

Intention and effect

A study of official Swedish in the planning process

Research proposal

Our living environment is undergoing a massive change. Human mobility will continue to grow dramatically, and homes, infrastructure and municipal services are being built at an ever-faster rate to meet demand.

The foundations of the final qualities of the built environment are often laid during the pre-project phases of a construction project. With today's societal development, these value-creating phases risk not being given the focus required to permit urban planning to meet the need for sustainability and good living environments.

The reconstruction of Slussen in Stockholm is one of the most complex urban transformation projects of our time. Genuine engagement by those at the highest level is needed from the start, to ensure that this type of megaproject succeeds. The ideal is such strong support it won't be jeopardised by a change in regime. Without political engagement, there is no guarantee that the project will gain popular acceptance.

The conflict management of the Slussen project has been called devastating. Critics said that politicians were both unwilling and unable to explain what the project involved and the opportunities a remodelling of the site could offer. When the City failed to communicate the necessity of the project and how the problem could be resolved, the narrative was picked up by the project's opponents, and the focus shifted from what would *be* to what *was*.

The spoken and written word precedes the construction process, and public debate is part of the context that affects how we view a specific site or building. Like everything else, Slussen is part of a verbal and visual discourse. How could the authority's way to communicate be developed, to create better conditions for a more collaborative planning process that fosters real inclusiveness, at the same time as efficient progress take place?

Method

The object of the study is the discursive context of the political decision-making documents, up to the decision of implementation, for the Slussen project. These public documents express the political will, formulated throughout using so-called official Swedish (*kanslitsvenska*), often seen as synonymous with bureaucracy and the language of power, and criticized for being deliberately vague but couched in complicated language to give the illusion of precision. Using textual analysis, the manifest content will be studied, in an attempt to reveal any latent ideas and intentions. An understanding of the context is necessary, why contextualisation will be applied. The reading of the text will be based on selected theories.

Aim/purpose

Previous research on the Slussen project focus primarily on the reactions on the project, and the dialogue with citizens. Here the aim is to study the intention of the City during the pre-project phases, phases which have also been partially ignored in research. What ideas are expressed? What do the documents tell us about the political engagement? How can the sequence of events that followed the formal decisions be understood based on these texts?

Theory

The material will be elucidated using theories from various disciplines. Discourse and deconstruction theories linked to semiotics provide valuable perspectives. Psychoanalytical theories about the latent could also open the texts to new interpretations and understandings. Planning theories could also be used to identify the prevailing ideal. The concepts *place*, *power* and *language* offers an analysis framework based on which the documents may be interpreted and understood. The intention is to choose two primary theoretical perspectives to apply when reading the texts. The initial research period will be devoted to choosing these.

Expected outcomes

To create basic knowledge for more appropriate management of conflicts of interest and value that may arise during the planning process as a result of how the political will is expressed via official documents.

Approximate time plan

I intend to spend the whole Fellowship at ArkDes. The first four months collecting material, choosing theoretical perspectives and making textual analysis. The remaining time will involve production of text and completion of a report.

Key words

Sustainable urban planning, pre-project phases, official Swedish, Slussen, urban safari

Biography of Katja Rosenlind

Current occupation

For the past eight years, at the Real Estate Administration of the City of Stockholm, I have edited the kind of public documents which are the subject of this research proposal. Initially reporting to the Chief Architect, subsequently, directly to the Director of the Administration.

The Administration is the body tasked with advising the City's politicians on property matters and implementing decisions linked to the domain, and is responsible for managing and developing the City's large property portfolio, comprising both public and commercial premises such as offices, sports facilities, museums, libraries, fire stations and market halls.

My job is to ensure the quality of the documents, which political decisions are made based upon. Prior knowledge is not required to be a member of the City's committees, why adequate and clear information are essential in these documents, which also work as communication to citizens, who must be able to follow the work of the City's government.

The job requires knowledge of the Administration's area of expertise, autonomy and the ability to decide what is relevant and what is not, and of course to be able to formulate oneself briefly and vigorously. But also great responsiveness, both to the politicians in charge and to the officer whose name stands as sender.

Finally, I am a trained curator from Stockholm University and have a master's in art. I now want to focus on the research field involving *language*, *architecture* and *urban environment*, with the intention of being able to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that govern the design our living environment. A Fellowship at ArkDes would offer the opportunity to do so.

Most important works

No works relevant to the ArkDes Fellowship programme has been done before.