



## Place-keeping in Gårdsten: Transforming the neighbourhood



Figure 1. Aerial view of Gårdsten 2007. Source: Christer Hallgren

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## Resume

Gårdsten is a housing district located a little outside the centre of Göteborg, Sweden. In the 1980s, the Gårdsten district was one of the most deprived housing districts in Sweden. Since 1996, a municipal owned housing company – Gårdstensbosteder AB – has improved the district and turned itself into an effective vehicle for community building, employment opportunities, social and educational activities, and innovative environmental solutions. Gårdstensbosteder AB works on an ongoing basis to achieve a development that is social, economic and environmental sustainable. The methods for improvement have been one of out-of-the-box thinking for new solutions to old problems combined with a leadership that has supported and engaged the local community. The district is today not only a well-functioning housing area that is able to attract new residential groups – it is also a beacon for other housing districts in Sweden.

## Introduction and context

Gårdsten is a small housing district located approximately 13 km 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 for a diverse set of groups in terms of ethnicity, age and social status. Approximately 85% of the residents have an immigrant background with 60 % born in other countries.

### Fact sheet: Gårdsten district

Built: 1969-72  
 Residents: app. 8,000  
 Location: app. 13 km from Göteborg  
 Altitude: 100 m above sea level  
 Rental flats: app. 2,695  
 Private homes: app. 430

Gårdstensbostäder AB is a part of a large public housing company owned by the City of Göteborg. Gårdstensbostäder AB owns and is responsible for managing most flats, buildings and open spaces in the Gårdsten district. City of Göteborg is responsible for some open space and infrastructure in the district. This includes green spaces and road systems. Gårdstensbostäder AB took charge of the district in 1996 after two former public housing companies.



Figure 2. Typical spot in Gårdsten. Source: Christer Hallgren

Like many other housing districts around Göteborg City, the Gårdsten district is surrounded and located within an abundance of forest and nature areas. The physical outlay of the district is formed around two long stretches of multi-storey buildings. A circular road encloses the main parts. The housing areas are divided into a western, eastern and northern part. The Gårdsten district is also home to public institutions such as a library and schools as well as local shopping facilities.

## The project

Since early 1990s, Gårdstensbostäder AB has in collaboration with other public authorities, local residents, and private contractors been driving a development that has changed the deprived state of Gårdsten and turned it into a liveable district. Both the district and the approach undertaken by Gårdstensbostäder AB has become a beacon for other housing districts in Sweden. The development of Gårdsten is ongoing and Gårdstensbostäder AB will also be responsible for driving the development in the future through their daily activities, with a central focus on achieving sustainable development. In 2009, the process of setting up a new five-year plan was initiated.

## The former situation

In the 1980s, Gårdsten district was an unattractive neighbourhood and a place few people wanted to live and stay in. 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. Many flats were in this period empty and gave the impression of a very dull, dark, and deserted district. Up to 4 out of 10 flats were empty.

## The challenge

When Gårdstensbostäder AB was given the task by the city authorities, the challenge was to rebuild a 'new' district and set up a new holistic and long term vision and plan for the district and the local residents living there. The alternative would be to tear down the whole district. The challenge implied the need to do something dramatically and quickly. Unconventional thinking and solutions were required to meet the challenge.

## Going beyond the standard: taking a new approach

Gårdstensbostäder AB has 30 employees and their offices are located in the centre of Gårdsten. Other housing companies in Göteborg are normally located outside the district they serve. In contrast to other housing companies in the Göteborg area, the employees in Gårdstensbostäder AB work within the local district they serve. The location of the offices is one part of the overall approach for engaging and serving the local community. Gårdstensbostäder AB is also not only an administrative housing company that maintains properties and rents out apartments, but it is also a development company that actively takes new initiatives and seeks to change conditions. Gårdstensbostäder AB is administratively divided into several departments. The administration is divided into:

- Facility management
- Accountancy
- Rental administration
- Information
- Employment services

A further difference to other housing companies relates to the organizational culture:

Gårdstensbostäder AB is more like an entrepreneur than an administrative company. The employees at Gårdstensbostäder AB, continuously think development and innovation into the given tasks. In particular, they apply the three tenets of social, economic and environmental sustainability' to their work.

## Governance and engagement

### The situation today

Gårdsten district is today a well-functioning housing area. Compared to the situation in the 1980s, the area attracts new residents, anti-social behaviour is 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 still home to many ethnic minorities, immigrants and social and economically disadvantaged families. However, the district is today also attracting new groups with slightly higher incomes. It should be noted that gentrification is not expected to become a problem in the future. Moreover, the district is also setting new standards for environmentally-friendly solutions for housing. A wind-turbine is one visible result of the environmental policies implemented in the local community.



