

Reimagining community prospects

A research plan on how flow and permeability of the public design intervention can act as a catalyst for invigoration of the urban fabric of underprivileged neighbourhoods and promote community engagement.

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01_introduction

A public condenser contributes to the creation of a healthy and inviting, for the local community, environment. As well as being an economic addition to the area by providing new job opportunities, the project should contribute environmentally by creating a climate positive and a nature inclusive space, linking the human and non-human actors together. However, the main project's aim is to enhance the social sustainability of the area by triggering interaction and integration between groups from different economic backgrounds.

Omnipresent urban renewal projects should provide underdeveloped neighbourhoods with the potential to gradually improve the quality of experiences available, ultimately enhancing overall quality of life. Public architecture, as a tool that directly shapes its surrounding context, can either passively blend into its environment or actively create a distinctive identity. Therefore, such design should possess a strong presence, serve as an orientation point, and invigorate the neighbourhood.

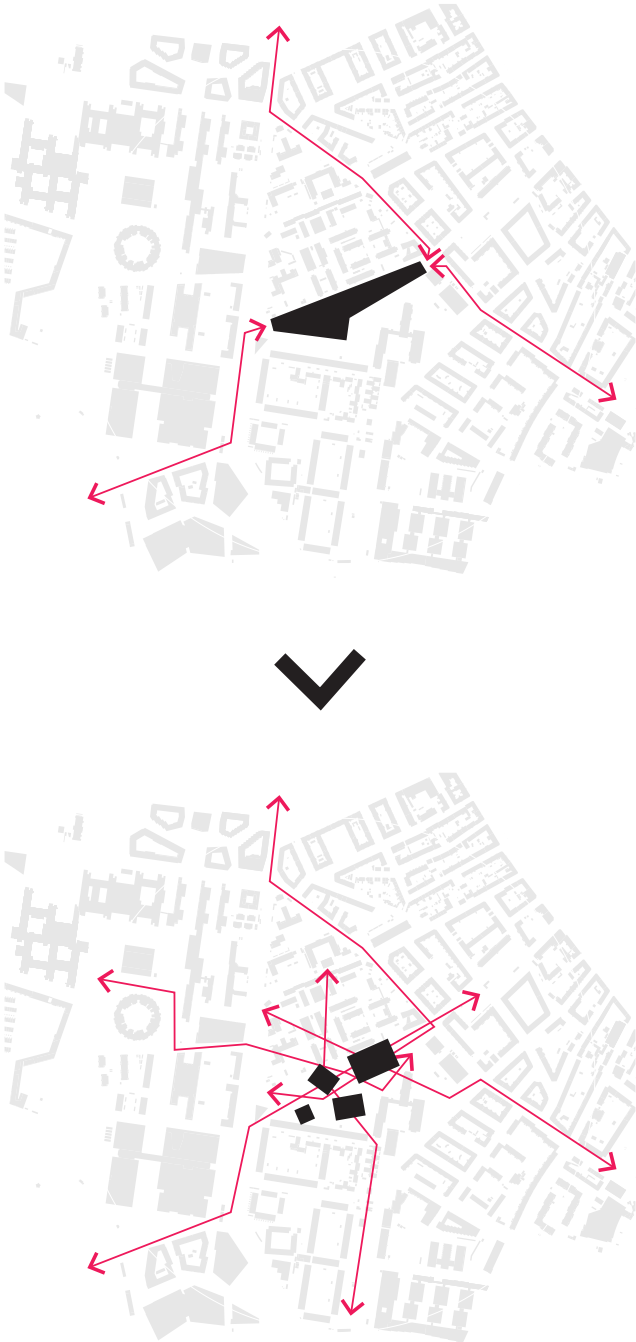
01_problem statement

Amagerbro, located to the south of the centre has historically been a run-down working-class neighbourhood that is now slowly undergoing urban renewal processes enhancing safety and living standards. Sundholm, a deprived quarter within Amager, struggles with bad reputation related to issues such as substance abuse, homelessness, lower average income and societal exclusion contributing to a reputation as a 'dangerous ghetto' (Andersen, 2024). This perception often results in outsiders avoiding the neighbourhood, while locals develop an inward-oriented community mindset.

