

The hillsides between two forests

A new visual, social and ecological horizon for Linderud

Is connectivity necessarily about accessibility? By turning vast unused lawns into diverse edge habitats, by carving out inherent landscape features and opening views, Linderud picks up the dialogue both with its immediate surroundings and the bigger valley context, and becomes a fun place not only to sleep, but to live and to belong.

Context

The diverse and complex valley northeast of Oslo called Groruddalen is home to one fifth of Oslo's population. My fascination for it started with how it differs from the rest of Oslo, with its juxtaposition of diverse entities, scales and spaces, with testimonies telling the stories of different periods, and mostly with its generosity. The immediate proximity to the forest is a unique quality for a suburban area, some inhabitants almost seem to live in the forest. Today the remains of the old farms that gave many of the districts their names coexist with vast and inaccessible industrial areas, sports grounds, large functionalist neighbourhoods and small scale one family house areas, heavy infrastructure and many leftover areas in between. Almost everything is bigger and vaster in Groruddalen. The forest that frames the valley is an ever-present backdrop, though often blocked out and rarely highlighted.

The site

Linderud is a perfectly representative example of the numerous neighbourhoods that were built between the 60s and 80s on the lofty hillsides of the valley. Around 6200 people live here. It is located on the hillside between Alnaterminalen in the valley bottom and Lillomarka on top, the blocks were built in the mid 60s and designed by the Norwegian architect Platou, who also designed the Linderud shopping center. However, it first and foremost is a place to sleep, with good links only to the subway that brings you to central Oslo. The district is cut off from its surroundings by heavy roads, railway, and it is not a safe place where parents can just send out their kids to play due to cars and a lack of places to go and things to do. The generous open spaces are lawn-dominated and feel vast and empty apart from randomly scattered trees and playground equipment. They lack an intermediate scale, are poor in their ecological value and do not inspire and stimulate to spend time outside, meet neighbours and play. However, just like many others of these housing districts with a lot of low status green space, its position on the hillside between the forest and the valley bottom is a great quality and a sleeping potential.

A sleeping potential, and the intention to connect

Belvedere situations with great views are part of the valley's inherent landscape structure. Yet they have not been seen as a quality worth highlighting in the planning and building process of most housing districts. Quite the contrary - often physical objects like garages or fences block or disturb views and where they are not blocked, they are rarely framed intentionally.

In 1949, just before the development from mostly farmland with small satellite towns, to industries gathered speed, a new plan for a park and hiking trail system got drawn in Oslo's Generalplankomiteens Kontor, but never fully implemented. The intention was to connect the forest with the fjord and to offer recreational green space throughout the city, as well as to connect the two forests North and East of Groruddalen through the valley. In the first place it was for humans, and specifically for health reasons, as the partly very

poor living conditions in Oslo just like in other European cities caused health issues and diseases. Good links to the forest that engage people to spend time outside were meant to promote health. Connecting Nordmarka with Ostmarka is still part of Oslo's Byokologisk program today, but creating large-scale physical connections is difficult and it requires long-winded processes.

Concept

So my project explores modes of connection and aims to broaden the thinking about connectivity. Does it necessarily have to be physical? By highlighting and framing views, I propose to connect the neighborhood to the big valley context visually. On a smaller scale, however, physical connections to the immediate surroundings are being created and strengthened. And while humans cross the valley with their eyes, the project provides new connections in the form of ecological stepping stones for the non-human dwellers, by turning today's lawns into rich and diverse edge habitats.

The project operates on four axes informed by the topography and the existing urban structure, building on the inherent qualities of the terraced terrain and unlocking views that allow for lookouts to different parts of the valley, to the forest on the other side, and even central Oslo and the fjord. Each axis has a different vegetation theme. The vegetation design is guided and informed by the intention to frame views, playing with sequences of open- and closeness. Belvederes are being molded to invite and give clear access to different views. Four of them I picked out as representatives for different view-themes for a more in-depth exploration.

