ABSTRACT

My project idea has emerged against the backdrop of current worldwide urbanization and the densification strategies often applied to take care of urban growth. Often conflicts are emerging that stem from ideas that we have to choose from either exploitation or preservation of green areas when developing cities. I’m interested in exploring this conflict in the context of Sweden and its many “green suburbs”. I wonder if densification of green suburbs could, contrary to what one may think, lead to an overall improvement of the green. With help of modern technology and infrastructure urban life has become less and less dependent on the local landscape and more dependent on consumption. Ideas about city and nature have given birth to monotonous urban environments with highly maintained and static green areas. Research by design can point to ways in which the landscape and its eco systems, already maintained or altered by humans, can be much better integrated in urban life.

With the site of the municipal Lagersdal densification or “city-healing” project in Eskilstuna as a starting point I want to investigate possibilities for a proposal that can challenge the urban/nature dichotomy and build both dense and green. Research through design can highlight the challenges and propose new ways of thinking about the role of landscape and nature in our cities.

By assessing green qualities of the site using mappings and interviews with locals I want to gain an understanding of the existing qualities. By exploring urban designs with increased density and more presence of eco systems I hope to highlight possibilities of creating an urban environments where urban dwellers have a closer relation the landscape that sustains them.
**CHALLENGE**

We see a fast urbanization in the world at large and also an urbanization in Sweden. There is an intense growth of Sweden’s largest cities but also smaller cities like Eskilstuna grow. Many municipalities with cities in Sweden state similar aims and methods for development, that is achieving a more city-like built environment and the method is densification.

So many visions of “cityness” or city-like environments is closely connected to the modern consumer lifestyle. This lifestyle is problematic in many ways and one of them is that we become disconnected from the landscape that sustain us. Urban areas seldom tend to promote a more hands on relation and knowledge about the local environment and hide the impacts of our lifestyles. It’s a modern condition which came about with the industrialization of our societies, when supply infrastructures sanitized cities and transportation and communication networks facilitated global trade and consumption but also cut the link between the natural landscape and our lifestyles. The question of how future urban dwellers will relate to the natural landscape is of acute importance if we want to achieve more sustainable cities.

Part of this inability to relate to the local landscape is the idea of nature as something completely different to the urban and that they cannot coexist. The idea of nature reserve comes from the notion of having to protect nature from exploitation. The exploited green areas becomes too often just simple stretches of parks with lawns. We end up with very mono functional green spaces. I believe we have to overcome this idea to some degree in order to build sustainable cities that support a mutually beneficial relationship between the inhabitants and the local landscape.

I want to explore this challenge by looking at the site of Eskilstuna’s Lagersdal project. It seeks to densify a suburban site along a wide road with good availability of public transport. Eskilstuna’s approach to a growing population is to grow the city from within to create a denser city. In order to create a more city like built environment the strategy is to primarily densify within existing structures of the city core, then along prioritized stretches of public transport and then only as a last resort expanding the city limits.

Eskilstuna municipality states that densification should not affect nature with high biological values and if green areas have to be exploited then compensation will be made close by. This reasoning indicates an idea about nature as kept either intact or exploited. We know that humans have altered their locals landscape for tens of thousands years and that we can hardly find any eco system on this earth unaltered by humans. Exploitation means change, but does it have to mean change for worse?

Suburban housing areas rich in green spaces exists basically in all cities in Sweden and it seems to provide the main stage for urban densification in the future. The Lagersdal project in Eskilstuna exemplifies this challenge very well. What I’m interested in exploring is if a strategy of densification can improve qualities and visibility of the local natural landscape and contribute to an urbanity better integrated with the natural processes of the landscape. At the urban scale can a densified environment at the same time foster stewardship and better knowledge and dependency on the local natural landscape?

**Research question** - Can we densify a green suburb while also increasing the presence of and engagement with the natural systems of the local landscape in the densified area?
**REFERENCE LITERATURE**

- **Andersson et al., (2014) Recomnnecting cities to the biosphere: Stewardship of green infrastructure and urban eco system services**

  This text provide the core theme of my research question. “The physical and mental distance between urban consumers and the eco systems supporting them mask the ecological implications of choices made.”

- **Marcus et al., (2016) Cognitive affordances in sustainable urbanism: contributions of space syntax and spatial cognition**

  Designing for cognitive affordances in urban areas can foster an awareness with citizens about the importance of the ecological landscape and nudge people in a more sustainable behaviors.

- **Forman (2013) lecture. Introduction to landscape ecology: patch/matrix/edge/mosaic**

  Forman’s notion of landscapes can be a useful tool for conceptualizing the complex mosaics of urban and green landscapes.


  Hanna Erixon Aalto shares the same point of departure as I do, which is to question the polarized relation between urban development and nature conservation. Helpful for me in framing the challenge and contains useful design references.


  Helpful for me in framing the overall challenge and contains useful design references for my project.

- **Ståhle (2005) Mer park i tätare stad, Teoretiska och empiriska undersökningar av stadsplaneringens mått på friytetillgång**

  Text shows that accessibility of green can be improved with densification. Less green don’t necessarily have to mean less useable or less valuable green. Dense environments can also be highly connected environments which are good for accessibility to green spaces.