

Experiences and situations mapping: A space analysis of Munkbrohamnen in Stockholm

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Universal Architecture in the designer's eye – accessibility, usability, universal design and the UN CRPD

Abstract:

This article is a small investigation of Munkbrohamnen, which is a small stop on the route between Gamla Stan and Södermalm. It is a place for sightseeing, but it doesn't feature as much fame and reputation as other places. Still is a one-of-a-kind and beautiful site, it is difficult to pinpoint whether if there need for some action or it is working just the way it is.

A place can be appealing to a person just because the one can associate it with some good **experience** or pleasing moment spent there, but also the other way around. The **spatial experiences** recorded by our senses and kept in our minds are the tools that we use to judge a place, emotionally rather than in rational thoughts.

Keywords: Place-analysis, spatial experiences, mental map, emotions, corridor

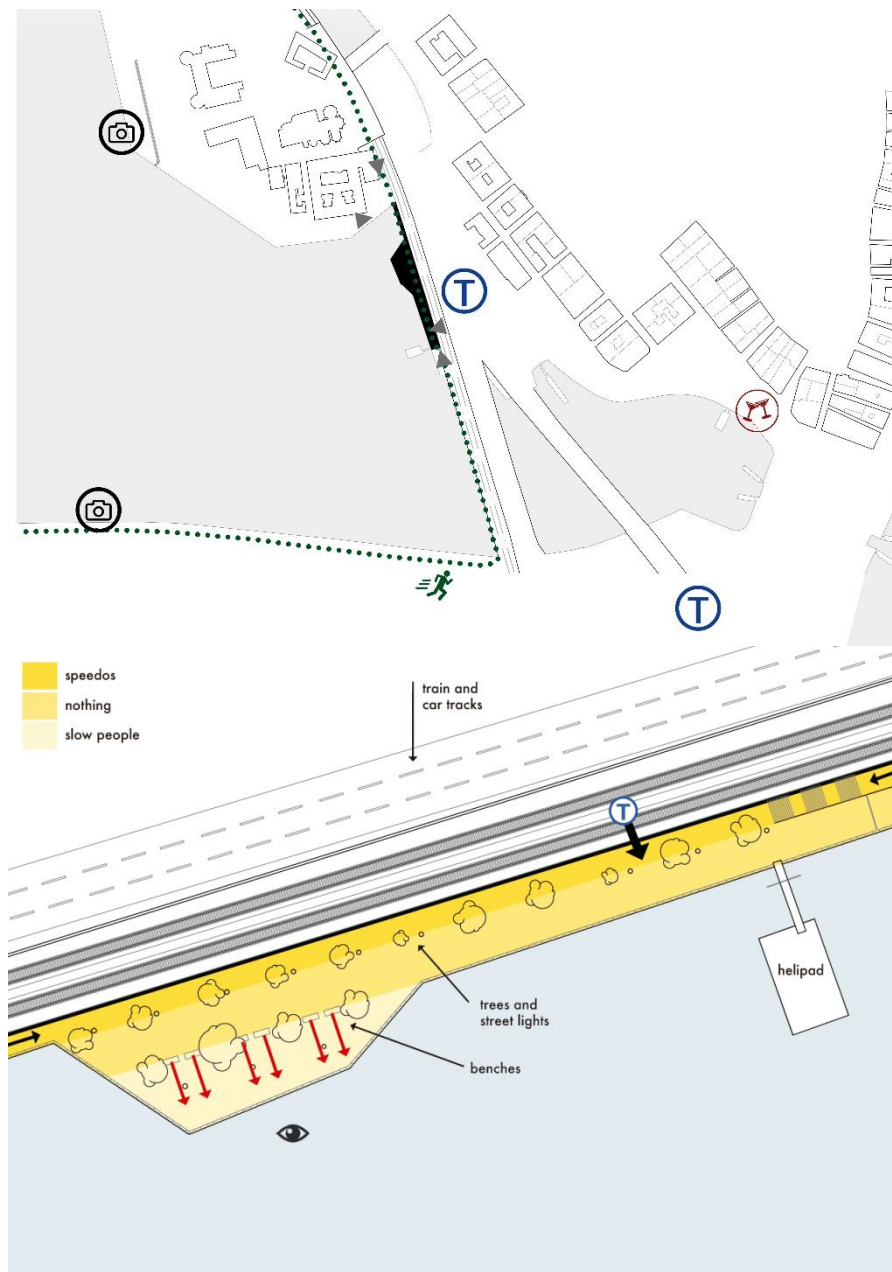
Introduction and theory

The particular site in focus for this study is structured with a rigid and fixed functioning. It is possible to detect three zones at this site: one zone where people walks fast, careless what is happening around them and heading somewhere; another zone where nothing happens; and finally a wide zone where people just hang out, only paying attention to the views around them, mostly the waterfront.

This site is most of the time empty, not only because the ill-suited location of outdoor furniture but also because of the poor level of accessibility. It is possible to access from the trains that pass above and between Södermalm and Gamla Stan, since the railways are elevated above the site.

I think that the site is mostly known by what people call "the drunken people", who use to hang around there. During all the week, especially in the afternoon and during the nights, you can see

them sitting on the benches and presumably acting under the effects of alcohol or other drug-related hazes.



So, my questions were:

- Would this site work in an easier and more clear way if accessibility was implemented here?
- Would a certain intervention solve the problems of the site, or are other sets of changes required in order to change this place into something else?
- Or this place is maybe just fine the way it is?

In my mind, urbanism often constitutes a careless or unsolvable issue in architecture. The newest parts of the cities tend to not work, while most of the people prefer to live and hang out in the old parts of the cityscape. We have progressed from the rational approach of the modernist movement, with cities divided per usages, but still we don't truly understand the nature of the cityscapes and all the variables that are part in it.

For example, the *Situationism* was a thought or an idea for understanding the city through life experiences, or as the concept indicates, relying on **situations**. Constant, with his work of "New Babylon", think of a utopian city very different from the ones we now: endless, in which everybody is a homeless, in a constant change...

