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Lund SUDeS: In Search of Strategies for Sustainable Urban Design

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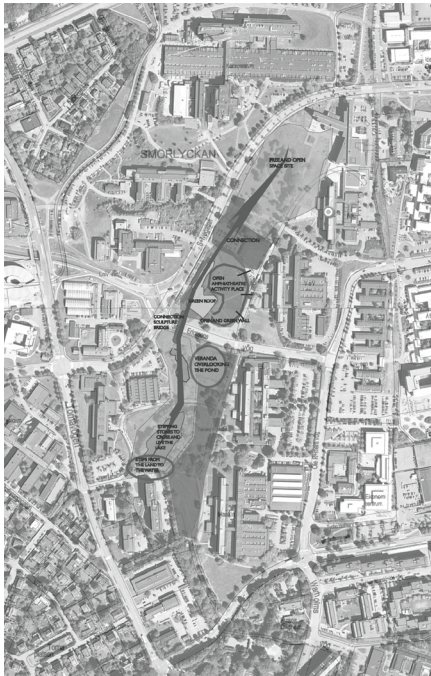
The faculty of the newly established master's degree program, Sustainable Urban Design (SUDeS), at Sweden's Lund University, held its second international conference over two days in early September 2007, assembling a group of thirteen planning and design professionals and academics from Sweden, Denmark, and the United States. The event, sponsored by the Ax:son Johnson Foundation and *Places*, allowed participants to exchange ideas and experiences in a flurry of lectures and discussions, and then join with students from four universities in a charrette examining ways to make the campus of Lund

Institute of Technology (LTH) more sustainable.

Dominated by more than thirty thousand students who study and live there, Lund is a vital part of the burgeoning metropolitan area of Malmö/Copenhagen, a district created by construction of the Oresund Bridge. Spanning the mouth of the Baltic Sea, from Sweden to Denmark, this area is now considered one of the "hottest" growth areas in Europe. The program for Sustainable Urban Design in the School of Architecture at Lund University intends to channel these creative energies into projects that address changing urban conditions and

create enduring, livable communities.

Lund University is more than three hundred years old, and its town center and historic university areas have a small scale and a dense urban structure that reflect their medieval origins. However, their many picturesque buildings, narrow and curving streets, and well-defined open spaces contrast starkly with the vast new spaces and large, self-contained, modern laboratory buildings of the LTH part of the campus. The problems created by this disjunction served as both the setting and subject of an intense program of investigation, proposal and critique.



The Conference

The conference introduced strategies for sustainable urban design from a variety of perspectives. The speakers, from three countries and several professional orientations, set out an array of compelling tactics for change. They examined ways that we think about cities and landscapes; how we build places, use them, and move through them; and how we imagine and sustain the evolving social life they support. In the end, the Swedish, Danish, and American perspectives formed a fruitful basis for interchange and provided some surprising areas of overlap.

In the first day's morning sessions, the Swedish traffic planner Christer Ljungberg stated bluntly that climate change means "no more business as usual," and he pointed out the importance of thinking in terms of "accessibility" instead of "mobility." The Danish architect Annette Gronbaek, working on the revitalization

of Copenhagen's urban core (now dominated by anonymously passing heavy traffic), proposed that public space, if imaginatively cared for, can be a generator of innovation. Christer Malmstrom, a Swedish architect and professor, reminded the audience to look for every city's "raison d'être"; as an important aspect of its identity, this knowledge will allow for spirited evolution of its form.

Gunilla Kronvall, a Swedish architect working on large development projects for the City of Malmo, argued for the importance of public "encounter," and called for study of the potential for gathering in all kinds of urban spaces. Kjell Forshed, another Swedish architect, explained how a few locally connected small-scale houses he has been drawing his entire life are now providing a basis for larger plans to integrate change with tradition. The American architect Andrés Duany stressed the urgency of sustainable urban develop-

ment. However, because of different attitudes toward climate change, which he categorized as committed, indifferent and skeptical, he said that compact sustainable development needs to become a compelling alternative, not a punishing or regulated one.

