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How to move a community? International workshop paves the way for a new Swedish service export

On 22 March a unique international gathering kicks off – City Move Interdesign. For two weeks the community of Malmberget in Gällivare municipality will be a global focus as experts from 17 different countries meet to lay the foundation of a new knowledge center. The theme: How can we move a community by starting from the needs and well-being of its inhabitants? Cutting edge expertise in community relocation could well become a new service export from Sweden.

Alaska, Australia, the Maldives. Around the world people's homes are threatened by climate change, earthquakes and forest fires. Whole population groups are being forced to relocate. Whatever the cause, the problem is a global one.

Now the community of Malmberget in the northern Swedish county of Norrbotten will be a pilot case for the entire world as 40 urban planners, architects, designers and researchers from 17 countries gather at a single workshop – City Move Interdesign. Working from a description of the problem, the group will suggest solutions and propose concrete and visionary ideas about how to move a community while focusing on people's needs, desires and circumstances.

Malmberget is undergoing revolutionary social change as a result of the area's extensive mining operations. Ever since the 1970s, Malmberget residents have gradually been forced to leave their homes. The process has inevitably had a negative impact on both the residents and the environment. At the same time, the local population has a paradoxical sense of pride in and understanding for the mining industry's growth. The ore both gives and takes away.

"The people in Malmberget have always lived side by side with the mining operations," says Anders Furbeck, director of the Quality & Environment unit at the mine operator, LKAB. "The transformation will continue as long as the ore is worked, and LKAB will continue to take its responsibility for ensuring that everyone who lives and works in Malmberget enjoys living and developing in the area."

Mining is the foundation of the municipality's industrial sector, creating the most jobs and also contributing significant funds to the Swedish national treasury. In recent years LKAB has discovered major new ore finds. While being good news from a business perspective, the finds will also have a major effect on populated areas. The increased activity in the bedrock leads to stresses and therefore vibrations, which worry local residents. Another problem is the impossibility of being able to provide precise advance planning information. The overall result is a situation whereby local residents feel insecurity and uncertainty.

"Gällivare municipality has low unemployment and a growing private sector even outside the mining industry," says Tommy Nyström, municipal commissioner in Gällivare. "But by far the most important thing is that our residents are happy and have a good living environment. If we look at the situation of the Malmberget residents, there is quite a lot of room for improvement.

"The move away from Malmberget has been going on for almost forty years and the people affected have patiently accepted their situation over the years. However, there are now additional factors which are more obviously affecting the circumstances of the remaining residents. The municipality hopes City Move Interdesign will help to guide us to take new approaches, in which future community development will be more characterised by a good living environment and a sense of well-being instead of insecurity and despair."

So how can we move people's homes, neighbours, sense of well-being, pleasant views, and workplaces? How can we get residents to stay in the municipality and enjoy life here? Based on their own areas of expertise, the experts will spend two weeks exploring a range of difficult questions.

"The participants will analyse, develop and propose solutions to problems that have a local connection but are also internationally relevant," explains Claes Frössén, project manager for City Move Interdesign at the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation (SVID). "The starting point is to use design methods and to anchor the work in a design process which focuses on the user – in this case, the local residents."

The results of City Move will be presented in an exhibition to be displayed throughout Sweden and abroad. The results will also form the basis for the City Move Innovation Center – a forum for knowledge about community transformations and planned population relocations. The aim is to bring together cutting-edge Swedish and international expertise and become the world leader in this field. The center will be based in Gällivare.

Read more at www.svid.se/citymove

See a one-minute City Move video on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpCd5_eZdRg

FACTS & CONTACTS

- City Move Interdesign runs from 22 March to 4 April 2009. The location is Malmberget in Gällivare.
- The project is being implemented by the Swedish Industrial Design Foundation (SVID) in conjunction with Gällivare Municipality and with support from the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, the Swedish Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications, LKAB, and the European Regional Development Fund.
- On 3 April the workshop results will be presented and the exhibition opened.
- Sweden's Minister for Enterprise and Energy Maud Olofsson and Minister for Communications Åsa Torstensson will attend.
- If you wish to participate, book a seat on the NextJet flight at 08:55 from Arlanda Airport. The return trip is at 16:00. The flight takes 2 hours 5 minutes. Unfortunately we cannot pay for air tickets but we can provide transport to and from Gällivare Airport, and lunch and refreshments at the event.

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