

161 **URBAN
DESIGN**

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**SCANDINAVIA
AND THE
NORDIC REGION**



**URBAN
DESIGN
GROUP**



1 Glasgow: the UDG at COP26

NEWS FROM THE UDG CHAIR

Climate change topped the agenda in the last few months, initially in the run-up to COP26 and now that it has passed, we are trying to understand what has been achieved. While the verdict on the success of COP26 varies depending on who you talk to, I am pleased that the UDG was one of the voices contributing to the debate.

Our Urban Design Summit aimed not only to cover high-level strategic discussions but also to focus on practical solutions. We balanced our afternoon keynote session of international experts on Climate Repair with morning sessions highlighting the need for clients and procurement rules to step up and support more ambitious climate goals, as well as the need to build a common language. We rounded off the day talking about Community Sustainability Hubs, sharing ideas of how we can all make a difference in our community, improving our relationship with the environment whilst bolstering community spirit and social connectedness.

The UDG's stated goal is to create People-Friendly Places and all of these issues are relevant to deliver this. To create truly people-friendly places, we need to put health and well-being of people at the heart of the decision-making process. This includes a positive relationship with nature, active travel and protection of climate. People-friendly places are planet-friendly places. They are places that:

- have a positive relationship with nature and protection of finite resources
- ensure a positive climate and protection from flooding
- allow people to live healthily and happily.

Sometimes, we hear voices saying that planning has lost its purpose. Isn't the sole purpose of the built environment professions - planning, architecture, engineering and urban design - to create positive places for human habitation? Throughout history, these skills have been employed to create safer, more comfortable places for people to live in, to protect humans from weather, make the soil more fertile and reduce health risks. We talk and care about climate change because we need to ensure that our planet remains habitable; in other words a place where people can live healthy lives and not be threatened by food scarcity, flooding or extreme weather events.

This is reflected in the National Urban Design Awards, whose winners were announced in November. What strikes me looking at the projects submitted for the awards is the effort and time that have gone into many of them. The projects that we are seeking to celebrate, those we call 'exemplar', are delivered against the odds. They are driven by exceptional clients, design champions or project teams that don't give up. However, exemplar projects are not enough, we need to ensure that what is exemplar now becomes the norm, tomorrow... and even that appears too slow.

This echoes the often-voiced frustration with COP26 that we are moving too slowly, that it is all words and little action. Our policies are out-of-date as soon as they are adopted, always behind the curve and never forward-thinking and ambitious. COP26 has focussed the minds of elected members, many of them now asking officers and developers to deliver zero-carbon schemes. Yet these ambitions are often not enforceable, because the market won't support them and policies don't require them. In many organisations and local authorities, there is the political will and the expertise, but it is still not happening.

In this context, we are exploring ways to draw attention to the day-to-day actions of our members, many of whom go unnoticed

by a wider audience, although they go far beyond business as usual. We are seeking examples where barriers and red tape have been overcome to deliver against the odds.

Driven by the passion to create better places, our members innovate to achieve site allocation processes that deliver truly sustainable sites; spend hours negotiating with elected members or highway authority and adoption officers to deliver truly walkable and cyclable environments; use their powers of persuasion to convince their clients to commit to higher environmental targets; and, remain open to learn from younger generations.

If you have positive examples from your day-to-day experience that may help others to turn exemplar projects into the norm, let us know.

GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED

I would like to invite all our members to share ideas and proposals of how we can make it easier to deliver good places. If you have suggestions for an urban design event, research, collaboration opportunities or would like to get involved, please get in touch with us at: administration@udg.co.uk

I hope you enjoy the Journal. ●

Katja Stille, Chair of the Urban Design Group and Director at Tibbalds Planning and Urban Design

DIARY OF EVENTS

Until further notice it will not be possible to run live events with an audience at The Gallery. There is however an online programme of events.

Please check the UDG website for details www.udg.org.uk



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Oslo Opera House in Winter by Snøhetta.
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and Ballet/ Svein Nordrum

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Saving the Planet

As this issue goes to print, COP26 has just ended. This global meeting cannot but focus our minds on what we are doing, individually and collectively, to avoid a disastrous future for humanity. The task is daunting and the information available is confusing, so that we cannot even guarantee that a particular initiative will not have side effects that negate its benefits. On the other hand, doing nothing is not an option. After two years of COVID-19 affecting the lives of everybody on Earth, we know that we have to ensure that we get the right information and that we collaborate with others.

By definition, urban design is a collaborative discipline which should make it pivotal in decision-making for the built environment. Unfortunately, the agenda has developed so much and so fast in the recent past, that professionals, however well-intentioned, have difficulties keeping up-to-date with events. At the same time practitioners have to compete with other professionals who may feel that they know better, deal with politicians who don't want to hear the message, or face developers who have only profit in mind.

