

Gothenborg's Jubileumsparken 0.5 and Frihamnen

explorations into the aesthetic of DIY

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Abstract

This design critique explores how a top-down approach of conventional planning coincides with a do-it-(y)ourself project that evolved from the site and is facilitated by a designated mediator instigated in city administration with the purpose of bridging the city's disconnected departments. Hence, the project called Jubileumsparken 0.5 was instigated in 2013 as a placemaking project in concurrence with urban planning undertakings in order to facilitate a redevelopment of the harbour area of Frihamnen in Gothenburg, Sweden. The purpose of this ongoing project is to make use of "meantime" to explore the site and its specific qualities and relationships, and to test these through prototypes and events before plans and protocols are set in stone. Only three years later, at a point when this specific meantime is starting to run out and the first development plans are being drafted, this article demonstrates – through a transformation analysis – that the abandoned site has been turned into a particular place through people's engagement and the processes of building together. Furthermore, it shows that the embedded narratives of these actions are starting to challenge the planners' otherwise distant and abstract understanding of this place.

Keywords

urban transformation; placemaking; site-specificity; do-it-yourself; relational aesthetics

Introduction

The city is bustling itself with preparations for the Volvo Ocean Race. Banners and pavilions, signposts and VIP booths sprawl across an otherwise emptied out harbour area of Frihamnen in Gothenburg, Sweden, on this summer day in June 2015. I cannot help but feel a bit surprised to see the area taken over by an affluent sailing race sponsored by car manufacturer Volvo, the former pride of the city and one of the main employers in the region during its heyday. Feeling a bit derailed by all the hustle and bustle of the race, I can't initially see the interventions that I have come to study, even though the view from the top of the bridge connecting the northern and southern banks of the Göta River is almost infinite. Then the rainbow flag catches my eye, fluttering alongside the crest of the city. Below, I can distinguish the prototypes that I have come to experience, nestled together in a sea of cracked asphalt. Not only has their construction turned an abandoned location into a place that now has significance for the inhabitants of Gothenburg and beyond, but it has also flipped a top-down masterplan to recognise the outcome of an unconventional practice of placemaking that was initially considered as comprising merely temporal events and spectacular happenings.

The prototypes are part of the project called Jubileumsparken 0.5. The name translates from Swedish into "*Jubilee Park*" referencing the city of Gothenburg's upcoming 400th anniversary in 2021. The suffix 0.5 suggests that this is a place in the making, that the prototypes are test beds for something else that will come in the future. So how do we evaluate a project that is not yet completed or never even intended to be? Is it even relevant for an issue that addresses particular places as its theme? I believe it is, but to assess this project at a time when it is still underway and the larger transformation process is picking up speed, a conventional architectural work analysis does not seem to be sufficient, as it "*only allows the researcher to investigate states of space - the form of the old harbour area before transformation and the form of the new city after transformation*" (Diedrich & Dahl 2016, p. 74; Hauxner 2010). Instead, an adopted analytical tool recognizes urban form as something dynamic, consisting of materials as much as of relations, thus making it possible to evaluate the change of space as opposed to the state of space (ibid.). The interpretive tool of transformation analysis (Braae, 2015; Diedrich, 2013; Braae & Diedrich, 2012; Diedrich & Dahl, 2016) allows the researcher to step into, and consider the project as it is, in motion, without being caught up in a discussion of a future end result. In the case of Jubileumsparken 0.5, there are a number of guiding questions for the transformation analysis: How does one inhabit the meantime? What values can be harvested from a meantime in terms of landscape qualities and relations? How does the place on site relate to the place in plans and the place in the future, and what kind of stakeholders inhabit the various 'places'? Is a process of building together, or DIY, enough to turn an abandoned site into a particular place and how is this then recognized by authorities? To explore these questions, the transformation analysis aims for a time-oriented understanding of the project by extrapolating how two redevelopment plans intersect with the project of Jubileumsparken 0.5 in Frihamnen in Gothenburg.