Figure 3. Typical spot in Gårdsten. Source: Christer Hallgren

#### VISION 2007 for Gårdsten

"A city district with an active citizenry. A neighbourhood where people take a responsibility for the place where they live. A place where diversity not only means that different cultures, lifestyles, nationalities, religions, ages and experiences are represented, but a place where these live together and interact for the creation of a sustainable, healthy and safe environment and welfare. A place where the new generation, children and youth, believes in the future."

*Excerpt from the five year plan.  
Gårdstensbostäder, 2007.*

### Engaging the local community

Community engagement has been a central element in the development of the Gårdsten district. The engagement process has been one of knocking doors, enabling visionary processes through workshops, participating in local events, delegation of decisions and budgets to the local community, local availability, and transparent and swift decision processes. One important part of the approach to governance in the district is the setup 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. The 5-year plan is at the heart of the strategy toward realizing the overall aim sustainable development.

As the office of Gårdstensbostäder AB is located in the centre of Gårdsten, employees are in close contact in their daily work with the everyday life in Gårdsten. Once a week all employees are engaged in community work in the form of 'dialogue meetings' with local residents.

The administration of properties owned by Gårdstensbostäder AB is partly decentralized and local people are employed in refurbishment and administration work.

Gårdstensbostäder AB is also engaged in close collaboration with other public authorities in the City of Göteborg. Two examples are collaboration on the setup of financial schemes for refurbishing schools in the district and collaboration in the provision of local jobs for youth in the summer time. Although the main financial source for developing Gårdsten is the revenues from renting out apartments, specific projects may receive funding from partners outside of Gårdsten.

### Employment policies

One of the new policies undertaken by Gårdstensbostäder AB was targeting the high unemployment rate. This employment policy has resulted in the setup of a new employment service as a part of the housing company's activities. Procurement policies have also been designed to support local job opportunities. This includes a requirement to provide job training as a part of contracts. The procurement policy has sought to divide large construction works into small bids with the purpose of allowing smaller companies to bid for contracts. The procurement policies have also required winning companies to use local workers through the employment services. An independent research report published in 2008 (Lind & Lundström, 2008) has shown that this approach delivers superior economic benefits for both society as a whole and the local community.



### Social approaches

Social policies undertaken by Gårdstensbostäder AB are diverse. The policies include meetings and social activities for different resident groups, including educational and informational activities. Examples are: activities where immigrant or woman groups can be together on their own premises or get help with various questions related to integration in a new country, raising children, or personal issues. There are also established many activities for the local youth in their spare time. This includes a music school, a youth club, sports and a practical training school, which provides training for jobs in the service sector. An annual celebration day with local performance, music, sports, flea-market also takes place in Gårdsten.

Figure 4. Kids having fun at the celebration day. Source: Viveca Larsson

Gårdstensbostäder AB has embarked on a 'thinning out' policy among low income groups. The large very group of families with low income was too concentrated in the district and made it difficult to sustain improvements in the local community. A limitation of new residents with low income has resulted in a decrease of families with a low income status. In 2010, approximately 1/3 of families receive social welfare incomes or pensions. The thinning out policy is now seen as key to improving the district.

## Environmental policies

The flow of energy and materials has been targeted through a whole range of activities and development projects. Alternative energy solutions are among the more 'high tech' solutions, but a re-use system, provision of information and better administration are also part of the environmental policies. Gårdstensbostäder AB seeks to think sustainability in all their activities.

Wind power produce electricity to approximately 1.000 flats and 500 flats has been energized by solar power. The schemes include technical solutions such as accumulation of solar produced energy in water tanks. In 2010 additional solar heated and energy efficient housing was under construction. The new constructions includes test of new cutting-edge technology together with the public energy company in Göteborg. The new construction allows the district to connect houses to the regional heating net for distribution of surplus energy.



Figure 5. Solar houses in Gårdsten. Source: Chister Hallgren

Sustainable solutions have been implemented related to heating or re-use of materials and installations in refurbishments. The major part of costs for housing is used to energy and heating consumptions. At the start the residents received a common bill for their use of heating and hot and cold water. In this form for payment there were no incentives for the individual resident to cut down on heating or water use. Since then a new administrative system has been implemented which measures individual consumption. The system

provides incentives for residents to monitor their energy use. The result is a minimized use of energy that saves residents money on their monthly bill. In addition, two local volunteers are engaged in providing information about efficient use of energy, water and heating. New residents and immigrants in particular need to know about the efficient use of these services and the potential for saving money.

The district has also achieved substantial savings in flat refurbishments through the re-use of materials and good procurement policies (approximately half the cost per square metre compared to ordinary refurbishments). Garbage collection is another service where environmental policy has been implemented. Today, all garbage is sorted in 8 categories for recycling.

