



Context: Gårdsten is a small housing district located approximately 13km from the centre of Göteborg. Approximately 8,000 residents live in the district. The travel time via the well-connected public transport system takes about 30 minutes. The residential buildings in the district are composed of multi-storey apartment buildings and some one-family houses. Today, Gårdsten is home to a diverse set of residents in terms of ethnicity, age and social status. Approximately 85% of the residents have an immigrant background and 60% were born in other countries. Like many other housing districts around Göteborg City, Gårdsten is surrounded by, and located within, an abundance of forest and nature areas. The physical layout of the district is formed around two long stretches of multi-storey buildings. Public institutions as well local shopping options are located in the district.

In the 1980s, Gårdsten district was an unattractive neighbourhood and a place in which few people wanted to live and stay. The district suffered from a range of problems, including high unemployment, lack of business, shopping and commercial opportunities, derelict buildings and flats, an unsafe environment and poor maintenance of open spaces, extremely high crime rates and widespread anti-social behaviour. During this period, many flats (up to 4 out of 10) were empty, contributing to the impression of a very dull, dark, and deserted district. Since the early 1990s, a public housing company – Gårdstensbostäder AB – in collaboration with other public authorities, local residents, and private contractors has been driving urban development which has changed the deprived state of Gårdsten into a liveable district. The aim is to create economically, socially and environmentally sustainable re-development. Both the district and the approach undertaken by Gårdstensbostäder AB has become a beacon of success for other housing districts in Sweden. The development of Gårdsten is an ongoing project and Gårdstensbostäder AB will also be responsible for driving the development in the future.



Photos:

Above: Children having fun at the annual celebration day. Source: Viveca Larsson.
Left: Aerial overview of Gårdsten. Source: Christer Hallgren .

Community engagement has been a central element in the development of the Gårdsten district. The engagement process has been one of knocking on doors, enabling visionary processes through workshops, participation in local events, delegation of decisions and budgets to the local community, and transparent and swift decision processes. One important part of the governance approach in the district is the establishment of 5-year plans for the district. The 5-year plan is the output from a participatory process where visions and targets are jointly developed.

Evaluation

Today, Gårdsten is a well-functioning housing area. The area now attracts new residents, anti-social behaviour has diminished, crime rates have dropped, local shopping opportunities have become available, new local jobs and educational opportunities have been created, open spaces are well maintained and new houses are being built in the area including private one-family houses. The district is also setting new standards for environmentally-friendly solutions for housing. New solar housing technologies have been implemented and a wind-turbine is one visible result of the environmental policies implemented in the local community.

Transferable Lessons

The case of Gårdsten is an example of how out-of-the-box thinking and true leadership can transform a neighbourhood. The means to achieve the transformation of the neighbourhood have been a combination of engagement of local residents, local resources, and new policies supporting local development.

Selected Awards and Recognitions

- Community Building Award 2006: Refurbishment of Eastern Gårdsten.
- Construction of the year 2005 Eastern Gårdsten.
- World Habitat Award 2005.
- Womans Building Association's Award 2005.
- Swedish Association of Municipal Housing Companies Environmental Award for Youth Activities 2004.
- Swedish National Energy Company's Solar Energy award 2003: Solar Housing area II.
- Construction of the Year 2000: Solar Housing area I.