Sleeping // Awakening

SUBURBS

Bergshamra, Stockholm
URBAN INTERVENTION
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Curation: Yoav goldwein
Photography: Livi Kessel

Master program in Urbanism
Kungliga Tekniska Högskola
Cities in the 21st century are changing fast. We live in an age where innovative technologies and globalisation allow reality to be constantly reinvented. Driving these changes are innovation and entrepreneurship. But as well as providing ways to improve lives, they can also be the cause of a dangerously exacerbating systemic inequalities, where not everyone enjoy the benefits of the race. The distance between the winners and the losers is well reflected in our urban environment, where small towns and suburban districts decline in contrast to the thriving city centers.

Architects, urbanists and decision makers have been trying to bring modern development into these areas, but general solutions or patches of 'problem solving' are not sufficient when dealing with the level of complexity associated with the formation and development of cities, inhabited as they are by sometimes millions of people from different classes and in different settings. There is a need instead to go to the root of any problem and look for solutions from the bottom up that will allow every citizen to take part in forming a better city for all.

Where there is a challenge there is also an opportunity. While city centers are under enormous pressure from capital and political powers, the suburbs and small towns have space for unusual ideas and smarter design. Those places have a great potential to become part of the healthy, inclusive and sustainable urban experience we wish to see in the future.

The suburbs can turn into a new type of inspiring neighborhood, where all residents are involved in its production, own their achievements (and failures), and live in dignity. With new smart technologies and attractive designs that use information and communication technology, cities can overcome barriers of communication, geography, information sharing and service access in urban communities.

Urban edges are the places where we can implement all the lessons we learned from the city. Experiments have already begun, focusing on the power of entrepreneurship and the potential of diverse communities. One of them is the urban intervention in Bergsamra, Stockholm presented here.

The intervention came to open a discourse in the local community on the ways which public space can be used differently with the emphasis on social and perhaps even political use, drawing back to the original purpose of public squares in ancient Greece.

The intervention was made out of two parts. The first, a 4 days street exhibition showcasing examples of bottom up urban developments in cities around the world. The second part was a moving innovation lab, experimenting the use of flexible, mobile and modular architecture for different purposes. In this case the structure used as innovation lab where a lecture was held together with a movie screening, open local citizens together with students from KTH university.

Throughout the 4 days intervention residents expressed their personal experience with their local urban environment, the new developments they desire, the functions the district is providing and the ones it does not. Some citizens contributed to the exhibition with ideas for exciting new uses of their public space and how they can engage in the change they would like to see.

Public participation in planning processes and idea generation workshops are common in recent years, but rarely being nourished by local government who has the means and authority to execute these ideas. Furthermore, developers and architects who are motivated primarily by cost-effective matrixes, tend to neglect the value perspective of public space, and adapt design that is cheap and easy to maintain.

Understanding the complexity of the relationship between citizens and "executors" in the urban environment, the intervention hopes to open this important debate in the suburb of Bergsamra and bring better collaboration in designing a better suburb for all.
Most problems have a spatial aspect, but their origin lies in economic, social, political arenas, the spatial being a partial cause and an aggravation, but only partial. It might be better to see the seeds of the future as sectors. It is clearly possible to have sectors of everyday life that are free of capitalist forms, operating within the capitalist system but not of it, not dominated by it. For short-hand, those are the sectors of the economy and of daily life that are not operated on the profit system, that are within it but not of it, that are not motivated by profit but rely on solidarity, humanity, the flexing of muscles, and the development of creative impulses, for their own sake.

They will need to draw resources from the for-profit sector, preferably democratically and openly through government, but their own driving force will be found in general principles that are radically different from those motivating the for-profit economy, and principles that can have increasingly wider visibility and appeal.

Peter Marcuse, The right to the city

“We want to change our public space but we are not allowed to. We must ask for permission and it takes a long time to get approval.”
“This is my living room, it’s a bit empty. I’ve been living here since 1978 and there is always someone to speak with here in the square.”

“The criticism of architectural determinism came in both soft and hard forms. The soft form was that architecture did nothing to deal with the social problems that came along with poverty for the working classes of advanced industrial societies. The hard form was that it made things worse. The hard form turned architectural determinism on its head. In the soft form, it could be agreed that the improved environment and the improved quality of the building itself, a new one that had replaced an old and ill-maintained one, was a change for the better.

In the hard form, a reverse architectural determinism insisted that not only did the architecture not contribute to a better social life, but it had the opposite effect: it led to a social life and social problems worse in many respects than those in the slums the new architecture had replaced.”

Richard Florida, The new urban crisis
“If I want to go out in the evening, everything is closed. There is no where to have a drink and meet people.”

