

R E F L E C T I O N

‘Design of the Urban Fabric’

This project has above all been an exploration of the phenomenon of Christiania. An exploration in search of the best future scenario for Christiania inside the surrounding city of Copenhagen.

This chosen subject pointed my path towards the Design of the Urban Fabric since this group is concerned about urban composition, spatial design intervention and public realm, all topics which I had a personal interest in exploring. The programmatic design interventions which aim at stimulating the cultural production in Christiania and its surroundings became the guiding concept of this project. Most importantly, this urban regeneration vision put emphasis on what Christiania proudly maintains: Its cultural background. Therefore, this project objective gave priority to Christianias cultural creativity which can easily ensure and maintain its existence without fighting for it. The design intervention carried out in this project follows an objective of repositioning the city centre of Copenhagen, reinforcing the identity of Christianshavn and regenerating Christiania as an alternative neighbourhood. Therefore the project is developed through inter-scalarity with coexisting aims and all with an emphasis on culture. The project is regarded as a story tool for the Christianites to overcome struggles and step into the future with advantages coming from a professional field, but giving all decision makings to the community for a full bottom up approach in their tradition.

Moreover, analysing Christiania’s urban fabric through an inter-scalar approach helped on a better understanding of its complex problematic. The choice of my primary mentor enhanced the encouragement of experimenting and scenario-base my research while sparking the intention of drawing and creating with a tireless belief in my project. The usage of experimentation as an academic design method was expected to highlight the importance to broaden the outlook and not reinforce it. The consultancy of my second mentor shaped my way through methodical thinking and academic framework while regarding culture as a different approach of urban regeneration.

Research and design

Rather than arising from nowadays hot topics in the field of urbanism, this project arose from a current social issue within the site-specific case of the freetown Christiania. The project is therefore an exploration of the current socio-economic state and its spatial relation with the urban fabric of Copenhagen and has been treated with regard to its current development trends. By choosing culture as the leading theme, Christiania is expected to approach the city through a more cooperative attitude. By reinforcing the cultural scene of Copenhagen with what Christiania has to offer, a mutual interest and resilient partnership occurs and improves.

The research part of this project proved to be difficult since the case of Christiania could not entirely be investigated through

general terms and urban theory as well as drawing upon references. Instead, it was a prime example of a neighbourhood in complete self-obtained control, self-management, cultural creation, collective action and right to the city. These urban phenomena were later explored through available literature accompanied by journalistic reports of the fast changing social state of Christiania. This occurred parallel to understanding Christiania in its spatial condition and exploring its role towards Copenhagen through drawing and sketching.

Hence, the urban challenges were tackled both by research and explorational studies but while designing simultaneously on ideas and thoughts deriving from the case-specific research. In this line, highlighting that the project is developed through research by design making an effort in avoiding a break between the two distinctive processes. Instead, it follows an iterative process, where the theoretical framework gave inputs for an experimental continuation of the conceptual framework into design dimensions.

The methodical line:

An experimental design approach

Determining from the beginning that experimentation would be the methodical pillar and narrative for developing this project have given various outputs for addressing the challenges related to Christiania and Copenhagen. Experimentation is a method for opening up possibilities, seeing new ways and

discovering alternatives, which in the case of Christiania would be a positive approach just like it is already represented through its culture and DNA.

Moreover, experimentation is about abstracting elements while testing a hypothesis, evaluating and making design decisions simultaneously. In this thesis, the experimentation was a constant search through a reflective dialogue and asking relevant questions; what if this scenario was the actual condition? Which impacts would this cause? And what should be done to achieve this? The importance was always to evaluate the impacts of the design proposal and look at it as a process rather than an analysis leading to a spatial design result. Something which developed step-by-step and through learning-by-doing while making considerable amount of mistakes but attempting always to reflect and redo.

As an urban designer, you always aim for understanding the context of the site. In Christiania, the self-organised environment has many qualities like for instance its cultural significance and creative cultivation, and the “what if scenarios” add a new experimental layer onto these qualities. The familiarity of culture and creativity was the element making unfamiliar combinations by scenario thinking either through mapping, sketching, collages or metaphors. Attempting to experiment through scenario studies associate current conditions to the future while generating new notions and outputs, when the imagination and intuition remain

Project structure



Fig. 117: The project structure with the most important elaborated chapters

key characteristics.

The field of urbanism yields for exploration through different scales and therefore the relevance lies in researching and understanding these scales from the regional, through the city, to the neighbourhood and lastly on the human scale. On this basis, the entire thesis is built on inter-scalar investigations in the problem field, analysis and design. The impacts of these inter-scalar practices bring qualities in the field of urbanism and contribute onto the discipline as a whole, and are later measured and evaluated through the instruments provided by literature and the experimental approach.

Relying on the theoretical framework was very important in this project. A considerable attention was given to the theory regarding the right to the city and the concept of the self-organised city. Authors like Lefebvre, Harvey and Portugali helped on understanding the politics of space in Christiania and to what extent the urban regeneration solution should involve socio-economic implications. On the other side, making culture the leading theme required an elaboration on cultural creativity and cultural production and their strong connection with the environment. Authors like Hall and Bourdieu helped on understanding the importance of creative clusters for a sustainable cultural production. Their theoretical work was a supportive argumentation why Christiania should take advantage of its cultural affiliation for

maintaining a decent urban regeneration. From a methodological point of view, literature of Foucault was leading on exploring heterotopias and urban compositions.

