

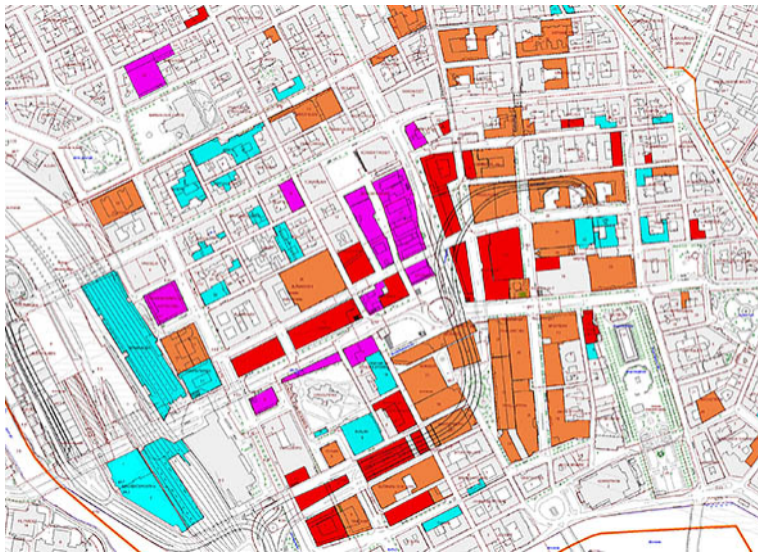
## RECORDING AND CHARACTERIZING THE MODERN CITY CENTRE OF STOCKHOLM

Per Olgarsson

*The Stockholm City Museum, Stockholm, Sweden*

### INTRODUCTION

The part of Stockholm generally known as the City covers a large portion of the centrally located district of Normalm. This rectangular area, measuring approximately 1300 x 800 meters, lies directly north of Stockholm's oldest district, the medieval Old Town. The area underwent a radical transformation between 1955 and 1980, when older houses were replaced by new buildings in a modernist architecture. The City has since come under heavy criticism. Today, once again, large scale changes are being planned. During 2007, The Stockholm City Museum conducted the Modern City Project to record and characterize the buildings in the area. This paper discusses the City using the project as a point of departure.



*Stockholm's City: changes in the area from 1950 to 1990. Light grey buildings are older than 1950, pink buildings were erected in the 1950s, red in the 1960s, orange in the 1970s and turquoise in the 1980s. The illustration shows how change progressed from the centre outward.*

### THE MODERN CITY PROJECT

The Stockholm City Museum is a municipal institution whose task it is to document change in Stockholm and safeguard the capital's heritage. The museum has long performed documentations and characterizations of Stockholm's buildings. An historical and architectural classification of the inner city including all buildings erected before 1960 was presented first in 1983 and then revised in 1996. This classification is used in the day to day administration of the municipality as a documentary support for city planning and decisions on building permits and demolition work. The classification system divides the buildings into colour-coded categories denoting their historical/architectural values: yellow, green and blue. Yellow buildings have a positive impact on the townscape and some historical/architectural values; Green buildings have special historical/architectural values, and are considered so important that they should be protected from any change that could diminish those values; buildings classified as Blue are in the highest category. They have values of such magnitude that they could be listed among the nation's landmark buildings. The colour-coded classifications correspond to specific articles in Swedish building and cultural heritage laws.

The Modern City Project was carried out during the spring of 2007, with a project group consisting of three conservation officers and two photographers. The group produced a comprehensive historical and architectural characterization of all buildings in the district of Normalm from 1960 to 1990, a total of 105 buildings.<sup>1</sup> The goal was to produce a document that would act as a tool in the ongoing planning for the area. This was done under the expectation that the museum could contribute to a

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<sup>1</sup> Buildings built before 1960 were not included in the project, nor were certain 1960s and 1970s buildings which have experienced drastic changes in recent years. Including these raises to 130 the count of buildings erected between 1950 and 1990 in the Normalm district.

nuanced discussion of the City, both among the general public and among those who govern and plan Stockholm. The documentation covered façades, roofs, inner courtyards and interior public spaces such as passageways, winter gardens etc. Apart from that, no documentation of the interiors was carried out.

