

The Experimental Start of the Planning of Södra Älvstranden in Gothenburg

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Foto: Nils-Olof Sjöden, Vägverket

In Gothenburg, city planning has in some respects taken a different path than in the rest of Sweden. The latest example of this is the planning process of Södra Älvstranden, the southern riverbank in central Gothenburg. By constructing a tunnel for the traffic, this area by the river has been made available for development.

From the beginning the basic ambition of the municipality has been to control the development of this area in order to secure the economic benefits involved. At the same time politicians tried to increase the democratic involvement in the planning process by initiating a public discussion early in the process.

Control was achieved by transferring the overall responsibility for the development to a municipality owned company, Älvstranden Utveckling AB, (the municipality is also the owner of most of the land) and the most influential politicians in Gothenburg were elected to the board. The official agency for city planning and other technical offices played a more formal role.

The public discussion started with an invitation to citizens and independent professionals to present proposals for the general character and use of the area. The invitation was also extended to organisations and associations that were interested to form a team and assign a project leader. Political parties were however excluded. The chosen teams would be given an official commission and some economic compensation. To make these teams more representative interested individuals that did not belong to any of the chosen organisations and associations joined the different teams based on a lottery draw. However, skilled architects, planners and people from the cultural sector dominated all the teams.

Two of the chosen teams were based in consultancy companies within Architecture and planning and two in non-profit cultural organisations. A fifth team was based in an inter-cultural resource center. The sixth team was put together to represent the interests of children and young people and included three architects and a drama teacher.

The teams started to work mid August 2005 and presented their final results in December 2005. They presented their visions to the public at a meeting in a cinema, and with wall charts that were exhibited at the city museum until April 2006. A special forum for the different presentations was created on a website. To make it easier to compare the different visions all the teams were asked to present their most important information on the same aerial photograph of the area.

After the presentation of the work from the six non-professional teams, four architectural consultancy companies were commissioned to work out proposals for the first part of the development, the Skeppsbron area. This work started in May 2007 and the invited architects were asked to present a proposal for the detailed use of the land, the internal communication network and the buildings. No official conclusion of the earlier teamwork was presented. It was up to the architects to take up what they found reasonable and realistic. Their proposals were presented in an exhibition and on the Internet during the autumn of 2007. We do not know anything about the official conclusions of that work. It will probably be presented during the autumn of 2008.

The Six Non-Professional Teams

The two teams based in architectural consultancy companies worked in a similar way. They concentrated on developing an understanding of the potential of the area and on links to surrounding areas.



Team *Rhizom* had their focus on creating a general vision for the urban life and on strategies to keep the dynamics over time. Continuous changes should be made possible by a flexible physical structure and development of a democratic organisation of the management of the area. To open up for more responsible and innovative developers a system without economic competition was suggested. The price for use of the land should be low and fixed and a fund should be set up for local entrepreneurs without a strong economic base. Their vision was called “Generocity”. For the continuation of the program a number of crucial questions were set up actualising issues as contact between different parts of the city, the possibility of opening up for different kinds of smaller initiatives, the balance between commercial, social, cultural and ecological interests. An elevated railway and new bridges over the river for pedestrians and bicycles was proposed to connect the suburbs with the central parts of the city centre. An emigrant and immigrant museum, a public bathe, an information box/place, a place for events and a “Wind Promenade” along the riverside were also proposed.

Team *Intercultural Resource Center* concentrated on bringing in experiences from the northwest suburbs of Gothenburg where people of many different nationalities try to develop their own local culture. A market place distributed over the bottom floors of new residential blocks, a public outdoor bathe close to the thermal power station, an outdoor stage for music and other performances, an archive for migrants and historical cultural exchange and a room for stillness were proposed. A mix of simple and cheap and more exclusive housing, services and places of work and cheap facilities for artists and artisans were argued for.

Team *Children and Young People* organised a more general discussion among children about urban life. This was done using different methods such as a set of pictures and role-playing around everyday situations. The children visited each other and experienced city areas they had never been in before. A number of key concepts were developed and discussed during the planning process, e.g. meetings, community, security and mixed areas. Small-scale housing with intimate yards so that the inhabitants can get to know each other was asked for. The children also wanted public places with mixed activities that are free to join and safe, as football grounds, an arena for skaters and an outdoor stage for music.



