

# Eurocities – urban regeneration in the city fringe

*Oslo event report*

*April 2024*

The last Eurocities *Urban regeneration in the city fringe* project event was held in Oslo 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2024 in parallel with the Hovinbyen conference, the same conference the project was born five years earlier. After highly motivating and insightful visits in the partner cities of Lyon, Brussels, Vilnius, Amsterdam, Prague and Düsseldorf, the project ended its series of events in Oslo. Focusing on urban transformation in city fringe areas characterised by barriers and heavy transportation infrastructure, it was natural to have an extra look at Økern in Hovinbyen. All partner cities took part in the event, as well as collaborators in Paris and Barcelona and a new acquaintance from Stuttgart.



*The participants enjoying the view from the top of Økern senter.*

## The city

At the beginning of 2024, Oslo has about 720 000 inhabitants. The population density counting the whole municipality is around 1 700 inhabitants per square kilometre. However, two thirds of the area of the municipality consists of forests protected against development through what's called Markaloven. Looking at the density excluding the forests, the density is a bit less than 4 000 people per square kilometre. The city is located in between the mentioned forest areas to the north and east and the Oslo fjord in the south, limiting the available space available for development. The city has been growing consistently for years, and is expected to grow to almost 800 000 in 2040, indicating a need to develop and establish more housing, and all other services needed in a city.

The geography and Markaloven mean that the only way to grow is by densification and a better use of areas already built. In recent years, this has affected Oslo drastically. There has been a lot of development along the harbor, an area which before consisted of mainly roads and harbour infrastructure. The harbour area now has become the forefront of urban development in Oslo with housing, restaurants, shops, museums and recreational areas. The next big thing in Oslo is Hovinbyen, a large area formerly consisting of big roads, industry and logistics facilities. The Hovinbyen area is located in the northeast of Oslo, with a relatively short distance and decent public transit connections to the city centre. The area will in the future have room for 50-60 000 new inhabitants and 50-100 000 new jobs.



Map over Oslo with Hovinbyen in orange and the inner city in hatching.

## The case area – Økern

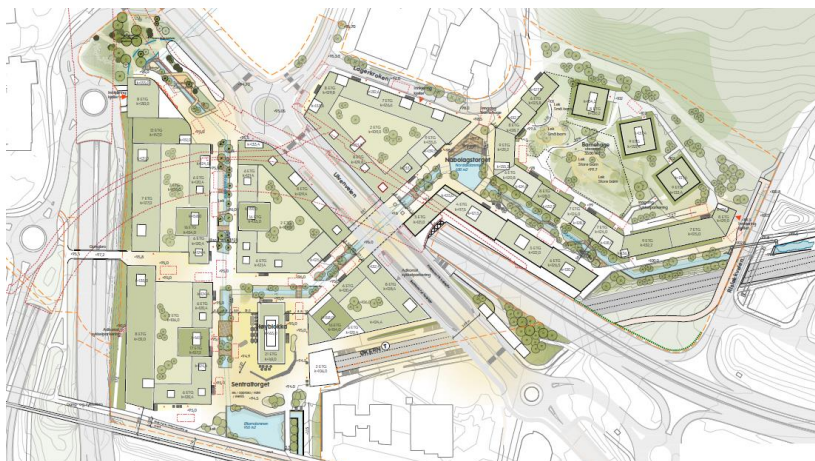
In the heart of Hovinbyen lies Økern. Three major highways meet in and around Økern, the rv 163 Østre Aker vei, the rv 150 Ring 3, and a bit south of Økern the E6. Currently, some might call it Oslo's biggest junction.



Map of Oslo, Økern marked with a red pin (source: [kart.finn.no](http://kart.finn.no))

Historically, the area consisted of farmland and recreational areas until the 1900s, while industry began to emerge at the end of the 1800s and further in to the 1900s. Today, the area is home to a lot of storage facilities and other functions for logistics. In the strategic plan for Hovinbyen, Økern is pointed out to become an urban centre for shopping, culture and work. One of the main principles in the strategic plan is to downsize the Østre Aker vei from a highway to an urban boulevard. This has proved to be difficult as the Norwegian public roads administration (NPRA) who owns the road, want to maintain the roads existing function.

There are more than 10 ongoing planning initiatives happening in the area, some of which have come quite far. One of them is the planning initiative of Økern sentrum, the most central part of Økern, a plan that includes the opening of the Hovinbekken stream and a car free central area. The plan is not yet approved.