The applied method of experimentation comes along with a supportive set of other methods to be used accordingly as instruments to further raise the awareness of the urban challenges such as design exercises and collages, but always carried out through various scales and coming together as a complete thesis. This coexisting lab was in constant search for clarifications but open to any type of stimulus.

Implications of the approach

The freedom of formulating your own problem thesis comes along with the condition to look critically at what you created.

The whole ideology behind the phenomenon of Christiania builds on a complete self-organised principle eventually pursuing complete ownership and decision-making for the urban development. The desire to develop a design-based urban regeneration plan for this place proved challenging as an urban designer to-be. When the place itself has all the rights for all sorts of decision-making, my design plan will have difficulties to find ground for respect and consideration. However, it was important to distinguish the professional from the layman, and thereby the graduation

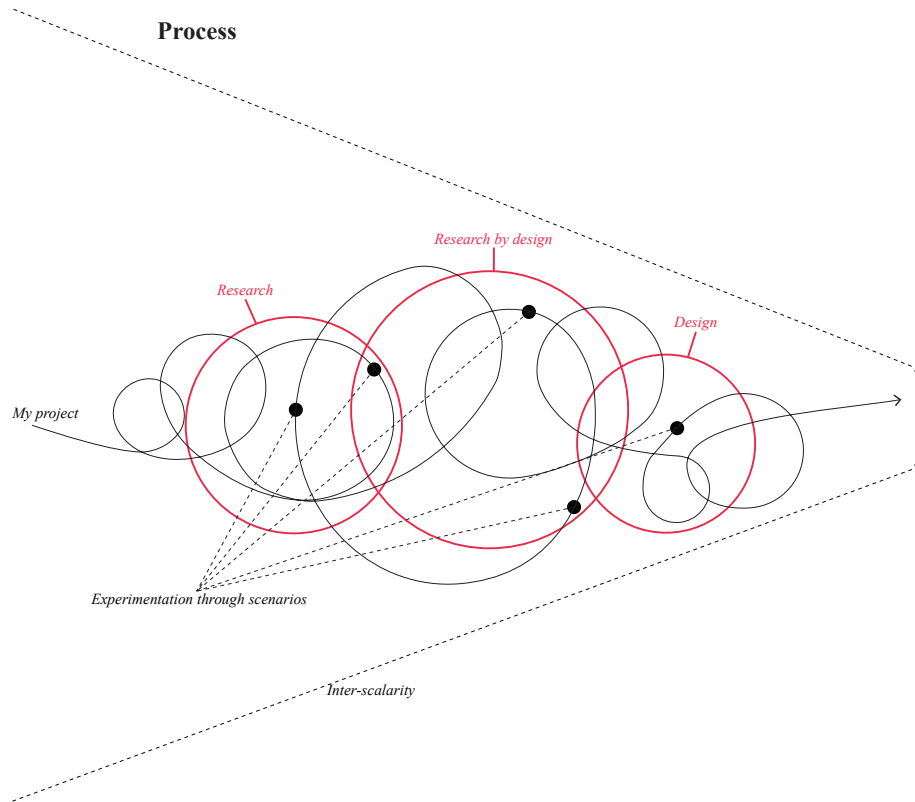


Fig. 118: The process of the graduation year was far more iterative rather than linear.

project took into consideration how the residents of Christiania see the future of the neighbourhood and what they think can be the solutions for a better one. These conversations with people and laymen surrounding this environment has helped to shape the project as an open civic involvement but leaving the actual spatial and policy choices up to the professional: the designer. In this way the people are invited through opinionated involvement and had there been more time, a more thorough participatory approach could have been followed while also having a closer geographic position to the site than what was the given situation throughout the graduation year.

Relevance and the wider social context

On a contextual note, cities today are becoming more unequal places. In this respect, in Copenhagen Christiania is the largest and most segregated neighbourhood as well as the most excluded place. Through years, to some extent Christiania has been self-isolated by the city's investments programmes, but however its current physical condition is mostly a result of ineffective decision-making and urban development policies. While the authorities have maintained a semi cooperative approach, Christiania itself has failed in showing a genuine desire in engaging with the rest of the city.

Given the societal urgency at the present moment, this graduation project thereby becomes very relevant as a spatial

improvement of Christiania. It aims at urban regeneration interventions which involve different scales within culture and socio-spatial conditions. Any transformation and improvement done to Christiania automatically would have an impact on Copenhagen and its overall urban structure.

I believe that the importance of Christiania's future lies beyond its physical borders. The proximity to the city centre makes it a neighbourhood of great development potential which has to be streamlined for a better direction. By using an urban regeneration programme focused on supporting the local entrepreneurship related to culture production, Christiania completes the puzzle of the cultural heart of Copenhagen. Remaining private for its residents but open for any kind of cultural involvement the freetown Christiania adds another crucial layer to Copenhagen's city centre. This urban regeneration vision brings a new definition of the borders of the cultural centre and makes Christiania a valuable creative partner regarding cultural production.

Furthermore, Christiania has a positive societal impact throughout the many scales, and I hope my project illustrates this clearly. Also, it is my hope that this graduation project brings new insights and knowledge to the urbanism field within the topic of self-organisation, where stimulating cultural production is an asset to regenerate a socio-spatial poor site.