After lunch, the Danish architect and professor Jens Kvorning used a French example, the riverfront at Bordeaux, to argue for adding complexity and capacity to urban contexts, so they may support changed behavior. Meanwhile, the Swedish economist Peter Elmlund, from the

Opposite: The vital urban quality of Lund's historic areas. Photo by Donlyn Lyndon.

Above left: The modernist-inspired LTH campus with its large, self-contained lab buildings was once set in an open landscape. The town has since grown around it. Historic Lund is off the map at lower left.

Above right: One of the student proposals for increasing the sustainability of the LTH campus by intensifying the use of space.



Urban City Research program at the Ax:son-Johnson Foundation, observed that “complexity is always good for small business” and provides for a wider distribution of economic initiatives. He noted that small buildings with internal and external connectivity allow for enterprises that foster local commitment.

The American guest professor at Lund, Donlyn Lyndon, called for making distinct places within the urban fabric, using the imagination and entrepreneurial energy of many different people to invest areas with human presence and provide the care required to sustain effective environments. Jeppe Aargard Anderson, a Danish landscape architect, then poetically described urban places and parks with sustainable design and large vision. He reminded the audience of the long “delivery time” of big trees, but noted that a single pocket can hold a whole forest as seeds.

It was the American architect and professor Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk who delivered specific tools and measurements for a city with human quality, citing the recommendations of several groups that have been influential in preparing new development standards in the U.S. Finally, the American architect and professor Ellen Dunham-Jones (previously a guest professor at Lund) brought the discussion directly to issues involving places of learning and the need for more creative interaction between them and the forces of the city. She showed an example from her home campus, Georgia Tech, which integrates private research-and-development space with the university’s research activities by extending the campus into the city. She explained that this connection creates a compact, livable, and walkable urban structure that sustains many kinds of interaction.

The Workshops

The conference then turned to speaker-led student workshops, charged by Peter Sioström, director of the Lund program for Sustainable Urban Design, with imagining the LTH campus in a new way.

The Lund Institute of Technology was founded in the 1960s on open agrarian land north of the town center. Its architect, Klas Anselm, worked with modernist forms and ideals. Every building on its campus was designed as an autonomous structure, equipped with laboratories, offices, and coffee shops. The entire layout’s character derived from the linear configuration of a grass landscape with a few powerful groups of trees but almost no evidence of people and activity. During its forty years of existence, the campus has been interfered with by the expanding city, and its formerly pure modernism has been picked away at so that it has lost its architectural identity.

The 150 students attending the conference (who study architecture and urban design in Lund and Copenhagen, planning in Karlskrona, Sweden, and landscape architecture in Alnarp, Sweden) were formed into teams and asked to conceive approaches to intensifying the educational experience and making more effective use of the campus land. Within the twenty-four-hour charrette, the interdisciplinary teams brought forth vivid proposals. Generally, they imagined the LTH campus as more urban in character than its current makeup, accommodating a wider range of housing and shops and giving greater definition to the open spaces. Some envisioned distinct elements within a varied green stretching through the campus; others pictured tight urban spaces absorbing existing buildings in a pattern of streets and meeting places more akin to Lund’s medieval layout.

The teams attended to various pressure points in the campus and to an adjacent but poorly connected private business and research complex. They also considered transit links that, while already active, could be improved, and in some cases relocated. The proposals included one experimental suggestion that the whole unbuilt area be subdivided into tiny rental spots available to anyone, which could then later be assembled into permanent structures as entrepreneurs prospered and needs required. Other schemes firmly established development envelopes able to accommodate an expanded variety of living quarters and a strong network of connections and informal activities suitable for a campus.

While little respect was shown Anselm’s original isolated brick architecture and structural ideals, all the student proposals anticipated the town’s growth onto the campus by stipulating that its forms be complex and engaging. The teams proved able to think schematically in strong and distinct shapes. This clarity was evident in both the design of buildings and the configuration of open spaces and parks. A persistent concern was for internal and external connectivity, which was eagerly pursued as an element of educational space.

Together, the conference and workshop created vital opportunities for sharing ideas. They involved both speakers and students in bringing new insights to specific places. And they set the stage for more general consideration of design that uses resources effectively and creates places of lasting value.

Opposite: One experimental vision called for subdividing the entire unbuilt area of the LTH campus into rental allotments, which could then be assembled to allow more permanent structures as needed.