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A CASE STUDY OF VÄXJÖ MUNICIPALITY’S ACTIONS TO INCREASE THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOODEN MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS

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A CASE STUDY OF VÄXJÖ MUNICIPALITY’S ACTIONS TO INCREASE THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOODEN MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS

Pre-conditions for building development

In 2005, a national wood-building strategy was adopted with the aim that 30% of all new buildings within 10-15 years should use a wood-frame and that the number of buildings out of wood increase by 30% within a five-year period (Ds 2004:1). Despite this, less than 10% of the multi-family houses are currently being built in wood, and the building developments in Sweden continue to show an upward trend for using concrete in building solutions for multi-family houses (Sveriges Träbyggnadskansli 2017; Svensk Betong 2016). However, several municipalities in Sweden chose to develop against this prevailing trend, Växjö municipality being one of them. Hence, Växjö municipality have since the implementation of the national wood-building strategy focused on using wood in new building projects. Therefore, Växjö municipality already in 2015 reached the municipal objective where 25% of the construction directly controlled by the municipality would be wood-based.

There is currently a change under way within public governance, from ‘government to governance’, which usually represents a shift from central governance to interactive governance because of a shift from public sector control to the private sector control (Montin & Hedlund 2009). In practice, this means that much of the power and control of municipalities has been transferred to private or other social actors Vall (2007). The planning for the construction of buildings has changed historically. Today, this is largely based on market actors fulfilling the requirement, and municipalities are expected to develop controlling instruments in line with the goals mentioned in the environmental policy and housing policy (Boverket, 2016). The municipality is expected to meet the public interest in housing and contribute to achieving Sweden's environmental and climate objectives, while at the same time the government are attempting to influence municipalities through the planning and environmental legislation that regulates construction.

Policies and control mechanisms used by municipalities

According to Boverket, (2014a), "Buildings and facilities should be located and designed in an environmentally sound way and so that good long-term management of land, water and other resources is promoted". Boverket have the primary responsibility for the national environmental quality objective "God bebyggd miljö" through the development of different policies (Grip 2013). The national strategy "More wood in construction" was adopted in 2005, where climate and environmental issues were highlighted in reference to the Kyoto Protocol by reducing the impact of the construction industry by increased use of wood as a building material (Ds 2004: 1).

Municipality often requires that land development agreement is established as a condition for detailed planning prior to the exploitation of land (Moberg 2015). There are several possibilities and limitations to pose specific municipal requirements in the guidelines regarding land development agreement with reference to wood. The legislation permits municipalities to pose specific requirements and guidelines for land allocation agreements based on the municipality's internal targets and policy documents (Swedish law 2014:899). However, the Planning and Building Act pose restrictions regarding the municipality’s possibilities to pose specific technical requirements for land development projects. This complexity is also analysed by Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting [Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions] (SKL), reviewing land allocation and confirming the municipalities position using civil law to pose specific requirements when selling their land for building projects (SKL 2014).

Administrative controlling instruments

In order to identify the administrative instruments controlling the possibilities or limitations for the municipalities' prerequisites for the development of wood construction a number of regulations have to be
reviewed; The Swedish Environmental Code (MB), The Planning and Building Act (PBL), the Boverket’s Building Regulations (BBR) and The Public Procurement Act (LOU).

- Physical planning: Planning and Building Act (PBL) is a designated controlling instrument for the regulating of land, water and construction planning.
- Comprehensive plan: Presents the basic features of the intended use for land and water areas as well as the future development of buildings. The plan is not legally binding - but it is mandatory to have a comprehensive plan (Boverket 2017).
- Planning program: The municipality can in a planning program set goals and starting points for any planning work in a specific program" (Boverket 2014).
- Plan description: The plan description are required combined with the detailed development plan to describe how the detailed development plan is to be understood and implemented. The PBL (2010:900) defines what should be included.
- Planning provisions: The detailed development plan is legally regulated by planning provisions such as usage provisions, property regulations and administrative provisions and is controlled by the PBL (Adolfsson & Boberg 2013).
- Environmental impact assessment: Environmental impact assessments must be included in the environmental plans describing the environmental impact of planned land development required by the Environmental Code (MB).
- The prohibition against specific technical requirements by the municipality: The regulations in the Planning and Building Act regarding municipalities' ability to set their requirements for specific technical requirements in planning were amended in 2014 (SKL 2014).
- Public procurement: The Public Procurement Act (LOU 2016:1145) applies to procurement made by a public entity.
- Land allocation and Land development agreements: The Swedish Government decided on a new law (2014:899) regarding guidelines for municipal land allocation projects that are of major importance for the municipalities in terms of land development agreements, land allocation and the pre-conditions for setting their requirements for construction.