Another interesting resource is Kevin Lynch and his work on the constituents of the city. This architect, stands for a city as an element of constant change where our sense work as the principal character for knowing it. As everybody have different perceptions, the image that they shape in their minds are different, and so is the understanding of the city.

Research problem

In most cityscapes, it is possible to detect these left-over places that either can be the result of a pure neglect or as the sheer result of the city development. These places are they examples of something erroneous, and could be boosted by spatial changes?

Methodology

As a method of investigating why is a public space does not work, I will rely on the people spontaneous thoughts from people I have met, and then ask them further in order to grasp the architectural aspect. I also asked them if they could draw what is called **mental map**. **Mental maps** are a subjective vision of a certain place. The interviewees were people of different ages, origins and with different occupations.

Result

I would like to start with my own impression of the site. I would also like to add some facts. The first of all, it was noticeable that it is a nice place to rest and calmly forget about your problems just seeing some people sitting on the benches, just looking to the ocean, or sometimes speaking in their phones.

Another thing remarkable was the amount of people that rejected to talk to me, supporting my thought about the function of the place as a practical **corridor** for most of the people, rushing to get somewhere.

And also, I would had liked to get more **mental maps**, but the fact is that most of the people didn't understood at all what that meant or they were too afraid to draw.

After having worked with this site for many days I collected my thoughts by performing a Lynch-analysis of this site (Lynch, 1960). This analysis includes five points.

Paths

The site itself is part of a path that connects Södermalm and Gamla Stan. The path starts and ends with stairs, which excludes persons with various disabilities. The start from Södermalm is a stairway under the railway and highway shadow, what contributes to a marginal look. The platform that continues after those stairs, runs at the same height as the railway, which can give a bad impression to someone but at the same time more perspective to see the views.

Edges

The bridge for the trains and the highway that crosses the site is the most distinct and noticeable division. It is not only a physical obstacle, but it also blocks the sight from the other side and establishes a kind of a division between both sides.

Another limit is the shore line. It is a very meaningful change, because it prevents people from walking on. So, although being such a beautiful part of the landscape, it's not accessible for the user.

