Redevelopment of Skeppsbron quay in Stockholm, Sweden

ALEXANDRA STAROSTINA
REDEVELOPMENT OF SKEPPSBRON QUAY IN STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

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SUPERVISOR: ALEXIS PONTVIK
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Supervisor: Alexis Pontvik

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Skeppsbron is both a street and a quay in Gamla Stan, the old town of Stockholm, stretching from Strömbron (the bridge located in front of the Royal Palace) southwards to Slussen. Skeppsbron was mentioned as Stadzbron in 1592, Skeepzbroon in 1647, and finally appears as Skeppsbron in 1961. When Stockholm had no longer to hide behind the city walls to protect and defend itself, all trading activities were moved to the beach area at the east of Stadsholmen. The shore zone opposite to Saltsjön was created partly by uplift and substantial infilling. At Skeppsbron’s west side are 24 buildings spread over 19 blocks which together make up the so-called Skeppsbronaden. It is known that development of this place was started during the 1630s and it is generally assumed that the plan’s originator was King Gustav II Adolf as he gave the permission to demolish the city walls in 1625.

In the Middle Ages, Skeppsbron was the city’s major import and export port. Sea waterway was the main transportation route at that time, and the traffic over the water and along the quays could be compared to air traffic at today’s Arlanda airport. Despite a severe economic decline after 1760, when state aid to manufactures was pulled out, the wharf was still the center of Stockholm’s trading. During the Middle Ages, fish market located between today’s Nygränd and Brunnsgränd and connected directly to Stortorget was the biggest market place on Gamla Stan. Later it was scrapped and replaced by the buildings block. The stone quay (”stenkaj”) replacing the old wooden construction was built in 1854, after drawings by Nils Ericson. Towards the end of the 1800s Skeppsbron kept losing its position as Stockholm’s main port area for freight, but passengers traffic was significant until 1980s. Both the wharf and Stadsgården got connection to the railroad in the early 1870s. At the same time two new ports, Värtahamnen for state coal imports and later Frihamnen in Lilla Vänern were built. Skeppsbron remained the vital centre for the local shipping business until the early 20th century.

Nowadays Skeppsbron is an area about 30-60 meters wide between the buildings and the water, divided into a heavily loaded traffic lane and a quay that is largely used as parking. The bus stops are located in the middle of the traffic lane with the guard rails for walking to and from the stops. Customs houses are still present and some of them can be used when foreign ships arrive to Stockholm. This place lost its functions and its popularity, it is not considered by many as a particularly inviting promenade despite the surrounding beauty. Located in the heart of the city, it is only used as a transitional area for pedestrians, as a parking for people living in Gamla Stan area and visitors, and as a place where people feel uncomfortable to go for a walk during the night.

During the site exploration the following main problems of Skeppsbron were found:

- Exclusion of the Skeppsbron from the urban fabric
- The loss of almost all functions of the embankment during the time
- No visual (attractive) connection to the internal part of Gamla Stan (Österlånggatan)
- Quite narrow biking/pedestrian path along the road

The main features of Skeppsbron can be determined as length and narrowness of the area (almost one kilometer long and 30-60 meters wide), closeness to the historical part of the city, and proximity to the water. These three characteristics played an important role during the process of the development of the design proposal.

Creation of a vibrant and attractive public space with diverse activities for both pedestrians and cyclists is the key goal for this project. Skeppsbron embodies some of Stockholm's well-known characteristics such as the vicinity of the water and the Old City silhouette. Although it is important to preserve a historical view on Skeppsbron, at the same time, it is necessary for the area to be transformed with more public and involving activities such as outdoor places, educational centers, restaurants, etc. Looking at these two points it can be said that work on the project needs to be carried out very careful and precise, but from my point of view customs houses should be demolished in an attempt to create more holistic and inclusive space in the quay area. Both, transport and aesthetic, aspects of Slussen’s and Skeppsbron’s development should be tied together to create more accessible and safer solution that will connect three parts of the city (Södermalm, Gamla Stan, and Norrmalm) by a continuous pedestrian route.