Background of wood-building development within the Växjö municipality

Several buildings out of wood had been constructed in Växjö, even before the first wood construction strategy was adopted in Sweden. The same year, 1994, as the ban on building houses over two floors with wooden frames was abolished, Värendshus built a three-story house using wooden frames that became the first building built in accordance with the new building regulation (VKAB 2016). Shortly thereafter, in 1996, Sweden's first modern 5-story wood-frame building was built at Välludden, Växjö, as a demonstration building for the purpose of developing wood construction technology following changes to the regulations. Thereafter, a research project was initiated 'Multi-storey buildings with wooden frames and light flooring' (VKAB 2016). The municipality had already been working to strengthen the local business community and the university, prior to its timber building strategy. Hence, since the 90's, Linnaeus University has collaborated with business actors to develop the forestry industry through the Wood design and technology programs. Therefore, since the municipality adopted their wood construction strategy 2005, they have continuously worked to identify partners and contribute to the processes that promote wood construction.

Växjö municipality has since its goal of becoming a fossil fuel-free municipality actively been working to profile itself as a municipality focusing on environmental and climate and has the slogan 'Europe's Greenest City' (Växjö Kommun 2011). The municipality is part of the Association of Climate Municipalities, an association of municipalities, county councils and regions that actively work with local climate development aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Sweden (Klimatkommunerna 2017). An important aspect in the municipality's environmental and climate ambition has become its focus on using wood as a construction material, where 50% of all municipal new construction projects will be wood-based by 2020 "(Växjö Kommun 2014). Växjö municipalities renewed wood construction strategy “Växjö - the modern wooden town” contains more links with the municipality's goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions in accordance with the municipality's environmental program. Furthermore, in the renewed wood
Identification of opportunities and limitations

A prerequisite for identifying the planning assumptions is to create an understanding of the possibilities and limitations for increasing the use of wood in construction. Furthermore, political unity and continuity with reference to the possibilities for the municipality to control increased construction in wood, as well as the municipality's long-term and political unity are significant factors for success. The identification of these factors is closely linked to the measures that the municipality chooses to take in order to facilitate increased wood construction.

The municipality actively works with identifying market constraints limiting development of wood construction by positioning themselves as a buyer for wood buildings in the market. The first limitation that appears in interviews is the lack of experience, expertise and knowledge in wood construction. This image is confirmed by all involved parties, committees and politicians, as well as by the municipality's external partners. The other limitation that emerges is linked to the municipality's ability to control increased construction in wood. In the “Växjö Declaration”, which was developed, and signed by Sustainable Småland, Linnaeus University, and Växjö Municipality, calls on the Swedish government to allow Swedish municipalities to lead the way setting environmental and energy requirements for sale of land. This is derived from a limitation that was identified, closely linked to national governance, which pointed out the absence of a government that sets clear direction and invests in wood construction at a national level.

Wood-building strategy

The actions taken by Växjö Municipality are first and foremost the formulation and adoption of wood building strategies, initially by the “More Wood in the Construction 2005”, and then “Växjö - The modern wood city 2013”. The wood construction strategies define both objectives and clarification about what to do and how and by whom these actions should be completed by. The “Modern wood city” strategy, adopted in 2013, stipulates that by 2015 25 % of what is built by the municipality entities will be wood-based and by 2020 50 % shall be fulfilling this objective. In parallel with this, wood construction strategies have been systematically included in the external communication about Växjö's work on sustainability. It was in conjunction with the wood building strategy in 2005 that the development towards increased usage of wood-building started to gain momentum and the Välle broar construction project was identified as an R & D focal point for wood construction (VKAB 2016). The municipality's objectives were increased use of wood in higher buildings and that in the next ten years “Välle broar” develops into a modern wooden city (Växjö kommun 2005). Hence, it was stipulated that the Växjö municipality actively will use land allocation activities to increase the development of wood construction, and further that the municipality will finalise the wood city project of Vällebroar and actively work to create new areas suitable for wooden construction, e.g. Torparängen (Växjö kommun 2013a). The municipality decides on a development strategy that land allocation and land development agreements shall be used to establish cooperation with the developers and contractors who wish to develop wood construction in Växjö (Växjö Kommun 2005).