In its historical and architectural characterization of buildings in the City, the Stockholm City Museum used a model that evaluates how a specific building or milieu stands in relation to a series of core values. These include, among others, artistic, architectonic and architectural historical values, townscape and the history of town planning values as well as sociohistorical values and the history of building techniques. These criteria were carefully weighed before the buildings were divided into the three colour-coded categories. Explanatory texts summarize the values of the buildings. These are intended as tools for city officials and members of the public who wish to know why a specific building has received a certain classification. The classifications were presented on a digital map to which city planners and officials have access. All information and all photographs are accessible to the public via The National Heritage Board's Register of Buildings.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE NEW CITY EMERGES 1955 - 1980

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Normalm district was laid out on a grid iron plan in line with the ideals of the time. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century this was Stockholm's commercial and administrative centre. Following World War II the area was characterized by its mixture of buildings, with houses from the 17<sup>th</sup> century through to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, an environment that varied, in both design and standard. Residential buildings with shops at the ground level and backyard houses with small workshops stood side by side with newspaper offices, art schools, market halls, boarding houses and hotels, as well a significant number of newer office buildings and department stores.

By now, both the city government and commercial interests had begun to see the area as problematic. Buildings were run down and out of date; streets were narrow and poorly adapted to the increasing motor traffic; variations in elevation were too great. In brief, the old Normalm was considered as ill-suited for the role of centre point for the city and, indeed, the nation.



*Sergels Torg Square, the upper traffic level. In the background department stores from the 1960s which line Klarabergsgatan, a broad thoroughfare.*

The planning for large scale urban renewal in the district began in 1946. The project was run by a relatively small group of experienced planners working for the city of Stockholm, who had close contacts with both city politicians and local commercial interests. In 1953 the so-called Hötorgscity began to emerge, an entirely car-free pedestrian zone bordered on one side by low shops with glass façades, and on the other by five high-rise buildings. Demolition and construction gathered momentum

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<sup>2</sup> The Swedish National Heritage Board is the agency of the Swedish government that is responsible for heritage and historic environment issues. The Register of Buildings is a national database that concerns historically and architecturally valuable buildings throughout Sweden.

during the 1960s and 70s. Hötorgscity was complemented by the central square called Sergels Torg, around which sprouted palatial banks and department stores but also large scale public buildings. In the 1970s changes occurred mostly in the district's southern and eastern sections, with the addition of office complexes, buildings for governmental agencies and an entire city block containing Gallerian, Sweden's first indoor shopping mall.

The City metamorphosis changed the character of the district dramatically. Nearly 700 buildings were torn down resulting in a 20 to 25 year period when large portions of the area were a construction zone, with half demolished houses and streets little more than provisional bridges over enormous gravel pits. The scale expanded, with new buildings often covering entire city blocks, and although the old grid-iron plan was preserved to a great extent, streets were broadened and the old squares and open spaces refashioned. A network of service tunnels were added beneath the surface, as well as loading zones, car parks, roads, subway stations, pedestrian tunnels and even shops. At the same time, a web of pedestrian bridges and public roof terraces connected the blocks of the new City above ground. Through this kind of traffic separation, the street level was by and large reserved for vehicles while pedestrians were to flow safely above the streets or below the surface. A system of escalators, lifts and normal flights of stairs connected the levels, thus creating a truly three dimensional city core.

An important aspect of the reshaping of the City was that the area was emptied almost entirely of residential housing. From 1955 through 1980 only a few isolated blocks of flats were built while housing and old businesses were relocated, often to the new suburbs.

