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WORKSHOP 2

Alna Environmental Park – a blue-green corridor of biodiversity, recreational opportunities and sustainable urban water management

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First an introduction to the backdrop of the Alna River and the Environmental Park. Oslo's landscape is rich and varied – its topography and geology, as well as biology. The fjord and water form the base of the landscape, which is surrounded by an amphitheatre and a valley (the Grorud Valley). Here, the city has

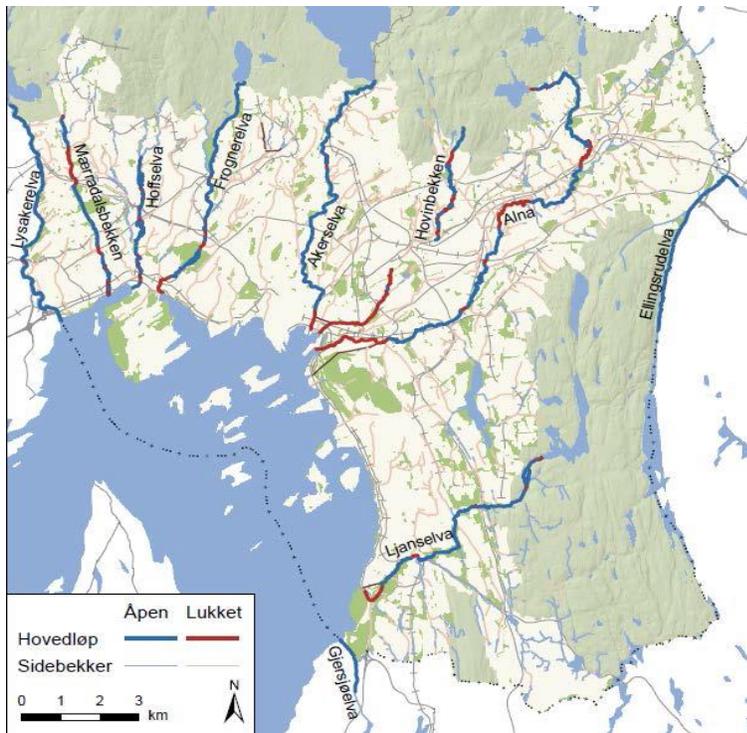
grown and developed over a thousand years. A continuous belt of forested hills and ridges – the so-called “Marka” – encircles the city, providing a green and lush backdrop.

Significant height differences between the forest and the fjord, combined with a climate that provides regular rainfall, has given rise to 10 rivers, which are considered the main waterways of Oslo. These urban waterways have largely defined, shaped and structured the development of the Norwegian capital, and have given the city its character and identity.

However, the significance and valuation of the city’s rivers has varied through history. During the last century, several sections of the rivers were culverted, in an attempt to put a lid on and rise above the natural landscape.

During the past 20-30 years, however, this attitude has changed dramatically, as the appreciation of the value and importance of the city’s rivers flowing openly and freely through the cityscape has grown. Today, when developing the city, Oslo has a clear ambition and goal to emerge as a blue and green city between the fjord and the forest, where living rivers form a city web, binding everything together into an organic, logical, functional and attractive whole.

Several of Oslo’s 10 rivers could be discussed when describing the efforts to preserve and strengthen the blue-green structures in the capital. In this application to the Landscape Award of the Council of Europe 2016-2017, however, we chose to highlight the work done along the Alna River since the turn of the Millennium. For years, the Alna was a “forgotten” river in the cityscape. Now, it is about to win back its rightful and important position.



The map shows the 10 rivers of Oslo: From left to the right we see:

- Lysaker River, the western municipality border
- Mærradal Stream
- Hoff River
- Frogner River
- Aker River
- Hovin Stream
- Alna River
- Ellingsrud River
- Ljan River
- Gjersjø River at the southeast municipality border

Bold lines = main rivers, thin lines = tributaries.
Blue = open, red = closed

The map is from the draft Green Structure Plan for Oslo, Agency for Planning and Building Services, 2009.

Rivers and waterways have been a major influence in the shaping of Oslo as a city and a landscape. The city has ten major rivers or brooks, which all run from the surrounding wooded hills through the city's built environment and into the sea. One of these rivers in particular – Alna – has been somewhat forgotten in most of the spatial planning practices during the 20th century. It might seem that the city turned its back on the river and the truly magnificent landscape which it represents. By forcing the river underground, through pipes and tunnels, the multi-functionality of the river was largely ignored.



During the last 15 to 20 years however, there has been a major change in the perspective of how and why the river landscape should be incorporated into all levels of urban development and spatial planning. Dating back to 1314 the riverbank of Alna represents the cradle of Oslo as the capital of Norway. Alna is also the longest of all the ten major city rivers, as it constitutes the defining topographical line all through the Grorud Valley. The last 15 years of municipal planning and landscape construction and restoration work shows that the river landscape of Alna is gradually being brought back to a more sustainable and healthy urban development in the years to come.