With this project I would like to introduce new educational (museum, exhibition spaces) and recreational (sport, leisure, food-related) spaces and revive the historical significance of Skeppsbron. It is also important to include secondary facilities in the project, e.g. short-time parking slots, bike parkings, WC, info-points, etc.
This project is an attempt to understand Stockholmers’ current needs in public spaces. Working on Skeppsbron development, different analyses were made including historical, transport, compositional, visual and others.

**Historical context**

The understanding of the historical context was an important issue which helped me to identify the frame of the work and to define the important historical landmarks of Skeppsbron indispensable as cultural heritage. During the Stockholm’s growth citizens came to turn towards the water with a series of tall, narrow houses on the long, narrow plots. It was “skillful and ornamental” and the country’s first and foremost showcase outward, visible to all visitors coming to Stockholm by ship and it remains so now.

**Historical analysis**

It is necessary to note the important historical buildings located on Skeppsbron and in the immediate vicinity of it. From Kungsträdgården and westwards, along the Skeppsbron, the Royal Palace, Riddarholmen House, Ruuthska palatset, Wittmarckaska huset, Sjöfartshuset, Sutthoffska palatset, Schönhska huset, Thuenhska huset, Tullhuset, Küsselska huset, Norra Bankohuset, Former Maritime museum, Räntmästarhuset and other notable buildings can be seen. Therefore I can conclude that cultural and historical heritage values should be safeguarded and strengthened.

**Touristic destination**

A large number of people pass this area everyday, because this is the shortest transit road connecting Södermalm and Norrmalm districts. It can be seen as an important link between the lively and touristic Götgatan (a partly pedestrian street on Södermalm) and the Kungsträdgården (city’s central park which often hosts festivals and events). A huge number of tourists see this place everyday, because it lies in the center of the city where all touristic buses make a stop. They also experience it as an unwelcoming quay arriving on a ferry from Djurgården or Skeppsholmen.

**Seasonal activities on the quay**

Activities arranged on Skeppsbron should have seasonal character. As there is a big difference in seasonal temperature, amount of precipitation and daylight duration, all activities located along the quay need to meet the requirements of being movable and changeable with ease. All activities on the water are presented as seasonal. Depending on the weather they can be replaced by suitable activities at any time taking into account citizens’ needs. Pontoons can serve as an additional quay, a pier, a pool, a tribute for sitting, a pavilion or as an urban garden. During the summer it can be a swimming pool, quay or dancing platform, during the winter it can be a pontoon-sauna or a small ice rink. On the pier people can enjoy the sunny days, seat, chat, read books, dance. In the urban garden people can grow vegetables, enjoy the flowers, and walk around the trees in the “old” city. Pontoons can be moved along the quay, connected to others, can be used as an extension of pedestrian walkways. All constructions are to be temporary and movable, they can be moved to another place (pontoons) or disassembled (wooden constructions) if needed. It helps to create a diversity of connections with the water (from above, on, below) and constantly changeable atmosphere on the quay. The aim is to create a variety of new targets on the waterfront and make it appealing to people all year round.

**Unique/general objects, temporal/permanent objects and functions**

Within the framework of the project, all activities were divided into four main groups: unique objects, general objects, temporal objects, permanent objects/functions. The first group includes such objects as: the footbridge, connecting the old city with the waterfront, which should become a landmark of the embankment; the museum pavilion with viewing platform on the roof and two floors of exhibition spaces, located right in the middle of Skeppsbron and linked with the footbridge; and a concert scene located on the former place of Gustav III monumentum. General objects group is based on a module som x som, all objects are temporary and are to be located in the middle of Skeppsbron. It is known that Skeppsbron is being used as a platform for different cultural activities, therefore all constructions along the quay should be flexible and adjustable. They can be changed according to the required functions (garden, outdoor gym, exhibition space, playground, space for relax, cafe, art space, labyrinth, outdoor cinema theater, swimming pool, or small beach in the city center). These places will cater for people of all ages. The modules can be easily removed or replaced if interests of the citizens change. It is important that events and other activities do not require permanent constructions that can disrupt port’s work and have a lasting impact on the environment.