Historically, Sundholm was an isolated social welfare institutions district, which current stagnation underscores the area's needs and complexities in achieving social integration. Physically, it's urban positioning between two major roads, isolates it from surrounding neighbourhoods and limits accessible east-west connections that could foster a greater pedestrian traffic and encourage social integration (Rasmussen, 2024: interview).

Designing with porosity can facilitate movement between public and private areas and can play a key role in improving the social integration of various economic groups – "building and action interpenetrate (...) to become a theatre of new unforeseen constellations" (Holl, 2009: 22) . Effective pathways and clear, interconnected spaces are essential in encouraging

interactions across different socioeconomic backgrounds. Such design could enhance the social sustainability by providing smooth flow between public, semi-public, and private areas which encourages natural interactions among the local residents, artists and external students, ultimately revitalizing the area as a dynamic and safe urban environment putting the needed eyes on the street.



03_theoretical framework

The nature of the public condenser implies the multiplicity of different uses and therefore a variety of design solutions. In relation to this, a hybrid approach highlights the importance of the interconnectedness of the abovementioned functions and their shared intensities, as well as their connection to the wider urban tissue. (Per, Mozas, Arpa, 2011: 13)

Individual and programmed spaces could be looked at from the perspective of Proxemics – the sociological study of the researcher Edward Hall on how people use space in their interactions with others and how spatial arrangements can affect social behaviour (Hall, 1969). Usually this depends on the distances and orientation within a space and four main types can be highlighted: public, social, private & intimate.

The hybridity of the design, therefore the connections between different uses, embraces the potential of the flow of in-between spaces. Expanding on the phenomenology aspect of architecture and the spatial experience of the space, Steven Holl advocates that architecture should be experienced in movement and time, with a building as a narrative that reveals itself as one wanders around. This suggests the importance of the flow throughout the spatial sequence, connecting indoor and outdoor environments - porosity. "The main horizontal passages {...} are meeting places whose interior glass walls expose ongoing work in progress. {...} (as) Space is envisioned as a social condenser {...}" (Holl, 2001: 323). A research into the relationships between the open, semi-open and closed spaces of the public realm, as well as the physical connection to the wider neighbourhood will be carried out to assess how this can affect the inclusivity of the surrounding community.

Holl also promotes the use of light and shadow as tools to create the multifaceted spatial experience within the building, which could be replenished by Pallasmaa's endorsement of the multi sensorial experience, not only focusing on the visual aspects but also the tactile and olfactory. (Pallasmaa, 2012) Both theories revolve around the importance of the play of light and material and can be the active tools of shaping the flow, and therefore creating the desired inclusive, in-between spaces.

04_research question

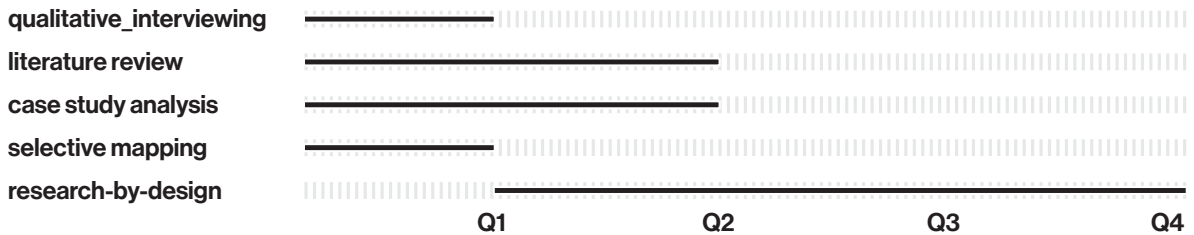
This master thesis aims to look into how the flow and porosity of public design can act as a catalyst for invigoration of the urban fabric and promote community engagement.

Secondly, I will look at how movement influences interaction and inclusivity in and around the building between different social groups. I will additionally analyse which practices of incorporating light and materiality can become a tool to shaping the movement paths.

For individual spaces I will investigate how dimensioning influences the perception of a space – I plan on looking at what proportions work best in order to create the sense of trust & well-being within a space. Lastly, I will study materiality and how it enhances spatial and social perception.

