



D2.5 Living lab report – Stockholm

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1. Executive summary

The Living Lab at Söder Mälarstrand have explored how temporary and participatory urban interventions can engage citizens and stakeholders in the transformation of a waterfront space. The project has tested and evaluated different digital and physical tools to enhance public dialogue and reach consensus between stakeholders.

Through a series of activities, including online participation via Placetoplan, workshops, storytelling sessions, and temporary street transformations, the project gathered insights into the key challenges and opportunities for Söder Mälarstrand. The findings revealed a strong consensus among stakeholders on the need to reduce car dominance and create a more accessible, vibrant, and people-friendly waterfront.

One of the key takeaways from the Living Lab was the importance of combining digital engagement with physical interventions to reach a diverse audience. While the digital dialogue platform provided a broad and accessible way to collect feedback, on-site activities helped foster deeper discussions, build trust among stakeholders, and encourage local participation.

The project's conclusions and insights have been shared with the City of Stockholm, ensuring that the knowledge and networks developed through the Living Lab contribute to the ongoing transformation of Söder Mälarstrand. The methodologies tested in the project offer valuable lessons for future urban development processes, particularly in fostering inclusive and consensus-driven decision-making.

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2. Introduction to the Living Lab Stockholm

Söder Mälarstrand is a 2 km long quay along Södermalm with an active port and residents in boats. The quay is partly disconnected from the rest of the neighbourhood due to level differences in the landscape. In a strategic document concerning the Ports of Stockholm, Söder Mälarstrand is identified as one of the highest-priority quays for redevelopment. As a complete transformation will take several years, the site has been deemed well-suited for a Living Lab. This initiative aims to prepare for the upcoming changes by bringing together diverse stakeholder perspectives and testing faster, lighter solutions.

Over the past two years, various activities have been carried out at Stockholm's living lab on Söder Mälarstrand with the aim of building consensus. Digital methods have been combined with analogue approaches to collect feedback and initiate discussions about the street, which serves as both a wide and deep quayside route. Stakeholder groups that have been involved include residents on boats and in a senior housing complex along the quay, property owners, municipal employees from the traffic department and the port company, the organization Konstfrämjandet, as well as business owners operating on boats along the stretch, and visitors and passers-by.



Figure 1 The quayside with residential boats © Alexander Ståhle



Figure 2 Parking, driveway and closed walls © Alexander Stähle

2.1. Overall goals and task description

The overarching goal was to study how physical transformations of places in dense city centres can be carried through. The process aimed to investigate how the perspectives of citizens and stakeholders differ and which methods were most effective in reaching a consensus on the challenges and opportunities of the place, thereby determining the direction of its transformation.

The main goal of this specific lab was also to:

- explore how physical and digital interventions could spark interest and engagement for a place among citizens and stakeholders
- collect ideas and visions among the citizens as an input for the further planning and decision making

3. Living Lab activities

3.1. Notes on the planning process of activities

The lab was founded in dialogue with the City of Stockholm. In the City's strategy document regarding the ports of Stockholm, Söder Mälarstrand was pointed out as one of the quays with the highest priority for change. Since a total transformation will take several years, it was considered a good place for a Living lab to begin with gathering different stakeholders' viewpoints and trying out quicker and lighter solutions.

The first step was to initiate a digital dialogue via Placetoplan, which then formed the foundation for upcoming activities. During the second year a full-day activity was planned to create a visible, physical presence on the street, thereby increasing the chances of reaching a broad group of Stockholmers.

The timing of all interventions within the lab have been planned based on the seasons, with most activities scheduled during the warmer months of the year. This was due to the outdoor environment being particularly exposed to weather conditions such as wind and rain.