Undoubtedly the outcomes of COP26 will be discussed for years and will influence the way that urban design evolves. For over two years we have been publishing our Climate Change Global Digest which we hope is helping colleagues to keep abreast of what is going on. The UDG has also been present at COP26 in Glasgow; a very brief report can be found on page 4 and a recording of the proceedings is available on the UDG website.

This issue's topic, urban design in Scandinavia and the Nordic Region curated by Paul Woodville, is directly relevant to these concerns as the region is particularly sensitive to climate change. Paul has gathered articles that cover a wide spectrum of issues and a variety of geographical contexts, and climate change is at the heart of many of them. Its effects are being felt now and urban designers, like architects and planners, have been acting to mitigate its negative effects. Scandinavian countries are amongst the wealthiest in the world and are known for their excellent welfare systems. However, as the numerous Scandi *noir* serials show us, they are not problem-free and suffer from social and economic inequalities. Some of the articles here address those issues as well.

Overall the contributors to this topic treat the challenges as opportunities, as much as threats. Therefore, the initiatives and projects described are positive and forward-looking, not just remedial. To those who live in more temperate climates with more unequal societies, there are lessons to be learned on how to face and shape the future. We cannot save the planet on our own but we can make a contribution, however modest.

Happy New Year! ●

Sebastian Loew, architect and planner, writer, consultant and joint editor

HOW TO JOIN

To join the Urban Design Group, visit www.udg.org.uk and see the benefits of taking out an annual membership.

Individual (UK and international) £55
UK student / concession £35
Recognised Practitioner in Urban Design £85
Small practice (<5 professional staff) £275
Large practice (>5 professional staff) £495
Education £275
Local Authority £100
UK Library £90
International Library £110

A Century of Evolution in Architecture and Urbanism in the Arabian Peninsula

Webinar, 16 September 2021

This packed event was attended by urban designers from around the world. The lecture by Professor Ashraf Salama (University of Strathclyde) formed part of a series of international events, which started with *Evolution of a City: Aleppo*, given by Husam Al Waer and will be followed by *Evolution of the City: Isfahan* by Farnaz Arefian.

Ashraf illustrated the extremely complex and well-researched evolution of the region in its pre-oil, oil exploitation and post-oil periods with many masterplans and examples of new urban quarters and iconic buildings in this fast-developing area. These were accompanied by chronological data on key events, political and social, and how they influenced the changes that took place in urban development, design strategies and architectural styles - influencing and being influenced by a changing society and lifestyles.

His talk was in three parts: the first addressed the contextual issues of how geo-cultural politics may have instigated a contemporary discourse on architecture and the urban environment. The second explored evolutionary processes, both physical and socio-cultural, against the backdrop of oil discovery, oil exploitation and current post-oil strategies, based on key incidents over the past 100 years and how they had shaped architecture and urbanism. In Ashraf's view, the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the role of British colonies and protectorates changed the desert culture and tribal traditions during the oil period. Independence led to a revival of pan-Arabism, linked by language, culture and religion throughout the Middle East and North Africa, expanding into Turkey, Iran and even Israel. He illustrated how these shifts took specific forms under nationalism and created their own mix of modern architecture, responding to global conditions. He explained in particular, how in this process the Arabic house built around inner courtyards had shifted courtyards outwards, and how compounds for extended families were turned into Western-style denser urban living areas, including tower blocks.

He showed the influence of Western masterplanning on changes at the city level and in large-scale regeneration projects. It was sometimes difficult to follow the rapid succession of slides, especially for those



not familiar with this part of the world and it may have been preferable not to include a discussant, Professor Attilio Petruccioli (Sapienza University in Rome), who talked about his own experiences at length.

There was still time for a very animated discussion with many questions of clarification and reflections on the possibly disturbing interaction between Arabic culture and Western design practice. Some asked how these modern cities, which had also left a legacy of increased social and spatial segregation, would be able to survive and accommodate a more sustainable way of life in the future. ●

Judith Ryser, researcher, journalist, writer and urban affairs consultant to Fundacion Metropoli, Madrid



John F N Collins OBE PPRTPI 1924-2021

John Collins, who died aged 97, was one of the original members of the Urban Design Group. It was through him that I was present at the first meeting organised at RIBA's headquarters in 1978. He was a rare beast, an architect-planner, a modest and quiet man but full of humour and originality.

Born in Moseley, Birmingham, Collins started his professional life under the guidance of Donald Gibson in Coventry, before joining Shankland Cox's team in Liverpool. From there he moved to become Deputy County Planning officer and in 1970, County Planning Officer for Cheshire. In 1982-93 he was President of the RTPI.

