

Göteborg: Green city

Göteborg is also a green city. I mean green in both its natural and environmental sense. Both politically and practically it plays a leading role in promoting and achieving sustainable development. I am now approaching the theme of our visit. Göteborg is located in the region of Vastra Götaland which is famous for its landscapes. Region Vastra Götaland is in charge of regional, sustainable development issues and provides its 1.5 million inhabitants with adequate health care. The regional parliament is elected every fourth year. “Today Region Vastra Götaland is regarded one of the leading regions in Europe when it comes to sustainable development. Indicators are the diversity in the energy sector, especially bio-energy and energy efficiency, organic food production, recycling supportive systems, and above all a genuine interest from both the political and industrial sphere to promote sustainable development.” (Göteborg and Region Vastra Götaland, **ekocentrum publication**).



A tree inside Ekocentrum displaying names of agencies, companies and institutions committed to eco-friendly sustainable development. (Photo: Kamal Rasul)

The results can be seen in practice. I reproduce below some interesting examples from the Green Map published by Ekocentrum which was one of the interesting places we visited. It is Sweden's most comprehensive environmental exhibition based in an eco-renovated 19th century building:

“In the varied landscapes of Vastra Götaland, many natural areas have been restored to promote greater biodiversity. One example being Lake Hornborga which is famous in an

international perspective for its cranes. Nordens Ark, a sanctuary for endangered species from the whole world is another main attraction.

To improve water treatment more and more sewage systems are designed to include wetlands.

The movement in Sweden towards sustainable and organic cultivation is strong. Many small farms sell a wide range of organic products and also act as good examples of sustainable, small-scale technology.

Farm use is a great resource for bio-energy, as used in the heating of Säterna airbase. In Trollhättan, the TRAAB refuse plant combines composting, bio-gas and energy production. An interesting exhibition of bioenergy is found in Lidköping. The solar field in Kungälv is one of the largest in Europe. The traditional industries in the region are improving their environmental commitment. Small towns, like Alingsås and archipelago villages show traditional ways of constructing sustainable communities. As a functional symbol of their commitment to new energy solutions, Göteborg Energi [the City's power provider] has installed solar cells on their headquarters.

Local Agenda 21 work focuses on cooperation and learning processes. Grästorp is one of the best developed examples. Many schools include environmental issues in their education. In Tidaholm a range of educational reference areas are designed and marked for both pupils and others. There are educational centres all over the region."

I think this is sufficient to prove the extent sustainable development is becoming an integral part of living and both intellectual and technological mode of life in Region Västra Götaland. Solar housing renovation project in Gardsten, is only one of many of such projects and initiatives.

The socio-historical context of the project

Just in the first day, we had still more to absorb. Before actually visiting the project, we had to know what it was, where, how, and most importantly the way it is related to Swedish situation in terms of: its housing policy and its energy policy and thinking. These two issues seem to have become inseparably interlinked at the level of thinking and planning new initiatives. Most of the international visitors were those with interest in new renewable energy and solar systems. But there were also those with interest in housing and community development dimensions such as community gardens.

Three more sessions on Day 1 were designed to give us more information about the contextual process of the project. Mr Kurt Eliasson, who is the Managing Director of Förvaltnings AB Famtiden (the owner of Gardstenbostäder) and the chairman of its board, talked about the company which initiated and carried out the project, what it was, how it developed and worked. I will talk about this later. Ms Eva Hedman from Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning told us about the housing situation in Sweden, and how the solar renovation project related to the more general question of improving and restructuring of large-scale housing estates in Sweden.

To know this we had to know more about Sweden, about the background of government housing policy and the trends prevalent in the housing sector now. Then Mr Christer Nordström, the designer of the project, gave a vivid introduction to the project. For the purpose of making a systematic presentation of the project, its

background, process and results, I will combine the information we had from these and other presentations and introduce them later under relevant headings.

After this long informative day, the bus took us back to the hotel to dress for the special dinner at Goteborg Town Hall hosted by the City of Goteborg, represented by the deputy Mayor of Goteborg Ms Elisabet Rothenberg,

The town hall was majestic with its unique floor designs, wall decorations, antique furniture and curtains, and paintings of historical figures covering its walls. We were received with smiles and champagne and spent some time in the lobby drinking and chatting. Then we were invited to the magnificent dinner hall where a number of round tables had been organised. A group of guests were allocated to each table. You had to look for your name to find out to which table and group you belonged. It seems that the allocation of the names was done randomly. But my name was at the table with the deputy Mayor and other Swedish hosts which gave me opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with my hosts.



Plenty of fish and wine with Anki Eriksson from Gardesten project. (Photo Kamal Rasul)

The deputy Mayor started with a toast to her and her city's guests, then jokingly praised Goteborg at the expense of its other: Stockholm. Goteborg is more generous in its hospitality with its abundant fresh fish. And yes scrumptious fish, wonderfully presented, was offered both as starter and main course. Then after the meal we had a walk around the building led by the deputy Mayor and had tea, coffee and cakes in another attractive room in the building. The hospitality was incredible. Our colleague from Ireland spoke on behalf of us when he raised a toast to our hosts and thanked them for their genuine friendship and generous hospitality.



Deputy Mayor Ms Elisabet Rothenberg.



Inside the Town Hall chamber with colleagues Ernar Malikov, from Kazakhstan (right) and Janice McNichol, from Scotland.

To be continued.