Sweeping city transformations such as this were typical of the post-war period. The national economy was booming; Swedish historians have called this epoch the "record years" and so it was only natural for this success to be made manifest in the nation's capital. With the attitudes of the times towards older buildings it was a matter of course for the old city centre to make way for something new: a modern city for the modern citizen, but for the new citizen to take his place, the old buildings, associated with filth, poverty and decay, had to be torn down.



*Peter Celsing's Bank of Sweden building. The architecture is heavy and imposing in rough-hewn black granite meant to embody the bank's stability. The building's height was decided only after a discussion which pointed out the importance of keeping the Bank of Sweden lower than the Royal Palace which lay some 500 meters to the south.*

#### THE CITY AND THE HISTORICAL TOWNSCAPE

Despite the ruthlessness of the City transformation, planning and building often bore the stamp of a deliberate relationship to the historical city. There was an expressed desire to hold the new City within the 19<sup>th</sup> century's unified city silhouette, where isolated high buildings functioned as landmarks. Thus, high buildings were restricted to one place, the 1950s Hötorgscity, where the high-rise towers were the modern counterpart to the church towers of old.

Even when it comes to individual buildings some interesting accommodations to the old city were made. The Sheraton Hotel, with its prominent location in the district's southern section, was given a façade of mottled brown clinker and projecting corner towers. This was a way to allow the hotel to



interact with the older houses in the area such as Stockholm's City Hall from the 1920s. Adaptations of this sort became more common during the later part of the 1970s, when, for example, the city block sized Sahlénhuset got a façade that harmonized with surrounding older buildings. To the north the building was clad in copper and plaster, to the east in white stone and to the west in red brick.



*Multi-storey car parks needed perforated outer walls to let in the daylight and allow the exhaust fumes to escape. Architects made use of these requirements and gave these concrete buildings a strong, expressive architecture. The photo shows the “Parkaden” car park, built 1960 - 1962 from a design by architect Hans Asplund. The concrete façades are latticed with the floor numbers. This is City's only multi-storey car park in original condition*

#### ARCHITECTURE AND MATERIALS

During most of the period, architectural development stayed within the overall framework of modernism, but the designs were adapted to the various functions of the buildings and changed in response to shifting ideals. The architecture of Hötorgscity's “skyscrapers” and low shops was firmly anchored in the International style of the times. The large department stores along Klarabergsgatan were given closed façades with few windows, because department store consultants, called in from America, preferred that solution as it provided good conditions for modern air conditioning and furthermore freed up internal wall space for displaying goods. Around 1970, the ideal moved towards a rougher, more expressive architecture. During the 1970s and 1980s architecture became more rooted in the existing city environment and Swedish building tradition.



*Anodized aluminium became a common façade material in the 1970s. The Gallerian shopping mall block was clad in aluminium sheet metal. The design of the portion facing the Brunkebergstorg square alludes to classical prototypes, hinting at pillars between the windows.*

As a rule, buildings were given a reinforced concrete structure, with exterior walls functioning only as climate shields. Brick was a common façade material, often with decorative face-works. Tiles and

plates of stone were in most cases treated. They could be highly polished, chiselled to produce a pattern, or indented and protruding for a prismatic effect. Plaster, which has been a typical façade material in Stockholm for many centuries, appears in the City as well. During the entire period copper and bronze were used both as facing and as a complement to other materials in roofs, windows and around entrances. Concrete façades often consisted of plates and elements that were given an outer surface of embedded stones. Glass façades appear in some 1950s buildings such as the shops in Hötorget and in some office buildings from the 1970s, at that time often with tinted panels.

#### STOCKHOLM'S CITY IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The large scale transformation of Stockholm's urban core has parallels in Europe and around the world. What perhaps makes Stockholm unique, in any case in a European context, is the speed and the scale of the changes, especially in an area that had not been destroyed by war. Demolition and construction in many British and German cities was often due to damage from World War II bombing. And in fact this is one reason that the remodelling of Sweden's capital has been so controversial, that it occurred in a well preserved city core. It is interesting to note that the people in charge of the transformation made field studies in London, Coventry, Rotterdam, Hamburg and Cologne, war-torn cities which had gone through renewal projects.

