

# LANDSCAPES OF ENCOUNTERS

(Västerås SE)

– an invitation to a multispecies city

## The Site as Landscape

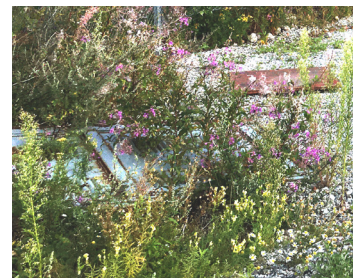
A living city is a place in which the urban fabric supports and hosts a variety of inhabitants. The citizens of the living city are both humans and non-humans with agency to reshape and reinhabit the environments they find themselves a part of. A living city has to support life. It has to be inclusive of a diversity of life forms and flexible towards the natural cycles. To transform the urban ecology and enter a new paradigm we see it as a necessity to support encounters between a multitude of species directing the citizens' attention towards the ones they share their environment with.

The project area, a former industrial site in the middle of the city of Västerås, is a familiar scene of the contemporary city. Apparently abandoned or neglected backyard, sometimes in central locations, impermeable surfaces and mostly industrial areas made for specific purposes or labor. At first glance they may seem partly empty, but at second glance, the lack of care and abandonment by one species reveals inviting opportunities for others. There is thriving life within the leftover messy elements and places, such as the birdlife around the silo, bushwoods, trees, weeds and grass that flourishes. A patchwork of conflicting differences of various situations of life.

To reimagine new forms of inhabitation, that includes more than just human citizens, it becomes necessary to see that human activities play an important part in the world's ecosystems. Making developments to the landscape that also can involve the habitations of other species is vital. An important step towards a multispecies city is to accept other species as social beings and acknowledge their agencies. It's about bringing forward a diversity of value systems, knowledge and culture, about showing curiosity towards other ways of living. Thereby a living city can never be a monospecies city. Every species is dependent on several other species during their lifetime to survive, and from this, humans are not an exception. A premise for the landscapes of the city is that it's constructed as an ongoing negotiation between multispecies agencies, and that requires that humans begin to share space and control.

By encountering the site in Västerås in terms of a landscape, as an ongoing negotiation between human and non-human agents, this proposal aims to enhance the qualities that's already there. Announcing presences, making additions and invitations that makes it possible to perceive and inhabit the place in new ways. Ways that want to direct the eyes of the human citizen towards other stories of what a city might be if we let it. A place in which natural processes, humans and non-humans are entangled in each other's life-worlds. That asks for guidance – strategies to curate this messiness, to invite and reformulate the ways we approach the city, to enhance the twist and turns a process might take if we allow others to take part of it.

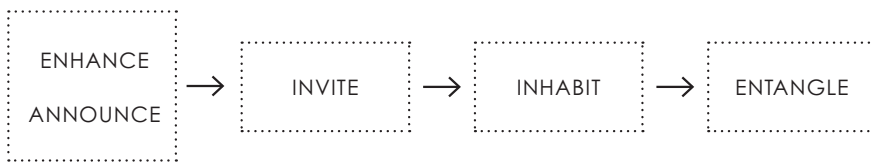
Existing Qualities:



## Working Through Time

So how do we start to engage with this place? And more importantly – how do we invite others to become a part of the process? What we propose for the site is a set of strategies that can be collected under the categories: vegetation & habitats, built structures, events and reuse. We see the role of the architect as a curator of the landscape, as someone who notices and encourages qualities that otherwise risk to pass unnoticed. Someone with the capacity to initiate new ways of thinking and living with the place, a guide rather than a someone who proposes a determined outcome.

Process over time:



The first part of the process would be to ENHANCE the *existing* landscape qualities that the site possesses. Like the brushwood which has already found its way to the area around the railway, or the shingle beach that has appeared after the demolishing of former buildings, or the assemblage of trees that have popped up in neglected places, or the birdlife around the silo making it more like a cliff than an actual building. One strategy dealing with vegetation and habitats is therefore to use the things that are already living at the site. Encouraging it to expand even more and use its spatial qualities to frame new narratives and to curate those landscapes by adding architectural elements. Making them into places to explore, inhabit and play around in. We see these uncoded spaces as places where weeds are allowed and given an opportunity to flourish, find expressions, and create subcultures.

As a large and rather unproductive central area the site has the potential of becoming a test bed that invites new typologies of landscapes to the city. But it requires attention towards what's going on, ways of ANNOUNCING a presence, to show people passing by that something has been initiated here. That the area isn't abandoned, but is waiting to be explored and taken care of. In this proposal the *sculptural* elements are playing that strategic role. Emerging as strangers in the landscape, their aim is to trigger the curiosity and imagination of what is about to unfold. As sculptural landmarks they can direct humans into the area, giving a clue about how these places are being connected to become a part of a grander scheme.

To get to know a place, a reason to venture there is needed. To feel INVITED, that something establishes your right to engage in the space. What build structures can do is to support these kinds of *occasions*. Like kindergarten children planting seeds in The Garden, to later on returning with their parents and showing their accomplishment. Tent structures that can be added to the sculptural elements at the old train platform in The Bushwoods, announcing activities hosted there to the people passing by. Establishing an interactive architecture with continuous and uncontrolled processes, inviting life to engage with the architecture itself. Structures defining an area where a creative gaze is encouraged and where it is up to the user to define and redefine the rules and norms. A participatory trial and error of co-creating the common city.

