

Stockholm is perhaps more famous for a culture of consensus than for its progressive contemporary architecture. But something has started to move. A number of high-profile architecture competitions, infrastructure campaigns and investments in new housing, as well as independent architectural initiatives, are transforming the city. This new Stockholm is riddled with paradoxes and contradictions rather than homogeneity. Björn Ehrlemark and Carin Kallenberg present the best (and strangest) bits of this new development.

# Stockholm's shifting ground

STOCKHOLM (SE) — TEXT: BJÖRN EHRLEMARK AND CARIN KALLENBERG, ILLUSTRATION: SYLVAIN TEGROEG

## TOUR GUIDE

Exploring a city, region, or theme

The 'Venice of the North', the 'Capital of Scandinavia', 'The Walkable City' – if you try to understand Stockholm using the slogans of the official, branded image, where does it lead? Sure, the city centre is an urbanized archipelago, where the pastel-coloured historic buildings are scattered over fifteen islands. And yes, it's a royal city with a big baroque castle smack in the middle. But that would barely get you halfway to understanding what Stockholm is truly about.

Although Sweden is currently the fastest urbanizing country in Europe, Stockholm still has a low population density, probably because it was purposefully built for isolation. After the Second World War, the city reacted to a wave of in-migration by expanding with satellite communities along a new metro system (the 'T-bana'). More than a continuous urban fabric, the concept of the master plan was to devise these new settlements as modernist villages,

self-sufficient in terms of services and social life. Surrounding parkland created buffer zones between housing districts.

The Stockholm of today is very much still an imprint of this idea, but overlaid with a few decades of added paradoxes and contradictions. The city is sliced up by freeways, tracks and tunnels, yet remains the only European capital without a ring road. It has witnessed several prestigious architecture competitions in the past decade, but progress towards implementation is generally at a crawling pace, if there are prospects at all. All while the housing situation has spun out of control. Prices for apartments double every ten years, and for the half-million people on the waiting lists for a rental, the average time in line is eight years.

However, the situation does create outbursts of energy, sometimes with absurd consequences. In central Stockholm, rooftop additions in all shapes

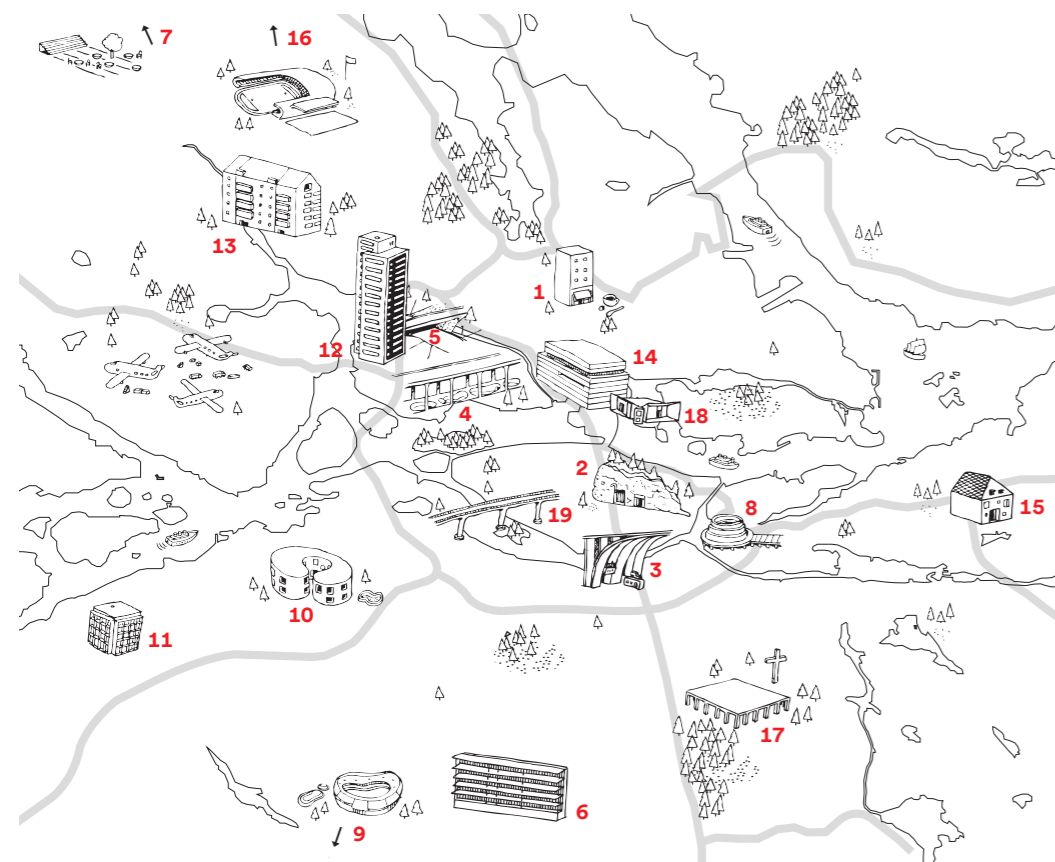
and sizes are one such outlet, remaking generic office buildings into mere foundations for new types of architecture. The row houses atop a department store at the corner of Drottninggatan and Mäster Samuelsgatan (visible from the Kulturhuset rooftop café) are the most extravagant example.

