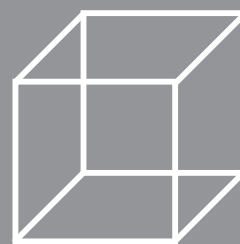
This is an attempt to outline some preliminary thoughts regarding what a built environment at Södra Älvstranden in Gothenburg could be. A lot of thought has been put into this area by professionals as well as non-professionals within different frameworks and with various ambitions. Further, development projects of areas similar to Skeppsbrokajen, i.e. central infrastructural and industrial sea- or riverside areas, have been on the agenda in numerous cities during the past 20 years. The issue is not new but there is more at stake here. The notion of “planning” has been contested during the past decades. Many regulatory tools for city planning and building have proved themselves outdated and often alternative initiatives are lost to commercial interests. The question is, is there a place for non-commercial initiatives at all? Or in other words, how can a top-down apparatus like the City Council along with their commercial allies come to terms with emerging grass-root demands for influence?



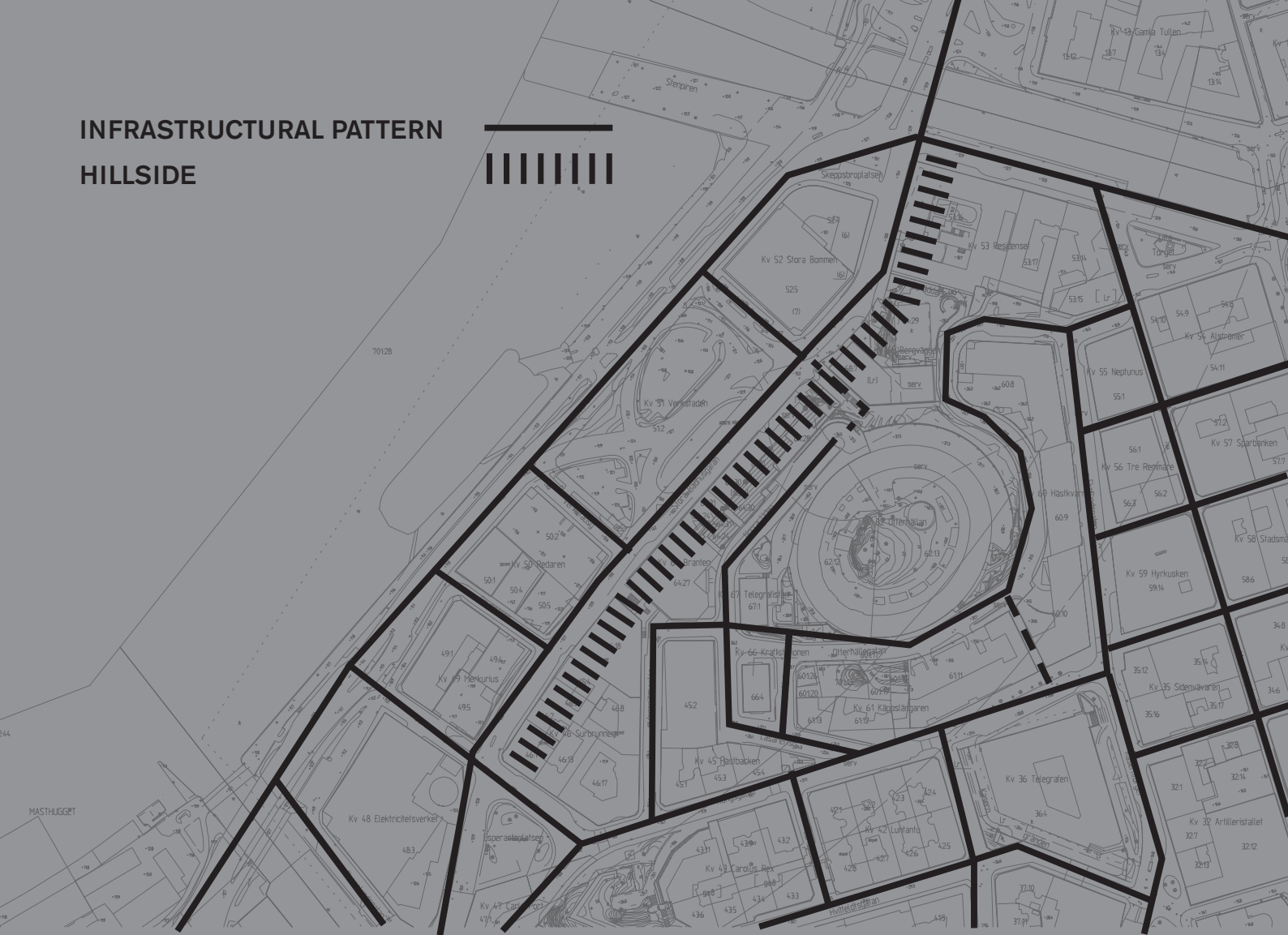
This attempt deals with these issues in two ways. First of all, the material presented here is the first step in a process which we would like to think of as an “envoi”, a handing-over process, where this material is given to the other members of the research group “Ingrepp” to be utilised in whatever way they feel suitable.

