

Town square (fridstadtorget)

Design for town square, Eskilstuna, Sweden



Client: Municipality of Eskilstuna
Project: 2005, in collaboration with Holger Schmidt (architect) and Patrick Verhoeven (urban designer)
Budget: unknown.
Status: international design competition.

Eskilstuna's central square lies at the intersection of two important urban axes which link the river with the station, and the new town with the old quarter. The square itself has great potential for activity and to become a major urban space in the city. However it fails to attract the people of Eskilstuna because of its poor layout which is divided into smaller spaces, making it difficult to survey and traverse. The furnishings of the square (seats, lights, planting) are ad hoc and chaotic, distracting the user from the already wonderful architectural diversity in the facades of the square.

The first step was to create an urban polarity by enticing people from the already busy shopping street (southern end) to the north of the square. This was achieved by organising new public transport stops on the northern end, and adding a new building with substantial new programme such as shops, restaurant, and parking for bikes, which also serves as a new gateway to the square. The square was then cleared of the smaller spaces (while retaining almost all of the existing trees) and surfaced with a wall with a single material, with different finishes, to form a new "house room". The specially designed lighting plays on the idea of this quirky theme. Subtle height differences separate the different dynamics of pedestrians from cars, as well as cafes, sitting areas, markets and other activities, dividing the square into flow channels and static areas.

In order to stimulate new uses and ways of using and experiencing the square it was decided to warp the surface of the space itself. The main shopping street that bisects the square across its width, forms the axis about which the surface becomes warped or stretched. On the south side of the axis the square is recessed to be flooded, forming an ice rink in winter, and a sitting area in summer. On the northern side of the square, the surface is stretched over the new building to create an elevated area with views across the river and back onto the square itself. This part of the square forms the catalyst for all kinds of new (organised) activities such as a podium, restaurant, terrace, and casual activities such as rollerblading, chilling out and sunning. In this way the new surface encourages the idea of 'people theatre', allowing people themselves to become the spectacle itself. The openness of the square leaves it free for interpretation, to be used for any number of different activities, such as markets, entertainment events, music podia, hanging out, and last but not least, eating the odd Swedish meatball.

