



INTRODUCING “DO-IT-YOURSELF” URBANISM

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Av: KTH

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[The Centre for a Sustainable Built Environment](#) at [KTH](#) in Stockholm brings together researchers from different disciplines – transport, urban planning, civil engineering, environmental studies, history of science and technology and architecture – to address sustainability challenges connected to urban environments. The Centre also acts as a point of contact between researchers and practitioners, in industry as well as the public sector. To support productive conversations between these different actors, the Centre produces a [blog](#) introducing relevant, emerging research themes. The highlights of this blog are now being shared here on the Hållbar Stad website.

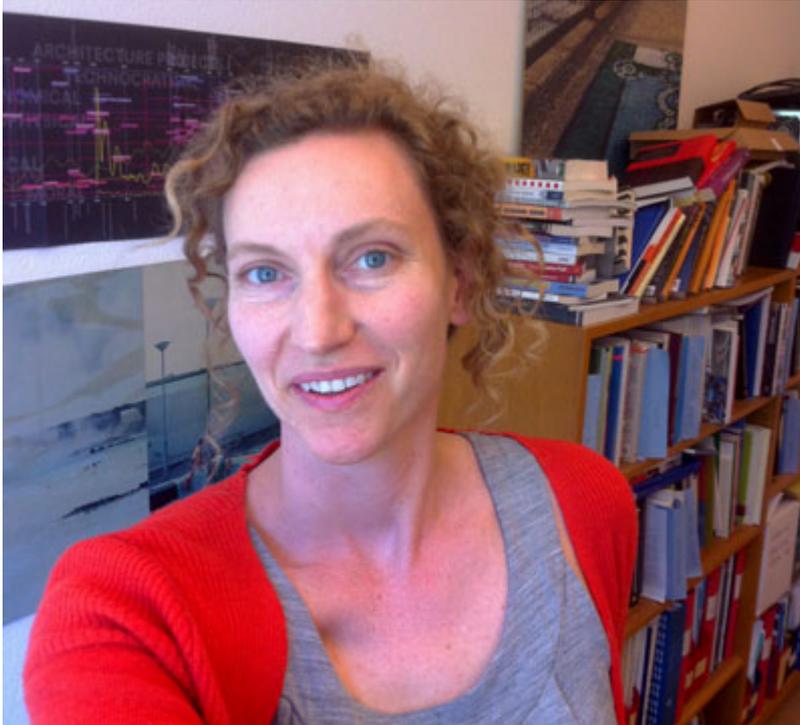
In this first blog the Centre for a Sustainable Built Environment works with [Karin Bradley](#), Associate Professor at KTH, to introduce the concept of Do-It-Yourself Urbanism and the questions this approach raises for those of us engaged in city making.

So, what is DIY Urbanism?

Rather than waiting for municipalities to improve their neighbourhoods, people are starting projects themselves that make neighbourhoods better, meaning friendlier and more sustainable places to be, especially with regard to the environment. Vitally, these people are not acting alone or on behalf of their own interests; instead they are collaborating with others,

locally and internationally. This is Do-It- Yourself (DIY) Urbanism and together with its close cousins, *tactical urbanism* and *guerilla urbanism*, it has started to change the way in which cities are made.

- Local planners, KTH researcher Karin Bradley comments, have engaged the public in planning decisions for many years now. DIY Urbanism is different. It's about a new wave of urban initiatives that have their origins in society, which come from people, rather than from the municipality.



Karin Bradley

This global movement is in part a product of dissatisfaction with traditional top-down urban planning, especially its struggle to respond to environmental challenges and a lack of high quality public spaces that support a feeling of community. It also reflects a wider change in society with people now re-casting themselves as active *prosumers* who contribute towards what they need rather than passive consumers of items produced by other people.

- Before, Karin Bradley comments, people read a handful of newspapers and these were written by experts, journalists. Now there are millions of bloggers using the internet to write and share stories that they think are interesting. The same thing is starting to happen in urban planning; the agenda is being shaped from the bottom-up and this is releasing an unprecedented wave of community creativity and engagement.

Whilst positive towards this development, Karin thinks we should also question it.

- There are issues about accountability, representation and the role of public authorities in these bottom-up processes that we still need to understand, reflect on and develop, she reflects.

What do DIY Urbanists do?

As a first stop-off point to understand DIY Urbanism and its impact, Karin directs us towards the [Park\(ing\) Day](#) movement started in San Francisco by design-art-activist group Rebar. The movement is about transforming car-parking spaces in to community parks on a temporary basis. In 2005 Rebar created its first urban park by hiring a car-parking space for two

hours, transforming it for those hours into a miniature urban park that included grass, a tree, a park bench and a *Park Open* sign.

Is DIY Urbanism really changing anything?

Karin thinks the answer is “yes”. Whilst Park(ing) Day is a clear example of citizen-led urban intervention, what makes it especially powerful, she reflects, is the way in which Rebar uses open-source tactics and the internet to enable the initiative to go global. As of 2011 Park(ing) Day has spread to 162 cities in 35 countries. A [“how-to” guide](#) to making your own Park(ing) Day is now open to anyone to download and act on.

And things have changed, notably in public planning authorities. The [San Francisco Planning Department](#) now supports the creation of temporary parks seeing them as a civic asset that challenges the car-culture of the city. They have minted a new typology term the “parklet” and created a process that allows people to apply to create one. By 2013, 40 parklets had been launched in the city and a further 40 are under development.

And DIY Urbanism in Sweden?

The next instalment from the Centre for a Sustainable Built Environment blog will look in more depth at Swedish DIY Urbanism initiatives.

Read more

- [Tactical Urbanism möblerar om staden»](#)
- [De tillfälliga parkernas tid är här!»](#)