While the city is poised to invest billions of euros in an underground, is nearing completion of a new railway tunnel under the city centre, and has decided to drill a couple new metro lines through the granite below, many of the most interesting recent projects in Stockholm deal with ways of repurposing existing infrastructure.

One example is **Buco Nero (1)**. The sleek Italian restaurant with blood-red tables of solid steel is skilfully inserted into what was once a sub-level parking garage. Actually, finding yourself in an underground setting is not that uncommon. Stockholm is virtually a Swiss cheese, with publicly accessible tunnels, underground plazas and spectacular metro stations. The city also has many Cold War-era bomb shelters (one in every 1950s apartment building), but the biggest are usually closed and sealed, or simply forgotten. Not at Renstiernas gata on Södermalm, however, where a former emergency command centre, carved out of the bedrock 30 metres below ground level, has been refashioned into a futuristic server hall (2) for a local Internet provider. Among other things, it provides server space for WikiLeaks in an environment built to withstand a nuclear blast, and is open for tours on appointment.

As Stockholm is a city of islands, it is also a city of bridges. A number of different initiatives have provided unexpected ways of repurposing large concrete overpasses of the late 1900s for public activities. Under **Skanstullsbron (3)** the nightlife entrepreneurs of Huset Under Bron ('The House Under the Bridge') have appropriated a neglected piece of infrastructure and some adjacent, run-down buildings and turned them into the most vivid spot on Stockholm's club scene. Under **Lilla Västerbron (4)** on the other hand, a 1400 m<sup>2</sup> skatepark constructed out of *in situ* concrete has been merged with the bridge-turned-ceiling above, creating a cave-like

'Many recent projects deal with ways of repurposing existing infrastructure.'



**1** BUCO NERO (2010)  
Architect: Rachid Lestarić  
Address: Roslagsgatan 4



**2** PIONEN SERVER HALL (2008)  
Architect: AF-L (A)  
Address: Renstiernasgata 37



**3** TRÄDGÅRDEN (2013)  
Architect: Huset under bron AB  
Address: Hammarby Slussväg 2, under Skanstullbron bridge



**4** RÄLIS SKATEPARK (2010)  
Architect: Stefan Hauser / Placed to Ride and Gudrun Rabenius  
Address: Rålambshovsparken, under Lilla Västerbron bridge



**5** BROVAKTARPARKEN (2014)  
Architect: nod (C-O-M-B-I-N-E)  
Address: Franzégatan 14, under the E4/E20 highway



**6** HÖGDALEN PUBLIC LIBRARY (2009)  
Architect: AG arkitekter  
Address: Högdalsgängen 10, Bandhagen



**7** TAXINGEPLAN (2010)  
Architect: International Festival (Tor Lindstrand, Mårten Spångberg)  
Address: Taxingegårnd 10, Spånga