Further, another of the municipal activities aimed at controlling an increase of wood construction based on the wood-building strategy is the interaction and coordination with various public and private entities. This ambition was further developed in “Växjö - the modern wooden city” (Växjö kommun 2013a) where the municipality presented the ‘Triple Helix' model, illustrating Växjö municipality's cooperation with the university and the business community. The intention is to support research and education on wood construction. Hence, the municipality participates in various research projects at a national and international level, strengthening research and development in the region.

Research environment

The importance of a collaboration with the university is given formal status in the land allocation agreements including a research partnership as a prerequisite for an agreement between the municipality and developer. This can be found in landing agreements for inter alia Vallen, Pelarsalen and Torparängen where it is stated that planning, design and construction should be open to research and follow-up results.
shall be available for subsequent projects (Växjö Kommun 2010; Växjö Kommun. 2015; Växjö Kommun 2017a). However, the initial plan for Torparängen was not focused on establishing a long-term research bed for the university until the municipal council decided in 2015 that the objective of the area should be characterised by a high environmental ambition and building in accordance with the Växjö municipality’s wood construction strategy” (Växjö Kommun 2013b). Therefore, cooperation with the university has been included as a requirement being awarded the project already at the initial stage of the land allocation competition. The research project associated to Torparängen is planned for 2016-2020 and is a multidisciplinary project including a market study focusing on understanding drivers for increased wood construction, procurement and tender management processes, design, production, delivery and assembly, acoustics and vibrations, measurement of moisture and heat, vertical relative displacements and analysis of end-user perception and demand.

Physical planning
The municipal council's directive stipulates that in the physical planning, solutions based on wood construction shall be tested at the start of each project. Further, where relevant in the detailed development plans the plan description shall include a description of how the implementation regarding the ambitions of wood constructions are achieved. Also, as in the case of land allocation and land development projects, it is decided that plans will be used to establish cooperation with builders and developers who wish to develop wood construction. (Växjö Kommun 2005). Therefore, a reference is included in the planning program concerning the municipality’s wood building strategy. Further, a segment of the “The modern wood city” strategy is also included to provide further guidelines for wood construction. These include, develop wood construction so that knowledge and interest in building using wood increases, build environmentally friendly and energy-efficient using wood as a default building component, based on a consumer perspective use wood’s affective values and aesthetic qualities.

Different activities are identified as the planning responsibility of the municipal. Hence, it’s stated in Växjö municipalities wood building strategy that Växjö Municipality is to conduct an active and early dialogue with interested builders, architects, developers and researchers to develop wood construction. One of the main measures to increase the construction of wood has been the municipality's role as a contractor, builder and actively seeking wood building solutions during their procurement activities. Also, the municipality can advise its affiliated companies to test the potential of wood in each new building project, and the municipal companies shall always specify and document the possibilities of using wood in their projects (Växjö Kommun 2005).

Further, a description inserted in the implementation plan concerning the building permit process specify that the municipality's wood building strategy will be taken into special account. This is considered as the basis for the design of all new buildings in the area (Växjö Kommun 2008). Wood as a construction material is also emphasised in the detailed development plan, especially defining areas where different wood-building projects are required to be tested as a primary option (Växjö Kommun 2008).

Land allocation – conceptual description
Växjö municipality has in its wood-building strategies stated that land allocation and land development agreements shall be used to establish the cooperation with builders and contractors who wish to develop wood construction and as a method to set aside dedicated zones for wood construction in the local area. Further, the municipality actively works with land policy programs to allocate areas for wood construction, which is realised through the purchase and sale of municipal land. The municipality's focus has primarily been based on requirements and the development of land allocation projects, where the municipality have implemented guidelines for land allocation and land development agreements in accordance with the new legislation.

