

„All of us must work together to create Copenhagen [...] Everybody who uses the city – residents, commuters, companies, civic society, etc. – is invited to play an active part in developing the city and bringing it to life. The best city to live in is the one you can help create yourself“

City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Administration, 2015: Co-Create Copenhagen.



MORE URBAN LIFE FOR ALL

How Copenhagen is setting the framework for integrated urban development

In a discussion with Birgit Kann (BBSR), Tina Saaby talks about the process of finding out what Copenhageners need, about the challenges of public discourse and cross-sectoral cooperation and about the importance of having a vision.



Photo credit: City of Copenhagen, Ursula Bach

Tina Saaby

has been the Chief City Architect of Copenhagen since 2010. She inspires, facilitates, advises, and coaches the politicians and City Administration. Her responsibility is to help defining architectural guidelines and visions in developing the city based on The City of Copenhagen's Architectural Policy. In her work she has a deep interest in how to combine the development of a sustainable and liveable city with a high quality of life.
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In the last few years, the City of Copenhagen has launched two urban development initiatives, "A Metropolis for People" (2010–2015) and "Co-Create Copenhagen" (2015–2025). Both initiatives are guided by the vision of making the Danish Capital "the world's most liveable city: a sustainable city with urban space inviting people to a unique and varied urban life"¹. Promoting an integrated view on urban development, the initiatives set specific goals for urban life based on the needs of all Copenhagengers, while at the same time inviting everybody to take part in shaping the future of the city.

The success of the strategies seems to prove them right: In addition to the positive feedback of the city's own monitoring system², Copenhagen is consistently placed amongst the top 10 of the most liveable cities worldwide by various city rankings³. However, reconciling the different interests of state, city, citizens and economic actors is not simple.

Mrs Saaby, can you tell us the secret for what makes a happy citizen?

This is a big question (laughs). In Denmark we have a long tradition of people centred urban design. So the starting point actually is often that question: what makes a citizen happy? And then to discuss the needs of the city and the needs for a certain kind of urban life in a certain space, before starting to discuss any design. This is concerning both the open space and the building design. It involves talking to people, getting to know about human behaviour, about what architecture can do to embrace humans in a lot of different ways. It is always a balance between individual needs and the interests of the city as a whole, so to say the bigger political view on the city.

BIBLIOTEKSPLASDEN, NØRREBRO

The new urban space Bibliotekspladsen (Library Square) in the North-West district, was completed in 2014. From the street level, the space slopes up towards the library with terraces and steps, and from round holes and green patches in the concrete, plants of varying heights spring forth. The landscape elements shield the square from traffic and bring a lush green feel and multi-purpose functionality to the urban space.



THE DESIGN OF THE SQUARE IS THE RESULT OF A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS, WHERE LOCAL USERS AND ASSOCIATIONS VOICED THEIR REQUESTS FOR THIS FUTURE OUTDOOR SPACE IN A SERIES OF DIALOGUE MEETINGS. FROM PETROL STATION TO CULTURAL MEETING PLACE.

Source: City of Copenhagen, 2015: Urban Life Account

How is this incorporated into the two urban development initiatives "A Metropolis for People" and "Co-Create Copenhagen"?

"A Metropolis for People" is specifically looking at liveability. It defines three aims to be reached by 2015: More urban life for all, more people to walk more and more people to stay longer. In the second development program "Co-Create Copenhagen" we are more precise about the human being as the key point in the city and in everything we are doing. Besides liveability it underlines the importance of having a city with an edge that reflects the diversity of its population and allows for individual differences. And also, that we should work on that in a more co-create way, not only with the city but also with the different stakeholders in general.

The initiatives outline common objectives according to the needs of "everybody who lives in, uses, visits, works with or runs a business"⁴ in Copenhagen. On what basis were those objectives defined? And who was involved in the process?

Both programs are based on a long process of workshops and talks between different economic players, stakeholders and the public in general, connecting knowledge from various fields and different points of view. In addition to that, we are doing a yearly survey called "Urban Life Account" that monitors the status of the initiatives and helps us increasing our knowledge about how people use the city. The surveys are based on different sources, such as pedestrian counts, observations of time spent in streets and squares, questionnaires, a transportation habit study carried out by the Technical University of Denmark and figures from the City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Ad-

(1) City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Administration, 2010: A Metropolis for People. Access: <https://kk.sites.itera.dk>

(2) City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Administration, 2010–2015: Urban Life Account. Access: <https://urbandevlopmentcph.kk.dk/artikel/urban-life-account>

(3) such as the EIU Global Liveability Index (2018), the Mercer Quality of Living Survey (2012–2018) and Monocle's Most Liveable City Index (2008–2014, 2016–2018)

(4) The City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Administration, 2015: Co-Create Copenhagen. Access: <https://kk.sites.itera.dk>



Photo credit: City of Copenhagen, Kontraframe

Urban life in Copenhagen: Harbour baths big jump

ministration. The data of the first surveys was also used as a basis for the second development strategy "Co-Creat Copenhagen". In that way we are getting more and more diverse in the way that we discuss the liveability issue.

In Co-Creat Copenhagen it says that the best city to live in is the one you can help create yourself. How do you encourage people and institutions outside of administration to play and active part in the development of their city?

There are different ways to do that. And sometimes it is good that it is more top-down-organized and sometimes it is good that it just happens. For instance, when we do a local plan, we organize different workshops and hearings as a part of that. Or when we have neighbourhood improvement, which is a program that is half paid by the state and half paid by the city, we have colleagues that are opening

an office locally and take decisions together with the people and the stakeholders in the area. Another example is the local district as an administration unit that represents the voice of the local neighbourhood and connects the local knowledge, for instance by organizing meetings in different local areas.

You mentioned that there also is bottom-up citizen involvement. Could you add an example for this?

As soon as the city invites, you can say it is top-down. But we have for example invited the citizens by social media and a digital map to adopt green areas around trees and be responsible for the maintenance. Another example is an invitation to do pedestrian gardens. I think if people can have the dialogues and start organizing that on their own, than we really start to have an open city.

“ 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!