

## The Larvik Folkepark

Larvik is full of opportunities. It has a great location, a friendly size, many historic buildings, baths, easy access to both nature and Oslo and so much potential. Larvik also has a rapidly changing harbour, with areas for private hotels and housing being built, but also a public culture house. We think the crown jewel of the harbour, the Tollkammare, piers and the overlooking Bøkkerfjell, should also be public. Not only accessible and nice, but properly used and fun!

We believe that the future of Larvik's harbour is dependent on two seemingly contradictory yet equitable factors. Firstly it must have a strong and clearly defined identity. Secondly, it must facilitate a great variety and diversity of uses. This leads us to a problem. What examples of urban design are clearly defined and recognisable, and yet also flexible to change? We believe that the solution lies in a multileveled response. An overarching project of unity that facilitates a number of micro-projects. What is this futuristic and mind-bending solution you ask? A people's park is our answer.

The 'Folkets park,' which translates to "People's Park" in English, has a rich and storied history that spans over a century and continues to evolve. First originating in Sweden in the late 19th century, Folketsparks were established as recreational spaces for the working class and acted as important social hubs for their communities. These parks provided an escape from the hardships of relentless industrialisation, offering green spaces, entertainment, and cultural activities for people of all ages and of different economic situations. Over the years, Folkets parks evolved to include amenities such as theatres, dance halls, playgrounds, sports facilities, and even zoos. They became vibrant centres for concerts, festivals, and public gatherings, fostering a sense of unity and community spirit.

A people's park is a solution which is perfect for this non-specific definition of space. It provides a framework which allows us to heavily demarcate the area, but while allowing for a wide number of flexible uses within its boundary. We also see it acting as a sort of safeguarding for the future of the city. A foundation for the harbour to grow positively and with a people-centred approach. It also is fun. Cities should embrace fun as a serious constitutional right of their residents.

Larvik's inner harbour is the most central part of the harbour and has a huge potential of becoming a real attraction in itself. The city's own ideas of reopening the old fishing harbour and restoring the pier give the opportunity to change how you access the water. In the new Folkepark, the fishing harbour will be transformed into a proper havnebad. Wooden decks along the water, a shallow pool with seawater for small kids, and a bridge over the harbour entrance

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that is also a jumping platform. The old building on the pier is restored and transformed into a food court and event space with generous seating areas towards the evening sun in the east. The food court allows local entrepreneurs and restaurant owners around the city to open small-scale businesses at the best location in town.

At the end of the pier, there is a sauna, a folkebadstue that activates the pier all year round. The sauna will have an undisturbed view over the Larviksfjord and can be booked by anyone. The harbour also harbours a kayak renting facility and a kids workshop called Kon-Tiki Adventure. In the workshop kids and enthusiasts come together in building rafts in the spirit of Larviks' most celebrated citizen. The harbour will be the citizens' favourite destination for a promenade, included in all running tracks and a go-to place for swimming all year round

It is easy to make the jump that to bridge two areas you must build a bridge. This is a fair and often correct answer, but we question its viability here in Larvik. A bridge would increase the speed at which someone can reach the harbour by a matter of seconds. In reality it today takes around 6 minutes to walk between the tollkammare and the square. Once the railway track is re-located, as is currently proposed for the future, it will bridge only one road. At a time when we should be reducing the use of cars in our town centres (and in general) is there not a fear that a bridge will simply facilitate greater car usage? The money that could be spent on this large-scale infrastructure could perhaps be better invested in a reactivation of the harbour area. Build it and they will come. A bridge will be built, but only figuratively in the minds of the Larvikians.

When one looks at a map of Larvik today they see the areas of Bøkkerfjellet and the inner harbour as being split by Storgatan and the railway track. We propose a solution that visually makes one see that Storgata and the railway are instead split by an area that spans between Bøkkerfjellet and the harbour. We believe that there have to be two converging strategies to accomplish this. First, the streetscape needs to be transformed so that the street material, for example, cobblestone, together with gates and symbols defines a space that the traffic slowly passes through. Secondly, the area Bøkkefjell and the inner harbour will actually both be included in one park under a single park administration, a Folkepark. This will significantly diminish both the physical and mental barriers between the harbour and the city.

Bøkkerveien which runs along the eastern side of the fjell will be reduced to a single lane for traffic, half of it being dedicated to pedestrians going up and down Bøkkerfjellet. The steep street of Bøkkerbakken will be pedestrianised. It is the closest way between the city centre and the inner harbour and will be filled with seating and plantings. Stairs will be built in the steeper parts, changing sides depending on where doors and entrances are located. A string of lights will crisscross up along the street, making it a proper part of the park. Property owners along the small street will of course still have access to their houses and parking spaces, but the speed is reduced to walking speed.