However, it is not explicitly mentioned anything regarding wood-building strategies in the guidelines for land allocation activities, but reference is made in effect to the ambitions of sustainable construction and the municipal environmental programs that contain references regarding the wood building strategy. Further, there is a consensus within the Växjö municipality that the land allocation process improves the governance and control for increased use of wood in building projects. This provides the municipalities with the possibility to stipulate specific requirements within the land allocation projects using own land.
Hence, it excludes them from the regulations within the Public Procurement Act (PPA). Therefore, Växjö municipality wrote specific requirements in the landing allocation agreement for the use of wood in the construction of Välle broar. This development is based on the official wood-building strategy, and the land allocation agreements are seen as the most suitable method fulfilling the ambition of increased use of wood in constructions with the municipality. Furthermore, Växjö municipality has mainly used land allocation contests with requirements for wood construction in accordance with the wood building strategy. The developers have to present their intended solution to a steering committee that grades and decides on the proposed solutions, jointly agreeing on a winner for the specific project. Exceptions may apply if the municipality policy states that can directly assign land to a developer, e.g. if a company should have a product that is something extra contributing to an added value for the municipality and its inhabitants.

**Land allocation competition – Torparängen**

Based on Växjö municipalities wood-building strategy regarding increased use of wood in construction stipulates that Torparängen is an area where most of the construction will be achieved using wood frame solutions. In addition, the detailed development plan ‘Del av Växjö 12:10’ (gained legal force 2017) designates Torparängen as the new wood construction arena for Växjö (Växjö Kommun 2017b; Växjö Kommun 2017c; Växjö Kommun 2017d). Further, Växjö municipality's definition of wooden houses is a building where most of the building frame is built using wood.

![Figure 1: Map regarding detailed development plan for part of Växjö 12:10, incl. Torparängen](image)

Torparängen, which is adjacent to Välle broar, was decided to use a land allocation competition to decided on developers to be allowed construction rights in that area. References were made in the invitation to the land allocation competition regarding the municipal council's decision (§ 2015: 17) of the objective at Torparängen. Växjö municipality announced, during spring 2016, the land allocation competition for five residential areas in Torparängen located in the northern part of Teleborg. A high environmental ambition and buildings in accordance with Växjö municipality's wood-building strategy will characterise Torparängen after its completion (Växjö Kommun 2017e). Further, specific requirements regarding wood buildings were made mandatory for the developers to comply with during the land allocation competition (Växjö Kommun 2017e).
Land allocation procedure
The criteria applied to normal land allocation projects are specified in Växjö municipalities land allocation policy, which is used for the activities associated with the project at Torparängen;

- Cost of land (decision made by the municipality council 2015)
- Building diversity
- Improved competition and market diversity
- Building and area design
- Organization and execution

The land allocation process is developed in two stages:

**Stage 1:**
The aim of this stage is to identify interesting project ideas where the developer describes the general ambitions of their project. An official report of interest by the developers includes an account of;

- Organisation and experience
- General description of the project implementation plan
- Ambitions regarding sustainable construction methods
- Ambition regarding wooden building construction
- Written description of proposed concept

Time schedule: 7/4 – 25/4 2016, submissions of conceptual ideas are to be made no later than 25/4 at 16:00. The evaluation of proposed concepts is made during week 18 and results are communicated no later than 29/4 2016.

An assessment is made based on the project's likelihood of implementation according to the proposed concept as well as the overall level of ambition for the project.

**Stage 2:**
The purpose of this stage is for the companies presenting the proposals that are considered most interesting to be given an opportunity to develop their conceptual project ideas further. The revised proposals shall include the following:

- Basic site plan that describes the design of the external environment, the location of buildings within the area, road solutions for cycle traffic and pedestrians and car parking solutions
- Type of building solution and ownership proposal
- Design examples of buildings and outdoor environments, i.e. façade designs, references or inspirational images. There is no requirement to present floor plans for the apartments'
- Possibly develop the proposal's ambitions regarding sustainable construction further
- Possibly communicate the choice of building frame and building system

The proposals must be presented in an A3 format as a pdf file. The developer proposing a building concept is not required to make an oral presentation. The municipality will only assess proposals that are complete in accordance with the defined stages in the land allocation process, as defined above.