Jubileumsparken 0.5: place and time

Situated on the northern banks of the Göta River, the Frihamnen area is one of nine areas located on the banks of this water body at the centre of the city and the region. (fig. 1). The Frihamnen area is a former harbour area established in the 1920s with three harbour basins and adjacent piers. The area, owned by the public developer Älvstranden Utvecklings AB, covers almost 30 hectares. As a former harbour area, the

site is flat and exposed, overlooking the city centre to the south and housing areas to the north. Extensive infrastructure constructions dominate the area, yet it is quite difficult to access. A handful of large warehouses are located on the site.



FIGURE 1 The area of Frihamnen situated in the Göta River in Gothenburg, Sweden. (City of Gothenburg).

The areas are undergoing transformation within a common framework referred to as the RiverCity Gothenburg project. Initiated in 2009 the aim was to formulate a vision and a strategy for the redevelopment, in close dialogue with the local and regional community. In 2012, the city adopted a vision labelled "*The River City Vision*". The vision builds upon an eco-city model and comprises three main strategies: Connect the city, Embrace the water, and Reinforce the centre (City of Gothenburg, 2012). Since then the vision has guided numerous plans, programs, studies, projects, activities etc., many of them carried out by the public developer, Älvstranden Utvecklings AB in collaboration with the City Planning Authorities in Gothenburg.

To start we need to unfold the urban planning tools commonly used in Sweden. Swedish planning legislation requires municipalities to adopt one comprehensive plan for the entire municipal territory. This comprehensive plan, *översiktsplanen*, is a long-term strategic land use plan. In addition to the *översiktsplan*, detailed development plans are instated for urban areas, which need to be revised for new developments or areas undergoing redevelopment. Depending on the project's complexity or extent, a preparatory plan is sometimes required. This preparatory plan, called *planprogram* or simply *program*, is used to survey various conditions of the site. (Boverket, <http://www.boverket.se/sv/samhallsplanering/kommunal-planering/>) The Frihamnen area is currently being regulated through various plans. A preparatory land use plan, *Program för Frihamnen och del av Ringön*, was drafted in 2014. The plan acknowledges the RiverCity vision and its overall strategies, and thus the proposed urban form corresponds to the eco-city model; high density, mix-use generic blocks in a strict grid and with the future Jubilee Park located in a remote southwest corner of the site (fig. 2). The plan pays only minor attention to the spatial qualities and atmosphere of the current site. Hence, the preparatory plan is a top-down implementation of a generic urban model with little or no consideration given to site-specific qualities.