In Cheshire, where I worked for him, in spite of the growing role of strategic planning in the work of county councils, he ensured that design remained a key element in the work of the planning department. We implemented countryside projects including the award-winning Thurstaston Country Park. It was not enough for John that we should identify and designate conservation areas; we also prepared Conservation Area Action Plans for a number of them.

In order to help to raise the quality of housing design within the county, John encouraged us to join with Manchester University to make *What a site*, a film promoting a site-based approach to housing design. John saw a prescriptive guide in the Essex mode as having dangers. He feared that the County Council's approach could become as boring as those by developers. In contrast we prepared a series of design aids intended to provide a kit of elements that could be used by developers to create their own site-specific quality places. These design aids

included pioneering work, pre-DB32, to free road design from the tyranny of the County Surveyor's byelaw standards. This meant working with the Surveyor's department and reflected the spirit of multi-disciplinary collaboration that John found so appealing in the ideals of the Urban Design Group. He joined the UDG as soon as it was founded and remained involved in the North West until 2018.

While President of the RTPI, he focused on ensuring that places were designed to meet the needs of the disabled. It was for this work that he was awarded an OBE. After retiring from Cheshire County Council, he was sent by the Overseas Development Department to Monserrat to help rebuild the island after it had been destroyed by a devastating earthquake.

Like many of my generation of architect-planners, I owe much to John's quiet and reasoned approach to the work of making better places for all. ●

Richard Cole architect and planner, formerly Director of Planning and Architecture of the Commission for New Towns

The Walkable City

Webinar, Wednesday 4 August 2021

Run in partnership with London Living Streets and chaired by the UDG's Katja Stille, this event explored walkability, from strategic planning to the nitty-gritty of design measures.

Living Streets' David Harrison began with an historic overview of walking in London, noting that 400,000 people a day walked in or out of the city in the 1850s; but the arrival of the motor car late in the century heralded the start of a massive decline in walking. Today, Living Streets is trying to grow walking trips in central London via their Central London Footways network. David described the network as 'red routes for pedestrians':

streets that are quieter, characterful and bring pleasure to walking.

Chris Martin (Urban Movement) also referenced pleasure, emphasizing the need to make walking appealing for all. Chris singled out the problem of getting across streets, and called for design to enable spontaneity of crossing. The practical means of doing so include better positioning and the design of crossings, medians, continuous footways and corner build-outs.

Women can be disincentivized from walking because their specific needs are not considered in planning and design; something which Sarah Parry (Leeds Beckett University, below) explained in her presentation. She called for a feminist approach to walking, citing exemplar projects in Umeå, Malmö, and Vienna which delivered more gender-equal designs.

Mike Grahn (Living Streets) explored

the three stages of crossing roads – the need to cross, starting to cross, and actually crossing – all of which are experienced differently depending on the person crossing. He explained how most crossings on neighbourhood streets are made informally, and people rarely deviate from desire lines. Vehicle speeds, volumes and mix should be managed to support informal crossings. Timing is critical; an adult needs a 6-10 second gap in traffic to cross, and will get annoyed waiting more than 30 seconds for a gap to appear.

We often take the shortest possible route to destinations, guided by Google Maps, but this can be the least pleasant or interesting. Peter Murray (New London Architecture) described his experience mapping and walking an alternative, largely traffic-free route from Chancery Lane to Aldgate. His walk via numerous alleys and public spaces celebrated the Square Mile's unique mix of historic and contemporary character.

Finally, Brian Deegan (Urban Movement) talked about practical solutions to challenges when crossing at signalled junctions. Using case studies from Manchester and elsewhere he explored three common issues – no invitation to cross, staggered crossings and unmet desire lines — and explained how to resolve them. Planned changes to the Highway Code were noted with the hope that they will support designers' efforts to make cities more walkable. ●

Richard Crappsley, Urban Designer,
AR Urbanism



Urban Design Summit at COP26

Whole day Webinar, Friday 10 November 2021

This is a very brief summary of the UDG event organised to coincide with the COP26 meeting in Glasgow. The day's proceedings were recorded and are available on the UDG website. Throughout the day contributors presented varied approaches and viewpoints on the threats posed by climate change and possible ways to tackle them.

The first session People Friendly Places are Planet Friendly Places saw presentations by finalists of the 2021 Urban Design Awards. This was followed by the launch of the Climate Framework, a new UDG initiative to break down silos, establish common ground, define a common language, and identify the knowledge and skills that built environment professionals must be equipped with. Mina

Hasman (Climate Framework Cross-Industry Action Group), Sue Morgan (Landscape Institute) and Robin Nicholson (Cullinan Studio) stressed the need for collaboration and integration between the professions, and for coordinated climate education. Jane Manning (Allies and Morrison) emphasised the role played by urban designers and the UDG.

