

revisiting Bo01



The Bo01 and wider Västra Hamnen (the Western Harbour) mixed-use redevelopment in Malmö, envisaged as the 'City of Tomorrow', is, incredibly, now over 20 years old. The development illustrates what is possible in terms of planning and implementing high-quality, low-energy and liveable mixed-use neighbourhoods. It is one of the classic templates for urban living, and I was excited to recently visit it again, to see how it had lasted over the years.

The harbour area was originally land reclaimed from the sea and developed as a shipyard and industrial docklands, but the heavy industry declined and was abandoned from the 1980s onwards. The Kockums shipbuilding industry closed in 1986. SAAB purchased the site and built a modern vehicle manufacturing factory, but this closed as SAAB-Scania merged with General Motors. The land was sold to the city authority in 1996, creating a unique opportunity to masterplan at the strategic scale—how often do city authorities wish that they owned the land in major redevelopments?

Unemployment was high for decades in Malmö, and redeveloping the Western Harbour provided the potential to change the economic profile of the city. This involved cleaning the contaminated land and rebuilding the area as a mixed-use neighbourhood, with a planned 20,000 population, 17,000 jobs, three schools, 15 pre-schools, and an extended University of Malmö, with over 25,000 students. Some of the old industrial buildings have been refurbished to link to the distinctive heritage.¹

Bo01 was one of the first areas to be built in the western part of the Western Harbour, developed as part of the Bo01 Housing Exhibition in 2001—'Bo' meaning to dwell in Swedish.² The area is mainly residential, with some commercial developments such as cafés, restaurants and offices, mostly built at three-to-five stories in height.

The highest residential units overlook the Öresund, the strait of water between Sweden and

Denmark; looking towards the Öresund Bridge and Copenhagen. The higher units also block the winter winds blowing into the rest of the neighbourhood, providing a calmer and warmer micro-climate for residents and visitors. The boardwalk and urban beach provide spaces overlooking the waterfront, with high usage, particularly in the summer, including for swimming in the sea. A winter garden gives a space for sitting during the sunny winter days. The Turning Torso is the exception in height—a twisted tower with 54 floors, designed by Santiago Calatrava, providing contemporary office and conference space and residential apartments.

The neighbourhood was masterplanned by Klas Tham to provide a diversity of functions, uses, cost, and tenure, including rental, ownership, multi-ownership, and student homes. The housing styles are all purposively varied, with different designs, heights, and colours—with different architects and developers chosen for different building plots. The European Village area includes housing inspired by different European styles, all overlooking the canal.

Much of the development area is used for green or open space (up to 50%), providing stormwater management and green roofing, with water integrated into the spaces, together with semi-private courtyards and public spaces. The neighbourhood is carbon neutral, a wind turbine and solar panels provide electricity, and the residential units use renewable energy for heating and cooling, drawing from a district storage system using aquifer thermal energy. There is 100% waste separation, vacuum recycling.³

The development was planned and implemented using a 'creative dialogue' between city officials, planners, architects, developers, and citizens, enabling debate and knowledge transfer. This led to the 'Quality Programme', which outlined the expected building and open space standards.²

The space in between the buildings is still the most impressive part of the neighbourhood. The formal grid network is modified to be less geometric and appear more organic; facilitating a fine network of spaces in which to walk, sit and dwell, with high-quality landscaping and public realm. The streets give priority to pedestrians and cyclists, and there are only a few vehicles that attempt to use the residential streets, hence traffic levels remain very low.



Photos: Robin Hickman

The quality of the spaces in between the buildings, and the lack of traffic, are what make social interactions possible—but we need to more effectively measure the quality of social interaction in these spaces so that they can be better replicated in wider developments

A critical design element was to provide space for informal social interaction, particularly in the many semi-private, landscaped areas. There is opportunity for meeting neighbours, children can play, and passive contact is encouraged, so that passers-by can be seen and heard. This is representative of a distinctive approach to movement and liveability,⁴ carefully designing the space between buildings so that pedestrian and cycle movement is prioritised and social interaction is made possible. This moves us beyond counting vehicles and increasing traffic volumes, to think how space can be specifically designed to encourage social interaction.

The transport connection to Malmö city centre and the railway station, 1.5 kilometres from Bo01, is either by bus, cycling, or walking. This is one weakness of the masterplan—a tram connection could have been built. However, there are plans to upgrade the bus route into a tramway in future years. Car parking outside apartments and car usage within neighbourhoods are kept to low levels through the use of adjacent multi-story car parks, often wrapped with retail or residential development to hide the structures. There are also electric-vehicle hire and car-sharing schemes for those who wish to use vehicles.

The rest of the Western Harbour continues to be built out, with further variety in styles of neighbourhoods—for example the Dockan Marina and Flagghusen, the latter aiming at more affordable housing with over 60% of the housing units rented.⁵ Scaniaparken and Varvsparken provide open spaces, together with Stapelbäddsparken, an urban skatepark. Alongside, a contemporary Bicycle House provides residential units and hotel rooms, with no on-site car parking apart from one space for disabled people, and cycle parking and hire is provided instead.

Yet the key lesson from Västra Hamnen is in the diversity of the spaces in between the buildings. These are environmentally sustainable neighbourhoods, but also there has been much thought and discussion, using the 'creative dialogues', to implement human-scale and engaging living environments.

When I look around at the new developments in London, I compare them to spaces such as Bo01. Unfortunately, the comparison is not favourable—we seem to have lost the plot in urban planning and design, and in transport planning and engineering, as the resources of local authorities dwindle and developers focus on increased profitability in new developments.

Think of Vauxhall-Nine Elms-Battersea, where there are many problems symptomatic of contemporary urban planning in the UK. There is no affordability in housing provision, and the level of environmental performance is disappointing. Yet beyond these factors, for the transport planner it is the informal spaces for social interaction that are missing. The big-block residential development, crowding around the power station, afford people few chances to sit outside their homes, to meet and greet their neighbours, or to amuse their children in a shared garden.

'Transport planners struggle to measure levels of social interaction... However, social interaction, with different types of people, is key to vibrant city life'

Transport planners struggle to measure levels of social interaction, and this is an additional reason why there is so little focus on developing spaces in this way. However, social interaction, with different types of people, is key to vibrant city life—and Malmö, drawing on its distinctive industrial heritage, has successfully achieved this in its new neighbourhoods. There are many lessons for us to learn.

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Notes

- 1 *Current Urban Development in Västra Hamnen*. Malmö City Planning Office, 2015
- 2 G Austin: 'Case study and sustainability assessment of Bo01, Malmö, Sweden'. *Journal of Green Building*, 2013, Vol. 8(3), 34–50
- 3 *Bo01 and Western Harbour Case Study*. Gehl Architects (undated)
- 4 J Gehl: *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987; and J Gehl: *Cities for People*. Island Press, 2010
- 5 'The Creative Dialogue' for Flagghusen. Malmö City Planning Office, 2011. Available at https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/metadata/case-studies/optimization-of-the-mix-of-private-and-public-funding-to-realise-climate-adaptation-measures-in-malmo/malmo_document1.pdf