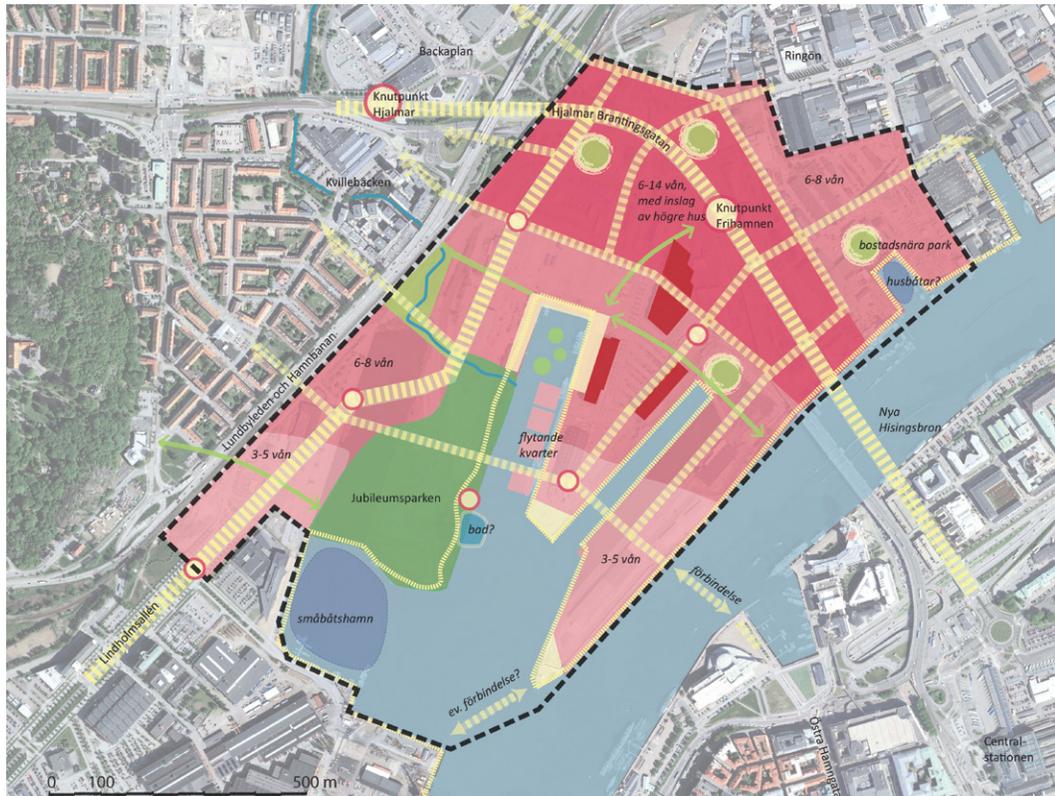


FIGURE 2 The preparatory plan Program för Frihamnen och del av Ringön with the proposed park Jubileumsparken located to the south-west part of the area. (City of Gothenburg, 2014)



FIGURE 3 The detailed development plan Detaljplan för Blandstadsbebyggelse i Frihamnen, etapp 1. The proposed park Jubileumsparken has been extended northwards to include the area where the prototypes are located. Two prototypes, the pool and the sauna, are recognized as existing, thus implying that they should be kept. (City of Gothenburg, 2015).

The subsequent detailed development plan is underway and a public hearing took place during the winter of 2015/16, with an additional hearing in the summer of 2016. The urban model of an eco-city remains the overall concept for the redevelopment, but a few significant changes that indicate an emerging appreciation of site-specific qualities, conditions and atmospheres of the site can be traced between the preparatory plan and the proposed detailed development plan, (Göteborgs Stad, 2015) (fig. 3).

In parallel with the drafting of the regulatory plans, the Jubileumsparken 0.5 was implemented as a joint project between Älvstaden Utvecklings AB and the City Planning Authorities. The aim of the project is to *“investigate, develop and formulate new and alternative methods and ways of working where community planning and dialogue with the people of the city [is] the core”* (City of Gothenburg & Raumlabor, 2015). The project strategy makes use of the meantime, between the present day abandonment of the harbour area and the completion of the new eco-city district. Various architectural firms were invited as consultants throughout the project. For example, the London based architectural practice MUF was involved at an early stage in mapping existing qualities of the site that relate to actual monetary values; for example, leftover concrete constructions could be used as benches, thus ‘saving’ a certain amount of money etc.. The Berlin based architectural practice Raumlabor was invited several times to construct prototypes, while they also instated the processes of building together. These prototypes: urban basics – infrastructure and connectivity; urban farming; bathing culture – a beach, a sauna, a pool; playgrounds; an empowerment project to facilitate initiative from the inhabitants etc. have made explorations into what constitutes a park of the 21st century (Platsbyggnad Älvstaden) (fig. 4). The ‘0.5’ park explores what might be called half- or part-way measures that can inform the design of the future (1.0) park.



FIGURE 4 Prototypes at Jubileumsparken 0.5: the sauna, the beach, a water playground, and a roller-derby arena.

