

## REPORT

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**Scholarship** for the Research, Internship and Field study  
on the topic of "Child-friendly city environment"

**When:** April - June 2014

**Where:** Malmö and Stockholm

I would like to start my report by expressing my gratitude to the Foundation crew and my admiration by the way of their work. I can say it is the first time I got a chance to experience an efficient working process with no extra worries at my side on any of organizational issues.

Here we come to the story itself and like for many other scholars it starts some months before the beginning of the trip itself. Right in the first welcoming mail from Disa Haståd I received all basic information I would need to start my preparations: how to deal with visa issues, how much a regular price for an apartment or a room could be in Sweden and even some sharp questions concerning my personal trip plan.

My scholarship theme was "Child-friendly city environment" and the objective was to study Scandinavian approach to this topic from the point of view of urban development. I was going to start by spending two months in Malmö for a field study of the local Themed Playgrounds Program and one month in Stockholm for making an internship in the Landscape Department of ÅF Consult Group. With the help of my Norwegian colleague Svane Frode working with children's questions in Scandinavia I knew that ÅF Consult made an agreement with SISAB and was going to reorganize many schoolyards in Sweden in the coming years.

After Disa Haståd helped me to contact ÅF Consult we started a discussion on how our collaboration could be beneficial for both sides. My Stockholm stay was supposed to fall on the month of June and it gave me a very little chance to get involved in some interesting project when everybody starts to prepare for summer holidays. I was advised to contact ÅF Consult office in Malmö to have a chance of an internship during April and May. So I did and after my arrival to Malmö I found very welcoming and helpful colleagues in ÅF Consult there.

Thus the Southern part of my scholarship stay started. I would say it turned out to be a very efficient part. They say in Russian "it worths to see something once than to hear about it ten times" - so was it. The chief architect in ÅF managed to make up an interesting set of projects for our common work. They ranged from big city squares where we tried to organize a comfortable environment for kids in a general complex net of adults' life to very local tasks of renovation of a schoolyard or a courtyard in a residential complex. ÅF Consult is a hub where construction engineers, energy consultants and infrastructural planners work in close collaboration so I got a chance to learn a lot not only about Swedish architectural approach to the question of children in the city, but a lot of technical issues which make this approach be

realized in the city structure. My aim was to make sort of a collection of cases and tricks which could be later grounded on the land of Russian cities and help to make them more child-friendly. I made a presentation for my ÅF colleagues showing my previous works on this question of child in the city including some investigational part about children's needs in an urban environment. I was truly surprised that their attention was mostly taken by this last part. It seems that Swedish way of looking at a city has such a long history of developing kids' question that it became one of the basic and obvious features in a design process scheme everywhere with no needs to study it with such a big attention as I aimed to do.

In parallel with the practical work in ÅF Consult I run investigation work to get more complex image of children policy in Malmö. I made some interviews with the officials from Malmö Stadt, including Caroline Larsson, the chief of the Themed Playground Program in Gatukontoret (Department of Infrastructure and Parks), and visited two local schools where I had a chance to talk to local pedagogues and get more information how the school system works.

The third task of my program in Malmö was field study. Since I managed to take my little son along to Sweden I got a chance to do it in a very illustrative way. In my free time we traveled around the city trying to cover all of 20 themed playground and testing each of them from an adult and a kid's perspective. I would like to thank with all my heart Disa Haståd for her heartfull work on making this "family" trip happen. She gave us a lot of help and support so finally I arrived to Sweden with my son and my mother who helped me to take care of him when I'm at work.

My later article "Homo Ludens: how a children's heaven in the south of Sweden looks like" <http://urbanurban.ru/blog/experience/583/Rebenok-igrayuschiy-kak-vyglyadit-detskiy-ray-na-yuge-Shvetsii> became something like a logical conclusion of my stay in Malmö.

Since Malmö is located very close to Copenhagen there was a chance to study Danish experience in child- friendly urbanism and see how it intervenes with the Swedish approach. In Copenhagen I visited children city farms, manned and adventure playgrounds, natural playscapes:

Skydebanehaven near Vasterbro Torg, Norrebro town square, the biggest natural playground in Valby Park, adventure playground in Rødovre, etc. I also experienced the results of a child-friendly neighborhood planning in modern public spaces like a famous Superkilen square, Sønder boulevard, Carlsberg's temporary urban spaces and climbing forest and others.