3.2. Communication

The target groups were everyone with an interest in the transformation of the sites but the identified stakeholders which have been addressed specifically are:

- The City of Stockholm
- Port of Stockholm
- Property owners
- Business owners
- Residents

Since the lab is a prioritized transformation project within the City of Stockholm, projects, tests, and events led by the municipality have been running in parallel with the efforts of StreetForum and Spacescape. Spacescape and the City of Stockholm have maintained continuous contact to coordinate and learn from each other's initiatives. Spacescape has former experience from working with the municipality of Stockholm and has developed a close business relationship with the project leader, which made cooperation and communication quick and easy.

The dialogue with the private sector, including property owners, residents, and business owners, took place more sporadically. All of them were given access to the web platform Placetoplan, allowing them to make their voices heard. They also received information through various project activities, to which everyone in some cases, or selected groups in others, had been invited.

3.3. Implementation of activities

The first and main method was the web-based tool Placetoplan. It is an online platform used to gather opinions and ideas from citizens in one place and make them visible for anyone.

Placetoplan was used to gain an initial, overarching understanding of the site's functions, challenges, and qualities. It was widely distributed to all stakeholders along the street. Setting up a dialogue page takes only a few minutes, and since it was simply a link, the implementation was quick and straightforward.

This marked the starting point for Söder Mälarstrand as a living lab, making citizens aware for the first time that the quay would be the focus of various projects related to its future transformation.

Once the initial information had been distributed and contact established, various on-site interventions were carried out on the street during the spring and summer of 2023 and 2024.

The City of Stockholm has, as mentioned, been running projects, tests, and events in parallel with the StreetForum interventions.

3.4. Short description of (selected) activities

The digital dialogue page on Placetoplan was launched early in the process and served as the basis for several later efforts. Here, respondents could share what they like and what they think could be improved through a map. Nearly 800 people submitted an answer, all still open to read (in Swedish) by anyone.

In 2023, workshops and walkshops were held on-site in smaller groups. Placetoplan was used to collect feedback and conclusions from the discussions. To reach a broader audience, "intercept interviews" were conducted where representatives helped with passers-by answer the dialogue questions.

- Aim: Gather initial, overarching understanding of the site's functions, challenges, and qualities and awaken community engagement
- Location: <https://www.placetoplan.com/soder-malarstrand/se-synpunkter>.
- Participants: 780 people, mainly passers-by and residents but also employees, business owners, school personnel, association members and property owners
- Tool: Placetoplan



Figure 3 Placetoplan workshop © Alexander Ståhle

To bring various stakeholder groups together for joint conversations, Street Forum's analogue tool, Storytelling Game, was tested. Residents, business owners, and visitors shared how they use and experience the street, aiming to gain insight into other stakeholder groups' perspectives.

- Aim: Facilitate sharing of personal stories about the location and enhance empathy and trust
- Location: On a restaurant boat at the quay
- Participants: 7 people - passers-by, business owners and residents
- Tool: Storytelling game

The latest intervention explored the method #residentialstreetlife, which was integrated into the project's third symposium meeting in Stockholm. Four parking spaces, taken over through a police permit, were used to set up a mobile outdoor gym and a sauna on a trailer. The quay was adorned with art installations, and the street's various stakeholders were invited to test an alternative use of the space for a day. The outdoor gym remained on the quay throughout the winter and was the venue for several public and free training events organized by various organizations and workout groups.

- Aim: Support appropriation of public space and co-creation of new consumption free social spaces
- Location: On a parking lot on the quay
- Participants: 35 people - passers-by and residents
- Tool: #residentialstreetlife



Figure 4 #residentialstreetlife © Karin Lobo Lundgren

3.5. List of tools & timetable

Table 1 List och tools

Name of the tool	Initiator of the tool / method	Living lab street	Period of implementation	Notes & Comments
Placetoplan	Alexander Ståhle, Spacescape	Söder Mälarstrand	31/03/2023-31/12/2024	
Streetmeter	Alexander Ståhle, Spacescape	Söder Mälarstrand	31/03/2023-31/12/2024	
Storytelling game	Brigitte Vettori, Space and place	Söder Mälarstrand	09/25/2024	
#residentialstreetlife	Brigitte Vettori, Space and place	Söder Mälarstrand	09/25/2024	

3.6. Challenges

One challenge was to mobilize engagement and action. In Sweden there is no tradition among citizens to engage in the community or take responsibility for activities happening in the public. This became evident during the #residentialstreetlife activity. People just passing by didn't seem to understand that it was a public event that they could join in, alternatively lacked the courage to do so. Some signs would have been useful in retrospect.