The various elements of the City, the modernist architecture, the city block sized buildings and the separation of traffic, are all typical for the period and thus part of an international context. Indeed, most characteristics of the City draw upon the works and thoughts of the radical European architects of the 1920s and 30s. The specific international influences behind the individual buildings remain for the most part unexplored. We know, however, that those involved in the larger projects were clearly influenced by buildings and milieus around the world. Sergels Torg, with its complex character mixing foot and vehicular traffic on many levels, is an excellent example of radical post war urbanism as it appears in bold proposals from the period's architects. Stockholm planners studied closely Charles Holden's and William Holford's 1947 plan for central London, with its network of pedestrian passages and shops below the car traffic of the surface.



*Large bank buildings line up along Sveavägen. New storeys of offices have been built on top of the original public roof terraces. To the left a glimpse of the 1950s Hötorget high-rises.*

#### DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CITY DISTRICT

As early as the 1960s voices were raised against the City urban renewal, though it was in the 1970s that the veritable storm of criticism, which has since dominated, first started. Few places in Sweden have been so universally condemned, by the press, the media, politicians, and by the public. The City area has been called desolate and unsafe, lacking in the housing and inhabitants that make up traditional urban life. The district has at times experienced social problems like drug trafficking and prostitution, problems regarded as resulting directly from the large scale and the perceived monotony of the environment. The area has been seen as dirty and run down, a consequence of poor building materials and dull, repetitive architecture. Often criticism takes a strongly nostalgic tone, a longing for the old Normalm.

The rising protests and a marked lack of interest among contractors slowed the transformation during the second half of the 1970s. When building started up again during the 1980s, it had a different character, reflecting the search for new ideals in town planning and architecture. During the period up until 1990 new buildings were built in the city, but now often with historical inspiration. These buildings were likely to be smaller and were often shoehorned in among the older houses. But city block sized transformations did not stop entirely. Now, however, in conscious contrast to earlier decades, the old street façades were often retained as scenery, and complemented by pastiches or copies of older houses.

One clear development was that City's system of public terraces, underpasses and pedestrian bridges to a large extent was closed. The main cause was that these areas had begun to be regarded as unsafe, breeding grounds for crime. Stockholm introduced a policy aimed at dismantling and closing areas seen as "haunts" and "crannies" – i.e. zones which were difficult to watch over and that were not connected to busy commercial strips. Old city planning ideas, once again in favour, expedited the development; multilevel traffic separation was no longer an ideal.



*Sergels Torg and the House of Culture, the heart of the City. The sunken square projects as broad walkways under the surrounding streets. On the upper level there is a super-elliptical roundabout with a sculptured fountain. The two levels are tied together by stairways, which also lead further up to viaducts and the high ground to the south.*

## ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL VALUES

The Stockholm City Museum's characterization of the City has pinpointed a number of central values both for the area as a whole and for individual buildings.

If we listen carefully, the City, a unified post-war downtown district with buildings in a modernist architecture typical of the period, tells us the story of 20<sup>th</sup> century Sweden, a welfare state characterized by a belief in the future and in technology. Buildings and milieus were often shaped by the best known and most well-established architects of the time. Designs are often of very high quality. Variations in architecture and materials are greater than was previously believed. The buildings are generally well preserved.

An important element is the district's previously mentioned system of public terraces, stairs and underpasses. As these spaces disappear, those which do remain become all the more valuable, as educational examples of how 20<sup>th</sup> century town planners thought and as important benchmarks of this period in Stockholm's development. The City has, as well, many well formed inner courtyards, a number of them cultivated. These milieus are generally semi-public, with access available via building lobbies. The courtyards often remain in their original form, and they often have great artistic values.

