

MARIATORGET: VENUSTAS, FIRMITAS, UTILITAS



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1. QUESTIONS

I would like to investigate the personality of a specific place, what elements or characteristics create the special feeling one gets in this place, and how can it be seen in an academic context. The place in question is Mariatorget, situated in Södermalm, Stockholm. These are the questions I within this assignment would like to investigate:

- What is the main character of the place?
- How does the place work today in terms of accessibility? How is the place used? Why is that?
- What main aspects of accessibility do I find when using the assesement protocol analysis tool?
- How does this specific space create a certain ambience? Are there any spatial elements or other things that determines it's certainty? How is place, space and mening regarded in some literature provided?

2. METHOD

My aim is to investigate the use of Mariatorget in a rather personal way. All experience of place is pure personal, based on experience as well as knowledge¹. Through the use of assessment analysis tool on site, reflection and some reading, I will try to place this specific site in a larger context and find out the universal design aspects of it. Methods used are hereby:

- Visit on site/analysis
- Assesement protocol
- Reading about space, place, cocreation, meaning
- Reflection / conclusion

¹ Jonas-Simpson

3. ANALYSIS

3a. Short description of the place

Mariatorget situated on Södermalm in Stockholm, close to the traffick commuter joint Slussen and Södra station commuter train station. It sits by a heavily trafficked road, Hornsgatan, but since it's also contains greenery as trees and bushes, it offers a calm and relaxed space in the midst of Södermalm. The park lives all year round. In the summer, the fountain in the center of the park is filled with water and the dragon sculpture in this fountain spits cascades of water. It is popular for kids to splash around in the fountainwater in hot summer days. In the winter, the home-like streetlights make the place inviting also during the dark hours. People are passing through it, since it's on an axis leading to Södra station, and staying there to rest. There are many businesses facing the park, both cafés, bookstores, restaurants, corner shop, gym as well as a church. In my opinion, it's a place where your pace lowers as there's much to experience through all senses. It's a place to think and it's a place where you feel comfortable just sitting and watching. The greenery, the scale and the situation in the city provides this relaxed inviting feeling. In terms of accessibility there are not many obstacles for disabled in the space in question. The fencing are generally low. The small stone pathway could be troublesome for wheelchairs and not very accessible during some periods of rain and snow.



Fig 1. The fountain in wintertime. . ©Dits, 2013

3b. ASSESSEMENT TOOL PROTOCOL - Mariatorget

In the following protocol, the scale 1 - 5 indicates a level for each aspect, with 1 as a poor level of ability/functionality element, and 5 as a high level of ability/ functionality.

Performative ability/functionality

4/5. It's easy to understand where to go and how to get to different places of the park and surroundings. The stretch on the west side of Mariatorget could be troublesome, it is actually a road for cars, the cobblestone indicates that it's a walkway. This might be confusing for the ones with poor sight, as they read the ground material in order to understand where to go. My guess is that putting the cobblestone there is a way of decreasing the velocity of the passing cars.



Fig 2. The cobblestone street on the west side. . ©Dits, 2013.

Visual capacity

4/5. It's easy to see where to go. Big trees can be in the sightway in summertime. The main walkway is lightened up at dark hours. It's a rather open place, but it offers some 'lonely corners'. People with poor or absent sight can be guided by low fences when making their way on the pathways, but these fences don't stop people from taking a shortcut over the grass.

Acoustic capacity

3/5. The traffick noise from the main street, Hornsgatan, is always present in the place. Goods transports to the businesses, especially to Rival hotel, are quite frequent. People

talking, discussing, birds singing, wind in trees. By the playground there's a soft sound of chimes, a pleasant acoustic installation.



Fig 2. Where noise (purple) increase, near Hornsgatan in the north and St Paulsgatan in the south. Car and bicycle routes (yellow) beside Mariatorget are one-direction. Only cargo transports/ residents are allowed on the east side.

The main walkways (orange) cuts through the place. Since the blocks on the east and west side are of the same length as the plaza, axes are straight and clear. ©Dits, 2013

Locomotive capacity

4/5. The place is flat and there are no stairs or other elements that inhibit movements. It's easy to understand where to go. It's easy to move around, small shortcuts everywhere, possible to walk either on grass or on walkways, although some mud on rainy days. Cobblestone on driveway on the west side, lowers the speed of cars.



Fig 3. Path connection grass field to walkway through plaza. . ©Dits, 2013.

Thermal capacity

3/5. Outdoor climate, not a very windy place. The trees and bushes helps to keep the place windfree.

Olfactory capacity

3/5. Leaves, grass, car pollution, cigarette smoke. Outside businesses such as coffeeshop smell of coffee and/ or food.

Overall assesement

5/5. Good mix of different opportunities to move around and sit, either on benches, or grass. I consider the place as one where *it's ok* just to hang around, alone or in group. All ages gather here. Sometimes street musicians play here. Swedenborgsgatan and Hornsgatan offers restaurants and bars, so there are people passing through the place at many different hours durig the day and night. I believe this *mix* of passing-byers and stayers is essential for the overall feeling of the place.

3c. Conclusion/ reflexion

As writes Jonas-Simpson:

The space and place and the knowledge of that space and place can change meaning.

I read this sentence in the context of Mariatorget as following: The place is situated in surroundings with high cultural values. But without knowing this, people - Stockholmers or tourists - still feels invited to sit here, bringing their 7-eleven coffecup. The place has a context but as I see it, it's not necessary to know this to appreciate the place. Knowing what take place at night doesn't really affect on he use of the place in the day-time. Every place has it's prime time, of year and day. Jonas-Simpson writes further: "Are there universal experiences of cocreating meaning in certain spaces and places?" Well, I think some of these universal experiences mentioned in a busy city could be a calm place, a place where you don't feel stressed, and where you feel invited and maybe even welcome. A place where you are able to choose where to go next, and when, could contribute to cocreate meaning of this space. When travelling,the traveller often remembers a specific event in a specific place, for example having an ice-cream on

piazza Navona in Rome. The feeling of being there is at the same time shared by so many others, yet it's a highly personal experience of being there, as many been before you and many will come after. Norberg-Schults writes: "In fact it's meaningless to imagine any happening without reference to a locality. Place is evidently an integral part of existence."² Bringing in the term "happening", the things taking place in everyday city life is elegantly presented. What would a place be without it's actions taking place there? Norberg-Schultz mentions also the three aspects of room: Perception, orientation and identification³. Place and space thus is necessary in terms of personal identification. I read this as: where you feel welcome, it's likely for you to return, and the place gets to be one of your personal identification labels. I see Mariatorget as an object with a high level of universal design. No specific obstacles were found, and I imagine people of most ages come and meet here.

4. REFERENCES:

- Christine Jonas-Simpson: The Possibility of Changing Meaning in Light of Space and Place, *Nurs Sci Quarterly* 2006 19: 89
- Norberg-Schultz, Christian: Stedsbruk (an analysis of place). *Nordisk Arkitekturforskning*, 1994. Genius Loci, Towards a phenomenology of architecture, 1980.

² Norberg-Schultz, 1980

³ Norberg-Schultz, 1994