Tracing the transformation strategy

According to Ellen Braae (2015) “*a transformation project tells the story of an industrial area whose function has changed*” (p. 292). RiverCity, and the Frihamnen area, are harbour transformation projects. Studying the transformation of Frihamnen and of Jubileumsparken 0.5 one can detect a wide difference in the attention paid to reading the existing site. Assessing site-specificity demands a method or a technique in order to identify site qualities. Lisa Diedrich (2013) offers an interpretation tool for revealing and evaluating site specificity in harbour transformation projects (p. 95). The interpretation tool describes three categories of ‘reading filters’ in order to identify the specific conditions of site: physical, dynamic, and immaterial. The physical filter encompasses structures and materiality, the dynamic filter deals with processes and practices of a site and the immaterial filter acknowledges memories, atmospheres, and discourses (ibid).

As we study the preparatory plan, it shows no evidence of site readings, as the document mainly focuses on explaining the future vision and the benefits of the selected urban model without describing the conditions of the site in which it will happen (Göteborgs stad 2014a, 2014b). The detailed development plan, however, starts to show evidence of site readings through its acknowledgement of existing structures; the harbour basin Lundbyhamnen, which previous plans proposed to be land filled, is now illustrated as being under consideration for preservation. The site for the Jubileumsparken 0.5 is zoned as ‘PARK’ in the detailed development plan, thus the dynamic and immaterial value of the project has been recognized in contrast to the preparatory plan’s proposition to use the same area for mixed-use high-density development. Two of the prototypes, the pool and the sauna, are identified as ‘existing’ on the illustrated masterplan that supplements the detailed development plan, suggesting that they might be preserved, a contradiction to their having been erected as temporal constructions (ibid) (fig. 3).

Despite these late recognitions of existing site qualities in the detailed development plan, it is apparent that the operational mode while drafting the plan is close to what Braae (2015) describes with reference to a blank paper and the transferring of representations of elements from the site into the development scheme (p. 293). Braae states that two contradictory mind-sets, namely project development and design process, are in play during a transformation process where the first starts with “*a blank sheet of paper to which representations of the elements from the site are transferred one after another*” (ibid) to become objects that are then included in the development scheme. This is what happened when the two prototypes were transferred and recognized in the detailed development plan with no attention paid to the relational conditions these two buildings have with the site, nor with the place appropriated through the various activities of the Jubileumsparken 0.5 project. As such, the operational mode of the planning process is rather a prolongation of *tabula rasa* – still a common approach in the culture of masterplanning, than of site-specificity. It is also apparent that the masterplan will do perfectly well even if, later on in the process, it becomes clear that the prototypes cannot be preserved for one reason or another.

Visiting the actual Jubileumsparken 0.5 prototypes on site, one recognises a larger consideration to site-specific qualities. In 2015, the site’s potentials were mapped during an open workshop conducted by the mediating organization, in collaboration with Raumlabor. The outcome was called potential maps. Scrutinizing these, they convey ideas for programming rather than existing physical conditions. Vast tarmac fields that can be adapted into roller derby arenas, cantilevered roofs that can be continuously used as rain protection when the former loading platform is transformed into a stage, a gathering of a few birch trees that can offer protection from wind and view when one moves from changing room to sauna etc. (fig. 5).



a



b

FIGURE 5 Site-specific qualities that have been cultivated in the transformation process: cantilevering roof transformed into a stage; birch trees used as a protected anchor point for the gangway to the sauna etc.

This aligns with Braae's second approach to transformation; that of selecting elements from a diverse whole that are then adapted to a new programme and re-installed in the whole (ibid.). What seems to have supported this translation process of selecting elements and transforming them into something else is an extensive mapping of the site, not only as a physical construction but also as a relational place. As expressed by Platsbyggnad Älvstaden (2016): "To recognise what makes a place unique is not only made at site but also in relation and in interaction with other sites" (p. 17). Studying the Frihamnen transformation project using the theoretical framework provided by Ellen Braae, one could detect two simultaneous processes at play: a top-down 'concept driven' planning process and a bottom up, 'site-inspired' placemaking design process. Understanding that these operations happen on different levels, one can understand why the outcome of one process is difficult to feed into the other, without it being a designated task.