**Connection to the city**

Through the analysis of visual accessibility of Skeppsbron five main views creating a clear visual connection from the old city to Skeppsbron as well as Skeppsholmen, Kastellholmen and Skeppsholmsbron were defined. I decided that these views shouldn’t be completely overlapping with objects on Skeppsbron, but objects could block one fourth of each view, causing a desire to explore them more closely. The footbridge location was defined at the highest point on Osterlånggatan (the closest street to Skeppsbron inside Gamla Stan), where the way from Stortorget towards embankment lies. It creates a continuous route from Stortorget to Skeppsbron avoiding road crossing and brings people to the viewing platform with the great view on the old city. This connection will play an important role for Skeppsbron's popularity as this place will most likely become a great touristic attraction considering the similarly designed viewing points (e.g. Katarinahissen).

**Compositional analysis**

During the compositional analysis it was defined that two-dimensional (on the land, on the water) location of the objects on Skeppsbron leads to the creation of the holistic picture, where the closest connection to the water as well as an entire development of pedestrian part of the embankment can be seen. Such location of the objects creates organic curves of sinuosoids that makes the overall view of Skeppsbron diverse and positive.

**Traffic analysis**

During the analysis of the pedestrian/vehicle flows I visited the site one day during the week (tuesday) and one day during the weekend (sunday) at the same time and counted people, cyclists and vehicles for an hour at each of four main gateways on Skeppsbron (line from Södra Bankogården street across Skeppsbron road, exit from the Strömbron bridge, entrance on Skeppsbron from Slottskajen street and the descent between the Royal Palace and The Riddarholmen House) and for ten minutes on fifteen entrances from Gamla Stan. After that I calculated the average number of people per hour passing entrances from Gamla Stan to Skeppsbron. During this analysis it was found that Skeppsbron street is a highly loaded transitional artery. Looking at cyclist’s flows it can be seen that almost all cyclists cross this area without any long stops and the number of them during the workdays is three times higher than during the weekends. It means that people use this area for commuting and don’t go there when it’s not needed. It can be said that the area close to the Royal Palace is more loaded with pedestrians than the other gateways and that people go to the Gamla Stan from there or pass the Skeppsbron towards Slussen. The number of vehicles is not significant, it’s related to the vehicle access restriction from the Slussen’s side. It can’t be said that heavy vehicle traffic is a problem of Skeppsbron, but it should be noted: cyclist and pedestrian paths are extremely narrow for such a huge and continuous flow.

**Greener**

Urban greenery that was introduced on Skeppsbron draws up entrance areas from Gamla Stan to the quay. Tree species is preferably planatus (plane-tree). Tree foliage is shaped and limited in height by 4 meters maximum to not block the beautiful view on historical buildings of Skeppsbron. The plane-trees should be pruned using a technique called pollarding, which is also known as topping, when the ends of each main branch are pruned back, creating a smaller, thicker crown.
Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, is located on Sweden's south-central east coast, where the freshwater Lake Mälaren flows into the Baltic Sea. Positioned at the eastern end of the Central Swedish lowland the city's location reflect the early orientation of Swedish trade toward the Baltic region. The central parts of the city consist of fourteen islands that are continuous with the Stockholm archipelago. The "heart" of the city is Gamla Stan, the city's oldest part, located on the original small islands of the city's earliest settlements.
Gamla Stan, the Old Town, is one of the largest and best preserved medieval city centers in Europe, and one of the foremost attractions in Stockholm. Currently it is like a living pedestrian-friendly museum full of sights, attractions, restaurants, cafés, bars and shops. There are several beautiful churches and museums, including Stockholm Cathedral and the Nobel Museum. The largest of the attractions in the district is the Royal Palace. In contrast to this, east coast of Gamla Stan, where Skeppsbron lies, is not considered by many as a particularly inviting promenade despite the surrounding beauty. Located in the heart of the city, it is only used as a transitional area for pedestrians, as a parking for people living in Gamla Stan area, and as a place where people feel uncomfortable to go for a walk during the night.
In the Middle Ages, Skeppsbron was the city’s major import and export port. A quay crane for heavy goods existed there since the 1500s. Wharf was built in mid 60s when the city walls were demolished. Sea waterway was the main transportation route at that time, and the traffic over the water and along the quays could be compared to air traffic at today’s Arlanda airport.