Time schedule: 2/5 – 10/6 2016, submissions of conceptual ideas are to be made no later than 10/6 at 16:00. The evaluation of proposed concepts is made during week 24 and results are communicated no later than 21/6 2016.

The evaluation process for land allocation projects is conducted by the planning office, the city building office, the technical administration and Linnaeus University. During the first stage, approximately 23-25 conceptual proposals were evaluated, generating approximately 10-11 proposals for the second stage of the process. The assessment is summarised in a written report that will be distributed to all parties presenting a conceptual solution.
The evaluation process of the conceptual proposals for Torparängen is designed to follow certain stages, in conjunction with the two-staged requirement process defined for land allocation projects.

Stage 1:
- The proposals ambition regarding sustainable construction
- The proposal's incorporation with Växjö municipality's wood building strategy
- The applicability from a research perspective
- The developer's ability to finalise the conceptualised project

Stage 2:
- The proposal's architectural conceptual approach
- The building's alignment with the plot of land and the landscape
- To what degree the proposal is complying with the detail development plan's design program
- How the proposal is expected to provide a good living and outdoor environment

Derome, together with Liljewalls architecture company presented one of the winning proposals for an area within Torparängen, Picture 1. Further, OBOS, Fagnes, Sverigebogården and Arkitektbolaget also presented winning concepts and were awarded the opportunity to build at Torparängen.

*Picture 1: Furutå Gavlar (Liljewalls arkitekter)*

Växjö municipality has initiated basic landscaping and infrastructure of the area during 2017, and the expected building start is varied dependant on the strategy of each developer. However, certain developers have commenced their construction in late 2017, and the remaining developers will have initiated their construction during the second or third quarter of 2018. The final completion of all the expected buildings in the area is scheduled for 2023.

The participants view of the activities associated with the land allocation process at Torparängen

The strategic decision regarding the number of buildings, and the type of buildings, to be built in the municipality is normally based on the program for housing development or the general building plan developed by the municipalities and the government. Hence, these plans are predominantly based on statistical projections and do not normally capture the inhabitant's expectations regarding cost levels, quality, size or material choice. Therefore, the development at Torparängen is to some degree based on guesswork regarding the inhabitant’s requirements, which to a degree is reflected by much of the development is based on political and governmental decisions rather than market drivers.
As mentioned in Växjö municipalities strategy is land allocation projects the main method developing, or procuring, new building projects. This is a method that both the municipality and the developers consider to be beneficial for the development of wood buildings. However, there is an important distinction that has been identified regarding the use of land allocation agreements. The process is based on the municipality selling land to the developers for their construction projects, thereby bypassing the mandatory requirements mentioned in the PPA. However, based on all the requirements that need to be fulfilled to comply with the land allocation process, developers are considering themselves as a seller of a building solution towards the municipality, rather than a procurer of land. This is a pivotal distinction, i.e. how the land allocation process shall be interpreted, either as a sales activity or as a procurement activity. Thus, the focus should be on the activities required by the municipalities to qualify as a potential buyer and the perception of those who are responding to these requirements. Hence, by creating a transparent understanding by all involved parties in this process and provide clarity to how this is required to be managed more efficiently.

The benefits of using land allocation competition at Torparängen, where according to Växjö municipality, the possibility to pose requirements regarding material choice, design and to have the option to choose companies presenting viable building solutions for the intended project. This process will also provide the municipality with an opportunity to support local companies, thereby enhancing the local knowledge base regarding wood-building solutions. It will also provide possibilities to start thinking about wood building solutions already at an initial stage of the projects. The developers included in Torparängen share this opinion and consider the possibility to select building solutions and designs without the formal limitations of the PPA as beneficial for the development of specific solutions, or companies, favoured by the municipality. However, both the developers and the municipalities have some concerns regarding the negative aspects of this process as being subjective, despite the ambitions of using a pre-defined evaluation process, providing difficulties for the developers to interpret the expectations.