Of the district's public squares Sergels Torg is paramount. It was the flagship in the city transformation, together with the three buildings which, around 1970, rose up south of the square: the House of Culture, the City Theatre and the Bank of Sweden. These buildings were designed by well known architect Peter Celsing (1920 – 1974), who in this way put his mark on the central City. The municipal authorities wanted this area as a counterweight, an oasis of culture and the arts amid the



otherwise strongly commercial City district. The three buildings were given an architectonic form that mirrored the activities within and the buildings' respective roles in the city. The buildings were designed in concert with Sergels Torg and Hötorgscity. The result was a unified milieu with few equivalents anywhere in the world, a coherent modern townscape of the highest order in a metropolitan centre.

Of the 105 buildings erected in the City from 1960 to 1990, thirteen received the highest architectural/historical classification and were marked in blue on the Stockholm City Museum's map. If we include buildings from the 1950s, the total jumps to twenty. The House of Culture is marked in blue for the following reasons pointed out in the explanatory text: It is one of the most influential buildings in 20<sup>th</sup> century Swedish architectural history; It is Sweden's best example of how 1960s thinking about broadening and democratizing culture influenced architecture and town planning; The building's architecture and design are of the highest class, both in the exterior and in the interior. The dramatic glass façade facing Sergels Torg unifies the building's large continuous floor spaces with those of the square itself, the glass serving only as a climate shield. The typical use of raw concrete adds to the building's values. The details are important; the copper in the windows, the use of enamelled sheet metal and painted wood, the canopy roofs' decorative light bulbs. The location of the building, directly beside Sergels Torg, Sweden's most important public space, gives the House of Culture a great value for the townscape.



*Office building in the city block known as Duvan, with the Klara Church Tower in the background*

There are 38 buildings marked in green on the classification map. If we include those from the 1950s we arrive at 44 buildings judged to have special architectural/historical values. These are not of the same calibre as the extraordinarily important buildings exemplified above by the House of Culture but are deemed to have significant value. As an example, the explanatory text for the city block called Duvan in the southern part of the City points out that it is a well preserved and representative example of an office building from the 1970s. The architecture is well formed, with a copper façade and a closed, fortress like design complete with distinct corner projections. Its high visibility from many traffic routes and the district's churchyard gives it values for the townscape. That the building originally housed Stockholm's first local radio station contributes a certain historical value.

Original details may contribute to a building's value – windows or entrance doors for example, components that were often mass produced in modern materials but which are important for the architecture. But buildings also often have individually designed details of high quality, like neon signs, address plates, lighting fixtures and wall clocks. Some buildings have works of art integrated into the architecture. These could be sculptures or reliefs, but even more functional elements such as gates or railings were designed by some of the era's well known Swedish artists.

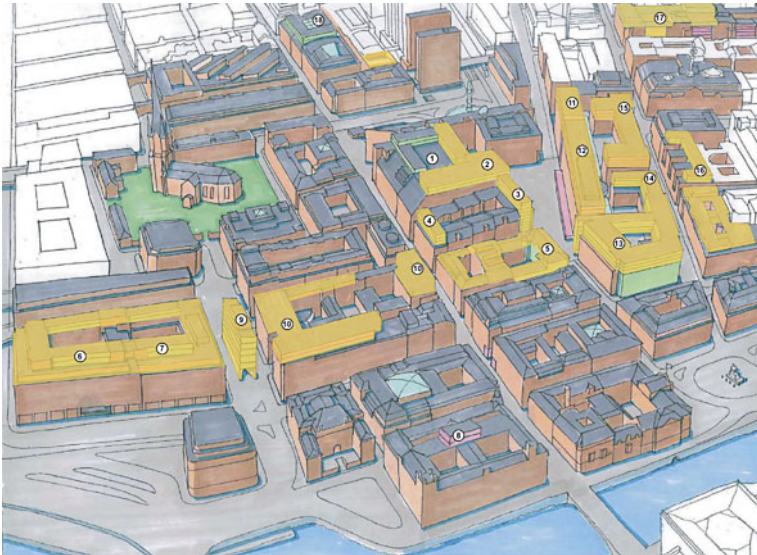
#### THE USERS' PERSPECTIVE

A part of historical characterization is taking a position on certain hard to define, but nevertheless important qualities, like symbolic values and identity-creating values. This is the role that buildings or environments may have in the minds of the public, i.e. those who use them, the city's inhabitants.