Skeppsbron remained the vital centre for the local shipping business until the early 20th century. The railway track was built in 1870 and demolished in 1975. The quay zone facing opposite to Saltsjön was created partly by uplift and substantial infilling. Passenger traffic was significant until 1976 when Silja Line moved to Värtan. Every year since 1996, Christmas tree is placed on Skeppbrokajen. Customs houses are still present and some of them can be used when foreign ships arrive to Stockholm.

Despite a severe economic decline after 1760, when state aid to manufactures was pulled out, the wharf was still the center of Stockholm’s trading. During the Middle Ages, fish market located between today’s Nygränd and Brunnsgränd and connected directly to Stortorget was the biggest market place on Gamla Stan. The stone quay (“stenkaj”) replacing the old wooden construction was built in 1854 after drawings by Nils Ericson.

Towards the end of the 1800s Skeppsbron kept losing its position as Stockholm’s main port area for freight, but passengers traffic was significant until 1980s. Both the wharf and Stadsgården got connection to the railroad in the early 1870s. At the same time two new ports, Våröhamnen for state coal imports and later Frihamnen in Lilla Värtan were built.

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HISTORICAL ANALYSIS. DEVELOPMENT OF SKEPPSBRON

1700
1790
1860
1896
1901
1908
1937
1940-1949
1950
1955
1970
1996

"Redevelopment of Skeppsbron quay in Stockholm, Sweden" - Urbanism Studies master Program. Student: Alexandra Starostina, Supervisor: Alexis Pontvik

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS. IMPORTANT BUILDINGS OF SKEPPSBRON

1. Kungliga Slottet
2. The Riddestolpe House
3. Rjuthsko palatset
4. Wittmarckiska huset
5. Sjöfarthuset
6. Suthoffiska palatset
7. Schönska huset
8. Thuenska huset
9. Tullhuset
10. Közelska huset
11. Norra Bankohuset
12. Former Maritime museum
13. Ränntmåstarhuset
14. Kungliga Myntkabinettet
15. Riksdagshuset
16. Storkyrkan
17. Nobel Museum
18. Tyska Kyrkan
19. Kungliga Operan
20. National Museum
21. Moderna Museet
22. Skeppsholmen Konstbiblioteket & Arkiv
HISTORICAL ANALYSIS. IMPORTANT BUILDINGS OF SKEPPSBRON

1. The Royal Palace
2. House of the <i>Swedish</i> Assembly
3. The <i>Humana Nova</i> building
4. The <i>Vasa</i> Museum
5. The <i>Stockholm</i> Palace
6. The <i>Stockholm</i> Central Library
7. The <i>Stockholm</i> Concert Hall
8. The <i>Stockholm</i> City Hall
9. The <i>Stockholm</i> Cathedral
10. The <i>Stockholm</i> City Hall Annex
11. The <i>Stockholm</i> Observatory
12. The <i>Stockholm</i> Art Museum
13. The <i>Stockholm</i> University Building
14. The <i>Stockholm</i> University Library
15. The <i>Stockholm</i> City Assembly
16. The <i>Stockholm</i> Main Post Office
17. The <i>Stockholm</i> City Hall Annex
18. The <i>Stockholm</i> City Museum
19. The <i>Stockholm</i> City Library
20. The <i>Stockholm</i> City Hall Annex
VISUAL CONNECTIONS TO SKEPPSBRON. ANALYSIS

"Redevelopment of Skeppbron quay in Stockholm, Sweden". Urbanism Studies master Program. Student: Alexandra Starostina, Supervisor: Alexis Pontvik
VISUAL ANALYSIS OF SKEPPSBRON

BLOCKED VIEWS

VISUAL CONNECTION
The alternatives for putting elements on Skeppsbron were developed. Top down: 1 - elements are located on the important views axes partially blocking them, 2 - the main axes are free from the elements, elements are different in size, 3 - elements have nearly the same size and the same distance between, creating straight visual line, 4 - elements are different in height and partly located on the axes, 5 - two different lines (aquatic and landed) of the elements intersect by each other. The fifth variant was chosen because it helps to create heterogeneous view of Skeppsbron without blocking visual connection of the quay with the inner city.
FIRST POINT. SUNDAY, 16:00
VEHICLES: 156
CYCLISTS: 648
PEDESTRIANS: 1,114
TO SKEPPSBRON:
FROM SKEPPSBRON:

SECOND POINT. SUNDAY, 16:00
VEHICLES: 156
CYCLISTS: 72
PEDESTRIANS: 216
TO SKEPPSBRON:
FROM SKEPPSBRON:

THIRD POINT. SUNDAY, 16:00
VEHICLES: 204
CYCLISTS: 72
PEDESTRIANS: 804
TO SKEPPSBRON:
FROM SKEPPSBRON:

FOURTH POINT. SUNDAY, 16:00
VEHICLES: 360
CYCLISTS: 1,122
PEDESTRIANS: 228
TO SKEPPSBRON:
FROM SKEPPSBRON:
INSOLATION ANALYSIS

Shading time [h]

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

MARCH

JANUARY

SEPTEMBER

MAY

JULY

NOVEMBER

SKEPPSBRON MASTERPLAN

TEMPORAL ACTIVITY ON THE WATER

During the summer it can be a swimming pool, quay or dancing platform, during the winter it can be a pontoon-sauna.

Can be replaced by a pontoon with a new function at any time depending on citizen's needs.

Easily changeable pantoons help to create a diversity of connections with the water (from above, on, below).

PLACE FOR ACTIVITIES

General modular space with the modul 10m*10m for various public activities.

SHELTER

Against the bad weather.

URBAN GREENERY

Tree’s species is preferably platanus. Tree foliage is shaped and limited to a height to not disturb a beautiful view on historical buildings of Skeppsbron.

Tree foliage is shaped and limited to a height to not disturb a beautiful view on historical buildings of Skeppsbron.

PLACE FOR ACTIVITIES

Several modular spaces with the modular 10m*10m for various public activities.

TEMPORAL ACTIVITY ON THE WATER

Pantoons can be moved along the quay, connected to others, can be used as an extension of pedestrian walkways.

URBAN GREENERY

MUSEUM PAVILION

Unique object with viewing platform on the roof and two floors of exhibition spaces.

PLACES FOR ACTIVITIES

Several buildings exhibiting marine culture, cafes, etc. can be situated here.

SITTING PLAZA

Open-air unique object gives opportunity to enjoy music, theater performances, etc.

CONCERT SCENE

Easily changeable pantoons help to create a diversity of connections with the water (from above, on, below).

SHELTER

Against the bad weather.

CAFE PAVILION

SITTING PLAZA

PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

Unique object connecting inner Gamla Stan with Skeppsbron quay, escaping the road crossing.

TEMPORAL ACTIVITY ON THE WATER

Can be replaced by a pontoon with a new function at any time depending on citizen’s needs.

URBAN GREENERY

Tree’s species is preferably platanus. Tree foliage is shaped and limited to a height to not disturb a beautiful view on historical buildings of Skeppsbron.

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It is known that Skeppsbron is being used as a platform for different cultural activities, therefore all constructions along the quay should be flexible and adjustable. These spaces are general and temporary and are to be located in the middle of Skeppsbron. They are based on a module 10m*10m and can be changed according to the required functions (garden, outdoor gym, exhibition space, playground, space for relax, cafe, art space, labyrinth, outdoor cinema theater, swimming pool, or small beach in the city center). The modules can be easily removed or replaced if interests of the citizens change.
These spaces on the water are seasonal and depending on the weather they can be replaced by suitable activities. On the pier people can enjoy sunny day, seat, chat, read books, dance. In urban garden people can grow green stuff, feel a smell of flowers, and walk around trees in the city center. All constructions are temporal and movable, in case of need it can be moved to other place (pontoon) or it can be disassembled (wooden constructions).
These pictures show the variety of objects aimed to provide a visual and physical border between the walkable area and the water side. That is to ensure safety and to avoid accidents. Some of the constructions can serve as supportive structures contributing to the contemplating experience. The materials for these objects are 1) pink granite, 2) white marble, 3) wooden slats or 4) wood, 5) glass, and 6) metal, which used in combination with each other.
Tree species is preferably *platanus* with a use of a pollarding technique. The foliage is shaped and limited to a height of 4 meters maximum to not disturb a view on historical buildings of Skeppsbron. The distance between trees is 3-4 meters. Trees draw up entrance areas from Gamla Stan to Skeppsbron.