Central aims of the Alna Environmental Park Project:

- Sustainable urban development and water management
- Visible improvement to the environment
- Higher standards of living
- Overall improved living conditions
- Making the Alna River more visible, accessible and ecologically sound has the potential to positively affect people's sense of well-being, although difficult to measure.....

- Bringing the river landscape back to life by giving it high priority and making it an obvious and intertwined part of urban spatial planning and management.

Outcomes:

- improved public accessibility to natural recreational areas as well as ecological restoration and preservation of one of the main city rivers and biological corridors;
- enhancement of the multi-functionality of the river landscape;
- strengthening of Alna as a corridor of biodiversity and recreational opportunities.

Sustainable territorial development

Particularly over the last two decades, the city of Oslo has focused on the importance of how the city's waterways can be preserved and restored as a means of more sustainable development of the urban environment.



The Municipal Master Plan of Oslo states the vision:

“To safeguard and strengthen the blue-green character of the city”

Public participation:

Oslo co-operates with a wide range of NGO's, community groups and individuals, who contribute substantially to the mapping, maintenance and protection of important natural areas. The City contributes financially to many of the NGOs.

In relation to the rivers of Oslo, an organisation called "Oslo Elveforum" (Oslo River-forum) was established in 2000, and it has proved to be an important partner to the administration in the municipality of Oslo, by raising awareness about the importance of the rivers of Oslo.

The organisation has, among many other things, worked actively to make primary schools adopt a nearby river and commit to help maintain it!

Alna River has become a landscape which the local residents are proud of. It has become an annual tradition that each fall it hosts a "light walk" along the river with art installations and many activities organised by various interest groups.



Alna river and the various recreational areas along the river, especially Grorud Park, is widely used and user groups are varied. From a health perspective, this is very important. In a social perspective, Alna river and the parks are used to facilitate meetings between people, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. For children's development, these experiences with nature are essential for the development of basic skills.

A higher standard of living and overall improved living conditions have also been central aims. Making the Alna river more visible, accessible and ecologically sound has the potential to positively affect people's sense of well-being.

Increased use and attention from new user groups

In May this year, Oslo city's residents' association invited the city's population to a city walk along Oslo's longest river (Alna). They expected 400 participants. 1,000 people met and participants were more differentiated than usual. Many young people and some from neighbouring municipalities had prioritised the walk this afternoon. The organisation has received requests to arrange similar walks in the future.



24. MAI
Vandring langs Oslos lengste elv
Oslo Byes Vel - Offentlig

Interessert Skal Del Mer

9,1 k personer skal dit eller er interessert deriblant Lillian, Else-lill og 10 andre

I dag, 24. mai fra 18:00 til 20:00
Begynner om ca. 10 timer - 15 °Sol

Oslo Byes Vel
Grev Wedels plass 5, 0151 Oslo, Norway

In the invitation, the following mentions were made:

For many, "Alnaelva" (the river Alna) is an unknown hiking area. The river, which is approximately 15 km long, flows from Groruddalen through cultural landscapes, residential areas, industry and forest areas before it ends in Bjørvika, at the core of Oslo city centre. It is rich in plant and animal life: 10 mammalian species, 57 bird species, 370 plant species and hundreds of fungi have been identified.

Vidar Berget from the Alnaelvas Venner (Friends of Alna river) will guide us from Brynseng to Kværnerdalen to see how, after several years of effort, Alnaelva (the river Alna) has been transformed into an accessible hiking area with reopening elbows, waterfalls, park areas, bridges and picnic areas.

For those with wheelchairs and strollers, it may be useful to know that there are some steep slopes along the way. This is an open event without registration.

The experience

The experience of the initiatives, both reopening of the river, the walking trail and the parks, has given us a lot of positive feedback. However, we have also learned that information is a very important part. When new groups are to use natural areas, it must be experienced as inviting and safe.



The municipality has focused on the positive effects of reopening the rivers, but there has also been a shift in thinking from what was primarily an environmental project to urban development for people. Participation, ownership and opportunities for use are now key aspects of the municipality's work on reopening of rivers and streams. One concrete example of this is that the municipality's various agencies co-operate across the agencies areas of responsibility with this field.

[Links to the movies shown during the presentation in Daugavpils, Latvia](#)



http://tv.coe.int/COE/video.php?v=Norway_part1



http://tv.coe.int/COE/video.php?v=Norway_part2

Link to film showing the annual "light walk" (not possible to show during the presentation)



www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOAyHF8Vsqg