**8** OBSERVATORIUM (2002)  
Architect: Gunilla Bandolin  
Address: Sickla Kanalgata 20 (Sickla udde)



**9** TELLUS NURSERY SCHOOL (2010)  
Architect: Tham & Videgård Arkitekter  
Address: Huvudfabriksgatan 18, Hägersten



**10** UGGLAN KINDERGARTEN (2010)  
Architect: 3dO  
Address: Lagman Lekares Väg 40, Norsborg



**11** BJÖRKSÅTRA TEMPORARY STUDENT HOUSING (2014)  
Architect: DAPstockholm  
Address: Björksåtravägen 48, Skårholmen



**12** LINDHAGENSKRAPAN (2011)  
Architect: Alessandro Ripellino Arkitekter  
Address: Moa Martinsons torg



**13** STRANDPARKEN (2013)  
Architect: Wingårdh Arkitekter  
Address: Hamngatan 17, Sundbyberg



**14** KUNGSBROHUSET (2010)  
Architect: Strategisk Arkitektur  
Address: Blekholmen 4



**15** PRIVATE VILLA (2008)  
Architect: Thiel arkitekter  
Address: Ekorrvägen 31, Nacka



**16** SOLLENTUNA SPORTS CENTRE (2009)  
Architect: Rosenbergs Arkitekter  
Address: Stubbhagsvägen 2, Sollentuna



**17** NEW WOODLAND CREMATORIUM (2013)  
Architect: Johan Celsing Arkitektkontor  
Address: Sockenvägen 492



**18** TERMINAL BUILDINGS (2013)  
Architect: Marge Arkitekter  
Address: Södra Blasieholmshamnen 10 (Strömkajen)



**19** ÅRSTA BRIDGE (2005)  
Architect: Foster + Partners  
Address: Tantogatan 75



### (Stockholm's shifting ground)

landscape for skateboarders. The third example in the same family of projects is quite the opposite, although not obvious at first glance. The landscape architects behind **Brovaktarparken (5)** were commissioned by the city to design a public space that discourages longer stays, as the freeway above is a logistics corridor for hazardous cargo. The project deals with this counterintuitive brief by criss-crossing the site with ramps at a shallow incline, perfect for strolling by or to enjoy the public art, but less so for prolonged visit such as picnics or sunbathing.

In a city dispersed but well-supplied with public transport, metros and underground stations become an important part of public life. T-centralen, the main hub of the T-bana, is likely Stockholm's most diverse and active public space. The municipality acknowledges its potential with a programme to promote building public libraries inside the stations. The **library in Högdalen (6)**, on the green line going south, was the first of these to open, and has direct access from the T-bana via an escalator.

The city's outskirts have also seen a renaissance in cultural institutions, and art centres in Botkyrka, Haninge, Sundbyberg, Frihamnen and Värmdö are now considered established players in the scene. The most prolific is probably Tensta Konsthall in the north-west, yet another example of inhabited infrastructure. The gallery is located in a former parking garage. When visiting, take a closer look at the **public plaza (7)** in front, designed to fit a variety of uses with simple but effective means: a grand staircase and paving patterns in the form of road markings.

Stockholm's housing shortage is growing worse every year, while none take accountability for the stalemate in building activity: developers blame 'nimbyism' and too strict planning regulations, architects and politicians blame them in return for sitting idle on buildable land, waiting for profits to rise further. When something does get built, more often than not the result is endless rows of overpriced waterfront condos – prefab boxes dotted with colourful balconies. The poster child of this situation is the now decade-old Hammarby Sjöstad. As a new city district on former industrial harbour sites, it was conceived as the centrepiece of green urbanism, but its reputation has since been normalized. It turned out neither as sustainable utopia, nor prefab hell, but closer to just as mediocre as the next development. One of its best and lasting pieces of public space is not an architect's doing at all, but a sculptor's: the **circular pier (8)** on Sickla udde seems to create a condensed public microcosm, all by itself.

A shortcoming of the planning of the 2000s was the lack of social infrastructure. Hammarby Sjöstad was marketed towards middle-aged and senior couples, but became inhabited by families all the same, and the shortage of kindergartens and schools was immediately apparent. In fact, the recent baby boom has taken the city by surprise, and it looks like large parts of an entire generation of Stockholmers will have spent their first years of school in temporary container barracks. Examples that contradict this trend are the **Tellus Nursery School (9)** at Telefonplan, and **Ugglan Kindergarten (10)** in Alby. Both use rounded, embracing plans and lively facade treatments in their designs, but to strikingly different effects.

In early 2014, the Stockholm planning authorities set a goal of adding 140,000 new dwellings in existing neighbourhoods by means of urban infill by the year 2030, to tackle the frustratingly limited housing stock. Yet there is already some ongoing experimentation with new ways of producing apartments at lower costs. To resolve the 56-month waiting time for student accommodation, temporary or mobile solutions in the form of anchored passenger ferries, stacked shipping container housing, or promoting self-build cottages in people's backyards have all been on the table. As a tactic for providing student housing, temporary building permits for as little as

five years on property awaiting permanent exploitation is championed by housing advocate groups – and is now starting to get implemented. A recent architect-turned-developer's scheme in southern Stockholm has made an effort to transform the constraints of the condition into a **new typology (11)**. It puts greater emphasis on communal spaces, cheap but neat-looking material finishes and a modular construction system that allows disassembly and re-stacking the units on a new temporary site.

