

Slussen Masterplan

Andrea Gousen



"The new face of Stockholm at Slussen – a modern urban quarter at the heart of the archipelago – is poised to become one of city's most dynamic civic destinations. The masterplan will provide new public spaces, an accessible quayside, pedestrian and cycle routes and prominent new buildings while transforming the existing infrastructure to minimise the threat of flooding and create a 21st century transport interchange."
- Foster + Partners

(Image copyright Foster + Partners)

Slussen, which literally translates to 'the locks' in Swedish, refers to an area on the northern edge of Stockholm's Södermalm island. It links the islands of Södermalm and Gamla Stan, the Baltic and Lake Malaren, and is currently the confluence of many transportation networks.

The area's current design dates back to the 1930s and includes a complex series of bridges, boat locks, pedestrian walkways as well as an underground transit station for bus, tram, and subway traffic. Considered a modern architectural marvel when it was inaugurated in 1935, Slussen has long been considered in need of renovation.

There are many factors that prompted the need for a masterplan in this part of the city. After 70 years of service the degenerated water and transportation infrastructure is in need of replacement. There is also concern that the current infrastructure is not equipped to handle flooding so it will be updated to handle the higher waters that climate change may bring. There is also need to create a modernized transport interchange in order to transform the presently mess of transportation routes into a destination that balances the need for many different modes of transportation.

"Slussen's prominent waterside location opposite historic Gamla Stan will make it a magnet for the city's best contemporary architecture, while the new road and elegant pedestrian bridges will become feature elements. Once complete, the new Slussen's extensive public terraces will provide spectacular panoramas over Stockholm."
- Foster + Partners

"This competition is addressing failed urban policies of the past. The designs all seek to breathe new life into the dead zones created unwittingly by Modernist and postwar planners."

WHAT WENT WRONG IN SLUSSEN

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Most planners regard it as a lesson in everything that was wrong with orthodox Modernism: endless swaths of barren concrete plazas and dank underpasses that seemed to invite midday muggings. Terms like "urban aberration" and "confusing maze of areas of concrete" and "black hole" are used to describe the Slussen in need of repair. Cyclists and pedestrians view the area as inaccessible. The goal of the masterplan is to "reclaim" this part of the city and reestablish the waterfront that has been lost in the confusing maze of roads and concrete. The City of Stockholm is taking this opportunity to also create a civic destination at the heart of the city.



Foster + Partners

Above: Two examples of design strategies created by Foster + Partners to link Sodermalm and Gamla Stan.



THE DESIGN COMPETITION

In late 2007, city officials finally decided to move ahead with plans to renovate the area in order to update its design and take better advantage of Slussen's waterfront location in the heart of Stockholm.

The Slussen regeneration is part of Stockholm's Vision 2030 initiative which encompasses the regeneration of several areas of the city as well as incorporating numerous social and economic advancements. The planning and design for Slussen has been in discussion for many years. A first architectural contest took place in 2003/04. In 2007 Foster and Partners was selected after a multi-stage interview process and design competition. The earliest possible start date for construction is 2012, and the new Slussen may be completed in 2018.

The five designs can be separated more or less into two categories: those that try to bring clarity and order to the jumbled traffic systems, and those that seek to draw the bustling energy of the old city across the site.

"I'm delighted that we have been appointed to design the masterplan for Slussen to revitalise this most important area for future generations to enjoy. This is a wonderful opportunity to reinforce the links between Stockholm's central islands of Södermalm and Gamla Stan, to repair the fabric of the city and to create a lively new destination that can be enjoyed at all."

- Spencer de Grey, Head of Design at Foster + Partners



Photo credit: Foster + Partners

The design by Foster + Partners was chosen because it proposed several small-scale spaces such as the one pictured above, in order to harness the energy from surrounding areas.



Photo credit: BIG Architects

The design by BIG Architects was a strong entry but was not chosen because of its tabula rasa approach to the site. It did not mesh with the existing style of this part of the city.

The Foster design embraces the messiness of everyday life rather than taking the tabula rasa approach of some teams. His design includes several small scale intimate spaces that were viewed as “humanizing.”

THE WINNING DESIGN

The Foster team was chosen because the scale and design of the planned buildings matches the existing structures. His design also embraces the messiness of everyday life rather than taking the tabula rasa approach of some teams. His design includes several small scale intimate spaces that were viewed as “humanizing.” Foster’s scheme emphasizes the grand scale while also shaping a comfortable and thoughtful pedestrian experience on the ground. While the design is contemporary, the buildings in the masterplan are similar in scale and style to the existing structures in the adjacent urban quarter so that it will seem a continuation of the surroundings.

The concept for the Foster & Partners design is to create a modern urban quarter at the heart of the Stockholm archipelago and a dynamic new civic destination. The masterplan will provide new public spaces, an accessible quayside, pedestrian and cycle routes and prominent new buildings while transforming the existing infrastructure to minimize the threat of flooding and creating a 21st century transport interchange.

In addition, the design features a wooden dock to be built on the Old Town side of Slussen in order to extend the pier farther out into the water, allowing more place for cafés with outdoor seating. An airy, glass building will be built near the current subway entrance so as to not obstruct views of the areas older buildings and the design also allows for the addition of a possible tram line connecting Slussen to Norrmalmstorg in downtown Stockholm. “It will be a functional traffic solution for the future,” said Stockholm Vice Mayor Lotta Edholm in a statement. And will allow for new connections to the east and north. The New Slussen will be the hub the city centre has been missing and will contribute to an exciting meeting between the historic and modern city.



Photo credit: Foster + Partners

Foster + Partners propose extending the ground plane around the existing City Museum into the new below ground transportation interchange to create more public space. A variety of mixed use buildings are integrated into the space to become an eclectic multi-purposed space for Stockholm. Slussen's location across the water from historic Gamla Stan are well positioned to attract the city's best architecture. The new road and pedestrian bridges will become feature elements in this space. Once complete, the new Slussen's public terraces will provide panoramic views over Stockholm.

A central feature of the new Slussen is the Water Square, which will be a pedestrianized public space "arranged around the new navigation lock and realigned quayside, animated by new restaurants and bars."

MIXED REVIEWS OF FOSTER + PARTNERS DESIGN

There are many different opinions of Foster's design, and many of them are negative. Some critics feel that the design is dominated by a pedestrian bridge that corkscrews up over the lake before connecting to a big public plaza. "The bridge would take forever to cross while presenting nothing special in terms of visual experience. The plaza, roughly the proportions of London's Trafalgar Square, is framed by pretentious pseudotraditional buildings that are meant to blend into the surrounding context but only diminish it. A series of generic bridges for cars, pedestrians and bicycles are equally unimaginative."

Regardless of the opinions of Fosters design, city residents are eager to bring new life to the area and for Slussen to be worthy of its affectionate nickname as the heart of Stockholm.



Photo credit: Foster + Partners

Project name: Slussen Masterplan
Project location: Stockholm, Sweden
Project date: 2009
Design team: Foster + Partners,
in collaboration with Berg
Arkitektkontor
Client: City of Stockholm
Cost: 6.3 billion kronor (\$743 million)

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