



**The Interreg IVB
North Sea Region
Programme**

*Investing in the future by working together
for a sustainable and competitive region*



MP4 WP1.3 Transnational Assessment of Practice

Temalekplats
(Theme)
playgrounds, Malmö

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Temalekplats: introduction

Temalekplats are playgrounds planned, designed and managed by the city of Malmö's Streets and Parks Department. Each playground is designed around a theme of interest to children, such as outer space, fairy tales and music. There are 19 playgrounds located around the city.

Context

The City of Malmö is the third biggest city in Sweden with a population of over 290,000. It is located in the southwest of Sweden, on the coast of the Öresund, the strait which separates the Swedish province of Skåne and the Danish island of Zealand, connected by the Öresund toll bridge since 2000. Malmö is the seat of Malmö Municipality and the capital of Skåne. Malmö grew significantly in the 19th and 20th century with the shipyards playing an important part in the city's industrialization. However, recession hit Swedish industry badly in the 1970s and the city's shipyards and manufacturing industry suffered and high unemployment followed.



Figure 1. Malmö with the 'Turning Torso' designed by architect Santiago Calatrava (left).



Figure 2. Malmö with the 'Turning Torso' in the background.²

The city reinvented itself at the end of the 20th century with the redevelopment and regeneration of the coastal areas which was made possible when the city won funding to host the country's housing exposition, Bo01, in the Western Harbour area³. The city is now heralded as an example of best practice in sustainable urban design and construction, which is the backbone to Malmö's master plan which aims to create a sustainable and attractive city⁴. The Öresund region, together with Copenhagen and its surrounding urban areas, now represents one of the fastest growing urban districts in Europe.

Malmö's Streets and Parks Department (SPD) looks after a range of open spaces including playgrounds, streets, squares and parks. The Department is one of the most successful in Sweden and has received numerous awards⁵. The Department manages, develops and renews Malmö's urban environment, ensuring that public spaces such as streets, parks,

¹ www.bdonline.co.uk/story_attachment.asp?storycode=3060872&seq=2&type=P&c=1

² www.southeastexcellence.co.uk/media/resources/Bo01_final_draft_8_April_09.pdf

³ Building Design (2006) Malmö model is a template for successful regeneration.

www.bdonline.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=3060872

⁴ Malmö stad (2009) Sustainable Malmö: making sustainability reality. www.malmo.se/English/Sustainable-City-Development/PDF-archive/pagefiles/susmalmo_kortis_eng_091118webb.pdf

⁵ Carmona et al. (2004) Is the grass greener...? Learning from international innovations in urban green space management, CABE Space, London.

playgrounds and beaches are attractive and safe. Malmö has a reputation for providing excellent parks and playgrounds, and is referred to as the 'City of Parks'^{6,7}.

The need for place-keeping

The impetus behind the project was to stress the importance of the environment for children in urban areas and the need for renewal of playgrounds in Malmö. Many playgrounds were built in the 1960s and 1970s in Swedish cities. These particular playgrounds are in some of the most deprived districts in Malmö. By the 1990s, the playgrounds were run down and in urgent need of renewal. Instead of simply replacing the play equipment with more of the same, the SPD recognized this as an opportunity chance to rethink the concept of what a playground is. The idea to invest in a selection of playgrounds which each had a unique theme was first tested 1997 in Beijers park. This playground was considered a success and a project to install more themed playgrounds was initiated in the mid-1990s by the city council's Streets and Parks Department.

The project, activities and place-keeping

The SPD's project on theme playgrounds aims to complete 22 different theme playgrounds in different neighbourhoods in Malmö. So far has 19 been completed and the first playground was opened in 1997. The playgrounds have different themes that are especially appealing to children: music, spirals, fairy tales, outer space and water, to name but a few. One theme is animals in the 'Africa' park which has full size animal sculptures set in the 'wild' shrubs. Children can climb on a giraffe and compete with the animals in the long jump. Some new themed playgrounds are the magic playground in Oxie and the farm playground in Videdal. Themed playgrounds in Slottsparken, Enskifteshagen and Kroksbäcksparken are also underway. The size and facilities around the playgrounds differ. In some urban playgrounds there are facilities including toilets, while parks on the urban peripheries have a much simpler layout with natural 'unconstructed' areas with no features other than sculptures and playing equipment.