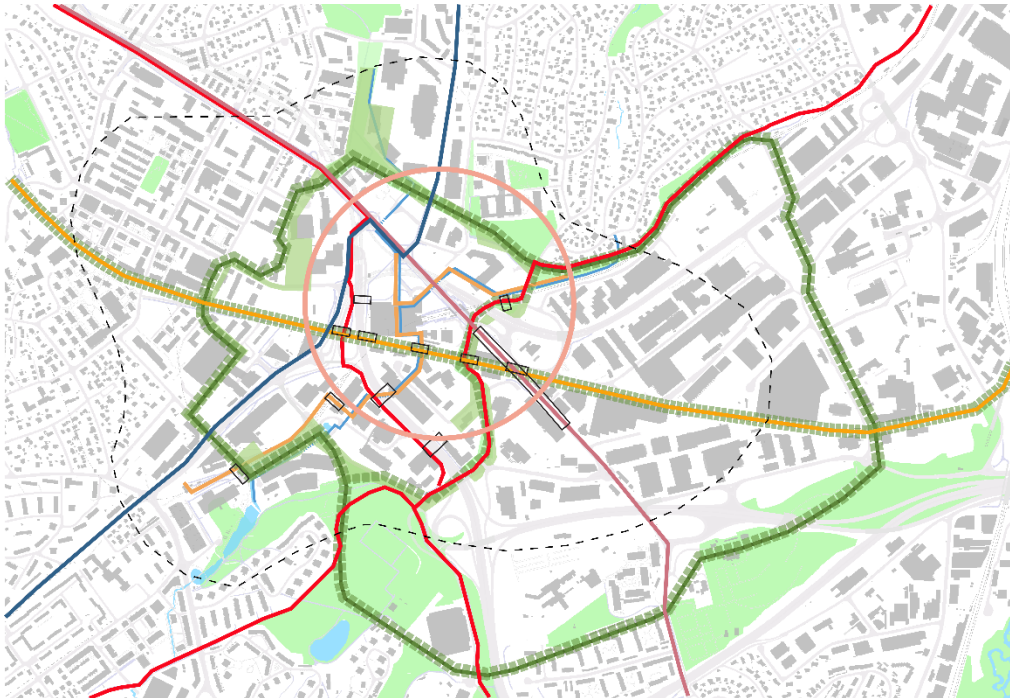
Proposed plan for Økern sentrum (source: Økern sentrum ANS)



## The workshop

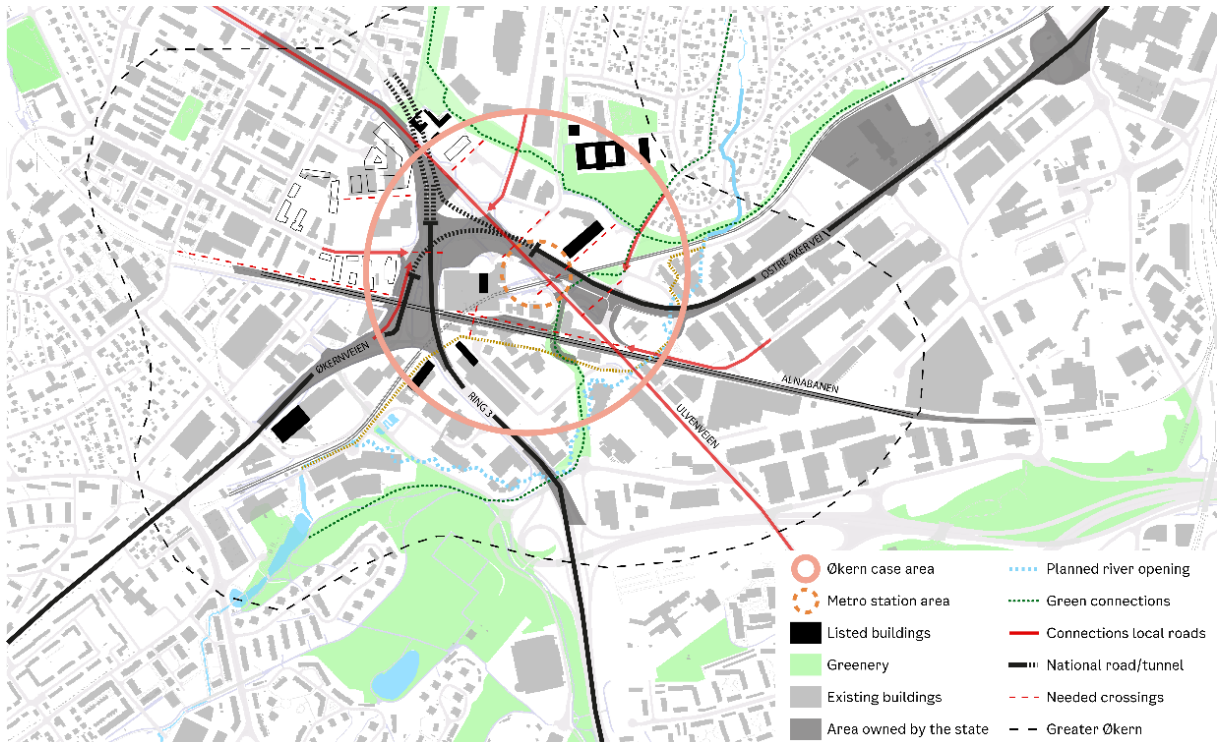
Four topics were identified for the workshop part.

