

# Locis and the ‘Little Village of Fittja’

**Elaine Reynolds**

*LOCIS is the name of a 3-way collaborative arts programme between Leitrim County Council Arts Office, the Centre of Contemporary Art in Toru, Poland and Botkyrka Konsthall in suburban Stockholm, Sweden. The project is funded under the EU Culture Programme and by the three separate project partners.*

I am an artist originally from Leitrim and had the opportunity to come to Stockholm where I am being hosted by Botkyrka Konsthall.

Here, I joined a group consisting of two Swedish artists, Mathias Akesson and Jorun Kugelberg, one Polish artist, Ewa Axelrad and Dominic Stevens, who is an architect living and working in Leitrim. One of the main goals of Locis 2013 is cross-disciplinary collaboration in response to specific sites. What brought us together as a group was a shared interest the relationships between people and the places they inhabit. In our individual practices, we have explored a broad range of ideas that relate back to this key concept.

The location of the artist's residence in Fittja, Stockholm, has proven to be a fascinating place for our ideas to converge. I look out my window onto modernist concrete tower blocks, essentially the same type of structure could be found in any European city. Countless examples of areas, built in this style, exist in the suburbs of Amsterdam, Paris and (until recently) Dublin. Some of these urban developments were very problematic and the 'de-humanising' modernist



■ **Locis Fittja**

architecture bore the blame. Yet, here in Sweden we see little evidence of the typical social problems that have come to be associated with this architecture. This particular area appears to function very well, people express a strong attachment to the place; they seem happy here. A sense of community is manifest in the way Fittja is affectionately referred to as 'the little village'. The visiting artists, were surprised to learn that this area was in fact viewed as very disadvantaged within Swedish society.

■ **Fittja allotment**



In the 1960's a housing crisis was declared in Sweden. The Social Democratic Government of that time initiated the 'Million Programme' a visionary project that aimed to build one million affordable homes across Sweden. Fittja was one such development. It is 2013 and Fittja enters a new phase of re-generation, the idea of 'lifting' Fittja up, away from it's stigmatized past, is being promoted.

As Stockholm enters another housing crisis, there have been moves towards the de-regulation of the property market. Historically, this has been very highly controlled by the government, now there is talk of introducing looser planning regulations, lowering taxes and taking a step back in terms of controlling rental and sales prices. It feels as though we should warn them! Bombard them with images of ghost estates, let them see what happens when the 'free market' gets free reign. Then again, it works both ways and there is so much that we Irish could learn from the way Swedish society is organized.

It is this type of give and take that characterizes an exchange project like Locis. I have experienced Fittja as a lense through which I can look at many aspects of Swedish culture. What's more, my time here has provided an opportunity to reconsider the place from which I have come.

*For more information on the Locis project or any of the participating artists, please visit: [www.locis.eu](http://www.locis.eu)*