In the next session entitled Creating Climate Safe Streets, the need to reduce the impact of the car and encourage active movement was a *leitmotif*. Chris Martin (Urban Movement) showed examples of design initiatives to make people-friendly streets and encourage safe routes for children to walk and cycle to school. Brian Deegan (Urban Movement) suggested solutions inspired by other countries.

The afternoon's theme was Climate Repair where design examples to tackle sea level rises, extreme heat and poor air quality were presented. Kristina Hill (Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California, Berkeley) dealt with urban areas that need to adapt to flooding, including San Francisco's Bay Area facing rising water

levels and seismic risks at the same time. Zongbo Shi (University of Birmingham) addressed street geometry in order to reduce the impact of pollution. She suggested that trees were not always a solution although if well placed, they could serve as a barrier to emissions. Zero emissions must be the goal, road traffic being the largest source of pollution in urban areas. She advocated integrating air quality into design. Maya Negev (University of Haifa) dealt with areas where extreme heat and dryness is a reality now. She presented cooling methods that did not rely on high technology, and examples of good and bad planting that were tolerant of the dry conditions.

Community Sustainable Hubs were the subject of Parisa Wright's presentation (Greener and Cleaner) A panel discussion followed chaired by Chris Martin. Many more ideas were presented and discussed, too many to include here but worth watching on the UDG website. ●

Sebastian Loew, with assistance from
Malcolm Moor and Tim Hagyard



Berlin Planwerk
Innenstadt, 1999
(Source: Berlin,
Senatsverwaltung für
Stadtentwicklung und
Wohnen)

■ Vorschlag Planwerk
■ Bestehende Planung
 Langfristige Ergänzungen
■ Parks und Grünanlagen
■ Stadtgärten mit eingeschränkter öffentlicher Nutzung, Sportplätze
■ Verkehrsberuhigte Straßen
 Maßstab ca. 1:30.000

My Favourite Plan: Mike Biddulph

Berlin Planwerk Innenstadt, 1999, by Berlin Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung und Wohnen (Berlin Inner City Planning Framework by Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing)

WHY I LIKE IT

Berlin is a city that I started to get to know in 1996 when I went there for the first time with my now wife, who is a German planner. We stood in what is Potsdamer Platz today, then the no-man's-land of the Wall between East and West Berlin, and wondered about the scheme to redevelop this part of the city, which can be visited today. Since then, I have been back to the city many times, as an academic and a tourist, and gradually pieced together the rich tapestry of its design and development, with layers of thinking building up to the present result. It is a good example of what Colin Rowe would characterise as a collage city. This 1999 plan brings all of those moments of history together on one page and summarised what was in the pipeline following Reunification, as the capital functions returned to the city. It is a kind of index, giving citizens and investors a sense of what has planning consent, and giving everyone an ordered sense of how the city will

develop. Within its detail are many interesting and controversial schemes which can be compared to some that are happening closer to home. Is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe a successful piece of design? Would or should we rebuild a royal palace today, if we were a republic? How are the Critical Reconstruction neighbourhood projects of the 1980s holding up today and what can be learned from them? Although originally drawn up in 1999, the plan is kept up-to-date, presumably because it is useful.

HOW CAN IT BE USED OR APPLIED

When I moved from academia to practice, I suggested to colleagues that we build a model of Cardiff city centre and the bay for our own reference and in order to keep a similar record of what is built, what is in the pipeline and what has consent. Built by us over a few years using Sketchup, it has become an invaluable tool which we can open up at any time, and into which we can quickly model and discuss new proposals as part of our own internal design review discussions. Sometimes we ping back to applicants graphic suggestions and ideas based on our conclusions, or clarify views or areas for which we need more ideas. It took me a while to realise that I had suggested this because of the influence that the Berlin plan had on me. In spite of the greater certainties of the German planning process, we are still able to use a similar tool, albeit in a slightly more dynamic way, in our own system. ●

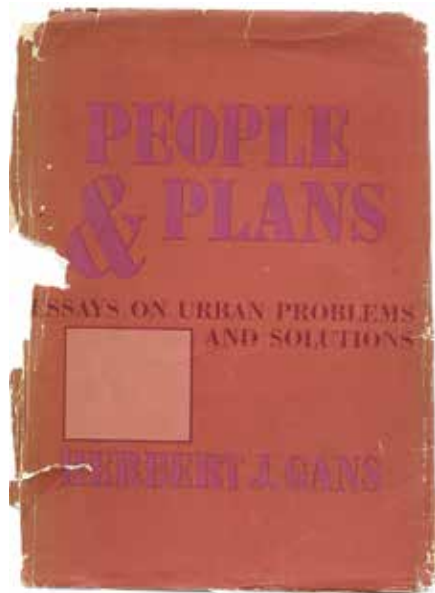


Current position

Urban designer with Cardiff Council in the Placemaking Team
Design Commissioner, Design Commission for Wales
RTPI Research Awards judge and member of the RTPI Partnership Board helping to accredit planning programmes