Catalysing radical increments and mini-laboratories: tilting the balance

The mode of working through smaller elements in order to transform a greater whole has been elaborated upon by the scholars Dana Cuff and Roger Sherman (2011). They launched the concept of radical increment as one of eight "principles of practice" to be offered in an urban paradigm that oscillates in-between laissez-faire urbanization and prescriptive traditionalists. Cuff and Sherman state that the concept of radical increments can be understood as a "design strategy that utilizes accumulation as a means of catalysing change, while producing urban character and identity in the process" (p. 24-25).

The prototypes of Jubileumsparken 0.5 in Frihamnen can be analysed as radical increments. Growing in numbers, ambition, and recognition – the sauna was shortlisted for the annual architectural award in Sweden 2015 – over the few years that they have been inserted in the barren land of the former harbour, they have created a buzz and are continuously generating expectations, thus fulfilling the initial aim of placemaking by raising interest in the area. As the prototypes are, in fact, built as temporary constructions, they can also be considered to be what Indira van 't Klooster (2013) calls "mini-laboratories to test ideas" (p. 9). In the case of Jubileumsparken the ideas being tested are programmatic explorations to inform the future park. These, however, are not only about basic functionality, materiality and/or use-value. In addition, they challenge social norms and perceptions, and open up the development process for critical participation. Platsbyggnad Älvstaden states that "In order to facilitate conversations and meetings

activities were initiated that were related to the planning process and the construction process, thus the oral communication was supplemented by sketches to inform [the participants]" (2016, p.8) . As such, the prototypes came to offer a much-needed creative resistance towards the real estate speculation that often emerges in concurrence with conventional land subdivision and distribution through long-term strategic visions and plans. This crucial shift between placemaking interventions and regulatory planning in the overall RiverCity project has been recognised by Dana Cuff and Per-Johan Dahl (2015) in a recent evaluation: "*The critical transition between the preparatory land use plan and more specific plans will shape the first phase of housing development at Frihamnen. At the time of writing this, it appeared that conventional approaches might beat out creative approaches*" (p. 9). Picking up where Cuff and Dahl left off, we can now conclude that the feared throwing overboard of the creativity and innovation to which Jubileumsparken 0.5 contributed did not happen, though it might have been a close call...

In accordance with Swedish planning legislation the preparatory plan, *Program för Frihamnen och del av Ringön*, was adopted in 2015. As described, the plan did not take the physical outcome of the Jubileumsparken 0.5 or the expectations that arose from the site into much consideration. The park is recognized only as something that will take place in the future and the proposed location differs from that where the prototypes were being built while the preparatory plan was drafted. Studying the preparatory plan, the future park comes across as something more real than that already constructed on site. It was no wonder that the project managers of Jubileumsparken 0.5 found that it was challenging to distinguish between the actual place, the location of the park given in the plans, and the place that was communicated through social media (Platsbyggnad Älvstaden, 2016, p. 21). The report from the public hearing process of the preparatory plan only briefly stated: "*Some have questioned the size and location of the Jubilee Park*" (Göteborgs stad, 2014b, p.6). However, in the subsequent detailed development plan being drafted now the situation is different. All of a sudden, the area where the prototypes are constructed is proposed as a park. A few of the prototypes are also included in the drawing as 'existing', thus indicating that they will be preserved. How can this be? What happened? To answer these questions we have to scrutinize the masterplanning culture, and to understand the tilting power balance currently underway.

