

Fjord City:
Socio-Economic Accessibility & Waterfront Redevelopment in Oslo, Norway
By Michael Rac ('14)

The Fjord City Plan, approved by Oslo City Council in 2008, is a comprehensive strategy to redevelop the Norwegian capital's waterfront. Fjord City strives to create better connections between Oslo's City Centre and the fjord on which it is built.

Former industrial lands, highways, and port facilities are being converted into new mixed-use development, civic institutions, and public spaces. The Oslo Waterfront Planning O

shoreline. The 225 hectares of land

to be developed are divided into 13 zones (see figure 1). This ambitious project will add new housing for 9,000, and employment for 50,000.

However, it remains to be seen if all the residents of Oslo, regardless of their socio-economic status, will be able to access and enjoy these spaces.

900 new condos, shops, a hotel, and a private art gallery - the Astrup Fearnly Museet. However, like many of the developments occurring with Fjord City, access is guaranteed to only those who can afford to pay for it.

In the mid eighties, social housing in Norway ceased to be financially supported by government. Instead, the rents of marginalized populations living in market housing are now subsidized. Considering that Oslo is commonly listed as one of the five most expensive cities to live in the world, this is troubling. The lack of designated social housing units, coupled with the high cost of living, poses a serious threat to Oslo residents with low incomes. Stein Kolstør, Director of the Oslo Waterfront Planning Office, described that all the new housing units being built with the Fjord City Plan are market units. In Tjuvholmen, a 3-room apartment on the third floor of condo building facing the water costs nearly 1.5 million CAD. With prices like this, it is unlikely that anyone but the ultra-rich could afford to live here. The lack of social housing units means that these new neighbourhoods will likely become wealthy enclaves.

Aside from housing, other elements of the Fjord City Plan are more socially and economically accessible. Fifty-two hectares of parks and public spaces are being built, in addition to kilometres of cycling and walking paths, several new museums and a library. For example, on a sunny Friday

afternoon along the Aker brygge boardwalk, crowds of people strolled along the waterfront, sat on benches eating ice cream, and played in the playground. However, aside from food stands along the boardwalk serving less expensive options, most of the restaurants along this stretch are expensive and underwhelming, which is typical in the more touristy areas of the city.

Fjord City is impressive in its scope, and much of the built environment, architecture and urban design is stunning. Without the inclusion of designated social housing units, however, what it amounts to is homes for the rich and public spaces for the rest.