

CRAFTING GARDEN

RÅSHULT



SARA LARSSON
MATHILDA DAHLQUIST



Crafting Garden in a nature culture context

by Mathilda Dahlquist

A reflective text about a project
by Mathilda Dahlquist
and Sara Larsson
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Disconnection is a word often repeated when reading about the *Anthropocene*. A human centric era indeed, but still it seems like the globalization makes us lose the sense of the bigger whole and meanwhile responsibility for our planet fades it tend to come back to us in form of stress and powerlessness.

The Anthropocene

"In the Anthropocene we are summoned to expand our understandings of ways to conjoin nature and culture, economy and ecology, and natural and social science"(Gibson, K. Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene, 2015) and I interpret that, partly, as a design brief. I believe that we can use creativity as a tool, to be a "change agent" (someone who aims to create change for the better) in the exploration of expanding our understanding to speculate in alternative futures. With history in mind and especially future I will in this text reflect upon one special part of Sweden, namely, Småland in a project called Crafting Garden Råshult.

Background

Småland, landscape of Sweden, have a crass history of suffering in the rural areas, coming to the starvation and poverty for the circumstances of a hard land to farm. They certainly experienced a conjoinment with nature. Perhaps accordingly, people of Småland are said to be cheep, (or economical), but I rather go with my own impression. Småland in a nutshell is to me the melting mass of glass being handled with skills of the glass master, the strenghts in bended wood that turns into a chair. Moreover, Småland, as idyllically presented in the stories of Astrid Lindgren, reminds me a lot of my own childhood: light summer nights, mosquitos over a lake, red houses and beloved ones near. In conclusion, Småland can briefly be described with to things, namely, rural nature and the passion for craft. These two subjects have been considered throughout this design project about the meeting of rural and urban, land and city, in Småland. Our focus landed in Råshult, a quaint place in which no less than Carl Von Linné was born.

Råshult is a site with a lot of potential to be a family excursion place. Today you can go there to vistit a café, go hiking on the trails and look at the house where Carl von Linné was born, next to blossiming gardens. However, after a study trip there, me and my companion reflected upon how little there was to do and engage with, especially for our upcoming target group- children. We got aware of the controversy of the place being a nature reserve. It both protects from destruction but limit curios visitors to touch and explore and do what Linnaeus once did at this site.

Design proposal

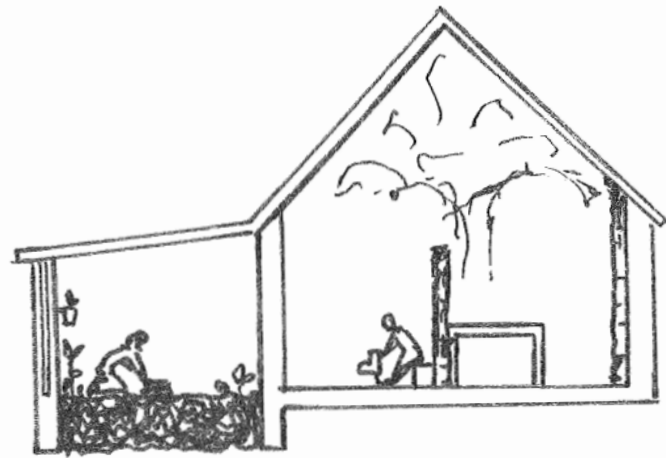
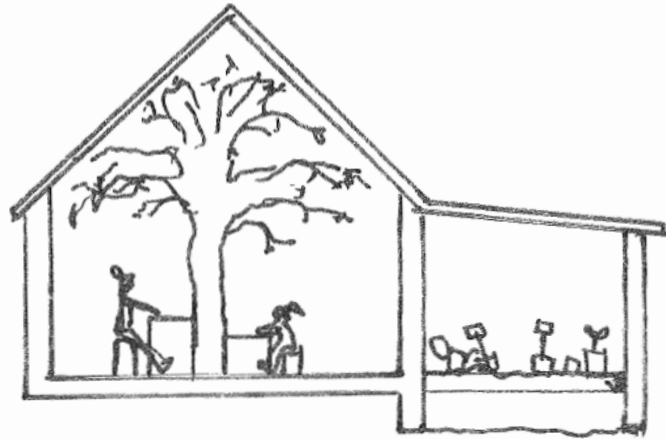
Referring to Råshult as a rural place, it's of value to know that Carl von Linné and Råshult has more than the house, in which he was born, in common: growth, plants and gardens characterize the place, even today. Maybe this was the start for his lifelong curiosity of the world of plants. In our project we took into account the background of gardening and designed an indoor crafting garden. We connected crafting with botanics thinking about the relation between Linné and exploration. Unlike how one should act in the reserve, it is free to go crazy exploring plants, dig into the soil, craft with natural materials, examine roots; everything one can think of connected to gardens. Our proposed design is a combination of concept making and architecture design.