According to Cuff and Sherman (2011) the master has gone missing in the neoliberal contemporary American context, thus no one remains to draft the masterplan. Hence, Cuff and Sherman are looking for other ways of conducting urban redevelopment. It is not this article's aim to validate the claim of the missing master, in a Swedish, European or even American context. However, amongst both researchers and practitioners there is a growing criticism towards a masterplan culture of grand visions and top-down protocols, fixed outcomes and generic aesthetics. (Cuff & Sherman, 2011; Jarzombek, 2008; van 't Klooster, 2013; Verebes, 2013). As a response, alternative practices such as open-source urbanism, urban commoning, hack the city etc. have emerged (Bradley, 2015; Deslandes, 2013; Fabian & Samson, 2015; Ferguson, 2014; Finn, 2014; Kodalak, 2015; Krivy & Kaminer, 2013; Pagano, 2013; Smith, 2014; Smith, 2012). In the wake of a missing or reluctant master, the practice of bottom-up participation is gaining ground.

These participatory practices can happen without any formal connection to city administration, or they can be integrated with city administration. The architectural scholar Lebbeus Woods claimed that conventional administration could only be challenged by instigating 'new structures' within city governance (Woods 1997). Indira van 't Klooster (2013) makes a similar claim by stating, "the contemporary creative prefers to pursue gradual change from the inside out" (p. 22). One way to do that according to van 't Klooster is to instate mini-laboratories "*with the aim of [forcing] jammed planning machines*" (p. 9). The prototypes of Jubileumsparken 0.5 and the mediators' role and position within city administration could offer innovative protocols to urban planning, if recognized.

Do-it-(y)ourself as an unlocking instrument

When studying the Frihamnen area and the Jubileumparken 0.5 project, treating top-down versus bottom-up approaches as a simple dichotomy is not sufficient to describe what is playing out. For example, the seemingly participation-oriented mediating organization and the Jubileumparken 0.5 project sit within city governance, making it a top-down initiative. At the same time, the operational mode is showing openness to participation and willingness to empower inhabitants to appropriate the place as they see fit (Platsbyggnad Älvstaden 2016, p. 8). Throughout the project, various outreach activities guided the process - workshops, guided site visits, communication through social media, and more. Through so-called 'open calls' executed in collaboration with Raumlabor, people were invited to sign up to participate in the actual construction of the prototypes (City of Gothenburg & Raumlaborberlin, 2015) (fig. 6).



FIGURE 6 'Building together' activities unlocking the fixed outcome of the masterplan into conversations about possible futures.

The actual building of the prototypes goes beyond mere participation in abstract planning processes. To actually spend time and work with the place, and to interact with the people visiting the place for leisure, work, or to participate in the open calls, changes the perception of the place. The workshops did not result only in realized prototypes, they also, according to the architects, resulted in conversations “*about the possible future*” of the park that drove “*imagination and speculation*” (City of Gothenburg & Raumlaborberlin, 2015). This unlocked capacity of using one’s imagination also turned some aspects of the sites more challenging specificities into assets, such as the vast derelict field of asphalt instead representing an atmosphere of openness and potentials (Platsbyggnad Älvstaden, 2016, p. 18). It is interesting to recognize

that the people who worked and participated on the site gained a 'site blindness', only considering the place, thus neglecting – one assumes – the ongoing planning process, while the people that did not work on site also gained a 'site blindness' of not recognizing the place at all (Platsbyggnad Älvstaden, 2016, p. 19). This tension between the actual site, the emerging place, and the future plan has propelled a dialogue within city administration, with the power to revise the initial intentions for the area (fig. 7).