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One of the most important features of the project is the crossing of the railway and Storgata. Today the crossing is small, seemingly randomly located and not too safe. In the Folkepark, the crossing is moved eastwards, extensively widened and made safe with proper gates and traffic lights. The crossing is located where people walk, up on the ramp towards the Bøkkerfjell and up along the Bøkkerbakken towards the city centre. The Storgata deserves to be something else than a thoroughfare. It wants to be narrowed and lined with trees, more like a boulevard. Narrowing it makes more space for pedestrians, trees, bikes and outdoor seating. Cars can still be parked along both sides of the street, gaining some needed parking space and actually slowing down traffic. This will also increase customers to the shops and restaurants already located along the street between the Grand Hotel and Bøkkerbakken.



Traffic lights will be introduced at the crossing. We propose the re-introduction of cobblestones to a stretch of road that includes the pedestrian crossing, as we believe that the use of such visual aids will also facilitate the 'slowing' and softening of the road. A change in road material will not just visually but also physically make drivers aware of passing through something, also slowing traffic down. The cobblestone will extend over a broad section of the railway that makes the tracks sink into the pathway like a tramline rail. Combined with a system of gates that closes the railway when a train passes, the crossing will feel natural and safe.

A folkepark can be organised in different ways. It could be a foundation, a non-profit organisation or the kommun itself that runs the place. It is not an ordinary park and not an amusement park, but rather something of its own and constantly changing content according to the city and the inhabitants' needs and desires. The goal is to create a recreational, accessible and sustainable space that can offer a wide range of activities, mostly, but not exclusively, cost-free. The Larvik Folkepark will economically profit from revenues from restaurants, boat parking and bigger events, but the main economic gain will be the re-vitalisation of the city and a not insignificant number of visitors spending money in Larvik. For example, the Folkets Park in Malmö is the second most visited destination in Sweden, with more than 2,5 million visits each year. The Larvik folkepark will of course be something else, but compared to Malmö it has a spectacular location and very close proximity to regional public transport. We think this could become something big!

The Folkepark organisation does not have to own the buildings inside it, even if it sometimes will be convenient considering it has to have a strong influence over what happens in the park. The layout of the organisation will have to be worked out and decided by the local community.

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An architecturally important feature to achieve this is that the park has to be well defined, with a single visual identity as well as a clear outer physical border. Contrary to the intuitional gut feeling, the aim of a defined border is the opposite of shutting out, but to include within. When you pass the gates, the aim is to liberate you from everyday life, the grey modern city and its conventions are somewhat left behind. The walls enhance the feeling of dispensation and allow a different atmosphere within, open for everyone.

A folkepark is in constant evolution, following the needs and desires of the people. It builds a skate ramp when the local skating community wants it. It brings in artists people want to see as well as organises a street food weekend. It builds a fun playground to be used in all weathers and it hosts seasonal events like Eid, Syttende mai, Nowruz, Halloween and Pride.

Larvik needs a new library and it has the potential to become an important part of the citizens' new living room, i.e. the Folkepark. We believe the old Tollkammer is a perfect location for a new library. After the refurbishing of the crossing and Bøkkerbakken, the Tollkammer will in fact be within 5 minutes walk from Larvik town square. The new library will be extended to fit the new needs. The existing buildings are most likely too small for the collections. We propose a welcoming entrance building closing the courtyard and creating a protected hushed garden. The entrance building will contain a reception and a flexible area used for exhibitions and events.

By reclaiming the land and restoring it to the people, this project represents more than just a picturesque escape; it is a rallying cry for change, unity, and a future that embraces sustainability. Within the embrace of this reclaimed biodiverse landscape, the urgency of climate inaction becomes palpable. Every tree planted, every eco-corridor established, and every sustainable practice adopted speaks volumes about the immediacy of the challenge that confronts us. It is not enough to merely acknowledge the environmental challenges we face; action must be taken now, and the Folkepark stands as a testament to our determination to do better.

Let the Larvik Folkepark be more than just a park; let it become a rallying point for a united front. Larvik can create a legacy that goes beyond architecture and urban planning—a legacy of hope, ambition, and a collective determination to create a more sustainable and equitable world. The peoples park is a reminder that the fight against climate change is not a task for the few, but the responsibility of us all. The Larvik Folkepark stands as a testament to our potential for positive change. Now, more than ever is the time to act—to transform this visionary concept into a living testament of our dedication to the future we all deserve.

