

Research Plan

Urban Joinery

Architecture as a Catalyst for Youth and Community Engagement in Bispebjerg



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Youth Vulnerability in Bispebjerg

The Bispebjerg district in Copenhagen, particularly the Nordvest neighbourhood, is facing socio-economic challenges that impact its youth. Education and income levels are below the municipal average, while the population of the neighbourhood is relatively young. As described by sociologist Aydin Soei in the Nordvest Study of 2021, these factors “create conditions for increased youth crime and insecurity compared to an average residential area” (Soei, 2021, p. 13).

A major concern in Bispebjerg, as highlighted in the aforementioned study, is the lack of engagement among young people. Many youth spend a significant amount of their free time at home in front of the TV, computer, or phone, rather than spending time with peers outside the home. While surveys indicate that just over half of the youth in Bispebjerg spend most of their time at home, twenty percent report that they would rather spend their time with peers, but still find themselves alone (Soei, 2021, p. 30). Furthermore, roughly ten percent of the youth in the area have a so-called ‘street-oriented’ lifestyle, spending the majority of their free time on the streets, in parks, or basements, which can expose them to higher risk (Soei, 2021, p. 21). Among fifteen to eighteen year olds, roughly 15 percent indicated that they carried a knife, twenty percent have physically assaulted someone, and twenty-five percent have committed acts of vandalism (Soei, 2021, p. 35).

This absence of structured engagement, whether through education, employment, or leisure activities, has been shown to correlate with increased crime rates among young people in Bispebjerg. Twenty-five percent of non-engaged youth committed shoplifting in the space of a year, compared to just twelve percent of those participating in structured activities. When it comes to acts of violence, the correlation is even more significant. Youth who are not actively engaged are four times more likely to engage in repeated acts of violence compared to those who are involved education, work, or extracurricular activities (Soei, 2021, p. 40). In short, the risk of adopting a dangerous, street-oriented lifestyle appears to increase significantly for young people in Bispebjerg that lack meaningful pursuits. The data suggests that increasing access to structured educational or vocational opportunities could play a key role in improving safety and well-being among Bispebjerg’s youth.

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The risk of a street-oriented and high-risk lifestyle, in which one is repeatedly involved in violent incidents, appears to increase significantly if one is not involved in any structured activities or communities at educational institutions or workplaces.

Sociologist Aydin Soei, Nordvest Survey 2021

Youth Opportunities in Bispebjerg

The challenges facing the youth in Bispebjerg play a central role in the ongoing development plans for the area. The vision statement of the Urban Renewal Plan emphasises the aim to transform Bispebjerg into a neighbourhood that provides “good growing conditions for children and young people”, while Mayor of Technical and Environmental Affairs, Ninna Hedeager Olsen, similarly underscores the importance of cultivating an urban area “where children and young people’s well-being and experience of their own opportunities are not limited by their upbringing” (Kvarterplan, 2022, pp. 5, 9).

Accordingly, one of the four guiding principles put forth in the Urban Renewal Plan is ‘Better Life Chances for Children and Young People’. This guiding principle focuses on improving the experience of growing up in Bispebjerg, highlighting the need for “easier access to positive local communities, education, and leisure activities [which will] strengthen the sense of belonging to the area as a positive and safe place with opportunities and well-being” (Kvarterplan, 2022, p. 10). As stated in the plan, this key focus area aligns with the City of Copenhagen’s ‘Policy for Vulnerable Urban Areas’, specifically goal nine, which aims to ensure that more young people in vulnerable areas receive an education (Kvarterplan, 2022, p. 10).

This guiding principle is operationalised into a specific neighbourhood plan called ‘Craftmanship and Urban Life’, centred around the existing NEXT school, a vocational educational institution that reflects the neighbourhood’s craftmanship and offers a diverse range of programs (Kvarterplan, 2022, p. 41). The main goal of this program will be to “highlight local educational opportunities [and] make NEXT visible as a local vocational educational institution that is relevant for the neighbourhood’s youth,” thereby serving as a reference for how educational institutions can be integrated into the local community (Kvarterplan, 2022, p. 43). Discussed strategies include opening the premises of the campus to the community, increasing the visibility of the workshops and educational environment, as well as exploring the development of new buildings and outdoor areas.

The challenges and discussions surrounding the youth in Bispebjerg as described above reveal an opportunity to design a public building that acts a bridge between the educational environment of NEXT and the local community, particularly its young residents. This building could foster interaction and exchange, facilitating the integration of NEXT students into the community while simultaneously bringing the local youth into contact with the educational environment of the school. By offering opportunities for meaningful engagement in educational, vocational, or avocational activities, the building would support the well-being and development of the youth in the area, while also aligning with the overall vision for Bispebjerg as outlined by the municipality.

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The project should serve as a reference for how educational institutions can be integrated into and become an active part of their neighbourhoods.

