

Manifesting the unintended outcomes of transforming an inhospitable place into a vibrant neighborhood

The case of Liljeholmstorget, Stockholm

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To enrich the quality of urban spaces for social encounters is receiving a considerable attention in Stockholm and in most of current development processes. This paper aims to provide analysis about the provision of social qualities through macro and micro strategies in transformation of urban spaces to become meaningful places, to underline the mechanisms and structures behind the actual space. Both empirically and theoretically, the research discusses the ways public spaces are conceptualized implicitly by planning intentions, and explicitly by design of the physical environment. Through a critical but constructive perspective to the urban practice status quo in transformation process, the paper develops analytical expressions for shaping public places, their qualities and nuanced relations expected in everyday practice. To achieve this goal, this study applies Liljeholmstorget transformation project, as the representative case around densification policy in suburbs of Stockholm (1996-2009). The development strategy aimed at creating a transport hub to become *more city like*, means to achieve ‘diversity and shifting the industrial image’ by mixed-use blocks including: public services, residential, few offices, shopping mall, parking, and open spaces. Nominated as a best practice for “an important planning task in sustainable urban development”, the City was rewarded in 2010 for the transformation of “high quality, with integration of functions and realization of the vision for a safe, pleasant, and vibrant urban spaces”. The study examines the quality of public places, particularly manifesting the unintended patterns and ways, which different groups interact with the space and each other. Ethnography was used as the primary method of data collection for reviewing the archives, and published reports. Besides, interviews with planners and designers investigated the insight into the mechanisms influence their reasoning. Participant observation was used to examine people’s practices and meanings, and physical traces, which recorded by photography and notes. The *good* collaboration between transport system and urban planning at Liljeholmstorget succeeded to transform an inhospitable place, but the findings are far to recognize a vibrant neighborhood. The study presents a taxonomy of unintended outcomes, in three patterns: spatial, functional and symbolic. The analysis of the mechanisms that caused and shaped each pattern show the power of practice as well as agencies. It reveals the known gap between environment-behavior studies and urban practice, however, points out the lack of conversation between the key actors of each profession, and the need of a language that could present the consequences of macro policies in people’s micro relations. The findings critically highlight the power relations in urban practice for shaping spaces, impeding proximities, limiting behaviors, and commodifying users’ urban experiences. On the other hand, it emphasizes the power of people’s desires in constructing socio-spatial and temporal relations with the space. By mapping out the unintended outcomes and miss-achievements, this research also suggests

rethinking the success of urban practice beyond of analyzing either the outcomes, as a behavior setting, or the intentions of planning and design process. The results show that the former is narrowed to symbolic aspects and number of users (even commuters), and the latter is celebrated by the relevant challenge and emerged goals of the time in each phase of the transformation process. It highlights that urban practice should be an ongoing process, between macro intentions and micro experiences in order to be successful in transforming urban spaces into meaningful places.