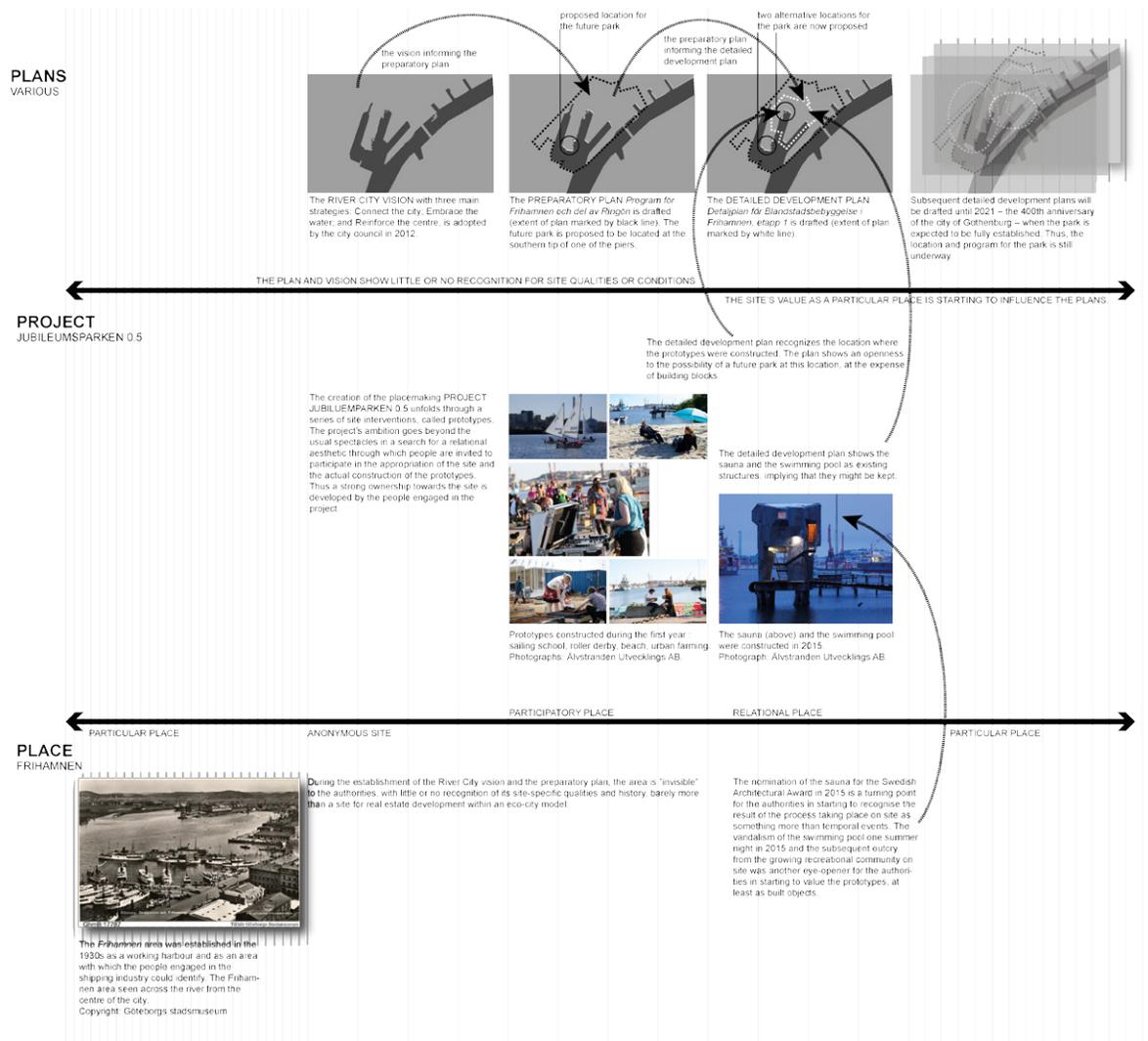


FIGURE 7 Frihamnen process diagram. doi:10.7480/spool.2016.2.1115.g1500

Silvia Lavin (2013) claims, in her introductory essay for the exhibition catalogue *Everything Loose Will Land*, that "DIY (do-it-yourself) projects [lose] the expectation that architecture's primary effect [is] to direct building toward a predictable future" (p. 41). The experience from the open calls at Jubileumsparken 0.5 testifies to Lavin's claim. The building-together workshops did not result only in realized prototypes but they also, according to the architects, resulted in conversations "about the possible future" of the park that drove "imagination and speculation" (City of Gothenburg & Raumlaborberlin, 2015). Quoting Lavin, one can further