The first topic was about the local street network in the future car free part of central Økern. Both the NPRA and the municipal agency for urban environment has planned cycle routes going through Økern. Exactly how these routes should go through Økern, and the design of public space have yet to be concluded. The planning and building agency want pedestrians to be the main focus in the car free area, highlighting the need for a system that's readable for pedestrians and cyclists and keeping the cyclists speeds low.



*Orange, red and blue lines indicate planned cycle routes. How should these meet Økern?*

The second topic was about the local street network for cars around central Økern. The major Østre Aker vei and Ring 3 roads partly go in tunnels when entering Økern, but Ulvenveien and Økernveien goes above ground and having no less than seven roundabouts on the stretch of 1 km from east in Ulvenveien to Økernveien southwest of Økern. This stretch of road should be transformed in to something more urban, enabling pedestrians to safely cross.



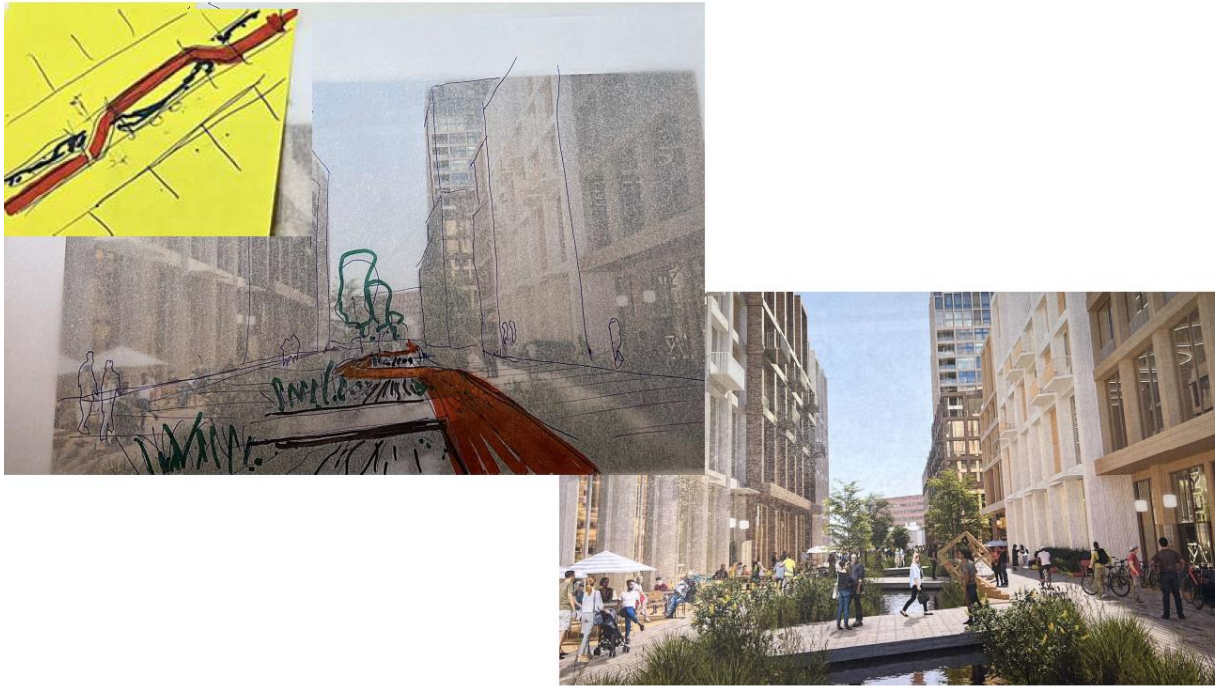
*Map of case area highlighting some of the main challenges*

The third topic was more of a utopian one, having one group to look at what happens when Østre Aker vei meets a new urban centre in Økern. Should the road be transformed step wise to maintain some of its function, should it be an urban boulevard in the entirety of its length or should it be left all alone? What type of functions should lie along the road, and how should this area be organised? These were some of the challenges in the third topic.

The fourth topic was about the process of planning and implementation in such complex areas. Many stakeholders with different priorities and goals to fulfil complicate the picture. For this topic, actors from real estate developers, municipal and state transport authorities, the city district, the public transit company and the planning and building agency in Oslo were included. A roundtable discussion was done to give the Eurocities group insights on the process of Økern and enable mutual learning.

