Above all, this project has been an exploration to get a grip on social processes, through design. The exploration took place in the city of Malmö, which was mainly due to personal interest. This interest started from being impressed about their environmental approach to urban development, to a more and more critical look towards this, in relation to the social challenges the city has to deal with. It touched me in the way that urban development can be really unfair. It is well known that there is a widening gap all over the world, between the rich and the poor, but I did not expect it to happen that much in Sweden. Sweden was to me a country of the social right movements and equality for all. These times are apparently over, however, I have the feeling that a new movement is on its way. This became clear when I went on a site visit during the summer of 2017. The Van Alen institute from New York, in collaboration with the municipality and more than 30 NGO’s, organised a festival in the city, the Opportunity Space Festival. Main topics were inclusion and inclusive spaces. It all fell in place, especially since the wider context became clear to me; the restructuring of the welfare state and perhaps the transition towards a participation society like elsewhere. Everyone’s role is changing and need to take their responsibility. Inclusion cannot be created without a shift from the government, stakeholders and the people themselves. Of course it takes much more time for this awareness to come. Therefore, this research and design project contributes to this, with emphasis on the connection between social and spatial processes.

Research and design

In the project, research and design are related to each other with mutual effect. An iterative process going back and forth from research to design resulted in a ‘development model’ which links the social and spatial perspective of urban development. The development model explains how spatial design can improve social processes. The link between social and spatial processes works throughout the whole project. First, as a way to explain how social processes as globalisation, migration and urbanisation have certain consequences for the society, which are experienced in the public spaces. Thereafter, the link the other way around is explored to see what design is able to solve for the social issues in the society of today.

During the first part of the project there has been a focus on research and analysis, to clearly define the situation of today’s society. A historical analysis and an analysis of national and urban policies, as well as urban theories guided me to the understanding of the context. An in-depth analysis of the specific neighbourhoods contained demographic data, and many plans and reports from the municipality. The municipality is well organised and many plans, documents and statistical data are published online, although often in Swedish. Major help was the report from the Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö, which gave insight into the (recognition of) social inequalities within Malmö. A spatial analysis focussed on the public spaces (indoors and outdoors) around the location, as well as future plans. The exploration phase was a search to material and visual aspects in the public space which may turn a public space into an inclusive public space or public domain. Combining different theories as well as own interpretations resulted in the development model. This model explains the requirements that a place has to meet, in order to contribute to social inclusion. This method has been revised over and over again, until I found it the optimal version. It started with eight general concepts influencing collective urban life, ended with six spatial design concepts influencing the social processes. The final design draws back on the historical research with a concept taken from the 1930s welfare state; People’s Home (Folkhemmet). It shows which values we have to take with us from the former welfare state to achieve a socially just city. The design expresses publicness, variety and includes all people in the urban space.
Project approach

The structural line followed during the project is related to time and scale, see the figure 154 above. This started with the causes of the past on the city scale, towards the contemporary result on the district scale. Thereafter the exploration of the future started, on the scale of the public space.

The first two phases contributed to a clear social and spatial context, which is in my eyes essential for developing new places. The role of the urban planner and designer is to deeply understand the conditions and structures that are there, and combine the different needs and wishes of several groups to transform it into something which would benefit all. During this project, the ‘all’ has been essential, when working with exclusion and inclusion. Vulnerable groups are often not heard or not able to express themselves, but are equally important as all the others. One of the tasks of the urban designer is therefore to recognise the vulnerable groups. The exploration phase has been a combination of research and design. To be able to explore the chances to improve the public space, the development model has been made. This combined different theories and tangible aspects of the public space as a way to combine the spatial to the social.

Important aspect of this project has been the process-oriented approach. I believe that an urban planning and design can not be a blueprint. Of course, it is important to show how the end result could look like, in the end we are still the experts. However, I think urban planning and design become more and more a process. It contains a lot of uncertainties and developing a design over time helps to get grip on these uncertainties. In the beginning a place can accommodate temporary installations. On the way, more permanent aspects are being made, but it is essential to keep the temporary aspects as well. In this way, places are flexible and able to adjust to different needs at different times. Here comes back the ‘all’ as said before. I think that places should be able to host all kinds of people and not made for certain groups at certain times. City development becomes in this way a skeleton which is undergoing different social and spatial processes. This permanent-temporality approach fits well in the line of approach, to take transformation literally and offer places for different needs and at different times.
The location is currently being constructed and the municipality updated plans during my project. Working within such changing spatial setting is therefore difficult, because it is highly dynamic. It helped a lot when I visited the location and saw the developments with my own eyes. It may have been too late in the graduation process and this caused time shortage for the design phase. On the other hand, during the visit was also the Opportunity Space festival which helped me way further in the understanding of the context.

Besides, for this research it would have been very helpful to get empirical data from the residents. However, there were difficulties getting input from them. I prepared an online survey, but no one filled it in. This may be related to me - what is this Dutch girl thinking to solve in here - but another reason became also clear when talking to an urban planner from the municipality. She explained that even they had also difficulties reaching the residents. People from Holma and Kroksbäck do not seem to be interested in the coming developments or giving input. There is talked already so much about the area and it gets a worse image in the media, so there might be a lack of trust here. It was sad that it did not work out for me, but it learned me something about the attitude of the people, and also their role to change when to achieve inclusion. I have solved this problem with more secondary data and some assumptions.

This research is part of the research group ‘History and heritage’. Malmö as location fits very well within this group. It has been through many social and urban transformations during the last decades. Compared to other Western cities, the city transformed relatively late towards a knowledge society. Besides, the restructuring of the welfare state changed a lot for the people in the city already. Together, this makes it a highly dynamic place where many challenges are coming together. The project highlights the strong social values of the welfare state and if this ‘social heritage’ would be valued, the city would be able to manage the challenges of today’s society. However, it is not only the role of the city to do this, it requires a change from everyone.