Our aim is to examine processes and agendas that constitute our ways of planning and building environments, not only in the way they “are” or even “should be”, but also in ways which may seem wrong, stupid or even “unrealistic”. The reason for this *malpractice* or, if you like, *amateurism* is a general feeling that we take too much for granted. A troubling feeling that we are living an impossible dream which rapidly is falling apart and will continue to do so if we are not willing face the full account of our actions. We are just trying to “get real”.

Further, these preliminary thoughts, which have taken the form of a cluster of ideas and concepts, try to outline a built environment, which in the best of worlds would have a less prohibiting and more reciprocal character in relation to local activities and agencies. Moreover, we try to expand the notion of built environment beyond the solely “human” perspective. Luckily we are not alone in this endeavour. On the contrary, it seems that every generation has had this dream of architectures that are less rigid, where the aim is, to use Nabeel Hamdi’s words, to find the “right balance between the creativity of emergence and the stability of design”.



# INFRASTRUCTURAL PATTERN HILLSIDE



## OUTSETS AND MODELS

1. When it comes to how to build in terms of heating efficiency, a dome or a 1:1:1 cubicle would be the better option. That is, geometries which minimize the volume/perimeter ratio.

2. From an energy point of view, a thermally “sluggish” material like concrete (or stone), in which heat can build up and be stored, would be preferred. That is, opposed to materials such as wood and steel, which have shorter heating/cooling cycles.

3. The path of the sun and the main wind direction has to be accounted for.

4. Today it is not only a matter of making the most out of our natural resources like the sun and the wind, but also about utilising the energy emerging from human activities. The human body and her prostheses, such as computers, radiate heat that

often turn into a “ventilation” problem. This problem could be transformed through the use of passive heating, by distributing the heat instead of getting rid of it.

5. When building, assembly for disassembly should be taken into account. That is, to look for a smooth transition between the different technical layers of the building, such as site, structure, skin, services, plan and mobile equipment as well as keeping them technically separated.

6. Looking at the site and its context, the suggested grid is at best rhetorical. In its isolated capacity it only establishes “directions”, lacking the fabric-like qualities of the grid when it works at its best. A hyper-block could be one solution, not only taking the dysfunctional grid into account, but also the issue of scale.



7. Existing buildings should be kept and taken care of if possible. New surroundings might bring out new unforeseeable characteristics from the existing milieu.

8. It is no coincidence that Seven Eleven have chosen to establish themselves on the corners of our cities. To think strategically in terms of location and infrastructure is a key issue when it comes to urban life. A way to use this strategic thinking would be to locate the tram-stop and ferry-terminal on either side of the built environment. The shortest path would then run "through" the building.

9. This would be possible if the new built environment was removed from Stora Badhusgatan, making place not only for a tram-stop but also reducing the impacts of the shadowing Otterhällan.

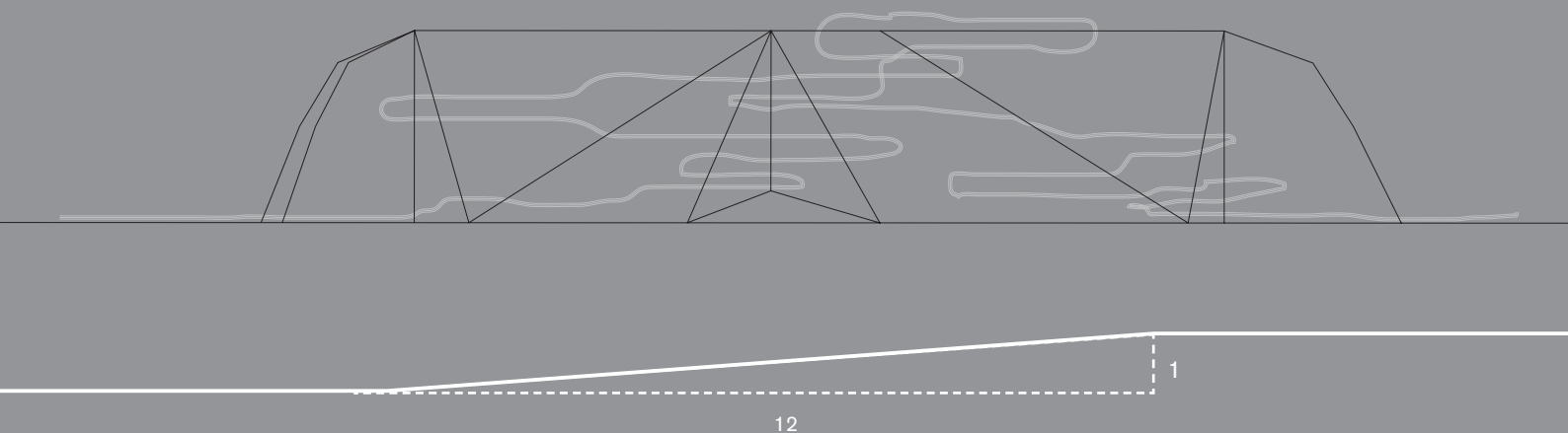
10. This would mean, if we still aim for a hyper-block, that the suggested building line along the quay, as an effect of the grid, would be trespassed.