“To this point, liveability has been largely a process of quantifying attributes to inform and develop government policy and to market cities to internal and external audiences. A key aspect of the current liveability debate focuses on the social health of communities. Debates within the literature would suggest that the notion of geographic community is largely irrelevant in contemporary society as people are less geographically dependent for work, education, family, and leisure. However, this ignores the social differences that exist in all cities and those people who have fewer, if any, options to move beyond those spatial boundaries. Ultimately, it is the “ideal” of community that underpins the notion of liveability within government policy.

Physical changes in the living environment do not guarantee the liveability outcomes policy makers claim such as a sense of community, meaningful social interaction or social cohesion for residents. The challenge is to go beyond the indices and rankings popular with governments at all levels and conceive, measure and interpret the social dimension of liveability in a way that is meaningful to residents in 21st Century urban settings and then express this vision in planning, policy and development outcomes.”

Kathy Lloyd
"There is no connection between different parts of the neighborhood. People don't mix much with each other."

"A community group that struggles to maintain ethnic diversity in its neighborhood and protect against gentrification may suddenly find its property prices (and taxes) rising as real estate agents market the "character" of their neighborhood to the wealthy as multicultural, street-lively, and diverse. By the time the market has done its destructive work, not only have the original residents been dispossessed of that common which they had created (often being forced out by rising rents and property taxes), but the common itself becomes so debased as to be unrecognizable."

David Harvey, Rebel cities
"There is too much green space between the buildings and it can be used in many different ways."

Rahul Mehrotra

"The increasing concentrations of global flows – of money and goods – have exacerbated the inequalities and spatial divisions of social classes. In this context, an architecture or urbanism of equality in an increasingly unequal economic world requires looking deeper to find a wide range of places to mark and commemorate the cultures of those excluded from the spaces of wealth and economic boom. These don’t necessarily lie in the formal production of architecture, but often challenge it. Here the idea of a city is an elastic urban condition, not a grand vision, but a ‘grand adjustment’."
“There is a graffiti wall hidden in the forest. I would love it to be public and to have the opportunity to express my art.”

“Immigration, demographic change and new technologies and communications media have transformed the spectrum of cultural choices available. The large-scale infrastructure and mass subscription model that underpins the logic of many funded arts organisations is poorly equipped to respond to the plethora of new artists, art forms, audiences, genres, and subcultures emerging in a rapidly changing cultural dynamic.”

Terry Flew
“After all, all human beings are the same—made up of flesh, bone, and blood. We all want happiness, and we all try to avoid suffering. We are the members of one single human family, and our arguments are born from secondary causes. Disputes, lies, and killings are useless. Every person we meet is our brother or sister. I would like to stress this point, which I think is essential. Each person’s happiness can make a profound, effective contribution that can improve the entire human community.”

Dalai Lama
"I grew up here, and I love this neighborhood, but as the family got bigger we had to look for a cheaper solution."

"Something serious happens to local democracy when it enters into a convoluted pact with a global corporation: accountability becomes monitoring, dialogue becomes communication becomes PR, representation turns adversarial, transparency stops short of real openness. The process is subtle and mercurial; the results, unless they explode into brutal catastrophes, recede into invisibility. Social housing is a game in which the tenants aren’t players but pawns: it is a kind of purgatory, where you are neither citizen nor consumer, caught in a limbo of impotence."

The underlying truth is that if you don’t respect people as equals, or cannot conceive of them as co-creators of their own living conditions, the housing serves only the interests of those who profit from it."

Zoe Williams
“There is so much we can do if we work together as a community. We need to be political and co-create this giant living room.”

“Most social problems—such as poverty, sustainability, equality, and health and wellness—are wicked. Wicked problems can’t be ‘fixed’. But because of the role of design in developing infrastructure, designers can play a central role in mitigating the negative consequences of wicked problems and positioning the broad trajectory of culture in new and more desirable directions.

This mitigation is not an easy, quick, or solitary exercise. Due to the system qualities of these large problems, this design process demands interdisciplinary collaboration, and most importantly, perseverance.”

Jon Kolko
“The space is a bit boring. I do miss some art.”

“The city is more than housing, important as it is, and in connection with these other aspects of the city modernism had no better record. It is in particular when one considers what we distinctively have in mind when we summon up images of the city and urbanism—complexity, variety, the unexpected, the sophisticated, the varied, "chance elements that lend variety to the tableau, . . . confusion, chaos, and tumult."

Nathan Glazer
“Being localised, small, connected and open (to others’ ideas, culture and physical presence), these promising social innovations actively contribute to the realization of resilient, distributed socio-technical systems. And vice versa: distributed socio-technical systems may become the enabling infrastructure of a society where these kinds of social innovations can flourish and spread. While centralised systems can be developed without considering the social fabric in which they will be implemented, this imposition is impossible when the technological solution in question is a distributed one; the more a system is networked, the larger is its interface with society and the more the social side of innovation has to be considered. No resilient systems can exist without social innovation.”

Ezio Manzini

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