Team *Liljewall* highlighted the uniqueness of the area and meant that it should be used to encourage creative people to move to Gothenburg by offering exclusive experiences and entertainment. A spectacular high-rise building designed to be a new landmark for Gothenburg and host a centre for knowledge-oriented and creative activities was proposed close to the opera house. The housing-areas were primarily shown as a continuation of the closed blocks in the older parts of the city.

Team *White* suggested a new bridge over the river east of Skeppsbron and a new tramway through the area re-establishing an old passage. By proposing a number of new buildings some of the neighbouring old city blocks were completed and connected with the harbour area. Along the quay a dense housing-area with shops and other services in the bottom floors was envisioned. A mix of apartments for rent and tenant owned apartments to secure a mix of people was recommended. A number of small pavilions close to the waterfront, with different activities for passing people, were also a part of the proposal.

Team *Ord & Bild* (named after the oldest cultural journal in Sweden) concentrated on finding ways to integrate the area with the rest of the city. A new low bridge for pedestrians and bikes was proposed to connect the two riverbanks in a better way. In harmony with the earlier public discussion, small-scale and cosy housing areas and unique public functions were argued for. All housing should be for rent and half of the apartments should be reserved for people moving in from neglected suburbs. The rents should be subsidized by the city. A new cultural centre with a public bath and a new museum for Migrants was also suggested.

The Four Parallel Architectural Commissions

To create a starting-point for the four parallel commissions a document was compiled by the city planners presenting a number of preconditions. The content is a mix of general goals from the overall planning documents and technical information about e.g. foundation and traffic.

In the General Plan for the whole of Gothenburg from 2006 there is a focus on environmental issues and sustainable development. It is also clearly stated that social diversity in all parts of the city should be attained. Additionally, it is desirable that new buildings and areas should be in balance with the older culturally valuable buildings.



The team of *Henning Larsen Architects* gave priority to the public passage along the river by a broad open landscape that is terraced towards the water. The housing area is located along Stora Badhusgatan at an upper level under which there are shops and offices. The height of the buildings vary from six floors in the south up to eleven floors in the north forming a continuous and sculptural building mass that corresponds to the river space and the hill of Otterhällan. Energy saving is emphasised and arrangements for both solar and wind energy are proposed.

The team of *Erseus, Malmström, Edström, Nivå, WSP* gave priority to the public interest and accessibility of the area. There are two rows of buildings for housing parallel to the river with small yards in between and terraces on the roofs. The passage along the river is quite close to the waterfront, with low bridges in wood. All buildings have the same, moderate height with four floors for housing and a bottom floor for services, offices etc. Only one higher building is suggested in the northeast corner in connection to a passage from the hill of Otterhällan. In the north, where the tramway changes direction, a public place has been opened up. Close to the riverside, is a public bath.



The team of *HMXV* suggests a block structure with two lines of blocks for housing between the quay and Stora Badhusgatan. The buildings along the quay stand close to the waterfront. The blocks in the two rows are displaced in relation to each other and each block has its individual form. The height of the buildings varies up to six floors for apartments and a higher bottom floor for offices and shops. The areas between the blocks are for the residents. Stora Badhusgatan is developed into an avenue with plantations along both sides. In the north there is a park through which the tramway passes and a new tram station connected to the boat terminal at Skeppsbron. In the south there is a harbour for small boats, a public bath and a new hotel.

The team of *Liljewall, Schmidt Hammer Lassen and Ramboll* concentrated on housing. To open up for the sun along the quay (as the riverside is oriented towards northwest) a row of quite low and small houses is proposed. A second row is created by tower blocks with 12 floors and by lower buildings with 3 floors with restaurants and shops on the bottom floors. Along Stora Badhusgatan there is a third row forming a protecting wall along the street. A central wide passage connects the hill of Otterhällan with the river dividing the area into two mega blocks.