The introduced structures won't exclusively utilize new elements, but can be mere re-arrangements of objects and material within the landscape. A kind of experimental attitude

Strategies:

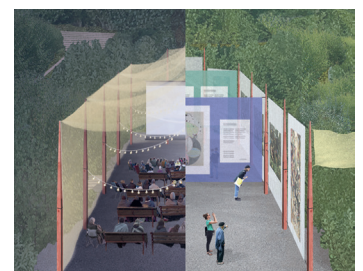
VEGETATION & HABITATS — Existing Temporary Lasting	BUILT ELEMENTS — Sculptural Framing Spontaneous
EVENTS — Occasion Engagement Encounter	REUSE — Materials Methods/ Knowledge



EXISTING  
(vegetation & habitats)



SCULPTURAL  
(built elements)



OCCASION  
(events)



towards the creation of *temporary* vegetation and habitats. For example, at The Cliff a pattern of reused car tires will extend over the silo walls to form the basis for vertical accommodations of bird life. The Meadow will over the years serve as a growing testbed for initiating vegetation on a former hard surfaced area. At The Shingle Beach, stormwater ponds serve as temporary habitats for a range of critters. Piles of sand and organic materials are also added as an invitation toward invertebrates. It becomes an interface for humans to meet other species, learning about them and reflecting over their presence. Enhancing a design that isn't possible to fully control in advance, rather a method to initiate and curate the cause of events for allowing the expressions of multispecies citizens.

To make these spaces matter, there is a need for more than occasions, there must also be relation building activities. Activities that allow the participants to INHABIT the landscape during and after the transformation. These kinds of *engagements* are focusing on involving the citizens, giving them agencies to take part in the creation of the landscape of the site.

The engagements proposed allow different degrees of commitment from the people involved. The establishment of a network of knowledge and preconditions can further influence the introduction of new interest groups. This includes involving a group of people that like to run a small part of The Garden in combination with the café. Further actions would be to establish an infrastructure to coordinate the allotments in the garden area, and to set up a small community taking care of and engaging with the Marine Allotments. More groups that could maintain and be partially responsible for a common space, generate more events and workshops that further develop the area. By employing local youths as trainees during summertime, there is continuation in social presence on the site. The workers are over time constructing and developing the temporary architecture and also inform and engage curious citizens. The presence of workers during day hours in the area increases the feeling of safety.

An architectural grammar is introduced as a basis for a simple co-creating process. New spatial configurations can emerge and diminish over time and interaction. These *framing* elements are flexible and visually recognizable and have a pedagogical role to show where and how to reconstruct them. The scale and modules of the elements and structures are in relation to the human body's capacity, hence becomes more easily handled, dismantled, and reconstructed. Reused *materials* could then be curated to be used within these frameworks, occurring in the in-between spaces of these more solid structures, as the proposed cafe pavilion in The Garden shows.

By establishing The Reuse Center initiatives to maintain and repair both personal and public material are encouraged, such as through renovation courses or other hands-on knowledge expanding events. A way of gaining wider understanding and knowledge when engaging the expiring buildings of the area. From disassembling, to cataloging, storing and later on reassembling the building parts. It becomes a partial accumulation of the landscape during a time of greater transformation, whereas the catalogued materials become more present and accessible to be continuously reused. Initially in the proposed temporary pavilions, but possibly later on within the new developments as well.

The access to this material library will hopefully inspire an upcycling culture in the area that increases the amount of *spontaneous* elements. Elements that are initiated by the citizens as a way for them to claim space and express playfulness and creativity. As an example the reused concrete stones in The Bushwoods could be used for different artistic purposes, like a graffiti workshop, expanding the area around the old train platform to a larger exhibition area. Likewise the playground at The Shingle Beach is to be seen as an ongoing process that allows children to take part in the design and construction.



TEMPORARY  
(vegetation & habitats)



ENGAGEMENT  
(events)



FRAMING  
(built elements)



MATERIALS  
(reuse)



SPONTANEOUS  
(built elements)

The initiated interventions and events within the landscape of the site will not necessarily remain through more permanent developments that are being planned by the municipality. But while the site will transform into more permanent habitats for humans, the parts of the landscape that once inhabited the place will become ENTANGLED into other parts of Västerås. Structures and materials will be moved and reused to host new events and habitats. The *methods* and *knowledge* used and developed during the period of this project can also be reused when approaching new sites, bridging between past and future, creating reappearing and migrating situations within the urban landscape.

Traces and memories of what once was will also reside within the area. Considering that some vegetation needs years to grow and establish itself, an addition of linden and fruit trees are proposed to heal the existing gaps between the green fragments in the area. Creating a head-start for this *lasting* vegetation, a chance to get rooted before new more permanent human habitats arrive. But also as a way to get memories rooted, either by the visual presence of engaging with the growing plants, or stronger memories via scent and taste, as of how the area during brief encounters in time used to be.

All those entanglements initiated by this proposal are in the end aiming to establish relations between the various inhabitants of Västerås. To support and direct attention to the everyday *encounters* that make us aware of each other. Make us realize that the city is a common ground for a diversity of life, life that includes more than humans.

## Landscapes of a Living City

The living city is a landscape of encounters. Encounters of negotiating agencies co-existing within the urban fabric. This is not merely a cultivation of other species that humans found economically beneficial. It is rather the presence of the unproductive, the wild, or what falls outside the current value system. The presence of the uncontrolled could be provocative, but there are life enhancing qualities to be found if we find a symbiosis with what is outside the constructed system. This is the essence of circularity, to find a symbiosis between life, time, and decay. In this world-making collaboration, architecture could act as a companion, initiating open-ended processes that could be claimed by the multispecies citizens. An invitation to become a part of the composing and composting of our common grounds, acting to sustain the possibilities of future worlds.



METHODS/KNOWLEDGE  
(reuse)



LASTING  
(vegetation & habitats)



ENCOUNTER  
(event)