The City district contains some of Sweden's best known and most highly used milieus. This is the geographical centre of Stockholm where subway lines meet, and where the Central Station welcomes bus and rail traffic from the entire nation. The great High Streets swarm with provincial visitors to the capital and Sergels Torg has become the nation's most important arena for political demonstrations and other popular protests. When Sweden's teams win in international competition, it is at Sergels Torg that thousands gather to celebrate the victory. The classless character of the district has contributed to more positive attitudes towards the City and changes proposed today are often met by protest. It is not least the transformation of public space into commercial space that awakens opposition, as for example plans to glass in sections of Sergels Torg to create an indoor shopping centre.

#### 2009: A CHANGING CITY DISTRICT

Today the municipality of Stockholm and private commercial interests are behind projects aimed at large scale change. An important strain is the movement to produce more apartments by adding additional storeys to the existing houses. There is a wish to attract more financially strong consumers to the area and to exchange the simpler shops along certain streets for exclusive up-scale "concept" stores. The apartments, preferably, are to be expensive condominiums that will attract the "right" people. The district is to become "safe", populated around the clock and with a character more like nearby districts, i.e. the large sections of the inner city that have apartment buildings from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, areas today characterized by accelerating gentrification.



*An illustration for the proposed plan for "Three Squares" (2007). The plan proposes building one, two or more storeys of flats, offices and hotels on top of post-war buildings in the southern part of the City.*

Other architectonic changes are happening as well. One tendency is for owners and commercial interests to make the City more "elegant". Materials and details from the 1960s and 70s are being replaced by new meant to signify quality and exclusivity. Concrete and sheet metal become glass, polished stone or plaster. Shop windows and doors in anodized aluminium are replaced by shiny steel or lacquered wood. Colours typical of the period, drab grey, shades of brown or yellow, are brightened into cool whites and light grey tones. These developments set their stamp, above all, on the High Streets, and carry with them a slow, step by step change not only in individual buildings but in the entire city milieu.

#### CLOSING WORDS

The Stockholm City Museum's characterization and classification of the City is not uncontroversial. That is partly because it recognizes values in buildings which have long been heavily criticized, not least by the Heritage authorities themselves. In addition the assessment can be interpreted as directly opposing the city's and politicians' efforts to bring change to the district. Many ongoing renovation projects involve buildings to which the Stockholm City Museum has ascribed a high value. This contributes to the misperception that the museum, the capital's central heritage authority, wants to



“make a museum” of the area. In a period in which it is considered desirable to replace the City’s basic modernist character with a new urbanity, this may seem incomprehensible.

For the Modern City Project to contribute to the preservation of the district’s values even in a time of change will require communicating through many channels with a wide audience, spotlighting historical and architectonic qualities without idealizing or hiding the area’s problems. The Stockholm City Museum must also act to promote the creation of a policy for the City that sets guidelines for handling change in valuable buildings. The model must be flexible and adaptable to various grades of architectural/historical values.

Finally it is important for Stockholm to deal comprehensively with the question of adding additional storeys to the existing buildings. Even during the wholesale City urban renewal of the 1960s and 70s consideration was given to the height of the old townscape. Here we have an object lesson from the post-war City; the will to change does not necessarily stand in direct opposition to preserving those elements that characterize a district. Another lesson from the 1960s and 70s, which perhaps is more negative, is the importance of going slowly. Drastic changes of the City are again on the drawing table. They risk once more destroying a district whose buildings may have great architectural/historical values, and which, after more than thirty years, has found its own exciting identity.

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