

“ When we plan new urban areas or convert an existing one, it is a challenge to create a city which stimulates urban life. We will become better at this. We will include urban life in our thinking from the beginning, following up to ensure that it works. Buildings will include a mix of residential, office, shops and cultural offerings and must contribute to creating life in public space with open ground floors full of activities. There must be opportunities for temporary installations and events especially on empty ground or on building sites. ”

“City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Administration, 2009: A Metropolis for People.

How do you deal with conflicting interests?

To have a diverse city, you also have a lot of diverse opinions about the city. I think that we shouldn't be afraid of those conflicts, because they also show that we have a good city, with space to discuss and space to disagree on different issues. I think that instead of being afraid, we should learn to be better in handling this. The question is: How can we em-

brace conflicts, and how can we have dialogues in processes, where we are not agreeing on everything? And that is very difficult. There will always be compromises, discussions and changes in that process. But with the urban development initiatives, we have a precise strategy for the city that serves as a tool to prioritize what kind of city we want. And that makes it easier to find a balance between the top-down and the bottom-up.

Since 2010, the number of visits to Guldbergs Plads has increased by **400%**

...I'M ALSO REALLY PLEASSED TO SEE ALL THE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES WHO USE THE SQUARE NOW ...
Jørgen, speaking about Guldbergs Plads

GULDBERGS PLADS, NØRREBRO
In 2014, Guldbergs Plads was transformed into a green activity park intended to motivate people to get more exercise on a daily basis, and with few and simple means, a new urban space has been created in Copenhagen. Together, green hills, larches and pale blue 'activity' poles form an urban grove, a dynamic urban space for activity and relaxation. The urban space was developed in cooperation with local residents.

After the renovation, the square sees both more visits and more varied use. Since 2010, the number of visits has gone up by 400%; almost five times as many people in 2015 as before the transformation.

On a weekday in summer, an average of 20 people an hour settle in to spend time in this urban space between 10:00 and 18:00. The number peaks at 10 in the morning, with the dominant activity being 'children at play' who come during school recess. Naturally, many 'children at play' are recorded, but at 9:00 and 16:00 there are also many 'adults at play'.

Source: City of Copenhagen, 2015: Urban Life Account

Beside the challenges of reaching a consensus between state, citizen and economic actors, what are the requirements on the administrative site for a successful integrated approach?

One of the biggest challenges is how to translate the urban initiatives into different fields. For example, what do they mean in regard to waste issues or climate change? And what is their impact on the look of the city space? Cycle traffic for instance is not only about bicycles, it also concerns liveability, the perception of space, nature and so on. Enabling these horizontal and cross-sectoral work flows is sometimes difficult and it has an impact on how you organize your administration and the different working processes. And it is extremely important to have the support from the political executives and local authorities. So you can say the implementation phase is as important as creating the vision itself. Otherwise you might end up with a vision that nobody knows about.

Talking about implementation: What is the legal binding force of the initiatives?

The urban development initiatives are informal planning tools that provide Copenhagen with a holistic city-wide strategy. And they are political documents. We talk a lot about the three different scales in urban design: The large city-wide scale, the medium site specific scale and the small project scale. When we work on the medium scale, there is a translation from the strategy to the local plan. And the local plan has to be agreed on by the city council. And in this process you both have citizen engagement and political engagement. And when we, as the municipality, when we work on the small scale, giving permission for buildings and projects in general, we have the political mandate to put regulation on the part that is connected with the vision and the strategy.



Source: City of Copenhagen, 2015: Urban Life Account



Photo credit: City of Copenhagen

Residential edge zones in the new waterfront city district Nordhavn, Copenhagen: Being established as buffers between public spaces and residences, they also strengthen the connection to green in the city

Can you tell us an example for such a regulation?

For example in the building permission for a residential building, there would be specifications about the edge zones of the buildings, defining the percentage of openness and half-private areas. We can also put regulations on, that you are not allowed to gate the area or to put signs saying that it is a private area. In that way, we connect the vision with the specific site and put it into action.

From the experiences you made so far with the two urban development initiatives, what aspects do you think might be transferable to other countries?

I think every city can learn to be more precise on the strategic issues and the site specific issues and the way they navigate in the three scales: the large, medium and the small scale. On the strategic level, the development goals might be different from city to city. But they have to be precise enough to be measurable. And in Copenhagen, especially when we talk about liveability, these goals are based on the behaviour and understanding of people.

Thank you for the interview!