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NEIGHBORHOODING DEMOCRACY

A PHOTO ESSAY

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Question 1: How is the neighborhood you went to?



Stigbergstorget is a calm, green and family-friendly neighborhood that feels safe and well looked after. It is easy to get to by tram and has plenty of seating, bike lanes, and space for kids to play. The streets are clean and the pace is slow. The neighborhood has a clear artistic side, with a maritime museum, vintage shops and a record store, and feels socioeconomically stable, though not very diverse in terms of food or people, at least on a Monday morning. Everything seems to be organized around the central park and square, which act as the social heart of the area. The neighborhood also has a strong historic identity rooted in the harbor: a light tower, a seamen's church and an old bell all point to its port past, and that history still feels present today. It is in these ways that Stigbergstorget immediately struck us as pleasant and inviting, being a place in which one lingers rather than simply passing through. Even so, there are some areas of the neighborhood on the river-facing side of Karl Johansgatan that appear to not yet have been redeveloped, as there are areas that appear hostile, less looked after and not as pleasant to either pass through or stay in. Nonetheless, Stigbergstorget is a nice area with a clear connection to a certain subculture.

Question 2: What do you assume of the people living there?



From our initial observations and impression, we were left with several assumptions on the people living in the neighborhood. Firstly, from the price level and structure of the streetscape and buildings, we assumed that most of the population are socio-economically stable. Furthermore, we were left with an impression that the

residents adhere to a certain political identity, more specifically being left-wing and green-oriented, due to the type of establishments we found in the neighborhood. From the observations of people and amenities of the area surrounding Stigbergstorget, we also assumed that the population consists of young families with 1-to-2 children, elderly people in addition to students and young adults. Specifically, there seemed to be a lot of individuals interested in the arts due to the presence of second-hand stores, vinyl records stores, museums, alternative movie screenings and cultural events at the center. Even so, Stigbergstorget and Allmänna Vägen does not appear to be ethnically diverse.

Question 3: Are people in the neighborhood politically active? Are they socially active?



The people in the neighborhood appear to be politically active owing to the political identity of the neighborhood and its history, which is often fused together with social activism. This is exemplified through the activities of the Sea Man's Church, which acts as a catalyst for both community organization and political activism, such as through its role in community-based political activities such as the "Folkfest för Fred och Klima" (People's party for peace and the climate). Even so, the level of actual political activism does not appear overwhelming, as there are not a large variety of political posters, graffiti or other methods of political expression that can be witnessed at Stigbergstorget or Allmänna Vägen. Even so, the neighborhood appears to make an effort to be socially active through engaging the local community through community centers for inhabitants of all ages (e.g. Majgrabbarna & Stenhuset), in addition to open and accessible public areas designed to encourage socialization, as for example the "Pratbänk" (Speaking Bench) painted in yellow to stand out. On the other hand, this level of social activity seems to rapidly diminish when walking further away from Stigbergstorget when the human-scale and oriented developments fade in favor of more modern, large-scale

practices of urban planning. These spaces appear to be less socially active due to the feeling of being insignificant and a lack of a sense of belonging and being grounded.

Question 4: Does the neighborhood seem peaceful or there seem to be frictions and struggles?



Stigbergstorget appears peaceful, quiet, calm and safe. The main square is anchored around community landmarks (e.g., church, park where people can gather or meet) and local businesses such as a variety of cafés and eating establishments. Even so, the peaceful atmosphere of the neighborhood appears to be stemming from the homogenous nature of Stigbergstorget, in which people of similar socio-economic statuses and political identities largely do not interact with other groups, hence avoiding frictions and struggles: not because they do not exist within the city of Gothenburg, but possibly because they remain divided and isolated across the city's districts (assuming thus far).

Regardless, a sense of peace is strengthened by the presence of people in the neighborhood, whether they are exercising, relaxing in the park, playing in the playground or eating in restaurants. The presence of people makes the neighborhood relaxed and inviting, making it feel welcoming and thus incentivizing one to stay and linger.

The friction was more driven by the architecture than a lack of sense of community. There is a divide you can sense, structured by the main road with the tramway - on one side there is an economically stable, community-focused, family-oriented side with warm-toned houses, narrow streets, a music museum, etc; on the other hand, six-floor industrial-looking brick buildings by the church and museum, overlooking the sea yet blocked by the highway.

Question 5: Do people seem calm and trustful or upset and afraid?



When we first arrived in Stigbergtorget/Allmänna Vägen, someone was playing the trumpet contributing to a peaceful atmosphere. Albeit there were not many people on the first day, we saw some people who were walking their dogs or relaxing on the benches at the neighborhood square. We also saw some people taking in the harbor view. One of them was a father carrying a baby in his arms, showing the child the newly arriving ships. The people of Stigbergtorget/Allmänna Vägen would be best described as laid-back and very open-minded. They seemed completely relaxed when approached by us for a conversation. Upon chatting to a bartender, an elderly woman approached us, claiming she overheard our conversation and might have something to add. They let us sit down and converse for a while in the bar, without expecting us to order something, strengthening the inviting feeling. They appeared to be very trusting towards new people, which echoed the spirit of the neighborhood.

Question 6: How talking to the people in the neighborhood change your perspective about the place?



Stigbergtorget seemed like an upper-class neighborhood at a first glance: it is well maintained, the houses are beautiful, there is a lot of green spaces with parks where families linger, and people take their dogs for a walk in the middle of the day. Our first impression was that the neighborhood was for people who are doing economically very well. After conversations with the people, we realized that several of the houses are state owned and can be rented for a fair price. A quote from a conversation was that: "This is a neighborhood for all people", however they also told us that there has been a recent shift in this reality and the prices of houses has gone up: it is becoming progressively a place for people with a good economic capacity.

This task took us to a different reality from what we are used to, usually even if we are traveling, we pass by a place with a goal (e.g. getting to a destination, buying groceries, etc.), but we never just look at a place and the people there and try to figure out what is the atmosphere or what could change to make the community stronger, more involved and with the better conditions. We had our findings, but when talking to a family, something simple like a bathroom on the park and a water fountain did not cross our minds, because we are not there every day for several hours; yet it is absolutely reasonable for someone spending their afternoons at the park to want to fill a water bottle or use the bathroom. These were things we were not considering that needed to be pointed out by the people who use the facilities.





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