

"1000 years with city trees - Prospects for Oslo"

City trees

In the crossing between urbanism, urban design and landscape architecture, the city trees play a special role because of their size and long life. The city trees introduce life and beauty in public space, also when the streets are empty of people. The city trees bring the greenery in to every block and each apartment in the dense city, so that inhabitants will benefit to the green without having to walk for several hundred meters to the nearest park or travel kilometers to the forests around the city. A continuous street planting introduces green structure in the urban space; I have chose to call this the "Green urbanism", a translation of the French notion and title of the book "Urbanisme végétale" by Caroline Stefulesco, Paris 1993.

A green line through the history of urbanism

Tree plantings reflect some of the best of each city's society, history and geography and symbolize humanity and culture, since they have a cultivating and civilizing effect. Important civilisations introduce big tree plantings in the cities. There is a green line through the history of urban design from the plaza tree from the middle age, through the classical promenades in the following centuries, to the golden age in industrial 19th century, the lack of them post second war, the struggle for the environment from the 1970's to contemporary renaissance of the European city culture in the beginning of the 21st century.

Norse mythology

For not many 1000 years the nature was completely dominating on the planet. In the beginning the houses were may be placed under them giving shelter, drainage and a pleasant shade in summer. We also know the world ash, with roots and branches in different mythic dimensions.

"Tuntre" Town tree

In the country side still, the central tree at the farm a "tuntre" meaning the town tree, still is the biggest structure on the farm. This pagen tradition of cultivating the central tree or the solitary tree has surveyed and is still living in the countryside of Norway and Sweden, known as "tuntre" in Norwegian and "vårdträd", a notion I have not found in other languages. The town tree tradition was brought from the farms and into the towns. Bergen was the biggest city in the Nordic countries in the Middle age and has kept the notion "Pratebom", "prate" is talk, and "bom" is tree after german "baum".

Classical ideas from the Far East

Beijing is more than 2000 years old, a garnison city close to the northern border of China. Marco Polo described this city in 1270 with temples, canals, bridges, may be with a population of 500 000, larger than any European city on that time. Admired by roman urbanists by referances from Rome, Versailles and Paris in several waves, many urban ideals come from China and Beijing.

Bergen

Bergen was the most important Norwegian city and the biggest city in Scandinavia because of the rich Hansa culture. The public spaces of Bergen called "Allmenning", are public streets perpendicular to "streter" or the streets or that followed the courbe lines of the terrain. After big city fires in 1561 and 1582 these "allmenninger" were widened and tree planting were compulsory to prevent fire. This is the first documentation of a green structure in a Norwegian city.

All roads leads to Versailles

Versailles is the most important landscape project, it is more than 1.000 HA, that took 25 years to finish. It is the most important reference when it comes to green planning. Versailles became the ideal for the whole western world, especially for the regional powers at that time; as Sweden, Denmark, Russia, Poland, Austria and many more.

Nidaros

Trondheim or Nidaros was completely destroyed by a big fire in 1681 and the Luxemburgish general Cicignon was responsible to draw a city plan with large, well regulated avenues and streets in a inclined cross form; Nordre gate and Munkegata. The large avenues are the most completed alleys of Norway and create green structure in the capital of Trøndelag. The tree plantings were compulsory from 1709, and accelerated throughout the 18th century. It means 300 years this year with city trees in Trondheim.

18th century: The age of beauty

Denmark is an important country for garden and landscape architecture and a cultivated country with much refinement. One of the most elegant city alleys leads up to Fredriksberg castle garden and Søndermarken; Frederiksberg Allé, was constructed and planted in the years of [1700-04](#) as parade promenade from Copenhagen to the farm of the Prince, with Parisian inspiration. Like in ACH it has been a principle for the urbanization in the centuries to follow.

The United states

The war of Independence was over in 1783. The president George Washington pointed out himself the new capitol on a beautiful peninsula between the rivers of Potomac and Anacosta. The officer Pierre Charles L'Enfant, son of a French artist family, draw up diagonal avenues; 3 NW`-Se, 6 NE-SW, star plazas and vistas to the monuments placed on the hills, inspired by Versailles a century earlier

Studenterlunden in Oslo

The Central park of Oslo, Studenterlunden, is a generous urban park, made possible through purchase of the properties in front of and south of the buildings. Today the alley of lime trees are extended, the earth is changed so that the lime trees, first planted in 1870, can live for 100 more years. Together with Slottsparken, the Royal park, further west, the parks create 1, 5 km long green structure in the central parts of the Norwegian capital. Karl Johans gate is restored, asphalt and concrete is replaced by granite. The sidewalk under the lime trees are doubled, so that we have taken 1.000m² from the cars and given the space to the pedestrians. The big picture is that the city centre has been returned to the citizens. We are again promenading on Karl Johans gate.

The Mall in London

Is designed by André le Nôtre in 1676 and shows a procession alley up to Buckingham palace between Green Park and St James's Park in the axis from Trafalgar Square to Queens gardens. Le Notre canalised the small river of Tybern in St James's park, but later transformed into a romantic park. The Mall has a generous street section of 60 m and sidewalks of 15m permit to lines of the platan.

Napoleon Bonaparte III

The emperor modernized an old fashioned France with ideals from England. He himself and Baron von Haussman led the grandious renewal of Paris from 1852-1870 with 236 km new promenades or avenues with 110 000 city trees and parks, that became a school for Europe and the whole world. The emperor grew up along the Constance see in Switzerland, and was exiled three times in England, and visited as often as he could Kent, Bath and Scotland. He liked better the countryside than the city, and loved the landscape.

In Europe and in the whole world

From the smallest village to the largest metropolies there were planted city trees with big passion. One of the most beautiful elm grooves was originally an alm alley in Seminarhagen planted in 1870 in Tromsø on 70 degree north on the coast of the arctic ocean. They are big enough to balance the increasing urbanization of the 21th century. 20 m high compared to the indigenous north Norwegian birc forest.

Stockholm

Paris has been the ideal for the esplanade system in the Swedish capital, here in a poem when Karlavägen was built in the 1880. August Strindberg writes in his poem "Esplanadsystemet"

Oslo

Bygdøy allé was planted in 1899, from Slottsparken westwards to Kongsgården on Bygdøy. Originally it consisted four lines of horse chestnut trees, but widening of the street has left two rows back. Old and ill trees have been replaced the last 10-15 years, so that we also in the 21. Century can enjoy the blooming. The horse chestnut trees create a deep, cold shade, not really an ideal urban tree...

Murmansk

This big subarctic city was completely destroyed, almost not one house stood left after the Second World War and is the best after war example north of Hamburg of a complete tree planting. Tens of thousands of shrubs and trees have been plant in a subarctic manner

Pedestrian streets from the 70-80-90

Many pedestrian street left the public space dead after the shops have closed, and has giving increasing traffic problems to the other streets. A good city consist of the mixed use, not the traffic ingenious system og a branch where the street become a cul de sac.

Carl Berners plass

is situated in a densely populated area in the eastern part of the inner city of Oslo. The junction serves as an east connection between the avenues from the city center and the middle boulevard. The new design of the avenue system is based upon the City Plan of 1929, bringing back the urban and green qualities.