

Becoming Hagastaden

# To exhibit/talk/inform

This essay is discussing an alternative strategy concerning the public information in the Hagastaden development in Stockholm, and the general attitude to a processive development of a city area. As I am interested in the point where professionals/officials and citizens meet and interact, I decided to investigate the program of our given assignment further. In that sense, my assignment is not so much about searching for a form, but more about searching for the content. I am very much interested in the "exhibition" part of the program, as an exhibition could be where the knowledge and interest of these different groups meet.

Hagastaden is planned to be a new, central part of Stockholm. The main motor for the transformation of the area, is the New Karolinska Hospital, planned to open in 2016. The goal from the municipalities of Stockholm and Solna, together with investors, is that the area will be the world's center for Life Sciences, with businesses and research facilities linked to the hospital. The heavy traffic of today will be hid under ground, and give space for 5.000 dwellings and offices for 35.000 workers. Construction work started in

2010, and it is planned to be fully realized in 2025.

## Trying to understand the plans / rhetorics

When looking through the material provided from the municipality and investors through web pages and brochures, a lot is said about visions and goals for the area. The area is also thoroughly drawn out; it will be established over approximately 15 years, and street sections as well as buildings for the first steps of the process are ready to be built. Visualizations of the life in the city-to-be are usually limited to showing facades, scale (sometimes not accurate, putting the new city part in as favorable light as possible) and people photoshopped in, pretty, happy, together.

What is not shown or explained, is how to get from the built office/apartment buildings to fulfillment of these goals. This is of course because a lot of the city life is unplannable, or beyond architecture and urban planning. But architecture and urban planning can and should also be generators and tools to fulfill ideas of a better city. Concrete plans can work with or work against these unplannable processes. That is why

we need architects, right?

### Democracy?

As plans for building entirely new parts of the Stockholm is definitely something the inhabitants of the city would find interesting (and, because Sweden is a democracy, after all), material is of course provided from the municipality. Documents produced regarding the plans are available online, and a "virtual map" is made to explain the plans to a broader audience. When you click through these virtual maps, what you will find is a few visualizations paired with the before mentioned goals for the area. However, this is not really something you stumble upon, this is something you need to seek out in order to see.

As you approach the site in development, on-site information is provided in form of a few billboards showing some facts on what will be, sometimes paired with the same renders you can find online. Most of the information is about infrastructural solutions, maybe because that is what is currently under construction. If you drive through in a car, as most of the people passing this area actually do, all the information you get about the building site you drive through, is a tiny little billboard facing the wrong way, hidden behind a tree. Not many passersby seem to actually look at the billboards – maybe because it takes time and an already developed interest to really get a clear idea of the plans – also for architects. This doesn't mean that people don't seem curious about the transformation of the area – many people stop to look at the construction site. It is an interesting, but closed off world on its own. Considered the size of the project, and the fact that a whole new part of the city is to take shape, the information from the municipality seems to be slightly undercommunicated. It makes me wonder if the information given out is given out just because the municipality have to, not because they see the importance of informing the citizens about what is going on. Would the critique and dialogue that could follow be too much extra hassle?

Through debates arranged by the Swedish Architects' Association, critique was directed towards the municipality regarding which solutions are chosen, both in typologies, public spaces and program (too much park/street, too narrow blocks, too few dwellings compared to office spaces). Critique was also directed towards how aesthetics were prioritized before securing



the municipality's main keywords for Hagastaden

quality of space; a lot is said about how it should look, facades, colours, etc., less is said about city/dwelling spaces with quality. But most of the critique was directed towards the process; how it is really only possible to ask questions and critique after the plans are more or less finished, and how for instance the debate is arranged by someone else than the municipality, and after decisions are made and plans adopted.

### A question:

What about other people, not necessarily that interested in architecture? Those who do not seek out the information on their own on web sites, or comment on newspaper articles. How do you communicate with them? Engage them? How can one generate processes where also these could be heard, or at least informed? Or make the places involved more accessible for the people of the city throughout the process? After all – the city is also right now, and even though the buildings of the area might be finished in 2025, the city is hopefully never finished.