Experience

24 years in academia at Liverpool University and Cardiff University



Urban Design Library #40

People and Plans, Essays on Urban Problems and Solutions, Herbert J Gans, 1968, Basic Books Inc

This book came out when I was studying town planning at the Architectural Association and it became one of the main texts on the course where all of us were architects 'converting' to planning. It was an attack by a sociologist-turned-planner on architect-planners who then dominated the profession. His criticism was addressed at what he called environmental or physical fallacies: 'that the physical environment was a major determinant of society and culture; and that only an environment based on professional planning principles could deliver the good life'. The debate around these two claims continues to this day.

The book is not just about this polemic; it includes 29 essays, most of which had already appeared over 20 years in various publications covering a wide range of planning issues. They generally concerned the American situation at the time but with universal relevance, including racial segregation, urban poverty and the failure of urban renewal to eliminate them, suburban life, inner cities, and even the relationship between outdoor recreation and mental health. Not all of Gans' arguments have stood the test of time, but they are striking in their range and the way that they can stimulate debate even today.

Like his contemporary Jane Jacobs, many of his findings went against the grain, and although the two agreed on what was wrong with city planning, Gans disagreed fundamentally with her suggestions, which he considered narrow and middle class. A whole essay in the book is dedicated to arguing with her: 'Her blanket indictment of

planners detracts from the persuasiveness of the other proposals and antagonizes people who might agree with her on many points'. Their disagreement seemed to have focused on whether neighbourhoods should be diverse or homogeneous in order to promote sociability. Reading this today, with Jacobs something of an untouchable saint, it is fairly refreshing!

Gans' approach to planning was based on sociology, his first discipline. His influence on my generation was far-reaching and it had the effect of distancing planning from architecture. The establishment of the Urban Design Group was a reaction to this and an attempt, only partly successfully, to reconcile the two professions. The world has moved on: the situation that Gans was facing – poor housing, poverty, social inequality, racism – is still the same, but environmental issues were not on the agenda at the time and now dominate it. Also at the time, white middle class Americans were fleeing the city, whilst today (or at least pre-COVID) they are returning to it. Therefore, some of the issues are different and require newer approaches, but many of the Gans' observations are still valid.

This book and others by the author (*Levittown* for example, probably his best known) face the problems of their day and try to offer alternative solutions that are not based on received formulae or on the assumption that physical form will affect behaviour. He sees the role of research as a means of understanding what people wish for their area and considers planning as a way 'to maximise the choices people can make in all spheres of life'. Gans is convinced that poverty and racism are American society's fundamental problems and he does not believe that planning can solve them. The essays in Part 2 of this book suggest that planning should be 'goal oriented', explaining that it is the people's goals that need to be identified in a process that is far from simple or evident. Developing this theme, he discusses the relationship between outdoor recreation and mental health arguing that it is more complex than policy-makers assume; he wonders for instance whether public open space responds to people's needs any better than a small back yard. Post-pandemic, this is a text worth revisiting.

Several essays in parts 3 and 4 deal with suburbs and urban renewal, the two key planning issues at the time. Overall, Gans defends the suburbs against the attacks of the planning profession: he sees them as responding well to most middle class Americans' wishes, and reflects that their social homogeneity makes for more successful communities. He doesn't see suburbs as problem-free however, and one essay suggests how to improve residents' lives. Turning to the 'urban crisis' caused by poverty and segregation in inner cities, he attacks urban renewal programmes that end up displacing existing residents and not benefitting them. Amongst his many recommendations,

he suggests that 'redevelopment should be pursued primarily for the benefit of the community as a whole and the people who live in the slum area'. *Plus ça change...*

Re-reading my old and well-worn copy of this book, I am amazed by the number of bits that I underlined. Many of the statements marked seem a bit obvious today but were quasi-revolutionary at the time; many are still challenging. Even if some of Gans' arguments have become common knowledge and he sounds a bit old-fashioned, he is still very relevant and on occasions surprisingly perceptive and fresh. The book is definitely part of the urban design canon.

