

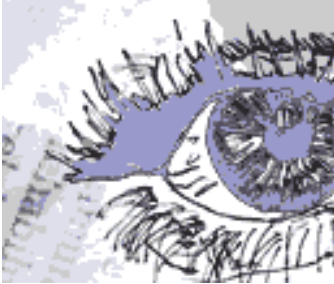
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Swede dreams

Malmo's new neighbourhood is funky, environmentally friendly and the envy of architects worldwide. There's just one problem. The locals hate it. Steve Rose reports

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'People walk up and press their noses against the glass': the Bo01 development, complete with beachfront boardwalk and Santiago Calatrava's Turning Torso tower

When visiting architects and planners see what they're doing in Malmo, they must either pinch themselves or fall to their knees and weep. As you arrive on a fine summer afternoon, the scene is almost too perfect to believe. On a wooden boardwalk along the seafront, tanned, healthy teenagers bask in the sunlight. Young boys dive into the clear water and model families paddle in the shallows. Beyond a breakwater interspersed with artfully polished rocks, the Oresund Bridge stretches across the horizon to Copenhagen, and to the north a wind turbine churns out clean energy. A row of funky, colourful new apartment buildings runs along a pedestrian promenade, with cafes and restaurants

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spilling on to the street. And, crowning it all, rising up in the background, is the Turning Torso, a spectacular 54-storey apartment block by genius architect Santiago Calatrava. It's like walking on to the set of a swimwear commercial. I almost expect to be turned away by guards at the entrance and told, "Sorry, you're just not perfect enough."

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This is Bo01 (pronounced "bo-noll-ett" - from the Swedish verb "bo", meaning "to dwell", and 2001, the year it opened). It covers only a few city blocks, but it is one of the world's top destinations for urban designers seeking inspiration. Parties from as far away as China, Canada, Australia and just about everywhere in Europe, not to mention groups from Yorkshire, Wembley, and the London Borough of Camden, have made the pilgrimage to Bo01 for a glimpse of how attractive the future could be - and they probably go home wishing they had Sweden as a starting point. This is a country that is famously ahead of the curve in sustainability, architecture and most aspects of modern life. A place where the municipal dump has over 30 recycling categories. But while Stockholm enjoys continual prosperity and ever-increasing hipness, Malmo, Sweden's third largest city, has had to think, and build, itself out of crippling industrial decline.

Bo01 is situated in the Western Harbour, a huge reclaimed area in front of the city's medieval centre that used to be one of Europe's largest shipyards. Where Calatrava's twisting

skyscraper now rises, an enormous gantry crane once stood as the city's symbol (it was sold to South Korea a few years ago). As in Britain, the decline of heavy industries caused mass unemployment in Malmo, but in the mid-1990s, the city took steps to reinvent itself, building a new university and mounting a European housing exhibition, which became Bo01.

"We had very high ambitions when it came to the environmental standards, but also the architecture," says Eva Dalman, an architect who has been with the project from the start. "We weren't just talking about ecological sustainability but also human sustainability. If you're unhappy in an ever-so-environmentally-friendly area, it's not worthwhile."

The visionary behind the scheme was a Swedish architect named Klas Tham, who had previously worked with Ralph Erskine on the Byker housing project in Newcastle, and designed villages in Newmarket and Milton Keynes. Tham researched all manner of European settlements, from Norwegian fishing villages to ancient Italian cities, paying particular attention to environments that had grown slowly and developed qualities that fostered a psychological sense of well-being, such as intimacy, complexity, mystique and surprise.

The key word in Bo01's strategy, says Dalman, was "diversity". No two buildings are the same. Each was designed by a different architect (mostly Swedish), using different materials, with a different mix of accommodation inside, and each is decked out in its own bright colour scheme. On the development's perimeter, the buildings are paler and taller, to block out the wind, while the heart of the development is calmer in atmosphere and louder in colour.

The buildings are highly contemporary but the arrangement feels less like a modern city than a cross between a medieval town and a holiday village. Rather than long, straight streets, the free-standing inner blocks are arranged almost chaotically, creating winding little paths that reveal something new around each corner, such as a sudden glimpse of the sea, or a tasteful public area with a sculptural fountain.