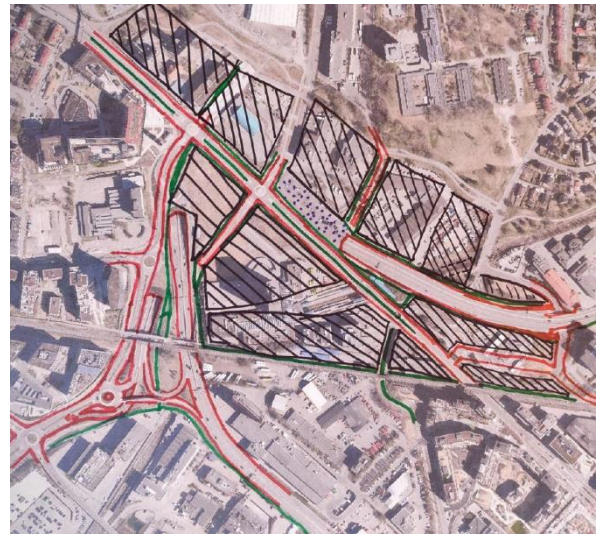
## Outcome and learning points

The group working on the local street network in the car free part of Økern came up with some design principles including the use of signage and design elements to signal prioritisation and hierarchy, legibility for all users and integration in the local context. The bike routes should go to, not through, Økern. They explored four alternatives, where one was the existing proposal with a focus on pedestrians, another one a focus on cyclists and a third exploring a fully shared space between the two. Lastly, an alternative with a reorganised public space compared to the current proposition was created.



*Snippet of design ideas prioritising cyclists but using principles from the original proposition in a way that keeps cyclists speeds low.*

Concerning the roads going around Økern with all the roundabouts, recommendations included changing many of them to regular intersections (both signalised and not), decrease the total number of intersections and transform Ulvenveien into an urban boulevard. Focusing on pedestrians and bicyclists, they will get direct access to all locations, while the cars have to take some detours through one way streets and a reduction of intersections. The measures taken would help transform the area from spaghetti to city.



*Ulvenveien and Økernveien with fewer roundabouts and fewer intersections.*

The group tackling a utopian future for Østre Aker vei and Økern focused on central Økern and redesigning the area between Ulvenveien and Østre Aker vei. Their ideas revolved around celebrating the metro station, creating a large green area around it, connected to the green ring and the opening of the Hovinbekken stream. Some pointed out that a road of 25 000 vehicles per day as Østre Aker vei can have an urban design without reducing the number of vehicles drastically. There were also questions raised on why actually wanting to transform the areas around Østre Aker vei, given its function and design today.

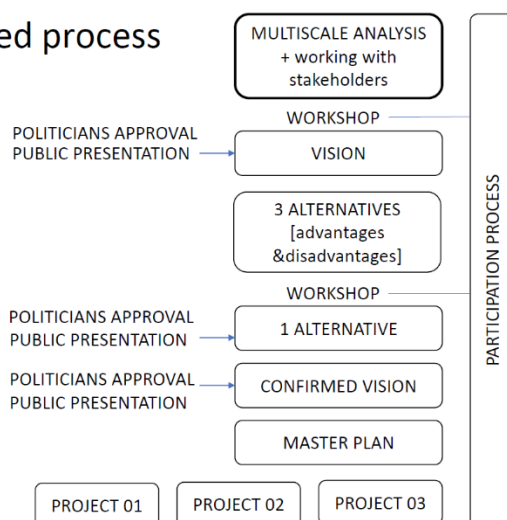




*A possible utopian future for Økern.*

Regarding the process and implementation of plans in such complex areas, a few problems were identified in the case of Økern. One clear vision for the area as well as someone having a coordinative function lacked. There were insufficient public participation and possibilities for stakeholders to give formal feedback, and a lack of commitment and stability from the stakeholders. A typical issue in such cases is disagreement between public actors, and Økern I no exception. The municipal agencies for planning and for urban environment want different things, and the Norwegian road authorities want another thing. Another problem seemed to be too high level of detail in the early stages of the process. The economy and financial responsibilities in such development was also ignored by many stakeholders.

## Suggested process



*Suggested process for creating a vision, further leading to a master plan and individual projects.*

An alternative process was created, starting with a multiscale analysis including stakeholders, resulting in a workshop, and creating a vision for the area. Eventually this could lead to the creation of three alternative visions for the area, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. A new workshop could help chose one, leading to a master plan and the planning of actual projects. The process includes both public and political participation in different steps and is very focused on creating a proposal rooted among all stakeholders.