### To exhibit / inform/ invite to dialogue

So, what is an architectural exhibition? What is its assignment? What should it discuss, and who is the target of this? I think different exhibitions can and should have different agendas, but in this specific case, I see the exhibition as an opportunity to share information and dialogue between the different actors in the processes; the officials/professionals, the media, and the citizens. Most architecture exhibitions should also have a

larger goal in addition to informing citizens about a specific project; to trig interest and make sure that people in general learn more about the city and its processes, and about architecture; about specific architectural instruments such as scale, materials, and spatial qualities.

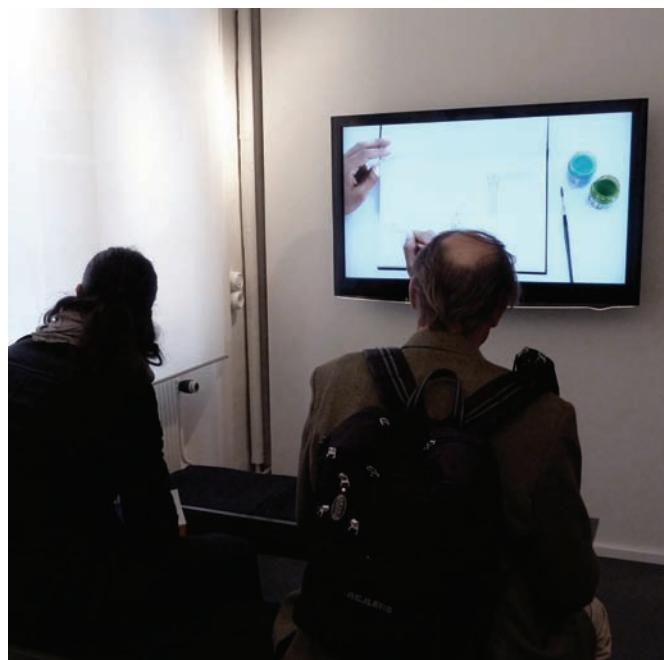
### The Slussen exhibition

Another city planning project in Stockholm, one that gets far more attention than Hagastaden (maybe the exception being the "Tor's towers" skyscraper project in Hagastaden), is Slussen. The reason for this attention is possibly that Slussen has had an important role in Stockholm's history through time, and also the fact that it is located in the middle of the city center. I visited the ongoing Slussen exhibition to get a grasp of how these exhibitions are done in Stockholm. The exhibition was located in Slussen, fittingly in the heart of the action. Outside there were posters on the facade, as well as posters in the metro station etc. The first you meet when you enter are keywords the municipality want connected to the plan, the most highlighted words were "water", "people", "safety", "light" and "infrastructural hub". Upstairs (where you are led to by a path of yellow dots), you are met by a young guide saying hi, wearing a yellow t-shirt with blue text (the colours of the project, and Sweden), a map of the exhibition and flyers. When entering the exhibition rooms, you see large visualizations, renderings or hand-drawn sketches, showing people in the sun, drinking coffee, rollerskating



the big Slussen model

etc. Slussen's importance as a meeting place in the city is also highlighted. This room is empty. In the next room, a big model, 15 square meters in scale 1:100, takes up the room. Along the walls, more large visualizations paired with a bit of explanatory text. Everybody in the room, about 25 people in a room of 25 square meters covered mostly by the model, is looking at the model. It is beautifully made in wood, very detailed with windows and facades thoroughly cut out, and covered by cars (neutral colour) and people (bright orange/red/yellow colour) to imitate city life. People were mostly looking and maybe trying to understand, but also saying things like "well, it looks pretty good". Another room had a smaller model concerning a part of the project (a "plaza"), and more sketches explaining crucial parts of the project. The last room was more of a "multimedia room", it had a TV screen showing a short film of a sketchbook and a hand, presumably of an architect (city planning office boss, Wolodarsky?), sketching his way through the visions to get to the final visualizations hanging in the exhibition. Definitely a very romanticised version of how these processes work: a single visionary architect sketching out ideas that suddenly becomes real... Two computers showing the website of the municipality were also provided in the same room.