Others think residential towers are the solution to the housing situation, but the city has until now fought new additions to the skyline quite fiercely, at least in the very centre. A few are popping up at the inner periphery, however, and **Lindhagenskrapan (12)**, on a new waterfront development on Kungsholmen, is the tallest rental apartment building thus far. **Strandparken (13)** is another benchmark in height, but in a different league. It is an effort to challenge the concrete manufacturers' hegemony at their own game: prefab. These new high-rises are all timber, the tallest wooden buildings in the region, including the 26-metre-high facade of cedar shingles that wraps the pitched roof.

As unusual as this building envelope is, it blends seamlessly with Stockholm's standard palette of shades of peach and terracotta. Like many other historic centres in Europe, appearances in the public domain remain conservative and the facade treatment is vital for contemporary projects hoping for realization. **Kungsbrohuset's (14)** highly engineered double glazing helped it become the first building to acquire three environmental certificates, but elegant glass boxes are still few and far between. Still, unwavering regulations can also force new architectural gestures. The **extraordinary villa (15)** in Nacka probably would not have turned out with a pyramidal roof and a skin of overlapping black slates, had it not been for the prescribed contextual formulas.

Other recent projects also deal with adaptations or insertions in sensitive but varying environments. Sollentuna's local **sports and swimming facility (16)** was awarded Sweden's best building in 1975, and has now been renovated and reimagined by the same architecture practice that designed it. At the Woodland Cemetery, Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz's joint project, and the only piece of modernist landscape architecture on the World Heritage list, an addition in the form of a new **crematorium building (17)** has just been inaugurated, following a commission by a prestigious invited competition.

The new **terminal for passenger boats (18)** taking tourists and locals into Stockholm's archipelago was installed last year on the quays of Blasieholmen. Sitting opposite the royal castle, and between the National Opera and National Museum, the project did not bow to formal historicism. Rather, the architects' splitting the programme into several pavilions – kiosk, ticketing and tourist office, technical facilities – enabled a striking yet benevolent contemporary addition to a rich historical setting.

Further south, Foster's **railway and pedestrian bridge (19)** between Södermalm and Årsta is an example of an outsider architect going all-out with regional references. The concrete is coloured in Falu red, traditionally used for vernacular wooden cottages. The bridge is also the only project in Stockholm by Foster + Partners, which is now working to remodel the city's Gordian knot, Slussen – a project that has been debated and revised since the early 1980s. Stockholm's landmass is shaped like an hourglass, and where north and south meet, so do Lake Mälaren and the Baltic Sea, not to mention all aspects of urban mobility: pedestrians crossing between the Old Town and Södermalm, commuter bike lanes, all metro lines going south, all trains bound for southern Sweden and Europe, boats passing through the locks, buses arriving from other cities, and cars heading in at least six different directions.

Luckily, Stockholm has learned how to inhabit its infrastructure. ◀

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

### DEBUT

Hiroshi Kato and Victoria Diemer Bennetzen, who together form KATO x Victoria, talk about their first project in Copenhagen: Super Street, a school playground in a town about 30 km north-west of Copenhagen. Combining Japanese elegance with Danish sharpness, they have created an experience-rich environment that entices kids to explore.



↑ Super Street by KATO x Victoria, 2013

### EUROVISION: NETHERLANDS

Throughout the 20th century, the Dutch attracted attention with their progressive spatial planning policies, cultural commitment and architectural innovation. Since the financial bubble burst in the first decade of the 21st century, the Netherlands seems to have lost this focus. The government has reduced its spatial planning policy to a marginalized and far less ambitious 'gate keepers' role, while propagating social participation and public performativity. Half of Dutch architects are unemployed. Property is devaluating. What is the current state of affairs? How does the young generation respond to these major changes? Who is responsible for key issues like social housing, water, infrastructure and the public domain in the near future? Guest editor Bureau Europa will shed some light on these questions and more.



↑ 'De Ceuvél', a creative hub on a polluted brownfield site, 2014

### TOUR GUIDE: BUCHAREST

In the past, Bucharest has experienced two major urban transformations. First under Ceaușescu's regime, which created Europe's biggest totalitarian operation, then rapid economic growth after 1989 that led to a wild construction boom of shopping malls and medium-rise office and apartment buildings. Nowadays, Bucharest is poised to change again with sympathetic modernization projects and independent initiatives, creating a general buzz around the city. Ștefan Ghenciușescu will show us the most commendable examples of this new shift.



↑ Apartment building by ADN BA, 2014

...and much more. A10 #58 will be published 1 September 2014.