understand that when a component of DIY is introduced, “*the architectural object [transforms] from predictable form – knowable and describable in advance through drawings – to unpredictable process*” (p. 40). The DIY initiatives may not have radically altered the transformation of Frihamnen from a prescriptive into an open process, but the resulting changes between the preparatory and the detailed development plans testify to the impact of the mediating function. Through the drafting process of the preparatory plan, the planning authority underestimated the impact the ongoing building-together process had on people and place. The preparatory plan anticipated the future, represented it in drawings and renderings, and attached a clear road map to implement it. As seen through the analysis of the planning documents, the planning authority was not initially able to assimilate the catalysing power that the prototypes were generating.

A new aesthetic understanding

The awareness that engaging with the physical aspects of a site generates a sense belonging to a place is not new, but still valid. With the help of Kenneth Olwig (2006) we can understand that people’s appropriation and engagement is needed in order to turn an anonymous location into a particular place. Based on the studied preparatory and detailed development plans for the area one can conclude that up until now the planning authorities in Gothenburg have regarded the Frihamnen area as an empty site with only a little bit of history to take into consideration when instating the new city. However, in parallel, the location has begun a transformation into a meaningful place for people, through the prototypes and the building-together processes. Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) claims that every aesthetic production produces a model of sociability entitling us to ask whether “*the work allows us to enter into dialogue or not, and if we are able to exist, and how, in the space it defines*” (p. 109). Jubileumsparken 0.5 is hosting a Facebook page where people can express their thoughts (<https://www.facebook.com/Jubileumsparken-Frihamnen-1011368268889931/reviews/>). So far, 58 people have shared their reviews, and more than 5600 people have liked the page. Among the reviewers, there are people that are enthusiastic about the design and specifically appreciate the view and the contemplative atmosphere. Other reviewers find the area rather poorly appropriated, with too much asphalt, and a lingering atmosphere of junkyard. It is interesting that several reviewers support the idea of the place being inclusive and several express gratitude that all activities are free. Quite a few express the view that the place belongs to ‘everybody’ and some even recognize a need to share more with the inhabitants of Gothenburg.

Conclusions

The Frihamnen transformation project read through the Jubileumsparken 0.5 project testifies to the fact that masterplanning culture is failing to recognise site-specific qualities and relational aesthetics. The first batch of prototypes went unrecognised by the urban planners. With the building-together processes, a larger sense of ownership emerged, first by the people participating in the DIY actions, and later by visitors enjoying the activities the prototypes offered. This later phase demonstrates a critical momentum during the meantime when the site is starting to emerge as a particular place through the appropriation of people. This is also when the planners start to recognise that the site is not only an abandoned harbour area

being rendered into prime real estate, but also a place of particular interest for an emerging community. The response from the planners to this emerging sense of place and community is to revisit the decision about where to localize the future park, thus opening up the plans for alternative futures, a response that describes an unusual and promising attempt by the local authorities to recognise the power of DIY processes. The other response by the planners is to include a few of the prototypes in the plans as 'existing'. By this measure, they recognise the temporal construction as something more lasting, though they neglect to understand that the value of the prototypes is not the actual construction but the relational qualities embedded in them through the narratives of the process. The significance of this relational aesthetic, and how it can be harvested in transformation processes, calls for further explorations that have not been possible in the writing of this article.

In addition, this article points to the finding that a facilitated and inclusive dialog between various stakeholders has the power of demystify the transformation process from abstract plans to concrete action. The empowerment of a relational aesthetic through do-it-yourself actions can contribute to unlocking planning processes, allowing the plans to include the particularities of a place. If and how these processes can stay open, to harvest even more site-grown insights, remains a question for further exploration. The importance of the mediators as agents with the ability to grant credibility to grass-root projects while simultaneously challenging conventional masterplanning culture from inside the city's administration is part of such further studies.

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