Lund was the other attractive destination to continue the field study. There is an important organisation called Naturskolan which is busy reorganizing schools' and kindergartens' yards. I was extremely interested in getting to know its work: besides Grün Macht Schule in Berlin there is no other similar organization in Europe which initiates collaborative work between government officials and school workers aiming to achieve a common goal of redevelopment a yard for the needs of modern children. Moreover it is an organization which bases its design principles on application of natural materials and sustainable design. We can easily study these principles even from the realized projects in Lund: Palettskolan, Förskolan Djingis Khan, etc.

One of the main events dedicated to architecture for children "Century of the Child" was going to happen in Vandalorum, a museum of international contemporary art and design located in Värnamo in the beginning of May and thanks to Disa Haståd and Hedvig Hedvist I got the announcement about it. So I registered and made my way to Värnamo on the first Friday of May. This conference gave me a good picture of the full story of children's policy and design for kids in Scandinavia. Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland met here to show and discuss the way they have been dealing with children's environment in a city - starting from indoor attributes like toys, furniture and school classes' architecture and finishing with the design of outdoor playgrounds and school- and childcare yards. The strongest impression and even a sort of a practical experience from this conference gave me the project of the Norwegian architectural bureau Helen and Hard - a site specific playground right in the inner yard of the Vandalorum Center. The chief architect of Helen and Hard told the full story of this project and shared the main principles of the site specific architecture.

The regular life in Malmö was filled with cultural events: Lars Englund's sculptures exhibition and Gerry Johansson's photography in Malmö Konsthall, organ concerts in Sankt Petri church, an exciting celebration of Walpurgis night on July 30 with huge fires all over in parks, the students' carnival in Lund which happens once in four years (we were lucky to catch it!) and some other local events.

In the Easter week we made our way to Stockholm to get to know other scholars and to have a common celebration in a big team. This was a bright idea of Disa and the organizational part as usually was perfect: we got two big cars and traveled around and in the city visiting beautiful churches in Täby, Härkeberga, Opdensala, Easter mass in the orthodox church. We went to Disa's dacha in the archipelago, participated in egg hunting in the Royal Palace with my son and had dinners with many interesting people every evening at Disa's place! This Easter visit became not only a wonderful chance to get acquainted with interesting people but also had a preparational meaning - it gave me some notion of the city of Stockholm and its life character. So when we moved from calm relaxed Malmö to the capital I had myself prepared well.

My Stockholm program was filled in with practical exploration but in this case rather of public spaces and parks - the question "how a regular public space and infrastructure can fit the needs of a kid" was the main matter for me in the capital. So I took my little son and tried to cover all main destinations where Swedish parents can travel in the city by bike: Trekantsparken, Rååmbshovsparken, Vasaparken, park of Kristinebergs, a wide line of outdoor activities along Ringvägen and the water, etc. I explored the main principle which makes alive any park in the capital city - a placement of a parklek and an öppna förskola that become a heart of a park and help young parents to gather and organize shared activities. I initiated a collaboration with one öppna förskola's workers and made interviews with parents. I plan to use all these materials for my article about Stockholm children policy. In general in Stockholm I tried to see from the point of view of a regular inhabitant how comfortable it feels to travel with a kid through out a big city and not only stay in places dedicated particularly to children. Stockholm was also a unique chance to experience city farms - Malmö quited making them some years ago. I visited 4H

farms in four different locations in the city and got to see all the differences between Swedish and Danish approach to the farming in a city.

I lived just on the opposite site of the channel from Hammarby Sjöstad. So as an architect I didn't miss a chance to study an innovative approach to architecture, urban design&planning and of course children's environment there.

After all the interviews, field studies and exploration in an urban environment I discovered that organization of city management sometimes plays much more significant role in making cities more friendly for kids and children. Interestingly children policy differs from city to city inside Sweden. In Malmo it turned to be more from up to down organized process where the government takes the initiative and starts up some programs which bring inhabitants' attention to the question of children in the city. In Stockholm I got to see it differently: having made up a good working scheme for kids' questions once the government just maintains its working state and gives inhabitants a chance to build up on it their own initiatives.

In the end of our stay in Stockholm we visited a wonderful Disa's dacha in the archipelago again and breathed in deeply the clean air of local pines - for a great finish in Sweden and a successful start some days later back in Russia.

I would love to thank a lot all the board members of the Sverker Åström Foundation for a great chance to get to know Sweden and its leaders in urbanistic and children's sector closer and studied many successful practices there. These three months in Malmö and Stockholm gave me tons of new information and connections and I truly hope to have a chance to continue this collaboration in the future!