Figure 3. Puckelbollplan "bumpy soccer field" playground



Figure 4. Spiral playground

⁶ See website http://www.malmo.com/index_eng.htm

⁷ <http://www.malmo.se/English/About-the-City-of-Malmo/pagefiles/Gatukontoret.2007-En.pdf>

Natural play facilities are employed in some of the playgrounds. The uniqueness of the place is an important factor for the theme playgrounds. In all the spaces at least some of the equipment are specially designed for that particular playground. The aim is to provide a range of activities for children in different ages, but also to make places that are enjoyable and pleasant for parents too. This seems to be successful as the themed playgrounds attract children and families from many different city districts.



Figure 5. 'Africa' playground

Partnerships and Governance

The playgrounds are maintained by the City of Malmö via its Streets and Parks Department which employs over 200 people including municipal planners, traffic planners, landscape architects and project managers. A landscape architect is responsible for the themes and planning of the playgrounds and coordinates the project. She is working with other landscape architects and artists to create new playgrounds.

In the planning and design stages for most of the theme playgrounds, education and childcare institutions of all forms, such as schools and preschools, have been involved. This means that pre-school/ schoolchildren in the area have had an influence on the choice of theme at a particular playground. In some of the projects residents and other organizations have also been involved in the planning and design of the playgrounds. The engagement of the local community is important to understand users' needs in a space and to promote a positive response to the project. This can lead to future preference for and sustained use and of the space, as well as better care for the spaces by users.

SPD is the only stakeholder involved in the long-term maintenance and management of the playgrounds, with (e.g.) no contracting-out of services to other stakeholders. No formal agreements have been put in place for these partnerships, however there is informal involvement of the local community which differs from space to space.

Finance

Initial investment for the first playground came from the Housing and Urban Environment Directorate at Malmö city council as part of its regular budget. When the success of the playground and the potential of the concept became clear, a specific investment budget for the theme playgrounds was created. There is a budget for the construction of one theme playground per year, which is decided after the proposal is presented by the landscape architect to the SPD. The playground projects vary in terms of their size which is reflected in the budgets which range from €70,000 to €500,000⁸. The SPD paid the associated extra costs for high quality in the investment phase. This is considered to be prudent in the long run because these playgrounds generate lower maintenance and management costs than if they were constructed with poor quality materials.

Funding for the long-term maintenance comes out of the SPD's annual budget. This is however an issue for the SPD as there are increased maintenance costs associated with the

⁸ The SPD cannot provide a breakdown of costs, as much of the work is carried out by employees as part of their daily duties and not separated or accounted for as a specific cost.

playgrounds because they are popular and very well used. This means that they need considerable maintenance and management, including more frequent cleaning and renewal for general wear and tear. These extra associated costs are currently not covered by extra funding but is described as needing careful redistribution of SPD's budget (based on renewing playgrounds less frequently than is actually required). It is unclear what the future funding will be for these playgrounds, but there is great public support for these spaces. The interest and understanding of the value of public space in general and of playgrounds in particular is much greater now than before the themed playground project started.

Policy

While no specific policy arrangements have been put in place, Malmö has specific policies relating to street furniture, which influence the choice of equipment such as litterbins and benches. The themed playgrounds form part of the city's regeneration programme. This involved policymakers setting aside budgets for the capital investment required for the playgrounds, however there is little policy support for the long-term maintenance and management of the spaces.

In 2009, Malmö received the award "Årets äppelträd" or "the apple tree of the year" from Movium, the national centre for urban public space. This was awarded for the city's "strategic commitment to urban meeting places for children and young people – meeting places that develop the urban life and benefit all people in Malmö". The themed playgrounds are an important part of this. It is argued that the themed playgrounds have raised the awareness of the importance and possibilities of playgrounds. This awareness is claimed to have increased both the public's demands for high-quality playspace and the political will to invest in playgrounds.