Urban designers will no doubt find the lack of illustrations in the book very disappointing and it certainly is. But I was reminded of my tutor at the AA; as we discussed the text, she said with great satisfaction: 'that shows that you are no longer an architect'. It was meant as a compliment and we took it as such! ●

Sebastian Loew

READ ON

Jane Jacobs (1961), *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House
 Louis Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' in A.M. Rose, ed. (1962), *Human Behaviour and Social Processes*, Houghton Mifflin
 Robert Goodman (1972), *After the Planners*, Penguin Books
 Peter Hall (2014), *Good Cities, Better Lives, How Europe Discovered the Lost Art of Urbanism*, Routledge
 Manuel Castells (2000), *The Rise of the Network Society* (Second Edition), Blackwell Publishing

Climate Change Digest Global

This edition draws together some of the most useful documents and research launched or promoted at COP26.

Climate Framework

The Cross-Industry Action Group which comprises volunteers representing various built environment professional institutes, member organisations and academic institutions has launched the Climate Framework. The role of the Climate Framework is 'to cross-pollinate experiences and expertise across the industry, embracing all disciplines, and creating a shared curriculum framework as well as a platform for holistic climate knowledge'. It's a beautifully simple idea and the result is a regularly updated library of the most useful guidance on addressing climate change for all those in the built environment sector. The information is arranged by theme, level of detail and type of content, and once you've mastered the search engine, this will prove one of the most useful sources of guidance at your disposal. We strongly encourage you to take a look and sign up.

<https://www.climateframework.com/>

Architects Declare's Practice Guide

Architects Declare has developed a *Practice Guide* to help signatories convert their declaration into meaningful action and build momentum within their practice. The first part is a Practice Roadmap that provides five steps to transform design businesses alongside some useful links to further advice. The second part is a Project Design Guide, which emphasises regenerative design and what this means for individual schemes. It's a very accessible document and achieves a good balance between clear headlines and detailed advice.

<https://www.architectsdeclare.com/resources>

LETI guides

LETI (The London Energy Transformation Initiative) has recently launched the Climate Emergency Retrofit guide and this joins a suite of documents including the *Climate Emergency Design Guide* and the *Embodied Carbon Primer*. Whilst produced within the London context, they form some of the best guidance for urban designers across the UK looking to achieve critical thresholds in climate positive design.

<https://www.leti.london/retrofit>
<https://www.leti.london/cedg>

RTPI/TCPA The Climate Crisis Guide

This introductory-level guide provides an overview of UK policy and legislation which can be used to address climate change at a local level and explains how this should be interpreted in local development plan and development management processes. It's a useful resource to point clients and local authorities towards where changes are needed in policy to support more sustainable urban design strategies.

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/planning-for-climate-change>

TCPA Practical Guide – Building climate resilient large-scale new communities

This guide explores the overarching requirements of a successful adaptation strategy. It provides recommendations on the headlines and for delivery on the ground. It is very much a guide for planners but has some useful detail in case studies on overheating and SUDS.

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/tcpa-practical-guides-guide-14-building-climate-resilient-large-scale-new-communities>

First Steps in Urban Heat

A short, easy to digest guide that sets out and illustrates the practical interventions designers need to make to manage urban heat and the evidence behind the advice.

<https://www.tdag.org.uk/>

Beating the Heat: A Sustainable Cooling Handbook for Cities

This handbook advocates a whole-system approach to optimally address urban

cooling. It sets out how this is achieved and provides a wealth of case studies to exemplify the approach from Barcelona to Ljubljana. A number of tables are included in the guide which will prove particularly useful to designers as they outline key interventions and the trigger points for introducing them. Chapter 6 is entitled Heat-resilient Urban Design and Infrastructure and should be a focus for urban designers.

<https://www.unep.org/resources/report/beat-heat-sustainable-cooling-handbook-cities>

World Resources Report: Towards a More Equal City

This four-page report promotes a new approach to cities, centred on providing equitable access to services. It offers seven crucial transformations under the themes of Reimagine urban service provision, Include the excluded and Create the enabling conditions for lasting change.

<https://www.wri.org/initiatives/cities-all-towards-more-equal-city>

UKGBC: Financing the Built Asset Adaptation Gap

The UKGBC has issued a report of a discussion forum focused on how the adaptation of the built stock can be achieved. It advocates the IGNITION finance model and the report provides some useful costings for adapting existing neighbourhoods.

<https://www.ukgbc.org/ukgbc-work/financing-the-built-asset-adaptation-gap-short-report/>

Citigen Energy Centre

The UK's largest heating and cooling system is to be installed at E.ON's Citigen energy centre in central London. It will use heat pump technology at a large scale to generate 4MW heating capacity (equivalent to heating 2,300 homes) and 2.8MW cooling capacity, with energy stored in boreholes 200m below ground.