If we consider the two main edges set forth, we understand the both east and west limitations are what give the spot under study this condition of a **corridor**.

Districts

We have the area of Södermalm and Gamla Stan. Although, the site is much more in contact with and easily reachable from Gamla Stan. If coming from Södermalm, your way is not as evident as it is from Gamla and also more mysterious, since you don't really know where you are heading, so there's also something special there.

Also, something very remarkable is the paving of the pavement. Most of the historical city centres of European cities are made of cobblestones, that offer a more medieval look. Even they are slippery when wet, they also offer nice reflections and have a special feeling when walking on it, very recognizable by any person.

Nodes

There are different nodes nearby. Riddarholmen itself is a node by its historical interest, and also for having a huge terrace/square with great views towards the water. At the other side, in Gamla Stan, at the other site of the train rail and highway, taking the other metro exit, there's a square with a fruit and vegetables market which is always very **crowded**. Not only because the proximity of bars, restaurants and many other appealing sites, I have to mention the importance of new technologies here. Because since the dawn of the game "PokemonGo", and the opening of point of interest of the game there, the place is filled with children, young and even grown man, playing the game.

Landmarks

The most important and obvious landmark in the site is the Stadhus, it is a sign of power and an icon for the city and the country. Moreover, in the same direction and closer we have Riddarholmen.

In the other direction, there's not such a building relevant for its architectural or historical beauty, nonetheless, there's a rock wall with a trail at its top (Mariaberget), that stands out because of the contrast between the buildings and the nature.

Finally, another remarkable reference, which is not always visible and in the same place is the sun. It is one of the reasons why people go to the spot, and when showing up, it makes the whole landscape way better.



People's opinion

During the last two weeks of October, I passed by Gamla Stan and I spent some minutes trying to ask a few questions and even trying if someone could draw me a mental map of the zone. The intention was to get perspectives from the site I'm studying, to know if it is indeed a one-kind and beautiful spot, and also if there is some problem concerning to accessibility and usability, with everything that implies. Here are some cases:

1: the running girl

This one was a runner, a girl in her twenties that usually make his way from his home in Södermalm passing through Gamla Stan. She used the spot usually to stretch in her way back, so it is not like any other place she passes by. She finds it beautiful, and didn't mind to have to walk the stairs up and down. Although, she wouldn't mind it to be more simple and clear, which would represent a help for some people with not the same physical capacity.

But the thing that I would like to highlight from her is that she like it to be apart from the city. The fact that it was a little bit marginal, the fact that it was an historical place...all these facts make it charming and with a special character in her opinion.

2: the walking man

A young man who work next to the Stadhus. He makes every day his way from the metro station to the office. He frankly said that he didn't mind how it was the place at all. Probably because not having any kind of disability, and also because of belonging to the big amount of the people who walk the place in a "functional way". He just told that he didn't like the fact that puddles where formed because of the uneven floor.

3: the two photography lovers

These ones where to twenty years old guys which loved photography, and usually hanged out there to take some pictures. They see the place as something for tourists and summer time, hard to enjoy during the winter. They also highlight how windy and wavy it is some days, feeling exposed to the mercy of natural forces.