movie about the visionary Slussen architect and his sketches becoming real

### Accessibility

What is interesting here, as I see it, is how people seemed to react to different parts of the exhibition. This is only an observation, of course, and other observers might find

something else. But I found it interesting how people seemed to think the large model was intriguing, more than the actual "dry facts" or the colourful visualizations. Also, people gladly sat down to watch the short film, rather than studying the same visualizations on the wall or on the computer screen. There is no doubt that "frozen pictures" misses something that live pictures have, or a model which shows additional dimensions such as scale, actual spatial qualities, texture etc. However, there is really nothing new about these observations.

One thing is to see what kind of information people first find interest in, or what is, also for architects, most easily accessible. There is no doubt that the actual physical solutions chosen in a project is also the easiest to understand. But if you want to take the next step, to understand WHY, the material is not so easily accessible. Why is this solution better than another? This is not addressed in the competition. When a solution is not questioned, it is also easier to accept by the audience. Alternative solutions are definitely discussed among certain people, also here, but they are referred to the street and in a separate exhibition somewhere else, with hidden sponsors and authors. The exhibition space provided by the municipality is not a place for discussion – it is a place for showing people how it will be – selling the solutions to people so they will nod confirmingly.

### **City planning office as business**

The exhibitions such as the one about Slussen seem to be marketing strategies – selling images of the city to the citizens. The municipality communication advisors seem to operate similar or identical to communication advisors hired by businesses. Architectural images often also have this idea of selling – already in school we are trained to make images on how great a building or space will be, taking pictures of models in the most favorable lighting, making images to wow people. Reality has often very little to do with it. Maybe this is also thanks to the system in the architecture world based on competitions, but it is most definitely because architects rely on clients to finance their visions – without being able to sell your proposals to a client, there will usually be no project – no matter how good the project is (unless we work for free and realise the project ourselves – but architects also have to eat).

In this sense – as architects are tied to clients,



billboard on site for car passengers - completely unreadable from a car

the architecture world is closer to marketing and business than it is to art – which, in many ways, manage to keep its own little world for itself. Art usually doesn't have clients in that sense, and the art scene has manifested itself in the position that it is always in opposition. The artist that earns money is not necessarily considered the "best" artist (that can also be the truth for architects). Architecture is part of an industry where profit and money is the drive, not making good spaces for people. Again, nothing new. But still, architectural and city planning processes might have something to learn from art processes:

*Art is revelation instead of information, expression instead of description, creation instead of imitation or repetition. Art is concerned with the HOW, not the WHAT; not with literal content, but with the performance of the factual content. The performance - how it is done - that is the content of art.*

- Josef Albers (teacher at Black Mountain College 1933-1949)

### **...or as something else**

But shouldn't the municipalities of cities have another agenda, focused less on selling solutions to citizens, but rather make sure that the city being built is the city that is the best possible solution? And rather explain how the process of building a city always have to be an endless compromise between a million different interests, that we have to choose, that it is complicated? That it doesn't all meet in one solution? Less

rhetorics, rather being honest, even though it will be messy and the fantasy about the visionary architect sketching his city will have to go. If city is a process, the idea of cities as something a grand city planner can put his definite signature on is dead. But how would that work, and what kind of office would that be?

Also, democratized and constructive processes is probably a good thing, but it is important to acknowledge that architects, planners and officials in the municipality is there for a reason; they have valuable competence that is needed in these processes. Democratizing in this context could thus be centered around making sure that the information available is not only accessible if you seek for it, but also understandable (without being dumb or too simplified), and making sure that the resources and knowledge in the communities are used as a tool to make better cities. Don't be afraid of the friction.