11. This line would be "intact" if we loose the notion that the new environment is a block or a hyper-block. Here the notion of the hill returns to us, as a kind of "pre-grid" structure.

12. This brings us back to the notion of infrastructural redundancy. Taking this issue seriously means making the built environment accessible in as many ways as possible. This means that we would not only rely on elevators and stairways to deal with vertical movement, but also make the most out of a system of ramps and slopes.

13. For this reason we will make the standard slope for disabled people (1:12) a regulating factor in the overall design.

14. We think of infrastructure as a mechanism limiting as well as making movements and activities possible. That is, as something to be acted upon. In this sense, even the space between floors is infrastructural. To open up possibilities, we imagine a floor-height between 3 metres up to 8 metres making it possible to add space, to insert one or even two floors depending on location.





## OUT OF SCALE

Scale is another key issue. Scale (as in relative size) is an “effect” of past and present planning and activities. One can think of scale as series of related ratios regulated by one or many common denominators. The “original” common denominator is the human body. Today we have a range of denominators, such as cars, chairs, containers and so on. These denominators, which on an individual level, may differ, still constitute a particular *scale*. We all know when a chair or car is out of scale, when it’s monstrous or minuscule. In this way a range of nested scales from furniture-scale, to room-scale, to block-scale etc. are fabricated. Subsequently, certain ways of dealing with space are affirmed while others are negated.

Scale can be intense and vast at the same time. Imagine the endless walkways of a larger airport terminal and you will have an idea of what the nested character of scale (and space) is all about. Although “denominated” by the human body aeroplanes are inscribed in a particular scaled space, a scale in which the human body is subordinated at the airports. This is also true for the area called Södra Älvstranden. Although the human body is the original denominator

its primacy has been lost to trucks, trains, ships and tankers.

The common understanding among architects is that areas like Södra Älvstranden have two scales, one maritime/infrastructural and one urban/domestic. One denominated primarily by trucks, trains and ships, the other by man. But is this really the case? Is not the notion of *scale* intimately connected with the notion of *infrastructure*? The maritime/infrastructural paradigm and the urban/domestic paradigm in this area are more or less adherent in their current state. In contrast we would like to explore the notion of scale as presented by the image of Uluru. Uluru as a habitat for plants, insects, birds, mammals and so on, could be described as overlapping and interfering rather than as isolated and nested in terms of scale. Could an un-nesting of scale be a productive way to by-pass the homogenizing mechanisms of scale? That is, could other “ratios” and “relations” between furniture, space, apartment, block and so on, possible affirm new or even “other” practices and bring out new relations among practices?

15. Thinking of a hyper-block in this way raises the question of direct daylight within the built environment. We imagine that the skin and a series of shafts (which brings daylight) operate in an overall environmental “green” system providing cooling, heating as well as fresh air.

16. When it comes to the overall structuring of the built mass, there are a number of ways to approach this. The common way to deal with high-rise structures is in terms of stacking or layering. That is, as a series of floors of top of each other connected with elevators and stairs. We interpret such a structure as a horizontal feature supplemented with vertical access points. Here we are looking for a semi-horizontal or semi-vertical movement (as the hill) or at least an interwoven horizontal and semi-horizontal structure, which enables continuous up-hill or down-hill movement without stairways or elevators.

17. There are two ways of thinking of such a semi-horizontal space. Either as a spiralling space – a uni-directional space, where “loop-holes” could be created with the help of vertical features such as stairways, escalators and elevators – or as a “honeycomb” where each cell has a stacked relation to the cells on top and below and a diagonal relation to the neighbouring semihorizontal cells. Assuming that each cell is diagonally connected to neighbouring cells, each cell would operate as a relay enabling nearly infinite ways of moving through, accessing and connecting the structure. This also means that alternate routes can always be found.

18. In our mind a spiralling/honeycomb structure could establish a new path to Otterhällan.