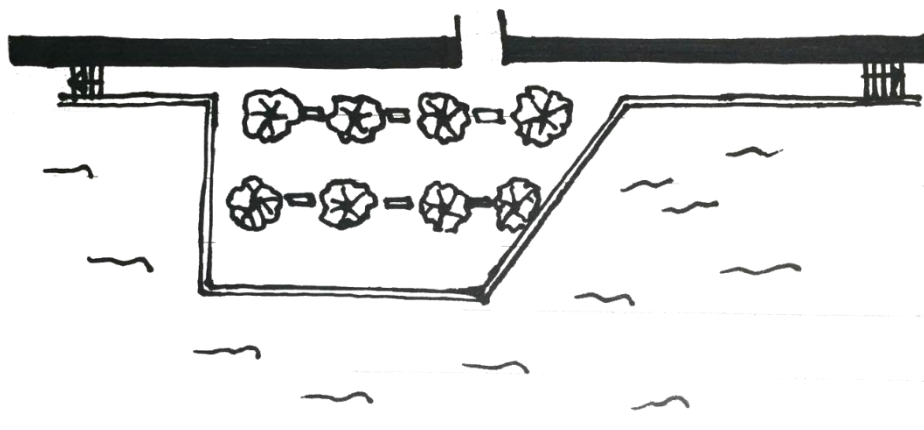
4: the elderly person

An elder who felt attached to the place in some way. As the case number 2, he had to pass by going to work and he has known the place for long time. Although, he pointed that when he felt like walking a little bit more, he preferred to get down in Slussen and walk through Gamla Stan's heart.

When asked about how to solve the problems in it, he just expressed that even not being perfect, it was okay the way it is. That it was not meant to be perfect, it is an old part of the city with a lot of history so it couldn't be perfect.

5: the children

Another user that I could interview, was a child that was hanging out with some friends. He just told me he liked the spot because of how close it was from the metro station, but that they prefer to be in the Riddarholmen's platform. And if was about seeing the views, his favourite spot was Skinnarviksberget. And even he agreed to draw me this **mental map**:



6: the exchange student

That one was an exchange student just like me, who was for the first time there. He didn't come up with lot of thoughts, but the most interesting was the he felt a lack of protection in the boarder, to prevent people of falling into the water.

7: the man in the fifties

This middle age man was walking his dog very calmly. When asked, he told me liked the passage rather than the centre because of the calm. He just felt that the city also needs this places where you can be by yourself peacefully and get away from your problems.

Conclusions

To start with, I have to admit that that prejudices took me to a wrong judgement of the place. At first, when thinking of accessibility of a place, you just take into consideration people using wheelchairs. And in that aspect, indeed, the site is just accessible from one of the four entrances because of the stairs. Nevertheless, I have found that the site is very liked but most of the people who truly see it as something more than just a passage. They don't find it **marginal**, they think of it as liberating; they don't see it **hidden**, they feel as it is easy to access but at the same time select.

Also, analysing the mental boy map, I found that he just aligned the metro exit with the broad space. So, the importance in it is that there is what the things happen, where the activities and the ones that think of staying focus. Therefore, some improvements should be made, at least to offer more sitting opportunities would be needed.

Despite I respect a lot the opinion of the people, I feel like some more change should be made. Accessibility is democracy, and the height and pronounced variations don't allow some people to go in there, so they also couldn't be represented during my interviews. In my opinion the entrance from the metro must have a solution for reduced mobility people. A major change that would also be grateful would be reconstruction of the first part of the path, the passage that starts in Södermalm and follows next to the train.

Another relevant aspect I have thinking during all the work, was the new way of storing information about spaces I learnt because of the course. The importance of all the senses for shaping your **mental map** of a determinate space. And the site was truly perfect for that: the train, the highway and waves crashing awake your hearing; the uneven floor, the feeling of the stones under your feet are also so obvious; the smell of the ocean may not be as strong as in other places, but is still there; and the most used, the sight from there is so recognizable. Some other interesting aspects were the feeling of freedom you could enjoy there, the change of light when going out of the metro station...

In the usability level, concerning the site as a public space, I feel that people take more profit of the site from what one can expect. The only furniture that the authorities arranged are 6 benches faced toward the water. The users can only gather in groups as one bench or two benches can fit, and without the possibility of looking at each other. Furthermore, the interaction with the people circulation behind them is absent; make random encounters or other interesting human relations impossible.

Taking into consideration all my experiences and knowledge of the spot, I clearly think that a platform lift should be arranged, at least from the metro entrance. It would open the space to a much wider collective with mobility problems. Another easy operation could be placing a handrail through the entire perimeter in contact with the sea. As for usability, I modestly think the intervention I did with my studio was quite good. We just mirrored two benches so they could face the people passing; we disposed stools as moveable sitting opportunities and we built a mirror in front of those benches so you could either see the views and also make the people passing by stop and take a look.

References

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Photos