### Questions

Could an exhibition function as a point where professional and citizens meet? If this point opens up for sharing and conveying knowledge back and forth, instead of being an arena where one group tells the other how it should be – what would such a place address? Which questions are to be asked about Hagastaden and the process concerning the area? What do people need to know to be informed, both about Hagastaden, but also about cities and architecture in general?



this is also the city

And how could an exhibition deal with these questions? What kind of "tools" do you have to communicate with?

### Different kinds of questions - different kinds of exhibitions

Some concepts of a city planning project should be easy to address in more or less "standard" exhibitions, such as scale and dimensions, material and textures, light and colour, different spaces, etc. One can for instance use the observation that physical models are more engaging and communicate better than drawings to make a good exhibition based on this. These physical representations should be a good tool to start a dialogue and start talking about other, more abstract concepts. Some questions are of more difficult matter, or just don't necessarily fit in a physical expression, and would be too boring explained on a billboard. For Hagastaden, examples of questions like these could be (questions I and the rest of the class have been asking ourselves);

-What is a Life science city, exactly, other than a branding strategy? Why is this the right image for Hagastaden? Is this what Stockholm wants and needs?

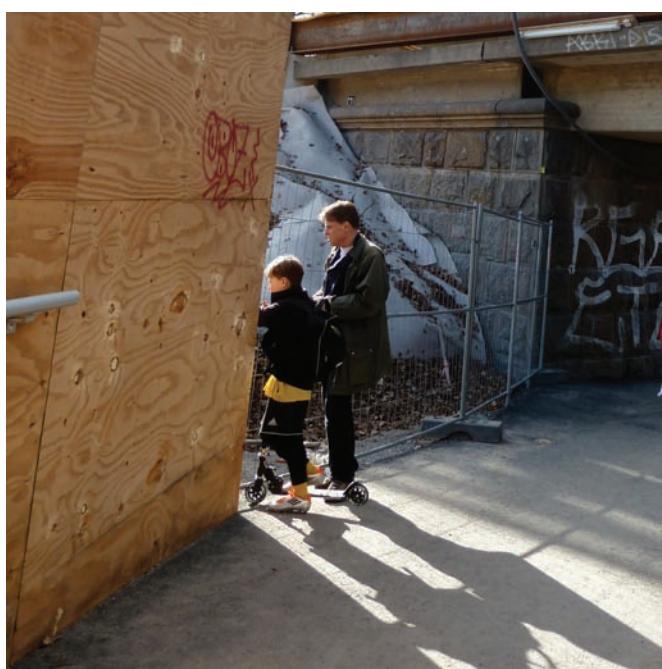
-Why are the right aesthetics for Hagastaden based on 1900's Chicago? Where does that idea come from?

-Why are all the buildings thoroughly designed first, but city life, parks and program around infrastructural hubs not designed more thoroughly? Since they are public spaces and relevant to more people, shouldn't they be done first?

-Why are there relatively few dwellings compared to workspaces, when Stockholm is in extreme need of more housing? Who will live in these apartments (how much will it cost)?

-Why are there no signs in the planning/architecture concepts that the whole city part is built on an artificial lid? Isn't this an interesting concept to work with? And what about history? Can you build up an identity from nothing without also taking history into account?

-Exactly how are the ambitious goals for the area, such as "creative", "versatile" and "adventurous" addressed in the concrete plans?



people are interested in the process

### Soft/hard exhibitions

To sum up quickly, I believe some questions can be addressed in physical and concrete expressions, and abstract questions might need more "abstract" expressions, such as debate, events, discussion. The physical exhibition could be a generator to ask more the difficult questions. A strategy regarding informing about the new cities, architecture, and specifically Hagastaden in this scenario, needs to include both "hard", physical exhibitions, and "soft" exhibitions – more difficult to define, but still as important.

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