This is the published version of a paper published in Garden History.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

The National Urban Park in Greater Stockholm: Background, legislation and implementation.
Garden History, 32(2): 279-280

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:gih:diva-3767
NOTE

THE NATIONAL URBAN PARK
IN GREATER STOCKHOLM:
BACKGROUND, LEGISLATION AND
IMPLEMENTATION

In December 1994, the Swedish Parliament
unanimously decided to establish a large area
covering 27 square kilometres between Ulriksdal,
Haga-Brunsviken and Djurgården, in Greater
Stockholm, as a National Urban Park. The first
National Urban Park in the world, it has been
seen as an innovative way of protecting an
important cultural landscape that also contains
important ecological areas and is of significance
as a recreation area. This note illuminates the
decision, the legislation and its implementation.

BACKGROUND

The area contains a number of historic landscapes:
the hunting park Djurgården and the baroque
garden at Ulriksdal, which were created in the
seventeenth century, followed by the formation of
English landscape gardens at Haga-Brunsviken
in the eighteenth century. These royal parks are
integrated in an old agricultural and naturalistic
landscape near the centre of Stockholm. For many
centuries, this landscape has been a spacious
and beautiful recreation area with a complex of
biotopes and a wealth of cultural heritage, which
have been well preserved due not least to royal
privileges hampering urban development. The
proximity to the city has made this area easily
accessible to the urban population, but at the
same time attractive for other types of land use,
and during the twentieth century it has been
encroached upon step by step, despite the often
expressed contrary wishes of parliament.¹

In the early 1990s, there were a substantial
number of development proposals for Ulriksdal–
Haga-Brunsviken–Djurgården, despite its status
as an area of national cultural interest. Proposed
development amounted to a building area of 1
million square metres.² This critical situation
for the park landscape led to a clearly creative
process that resulted in the development of the
Act for the National Urban Park.³

THE LEGISLATION

The legislation for the National Urban Park
opened the way for the formation of National
Urban Parks in general. The criterion for giving
an area legal protection as a National Urban
Park is that it is of national interest, which is
significant for national cultural heritage, and
for ecology and recreation in a municipality or
densely populated region. The National Urban
Park Act states:

The Ulriksdal–Haga-Brunsviken–
Djurgården area is a National Urban
Park. In a National Urban Park, new
built-up areas and new installations may
be created and other measures taken only
if this can take place without encroaching
on the park landscape or natural
environment and without the natural and
cultural values of the historical landscape
being otherwise damaged.⁴

The regulations for the protection of the National
Urban Park are strict. Even if new houses, roads
or any other built features are of the greatest
importance for the development of the area or of
local trade and industry, they are still forbidden
within the National Urban Park.⁵

THE IMPLEMENTATION

Over the past decade since the National Urban
Park Act was established, there have been positive
developments by the municipalities in charge of
the legal planning instruments for the area. An
example of that is developmental work in the
field of biodiversity. However, at the same time
there has been a loss of biotopes in biological core
areas and connectivity zones as well as changes in
landscape scenery in the direction of more urban
elements in the rural landscape context. However,
in comparison with the threats of development to
the area before the legislation came into effect,
the outcome is not at all bad, with about five per
cent of the exploitation volume planned before
the legislation was realized.

But why has the Act not been able to stop
development altogether? Independent studies of
the impact of the legislation point to the fact that
the preservation of the National Urban Park has
not been a priority for those municipal bodies
in charge of planning. Here real-estate owners and construction companies have continued to influence the planning process. And in studies of the Environmental Impact Assessments and other descriptive material coupled to detailed development plans, there is evidence of a failure to investigate or identify natural and cultural values or environmental impacts. This has been interpreted as part of a strategy to avoid the intention of the law. Furthermore, the County Administrative Board of Stockholm has been too relaxed and has implemented the Act too leniently in terms of maintaining the national interest. However, it is also clear that more negative developments would have occurred without the legislation, although the intention behind the National Urban Park Act that ‘the development of the National Urban Park should aim at strengthening the area’s natural, cultural and recreational values and protecting biodiversity’ remains to be fulfilled.

Despite the problems described above, it can still be concluded that the formation of the National Urban Park in Greater Stockholm represents an important step towards the management of natural, cultural and recreational resources close to urban areas. The formation of the law represented a clear, innovative political process, and it is therefore understandable if there is a need for development of the law as well as a system of checks and balances connected to it.

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REFERENCES
2 Part of them are listed in ibid., pp. 68–9.
4 The Environmental Code, Chapter 4, §7.

The National Urban Park on the Web:
http://www.ekoparken.org
http://www.haga-brunnsviken.org
http://www.nationalstadsparken.org