At first glance, there's nothing particularly "sustainable" looking about Bo01, but efforts have been made to tick every box. The private developers who were invited to build each block were required to earn "green points" by incorporating features such as nesting boxes, nature-friendly plant varieties, water features and so forth. The wind turbine caters for all of Bo01's electricity

needs. Rooftop solar collectors provide a fifth of the heat, and the rest is from geothermal sources in conjunction with Malmo's existing super-efficient district heating system. There are vacuum tubes to collect recyclable and organic waste - the latter goes to the city's biogas extraction facility to generate electricity. Water is managed via a system of ponds, open channels, a moss-covered roof, and so forth. It makes eco-architecture look like a walk in the park - literally.

The development has fused with the rest of the city better than anyone anticipated. Malmo's teenagers were quick to abandon the local beach and adopt Bo01's boardwalk as the city's coolest meeting place, and as the rest of Western Harbour's seafront has been landscaped, the public has started to spill from the old city to the new in droves. Bo01 is now the place Malmo residents show off to their visitors.

Is it all too good to be true? A little. One thing that's not so diverse about Bo01 is the people. Judging by the healthy, affluent, almost entirely white residents, you'd never guess that 40% of Malmo's population is foreign-born - mostly from Yugoslavia, East Africa, Iran and Iraq - and from their grubby housing blocks on the other side of the city, this must indeed look like an unattainable paradise. Three-bedroom apartments in Bo01 start at around £250,000, more than double the national average, while a two-bedroom flat in the rental-only Turning Torso will set you back 12,500Kr (£950) a month, although that does include your own wine cellar. A backlash, of sorts, has started. Down in Mollevangen, the student district, they're selling T-shirts with a graphic reconfiguring Calatrava's tower as a raised middle finger, and the slogan "Fucking Torso". A cut of the profits goes to the local homeless shelter.

In other ways, Bo01 has discovered that sustainability and quality of life are not always compatible. It was originally hoped that the project would be a shining example of low-energy living but because of its citizens' necessarily affluent lifestyles, this never really happened. Many of the houses feature generous expanses of glass to capture the sea views, for example, but these have translated into substantial heating bills for the owners. And combined with the openness and popularity of the district, these windows have brought home the meaning of "exhibition housing" all too acutely. "People just walk up and press their noses against the glass all the time," says Scott, an American, who lives on a sixth-floor seafront apartment. "If I was on the first level or the ground level, I'd move out, and many people have done just that, six or eight months after moving in.

Others have blocked their windows with shades, but what's the point of paying all that money for a sea view then covering it up?"

The battle against that eco-nemesis, the motor car, has also faltered. The original plan accounted for an average of less than one parking space per home - and yet, many dwellings run two or more luxury cars. A fleet of rentable electric cars sat unused for years before they were taken away, and despite the abundance of cycle lanes and buses that run like clockwork, many Bo01ers have suffered the un-utopian experience of driving around looking for a parking space. In a nod to the inevitable, a multistorey car park has been built next to the Turning Torso.

Still, the benefits far outweigh these gripes for most Bo01 residents. "I get a larger sense of community here than anywhere else I've lived in Malmo," says Scott. "In one sense we're all pioneers out here, and we're all on show as some architectural spectacle. There were some odd things that brought us together."

Christer Larsson, Malmo's director of city planning, acknowledges Bo01's shortcomings, but he puts the project in the context of the larger Western Harbour redevelopment, where there is a great deal more building to be done: "We learned a lot from Bo01. It was a very good start for the Western Harbour and very important for integrating the area with the rest of the city. And the Turning Torso is now the branding building for the city as a whole. But now we have to make something that's more for everyone. It's important to have 'normal' people in Western Harbour, so to speak. The policemen and the nurses." Larsson also points out that the popularity of Bo01's waterfront has brought together people from all areas of the city. "I know because I have teenage daughters. They're there all the time, and they meet people from the other areas, not just from where we live."

The next phase of building, on the headland north of Bo01, will be less spectacular but more egalitarian - as much as 70% will be affordable housing, according to Larsson - and, it's hoped, just as sustainable. Eventually, 30,000 people will live, study and work at the Western Harbour, after which Bo01's 1,000 or so "pioneers" will merely be part of a larger plan in which the key is, again, diversity. Attractive and trailblazing though it is, Bo01's image of perfection is unsustainable in the context of a wider, poorer, messier reality. Like all utopian projects, its

functioning depends on exclusion as much as innovation, and as such, it is less a model for the urban future than a brave and largely successful experiment.

"A lot of the goals we set ourselves weren't reached, but I think what's special about Bo01 is its high ambitions," says Dalman. "We've worked with all the questions, and even if we didn't go all the way, we got a long way, and we're happy to share our knowledge. Maybe some cities can go further, and maybe we will in the next part."

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