<https://environmentjournal.online/articles/heat-from-the-earth-will-heat-londons-buildings/> ●

Jane Manning with Joanna Wright, Mitch Cooke and Julie Futcher



Climate Framework



Architects Declare



LETI guides



RTPI/TCPA



T CPA



First Steps



Beating the Heat



World Resources



UKGBC: Financing



Citigen Energy Centre

For key sources of information and further reading. Simply hold your smartphone over the QR code whilst in camera mode and you will be taken to the relevant web page.

From Broad Street to Broad Meadow, Oxford

A wide historic street and car park has been transformed into a temporary park in the city centre, one of the city's largest public spaces

In each issue of Behind the Image, one of our contributors visits a contemporary public space from around the world. The photography tries to reveal an alternative perspective on a familiar precedent, famous space or place. These images illustrate how the public space works in practice: exploring its features (designed and unintended), and the way it relates to the surrounding context. ●

Alice Raggett, Lionel Eid, George Garofalakis, Elizabeth Lancaster, Imogen Blaikie and Laura-Dodds Hebron



Testing for the future: throughout the summer, the temporary space was used to host an extensive programme of community events and it has been extended to accommodate the annual Arts Market during Autumn. Oxford City Council have been consulting the public on their views about the initiative and whether Broad Street has the potential to become permanently pedestrianised.



Space for play: the removal of vehicles and introduction of floorspace artwork by Bryony Bengel-Abbott has created simple, safe and attractive play zones for children.



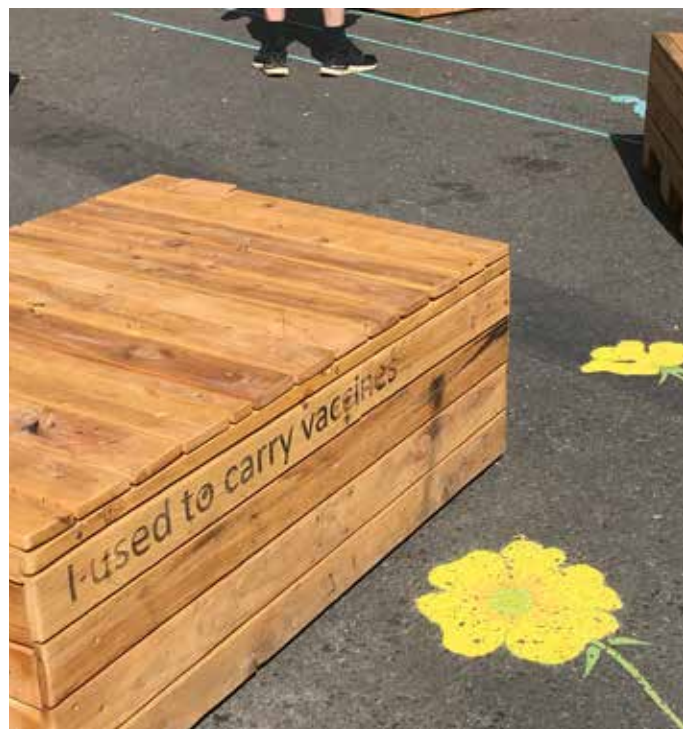
Edges: car parking spaces have been reclaimed for outdoor seating areas associated with nearby cafés, to create a more animated edge to the public space.