Valuation and evaluation

The project has made Malmö famous throughout Sweden by directly tackling playgrounds and modernizing them in an innovative way. They have become so popular that inhabitants in Malmö travel to different neighbourhoods just to try out the different playgrounds. This is one of the most successful aspects of the project, because neighbourhoods with 'poorer' reputations now draw people from outside the area. Anecdotally, estate agents state that the playgrounds contribute towards making the housing estates more valuable.

The SPD regularly measure the perceived quality of open spaces through interviews. One of the interview questions is about the theme playgrounds. The results show that the playgrounds often get good results, i.e. a high level of satisfaction on the part of users. It is clear that the information about new playgrounds is well-communicated and spreads rapidly among Malmö's residents. However, this is not measured formally and there is scope for further methods of evaluation.

Place-keeping challenges

At the moment, many of Malmö's theme playgrounds are beginning to reach the end of their lifetime (estimated at about 10-12 years). This means that SPD has a large programme of playground renewal to carry out in the very near future. This programme will not be as extensive as the original renewal project as the current playgrounds are of a much higher quality than in the 1990s.

A further challenge from providing playgrounds of such a high quality is the city having to deal with high expectations of the playgrounds on the part of users. This will be a great challenge for SPD to meet the coming years. It now becomes clear that despite using high quality materials, the long-term maintenance and management of the playgrounds could have been considered more carefully in the construction phase.

One of the biggest challenges facing place-keeping in the playgrounds is the issue of financing the project in the long term. Budgets are insufficient for the considerable place-

keeping which is a problem experienced all over Malmö. The problem is that it is much easier to secure funding for capital investment for large, flagship projects than for small projects and funding for maintenance.

Long-term management strategy

In developing the idea of theme playground long term management was not really considered. It has been discussed internally at the SPD that there is a need to find a new model for the rapid depreciation of playgrounds. A period of 33 years is normally considered for investment in public space. With their relatively short 10-year life span, the playgrounds are capital-intensive and require a disproportionately high level of maintenance and management, which is a real problem for the SPD.



Figure 6. Fairy tale playground

A shorter depreciation time is clearly needed, but at the same time a strategy is also required for how to manage the playgrounds after that time. Sometimes complete renovation could be necessary, but it might also be a good solution to carry out part renovations. This raises the question as to whether the SPD is dealing with investments or operating costs. This is a current issue at the SPD when the first theme playgrounds begin to need considerable renovation. These discussions relate to both the funding model but also the maintenance programme and the need to carefully choose construction materials. SPD would favour the reduction of operating costs through the capital investment of high-quality construction and equipment.

Transferable aspects of the project and knowledge sharing/ lessons learnt

Although the experience of the increased cost of maintenance somewhat came as a surprise, the landscape architect at SPD does not believe that claiming a higher operational budget at the outset would have been possible. The popularity of the playgrounds has become an important consideration, which was not anticipated when the theme playgrounds were at the planning and design stage.

While the popularity has been a challenge, the playgrounds have generated huge confidence in both public spaces and in the SPD, which makes the case and support for further investment stronger. Creating high-quality public spaces with high-quality materials, planning and design have directly led to very successful and popular spaces.

It is pointed out that at SPD there is a gap in public space management which relates to lower profile places and parks. These spaces are often popular, important and well used in people’s everyday lives, but do not receive adequate refurbishment and development covered in the regular maintenance budgets. They also do not generate supplementary income to make a strong case for investment as easily as do the theme playgrounds. Learning from other case studies which focus on such spaces would be of use to the SPD.



Figure 7. Cirkuslekplatse playground. Source: <http://www.malmo.se/Medborgare/Idrott--fritid/Ung-Fritid/Lekplatser/Cirkus.html>

Format of this report

This report is based on the findings from a series of face-to-face in-depth interviews carried out with the Landscape Architect at Malmö City Council's Streets and Parks Department in 2010, who granted permission for MP4 members to use their responses in this report. These interviews were 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 in the footnotes. 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.



Figure 8. Rörelselekplatsen playground. Source: <http://www.malmo.se/Medborgare/Idrott--fritid/Ung-Fritid/Lekplatser/Rorelse.html>