Urban Renewal Plan Bispebjerg, 2023

Research Questions

To further explore this topic, the main research question has been formulated as follows:

"In what ways can a public condenser bridge the gap between educational institutions and local communities to enhance youth engagement in Bispebjerg?"

To structure and guide the research process, several sub-questions have been developed:

1 What are the specific needs and preferences of the youth in Bispebjerg regarding educational and community engagement?

Gather insights from local youth to understand their perspectives on what they want and need from a public space, and how they are interacting with existing youth programs and facilities. Look at the Youth Council report on youth engagement in Bispebjerg.

2 What types of programs and activities could be hosted in a public condenser to promote educational opportunities and community involvement?

Identify potential events, workshops, and programs that could attract youth and foster a sense of community. Look at existing activities in the area, the Youth Council report, and explore what educational programs at NEXT could be translated into student-run community functions in a public condenser.

3 How can the location and accessibility of the public condenser influence youth engagement in Bispebjerg?

Examine how the strategic placement and ease of access to the public condenser can impact its effectiveness in attracting local youth and encouraging regular use. Analyze factors such as proximity to major transit routes, walkability, and connections to other community hubs or popular youth gathering spots.

4 What spatial design strategies and tools can be employed to facilitate meaningful interactions between NEXT students and the local community within the public condenser?

Investigate programmatic layouts and spatial strategies to facilitate interaction between NEXT students and the local community. Identify specific design approaches that can encourage interaction and collaboration, such as creating flexible spaces, optimizing sightlines, and integrating social zones or adaptable layouts. Look at case studies of successful community spaces and architectural theory to understand how physical design can actively foster connection and engagement across different user groups.

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In what ways can a public condenser bridge the gap between educational institutions and the local community to enhance youth engagement in Bispebjerg?

Research Question

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore how local communities, particularly the youth, and educational institutions can be more closely connected using a public condenser as a unifying element to facilitate mutually beneficial interaction and exchange. Specifically, the research is focused on the community of Bispebjerg and the NEXT vocational educational institution, and creating a space for people to engage in vocational and avocational activities. The research will investigate the specific needs and preferences of the youth in Bispebjerg regarding educational and community engagement, the types of programs and functions that help promote the stated aims, how the location and accessibility may influence participation, and successful case studies of projects that engage the youth in an educational setting. The research will therefore assess the current context of youth engagement in Bispebjerg, as well as propose potential strategies to inform the design of a public building that addresses youth vulnerability and supports community integration.

Research Methodology

The methodology for this research proposal integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches. First, a further analysis of reports, studies, and statistics, such as the Nordvest Study or the Urban Renewal Plan for Bispebjerg will provide deeper insight into the current context and local needs within Bispebjerg, as well as further development plans to align the project with broader objectives. Next, a literature review will be conducted to provide the theoretical foundation of relevant topics, such as youth-focused community development and structured engagement, as well as integrating educational institutions into their local surroundings. Complimenting this, a quantitative case study analysis will identify successful projects of public buildings that effectively bridge educational institutions and local communities, with a focus on youth engagement and educational buildings. With the local context and relevant examples in mind, a site analysis will examine local challenges and opportunities for the implementation of a public condenser in the allocated site area, looking specifically at existing public spaces and buildings for young residents of Bispebjerg, as well as the relationship between NEXT and its immediate surroundings. Further research-by-design methods will be implemented in the following phase, where various spatial and programmatic strategies will be explored through conceptual models, aiming to show how the public condenser can facilitate interaction between NEXT and the local community. Finally, a theoretical design framework will be developed, synthesizing the insights from the data analysis, literature review, case studies, site conditions, and conceptual design explorations to establish the overarching design principles and strategies that will inform the design process.

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To explore how local communities, particularly the youth, and educational institutions can be more closely connected using a public condenser as a unifying element to facilitate mutually beneficial interaction and exchange.

Research Aim

Preliminary Proposal

The initial concept for the public condenser proposes positioning it strategically between NEXT's campus and the neighbouring Emaljehaven park, creating a physical and social bridge between the school and the local community. This proposal envisions translating the diverse study programs at NEXT into community-facing, student-led functions within the building, facilitating exchange and inviting active participation from both students and residents. This allows students from the campus to be integrated into community life in a productive manner, whilst also allowing the local community a closer connection to the educational environment of NEXT, enhancing the sense of belonging of both groups. Flexibility will be a core feature of the building, allowing spaces to adapt throughout the day for various uses—supporting educational activities during school hours and transforming for broader community engagement afterward. Furthermore, as the building aims to be a complement rather than an extension of the formal learning environment of the school, qualities such as informality and accessibility will be emphasized. The overarching theme of craftsmanship will also be woven into both the programming as well as the design of the building itself, with elements like material choice and construction methods reflecting the school's vocational programs and the neighbourhood's cultural heritage. This preliminary proposal lays the groundwork for enhancing youth engagement opportunities in Bispebjerg, with each design decision subject to further research and refinement in the following phases of the project.

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