The developers consider the land allocation process as vague since the municipality see themselves as a seller of land, whereas the developers see the municipality as a buyer of a building solution. Therefore, they do not think that the municipality has necessary knowledge or an appropriate process to transparently manage this activity resulting in un-clarity regarding the requirements. The developers highlight the municipality’s lack of structure as a problem and consider the municipality to base their decisions on an ad hoc structure, which can be derived from insufficient communication regarding their actual evaluation methods. However, this method is used, according to the municipality, to provide increased flexibility for the developers creating opportunities to provide new and innovative solutions at Torparängen. These possibilities would not be feasible if the evaluation process were restricted with detailed requirements. However, this is of some concern for the developers who consider the insufficient structure and lack of documentation as a problem. Also, both the municipalities and developers recognise the general problems associated with an insufficient procurement process without proper evaluating methods, which also is evident at Torparängen.

Further, the municipalities could see a value in capturing the inhabitant’s opinion regarding new building projects when developing the specification material to create an accurate market requirement analysis. However, despite its’ importance, this was not prioritised at Torparängen due to time constraints and general resource issues. According to the developers at Torparängen, the limited scope and structure are directly influencing the selection process negatively, a large degree of focus is towards the design solution. All other areas are assumed to be dealt with by the developer at the building permit stage. This generates a large degree of uncertainty on what is evaluated, which is reflected by contradictory evaluations made for the same project at a different time by the same individuals within the municipality. This is something, according to the municipality, that must be improved and standardised. However, considering the insufficient process with limited standardisation, based on subjective evaluations, make objective evaluation a challenge. This is reflected in the developers view regarding evaluation where solutions based on high quality, modern design beyond the scope of the project has higher likelihood being awarded, resulting in an unnecessarily high cost.

Land allocation projects are, according to the developers and municipalities alike, a beneficial process for controlling the development in a certain direction, which is beneficial for increased use of wood buildings. However, both parties believe competition should be on equal terms, irrespectively of building material, and the functional specifications for the building should be the decisive factor for choosing a
certain building solution. Further, the developers can see a benefit developing a quantifiable evaluation method in addition to the current structure. The municipality could have the option to require a cost structure with a rough square meter cost indication for the buildings. This would provide an easy follow-up method on the developer’s performance and if they stay within the confines of the earlier presented project scope. Furthermore, the developers would like a development of a national standard associated with land allocation agreements, generating a more efficient process. This is currently very fragmented regarding requirements, assessments, distributed materials and expectations, contributing to an inefficient process, which could be derived from confusion regarding the seller/buyer perspective.

Concluding statement

Växjö Municipality has during some time made a strategic decision to be profiled as a green city with a focus on sustainability. This has, among other things, contributed to an official strategy with a focus on wood construction. Therefore, any new building developments under the municipality's control are required to test and present the new building developments based using a wood-building solution. Also, having communicated an ambition to focus on sustainability provides a faster pace in regards to new developments using wood.

The governance of the public process also affects the development towards wood-based building solutions. The municipalities have several options to initiate building developments based on the projected demand, e.g. using public procurement of new developments or the land allocation activity. Växjö Municipality has to a large degree opted for the land allocation activity since it provides more flexibility to pose specific demands regarding the building specification, which is not possible using public procurement that is limited by the public procurement act. The reason for these differences related to the selected models are based on land allocation activity is a sale of land with specific buyer requirements imposed on the developers by the municipality. As such, the municipality has created a general process described in 3.3 that needs to be fulfilled, in addition to requirement specific to the scope for the development included in the land allocation activity.

Despite the municipalities having a documented process to sell land using the land allocation activity, thus controlling the development of wood-building solutions, is a process that create confusion for the developers. Considering the specific requirements imposed on the developers during this activity creates confusion. The general perception by the developers that they see themselves as a seller of a building solution rather than a buyer of land, hence making the municipality a procurer of a building development project. This changes the dynamic in the land allocation activity requires new methods and procedures. Furthermore, the developers consider that there is significant room for improvement in this process since the municipality provide limited information about their expectations and do not have an adequate process during evaluation. This provides a situation with uncertainty regarding what to propose by the developers, in addition to a subjective evaluation process performed by the Municipality. Furthermore, since the municipality does not follow a standardised process the evaluation can change during an ongoing project and change between different projects based on the management structure within the Municipality.

References


Swedish legislation:

- LOU 2016:1145. Lagen om offentlig upphandling.
- PBL 2010:900. Plan- och bygglagen
- MB 1998:808. Miljöbalken