05_methodology

In order to holistically understand the needs, challenges and opportunities for the research project, an array of research methods will be implemented. Initially, a qualitative method of interviewing people from and around the site, to understand their subjective perception, needs and challenges will be conducted (*note: this has already been done during the September excursion to Copenhagen*). Subsequently, a thorough literature research will be carried out to identify and explore existing frameworks on research subjects: movement, porosity, play of light and shadow and materiality as guiding tools for designing flow. The latter method will be supplemented by an array of case-study analyses of already existing projects to understand which design choices have the positive (or negative) impact on the space, flow and interaction. **Superkilen Park** by a collaboration of Topotek 1 + BIG Architects + Superflex, **Sesc 24 de Maio** by MMBB Arquitectos & Paulu Mendes da Rocha, **Estación San José** by FRPO Rodriguez & Oriol, **Campus Hub in Paris-Saclay** by Studio Muoto or the **Paris Community Centre** by Bruther are only a few examples that will be studied. Lastly, throughout the process, topics of movement and phenomenology of spatial experience will be tested in research-by-design with speculative diagramming, selective mapping, physical & digital modelmaking and visualising.



06_significance & contribution

This study contributes directly to strategies for creating environments where diverse social groups feel welcome and engaged. It is especially valuable as cities worldwide undergo rapid urban renewal and seek methods for enhancing community cohesion in areas impacted by socioeconomic disparities. Furthermore, it examines the ways in which spatial sequencing and materiality choices impact social behaviour and experience, informing design approaches that contribute to the resilience and urban health. It addresses not only the physical layout and aesthetics but also the experiential quality of spaces, helping to inform a future of public architecture that prioritizes inclusivity, well-being, and connectivity across urban landscapes.

07_bibliography

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appendix_01_interview with T. Rasmussen

This transcript captures a conversation between Bas Jonker, Miguel Borst and Teddy Rasmussen, discussing the volunteer center in Sonderbro, Copenhagen. Bas and his team are Master's students working on a project related to community architecture in Copenhagen, focusing on understanding the local community and institutions before designing a public building. They are interested in Teddy's experiences running a volunteer center and how it connects with the community.

Teddy, the manager of the Volunteer Center, explains that the center supports local NGOs and citizens, focusing on social issues such as loneliness, homelessness, and youth disengagement. The center has been operational for 10 years, hosting numerous activities and collaborations with local NGOs, including projects aimed at food waste prevention, digital literacy, and support for vulnerable groups.

They also discuss specific challenges in the area, such as increasing youth unemployment, lack of education, homelessness, and feelings of isolation within the community, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The conversation touches on the center's focus on fostering participation in community life and addressing social inequalities.

Teddy discusses his work managing a volunteer center located in a community area (presumably in Copenhagen). The center operates in a space previously used for various social initiatives, now repurposed for activities aimed at fostering citizen engagement and collaboration between local NGOs, institutions, and citizens. The center's focus is on tackling social issues, such as homelessness, loneliness, and youth disengagement.

He explains that while the center organizes numerous activities, it's not tied to one specific group but serves various causes, including aiding marginalized groups like the homeless and unemployed youth. These groups often face isolation, mental health issues, and sometimes criminal activity, making social inclusion a core objective of the center.

A particular challenge highlighted is the lack of a cohesive community spirit in the area, partly due to its history of being used for social housing and various institutions for vulnerable groups. This has led to tensions and social fragmentation. Teddy points out that there's no comprehensive urban planning for integrating these populations, which has caused some friction between different groups.

The conversation also delves into how Teddy's organization collaborates with other agencies to support homeless people, acknowledging the limitations and difficulties in addressing these complex issues. Despite these challenges, they are working step by step to foster a more inclusive community by facilitating spaces and activities where different groups can meet and interact. However, resource constraints, such as funding, limit their capacity to expand these initiatives.

The conversation between Bas Jonker and Teddy Rasmussen explores urban development and community dynamics, particularly focusing on projects related to schools, buildings, and community spaces. Key points include:

Community and Building Integration: Rasmussen highlights a project where housing is integrated with a local community activity center. The goal is to create a space where people can connect, and foster social engagement in an area lacking such spaces.