The experimental form of the transformation was also a new way of working which have been proven difficult to implement within the standardized processes in the municipality. Interim changes fall between the most temporary projects and the permanent rebuilds, and there are no guidelines to follow. This calls for bold management and a willingness to take risks within the city's leadership.

Söder Mälarstrand is a very long quayside, and even small changes require a significant investment. It was therefore challenging to secure funding for interventions that were substantial enough to make an impact.

Lastly, it was easier to gather ideas and views in a one-way-communication than to maintain a relationship and inform back to the community what was happening and how their ideas were being considered.

3.7. Preliminary Results

The Living Lab at Söder Mälarstrand highlighted the strong interest in transforming and activating the quay among both directly and indirectly affected stakeholders. The interventions and activities carried out have demonstrated that there is an unusually broad consensus from the outset regarding the issues and the necessary changes. Most of the people the project engaged with focused on car traffic and the need to transform the quay

into a less car-dominated corridor that better utilizes its unique waterfront location, providing more reasons for people to visit and stay.

The project has played a key role in gathering and documenting these opinions, ensuring that the knowledge was passed on to decision-makers and landowners, such as the City of Stockholm and Port of Stockholm. The various initiatives have also fostered new communication channels between the project team and stakeholders. Additionally, stronger connections have been established between the quay's businesses and residents, leading to a decision to formalize their collaboration.

Statistics from the digital dialogue platform demonstrated that the general question of Söder Mälarstrand's future have reached a broad audience. Furthermore, residents, businesses, and property owners have been more actively involved through invitations to physical meetings, where they had the opportunity to share their perspectives in a structured setting. These efforts allowed stakeholders to develop their viewpoints while also gaining a better understanding of each other's positions.

The physical transformation of the quay has only just begun. Due to the size of the area, the interventions within the scope of StreetForum have not included any major or permanent physical redesigns. However, alongside the research project, the City of Stockholm has implemented a range of temporary installations that have attracted visitors and contributed to new ways of using the space. These efforts will continue even after the conclusion of StreetForum. Combined with the dialogue initiatives carried out as part of the research project, there is strong potential for the quay to evolve into a significantly different and more dynamic space in the future.

3.8. Follow up – planning 2025

There are no further activities planned for the site. During the final phase of the project, we will intensify the collaboration with the City of Stockholm to ensure that all lessons learned and established communication channels are passed on to the project manager at the municipality.

4. Conclusion

The living lab at Söder Mälarstrand revealed several key findings. Most participants identified car traffic as a major challenge, with a strong preference for reducing vehicle dominance and making better use of the waterfront. There was broad agreement on the need for a more pedestrian-friendly environment with diverse public uses.

The project has helped to make this consensus visible to the broad public as well as decision makers. It has also facilitated new collaborations between residents and businesses along the quay.

Thanks to the publicly available comments and responses in Placetoplan, decision-makers and planners involved in the ongoing transformation process now have a solid foundation to build upon. This documentation will serve as a valuable resource that can be used as an argument if resistance to change arises in the future.

While the physical transformation of Söder Mälarstrand is still in its early stages, the living lab have laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and user-centered development process. The continued engagement of both the City of Stockholm and local stakeholders suggest a promising future for the area's evolution.

The extensive and large-scale street environment will be a challenge also in the future development, requiring significant, and therefore costly, interventions to make transformation truly noticeable.

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