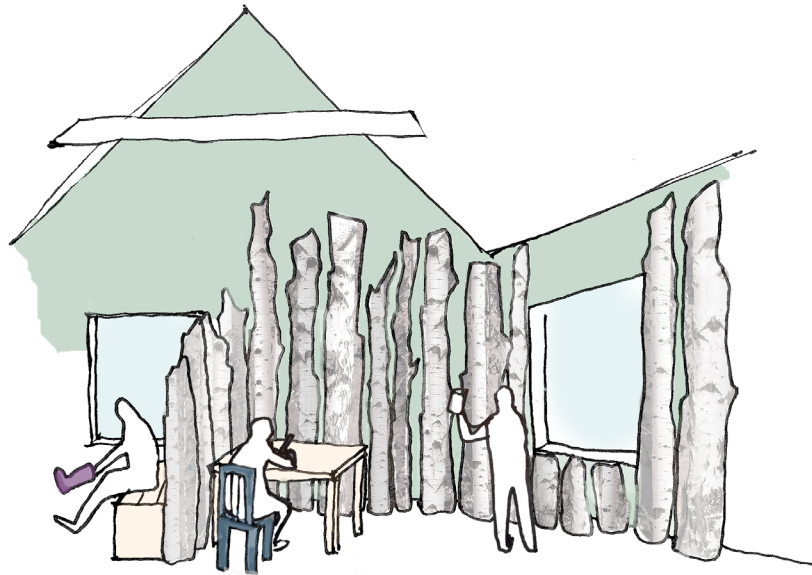
It is suggested that the human have a range of common basic needs to achieve a better wellbeing (Thorpe. A. The designers Atlas of Sustainability, 2007, p.115). Curiosity is one, which could be found with exploration. Self-esteem is another, a need that can be achieved when we feel that we are doing something important, feel that we matter, and do something that make us feel that we are capable. Linné was an explorative man, and his curiosity and passion took him far. And so *exploration* became a leading word in the project that provids families a site to go and be curious and meet a rural place by own exploration.

Process

Earlier in the process me and Sara shared vision with Visionsgruppen (of Råshult) to make Råshult a more attractive visiting place and to get more people out there. We were then focusing on sharing the history of the place. The end result, however, are not focusing







on the attractiveness, but rather on the possibility for families to come and connect to the site as a rural one, to nature. The project has been process-led, which meant for us that we let one thing lead to another without knowing about the endresult. For instance, we at one point researched clothes from the 16th century which reminded us of the real core, the explorative mindset and curiosity of learning by experiencing.

Our target group was families with a special focus on children. As we thought of how to involve children in our process we created a crafting book that we called "The trip to Råshult". This crafting book was handed out to tree children to fill out. We got them back and were happy to see that the children had interpreted the task with creativity.

"If you sit too long by the screen your eyes will turn into squares" was a well-known joke when I was a child. An assertion that makes sense not least in present time. Recently an organisation, Generation Pep, encouraged children to get "upp och hoppa Sverige", up and jump, because studies show that a lot of children are moving too little. Probably, it goes for adults too, and working in front of computers are common. Maybe, spending time by the screens is not only for amusement coming to children. It can also be a way to hide from "the real world" that can be oppressive and demanding. The screensitting itself hasn't very much to do with our project, but a connection to the inspiration of it. It is clear that we need to get out more.

Children's interest in performing environmentally friendly is influenced by their previous experience in nature (Cheng J, 2012, p.31). This would mean that the closer relationship they have with nature, the more they care about it, probably because the sense of responsibility can be connected to something tangible.



Presumably, it is important for a designer, working with sustainability, to include children in sustainable thinking and mind-set, since they, naturally, are a group that will grow up and later have the influence to make a change.

Our hope for the Creative Garden is that children can let their creativity and fantasy flow, as the perceived control children have in relation to nature are also affecting their pro-environmental behaviours (ibid, 2012, p. 31). The creative garden will be a place for them to strengthen their relation to nature and increase their respect to it. From personal experience when I work with children in the age of 1-3 years, I've noticed a simplicity in the way they interact with the surrounding nature. They ran to the sand box and dig in with their hands without any thought of that they will be dirty. I admire the sense of freedom and spontaneity. It is of value to encourage that.

The importance of strengthening our relationship to nature becomes clear when it's said to increase pro-environmental behaviours. The views for a sustainable future seems, in this case, bright when we are expanding the understanding of ways to conjoin nature and culture. Moreover, in the relationship to nature and by crafting we will reach another level of sustainability: achieved social well-being. Common components in the connection to nature and the performing of craft is the ability to reconnect to ourselves. A man representing Hemslöjden said to me: "when we work with our hands, something happens." What "something" means in this sense is exciting to think of, not the least through the act of making. Crafting can be an experience that makes us feel good and in *The Meaning of Craft*, (Pllnen, Sinikka, 2013) several participants explain their relationship to craft as a symbol of ourselves and a way to express

oneself. It is seen to generate self-esteem and to be a beneficial use of time. They call it a "willingly self imposed obligation that improves development physically and cognitively" (ibid, p. 221).

To achieve a circular system, the materials in the crafting garden are waste materials from the Café at Råshult. Then, the opportunities are endless and the Café may also get something back. Astrid Lindgren, the famous children book author from Småland, reflected: It can be things in a book that only children found amusing, it could also with advantage be things both children and adults found amusing. But it can certainly not be something in a children's book that only adults find amusing." This spells out quite much what we intend for the project in the way we are focusing on children. But personally, agreeing with Lindgren, there will be a benefit if parents or adults engage to precede as a good example for their children, learn also, but perhaps mostly because I think they would enjoy it too.

Conclusion

The history of Småland tells us of a challenging relationship to the land that is found in the world today. On the other hand the contemporary globalization overwhelms us with options. Again, it can be hard to grasp the greatness and the world becomes a buzz of possibilities. Maybe we should turn more to ourselves. Remember to be explorative and creative. Maybe it is not until then that we can successfully start to face the challenges around us. A human era indeed, in which the force of human is strong, but then even more important is not forget about the individual itself- me, you, us. If crafting with nature expands our understandings of how to conjoin nature, then let's go for it!

References

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Thorpe. A. The designers Atlas of Sustainability, 2007

Images:

1. Råshult, Småland.
The cottage where Carl von Linné was born.
Photo by: the author

2. Crafting book "The trip to Råshult".
Illustrations: the author with Sara Larsson

Sketches and illustrations of the barns by the author.

Last page: Crafting Garden at Växjö Stadsbibliotek, as part of the exhibition "Små Changes."