Geography and Connectivity: There's a discussion on the physical layout of neighborhoods like Amager, where streets primarily connect north-south rather than east-west. This lack of connectivity hinders community interaction

Public Spaces: They reflect on limited public spaces, such as small parks and playgrounds, and how these are insufficient for fostering a sense of community.

Loneliness and Isolation: Amager has a higher rate of loneliness compared to the rest of Copenhagen, which could be due to limited public areas where people can meet and engage.

Historical and Social Fragmentation: The conversation touches on the historical fragmentation of Amager into isolated "villages" or zones, leading to disconnected communities. Some parts function as distinct neighborhoods with a village mentality, while other areas are more transient and less rooted in local culture.

Demographic Changes: There's ongoing urban development and an influx of new residents in Amager, further changing its community dynamics. However, the challenge remains in integrating these new developments with existing communities.

The conversation delves into the challenges faced by NGOs, especially in combating loneliness and creating spaces for community engagement in Copenhagen.

Key points include:

- 1. Challenges in Creating Community Spaces:** Teddy Rasmussen discusses the ongoing struggle to create spaces where local residents can engage in activities. These are usually small groups, and there's a broader issue of limited political and financial support for such initiatives. Despite efforts, it's difficult for smaller NGOs to secure resources for meaningful community work.
- 2. Loneliness and Social Issues:** A central concern is addressing loneliness, which is a significant problem. Rasmussen mentions that many programs target this issue, but there's a lack of sufficient political backing. He emphasizes how essential small, local organizations are in providing support for individuals who would otherwise become a larger burden on society.
- 3. Lack of Political Support:** Rasmussen critiques the lack of long-term political and financial support for smaller NGOs, noting that while politicians acknowledge the importance of these organizations, they don't provide sustainable funding. He warns that the collapse of such NGOs would lead to increased social problems.
- 4. Personal Motivation for Volunteering:** Rasmussen reflects on his personal motivation to work in this field, emphasizing the importance of creating opportunities for people to reach their potential and contribute to society. He sees working with volunteer organizations as a fulfilling way to blend professional and personal lives.
- 5. Volunteer Work as a Broader Social Impact:** Rasmussen believes volunteerism can bridge

personal fulfillment with social impact, and expresses frustration that politicians don't recognize the broader significance of volunteer work. He sees volunteers as a critical yet undervalued part of society.

In summary, the conversation highlights the difficulties NGOs face in sustaining their work to combat social isolation, the personal motivations of those involved, and the crucial yet underappreciated role these organizations play in strengthening community ties.

In this final part of the conversation, Teddy Rasmussen discusses several key points related to democratic engagement and the role of community organizations:

- 1. Democratic Participation:** Rasmussen emphasizes that small, local organizations, like the ones in Copenhagen, play a vital role in teaching people, especially immigrants, how to participate in democratic society. These organizations offer a platform for individuals to learn about dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration, which are fundamental aspects of democratic life. This process helps build democratic skills and allows people to have a say in shaping their local environment.
- 2. Challenges with Political Influence:** There is a disconnect between these grassroots efforts and national politics. Rasmussen expresses a sense of frustration, stating that local organizations often feel powerless to influence broader political agendas. He notes that while local efforts are significant, they often lack the recognition and support needed to thrive.
- 3. Role of Volunteering:** Volunteering is seen as an essential tool for fostering civic responsibility. By involving people in local organizations, especially those from different cultural backgrounds, it helps them integrate and become active citizens.
- 4. Collaborative Networks:** Rasmussen shares the importance of creating networks between various community spaces, such as cafés and libraries, to provide a comprehensive support system for citizens. This interconnectedness enables people to access different resources, making it easier to engage with the community and access services.
- 5. Inclusivity and Empowerment:** By fostering participation in these local spaces, people not only engage with their communities but also feel empowered. Rasmussen stresses the importance of having flexible spaces where individuals can develop ideas and projects that benefit the community.

In conclusion, Rasmussen highlights the importance of local organizations in teaching democratic participation, fostering community connections, and the need for better political support to sustain these efforts.