Sequences from forest to riparian landscape

The main connector on the valley scale, both visual and physical, is a continuous axis stretching over 500 m between Lillomarka on top, and Veitvetparken on the bottom, connecting two important recreational public green spaces. The vegetation underlines the shift from the forest down to the riparian landscape. On a more private or half-public neighborhood level, three axes beam through the blocks with different thematics, spatial experience and outlooks. Together they form a functioning system rich in spatialities.

Historical and cultural landscape

The new Linden alley refers to the history of the site. Linderud Gård is the oldest and the only remaining manor house in Oslo, it is a gem that is currently almost hidden since it is very poorly connected to the neighborhood, sitting in the shadow of Linderud shopping center. The new axis creates this missing connection, picking up on the farm's most distinct and more than 200 year old landscape feature, the Linden tree alley with the slightly elevated path. Repeating this feature along the axis, the elevated path helps zoning the street space and making it safe for pedestrians.

Future landscape

The central neighborhood axis follows the elevation of 161m almost continuously, and this is where views come into play the most. By moving the earth, terraces are being created and sustained by small granite walls built with natural stone from the Groruddalen quarries. Following the line, the wall turns into a big terrace, from which not only big parts of the valley and Oslo are visible, but even the fjord and the hills far outside Oslo - creating a sense of belonging to the city between the forest and the fjord. The open and gently waving character of the lawns is being enhanced and subtle terrain interventions as well as vegetation form edges to frame the generous open spaces, creating both open and interior zones.

The low gardens

Statsråd Mathiesens vei stops in line with the garages and is being narrowed down in order to minimize traffic, give space to the people and to make it a safe place for kids to play outside. While also hiding infrastructural elements and decorating the view, vegetation zones serve storm water infiltration to catch most of the surface water before it can reach the subway station and cause floods there, as it does today. Along this axis, only a thin line of forest and a lot of sky is visible behind the garages on eye level, but jumping high on the trampolines unlocks a view of a bigger part of the valley. Further up a footbridge gives access to the wilderness of the vegetation along the railway, which turns into an even more wild seeming "butterfly field" by adding insect-friendly herbs and perennials, grasses and shrub species. Like a balcony, the walkway has a handrail only on the slope-facing side, forming a spatial edge and protecting from passing trains. Three of the existing garages are being given new use: a bicycle workshop to motivate the shift from car to bike, and a place for kids to meet up and do homework together.

Where all the axes meet, an orchard forms a new community hub. Inhabitants have the opportunity to grow their own fruits and vegetables or build little structures for seating. There are already signs on site, small interventions that show willingness to decorate the space and use it in different ways, and an interest in gardening. The orchard does not depend on this engagement to implement a garden, but it provides the opportunity for the people who want to take care of a small plot. The project provides a frame within which the programme can be developed with the community. The programme I propose is therefore exemplary.

Selected views

The valley has many different characters and faces. Overall it is large, out of human scale and can be overwhelming and difficult to orient yourself in. This also translates to many areas where people are living. In this project, interiority and comfort are established through selected views. Some points offer wide overviews and create connection and belonging to the valley as a whole, while others intentionally frame selected aspects and bring comfort. This sometimes means hiding certain parts in order to highlight others, sometimes it means taking away or adding objects.

From the top, the blocks of Sletteløkka frame a snippet through the valley as a whole with the forest backdrop on the other side. Down in Veitvetparken lush green hides most built elements and the view is limited to the forest backdrop on the other side of the valley and the sky, creating an almost interior green space within the sequence of different spaces. At the generous neighborhood terrace by the orchard, where the granite wall swings far out, a big part of the valley is hidden behind existing trees, but the view towards the city, the fjord and the hills far beyond opens up, creating a sense of being part of Oslo, the city between the forest and the fjord. From the little belvederes between the red brick blocks, fragments of the valley are visible. Goods can be watched being shipped to and from Alna freight terminal, and over the years, the locals witness the development that is going on in the industrial areas down in the valley as observers of the transformation.

As a guide plan for an underlying landscape structure, this proposal can inform the numerous similar districts in the valley. By proposing clear use and creating safe open spaces that are in dialogue both with its close surroundings and its bigger context, local communities are being strengthened and functionalist neighborhoods with generous but unused open spaces, just like Linderud, turn into places to belong.