## Development of open spaces

The open space in Gårdsten district was formerly characterized as dull, unsafe, overgrown, poorly maintained and poorly lighted (paths and roads). A targeted effort has created an open space of higher quality and value for the local community. The effort has partly taken place in collaboration with the Department of Parks and Nature in Göteborg.

In order to create a new environment and continuously ensure improvements study tours and trips with local residents to other places in the Göteborg area have been arranged, 'park walks' have been integrated as a part of future workshops, external funding have been applied for, and visible improvements and new project been carried out. Budgets have been allocated to specific

development project where, from the outset, resident's needs and wishes were taken into account through deliberative processes. One project was a local activity / sports field for ball games and physical activities with a total budget of approximately €250,000.

### Local economic development

In the past there were no local shopping, commercial or business opportunities in the district. One problem was that only few of the residents owned or had access to a car. Therefore, basic functions such as shopping were a problem for most residents. A targeted effort has been made to create new job opportunities. The employment policies from Gårdstensbostäder AB have been a part of this concerted effort. The opportunities have also created new job opportunities, while the resulting local public life in and around commercial centres has contributed to an improved feeling of safety and quality of life. The overall positive development have ultimately resulted in increasing private property prices in the district for private one-family house and an interests among other people to move into the district. The increase in private property prices is perceived as a positive development by Gårdstensbostäder AB. The increase reflects both the value of the regeneration efforts and makes the district attractive for private investments.

### Evaluation and lessons to learn

To a large extent it is the concerted actions and the synergies between the policies that have resulted in the positive development and visible improvement on the ground that can be found in Gårdsten district. For example, the local economic development has together with the improvement of quality of open spaces improved the sense of safety throughout the district. Local engagement and involvement in decisions has been a cross-cutting vehicle for implementing the different policies.

The development has resulted in acknowledgement from both outside and within the local community. User surveys have revealed a high degree of satisfaction among residents in Gårdsten district while Gårdstensbostäder AB has received many prizes for the development and been acknowledged as an example of best practice in Sweden. The success of the economic approach in Gårdsten is also documented by the economic valuation in 2008 (by Lind & Lundström). The strategy of using local work in the district has contributed to the overall economic improvement.

#### 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.

One important part of the overall approach to place-making and place keeping is the 5-year plan that aims to achieve a locally sustainable development in Gårdsten. Gårdstensbostäder AB has catalysed the development processes through decentralization, enactment of the local community and collaboration.

The case of Gårdsten is an example of how out-of-the-box thinking and true leadership can transform a neighbourhood through facilitating community engagement and the delegation of decision-making to the local community. 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.



## Format of this report

This report is based on the findings from a face-to-face in-depth interview carried out with the Vice Director of Gårdstensbostäder AB in 2010, who granted permission for MP4 members to use their responses in this report. This interview was semi-structured and conducted using the question schedule used in the data collection for all the case studies. In addition, the sources of secondary data which provided the contextual information are referenced and the photographs are reproduced with permission.

## Glossary

**Place-making:** creating high quality places that people want to visit, experience and enjoy. It implies a people-centred approach which emphasises designing spaces that promote health, wellbeing and happiness. Such spaces engender a sense of belonging and connection for those who use them.

**Place-keeping:** relates to maintaining the qualities and benefits – social, environmental and economic – of places through long-term management. The management required to maintain these qualities and benefits, the approach adopted and the timescale will depend on the 'place-making' aims, the available resources and the life span of the 'place'.

**Partnership:** is defined as agreed shared responsibility between public, private and community sectors. It is a relationship which, in this context, is normally formed between governmental and non-governmental sectors – i.e. it is a manifestation of governance relationships.

**Engagement:** is a cross-cutting issue which describes successful models of working with communities and encouraging appropriate use. Engagement is an aspect of governance particularly relevant in forms of participatory governance and is intrinsic to the concept of 'governance' as defined below.

**Governance:** relates to the relationship between and within government and non-governmental forces. The term implies wider participation in decision-making than representative democracy or other forms of government, recognising a wider range of actors other than the state, and allowing for varying governance contexts and processes.

**Finance:** describes financial models for efficient long-term management.

**Policy:** is discussed within the context of embedding best practice into spatial planning and other policy.

**Valuation:** describes the economic impacts of improvements to open spaces, but also relates to wider socio-economic and environmental benefits.

## Material and references

### Documents

Gårdstensbostäder, 2007. 'En vision och ett framtidsscenario till vägledning för beslut och aktiviteter'.

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Hans Lind & Stellan Lundström 2008, Affären Gårdsten: Har förnyelsen av Gårdsten varit lönsam?

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### More information

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