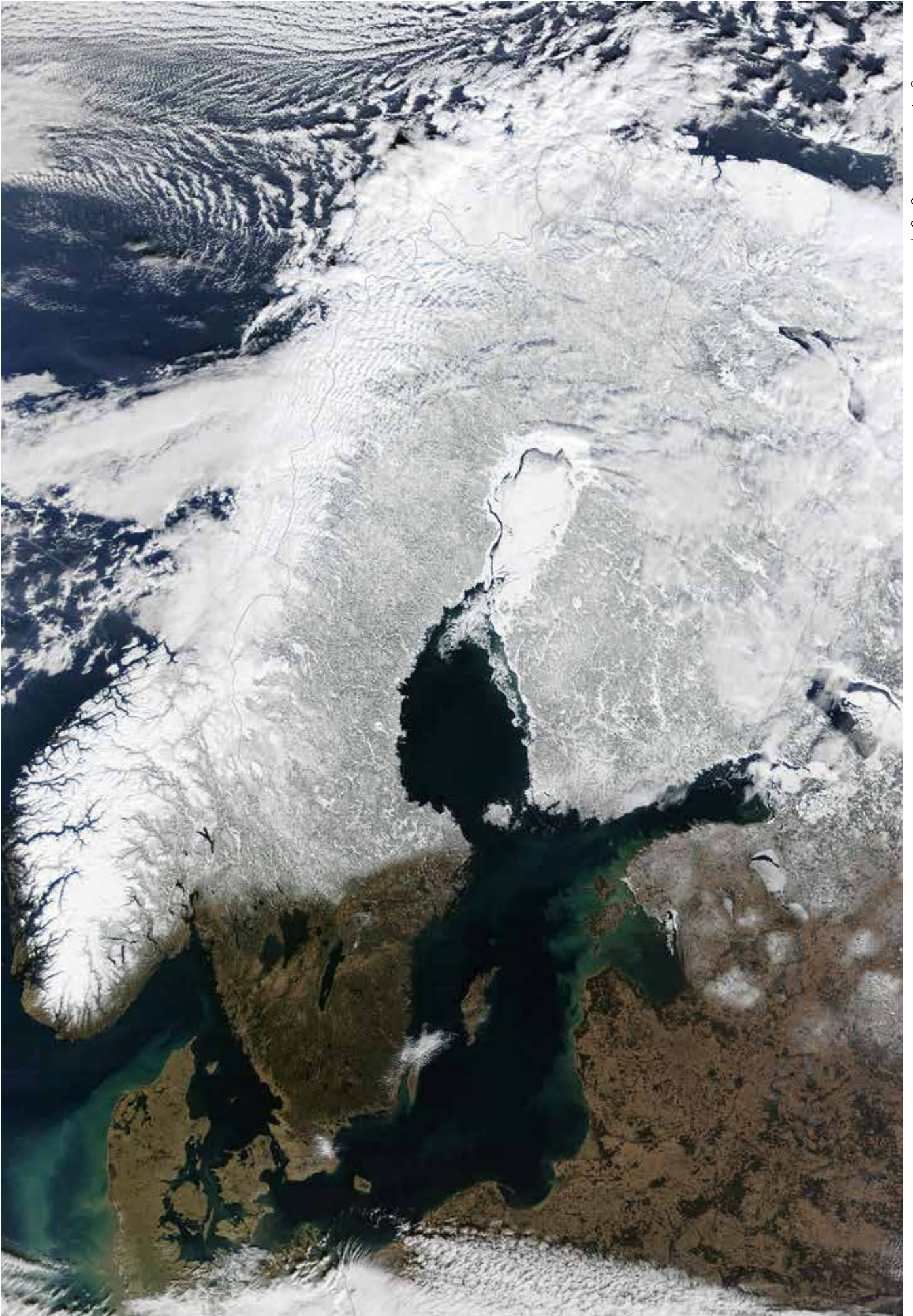
Urban greening: the typically hard, asphalted character of Broad Street has been softened through various forms of urban greening including the planting of young trees, the introduction of wildflower meadows and a sequence of grass lawns. Raised beds are arranged in an informal manner throughout the street, creating varied pockets of space for children to climb, explore and play, and for adults to gather and chat.



Movement: despite the changes to reduce the dominance of vehicles and create more space for pedestrians, Broad Street has retained access for bicycles with a two-way cycle route through the scheme, encouraging permeability through the area.



Reuse: the Council prioritised using local suppliers and recycled materials, and is working on reuse plans for the furniture and as much of the infrastructure as possible. The space features wooden seating and planters made from pallets used to transport vaccines and medical equipment during the pandemic.



The Nordic Region, with its diverse geographic and climatic zones. Source: NASA

Urban Design in Scandinavia and the Nordic Region

Looking from the outside, Scandinavia and the Nordic region can sometimes be hard to pin down as cultural – or even precise geographical – entities. However, within the region itself, most people would agree that a number of shared themes and interests unite the Nordic countries. A common approach to public investment, shared design traditions and a strong legislative focus on environmental issues are common themes across the region, with a commonality of intent that perhaps manifests itself most clearly in the design of cities and the urban environment.

The question of overlapping identities, both linguistically and culturally, is also an integral historical part of the Nordic region. The term Scandinavia generally applies to Sweden, Norway and Denmark, which have similar languages that are, for the main part, mutually understandable. The word Nordic refers to these three countries, plus Iceland and Finland. Icelandic and Finnish are not immediately comprehensible to speakers of the three Scandinavian languages. Nevertheless, Danish is widely spoken in Iceland and Swedish is an official language in Finland, appearing alongside Finnish on street names in many cities.

Cultural and linguistic similarities allow for a large amount of cross-border collaboration on city planning, architectural and urban design projects, yet the differences in approach are still large enough to allow for a healthy exchange of ideas between Nordic cities.

The Nordic Council was founded in 1952 to foster cooperation between the Nordic countries. Climate change and sustainable development are two of its core policy areas. Interestingly, despite the high level of political and economic cooperation between the five Nordic countries, only three are members of the EU, three are in NATO (only Denmark is in both) and just one (Finland) is in the Eurozone. The informal nature of this loose-fit model for Nordic cooperation might be its strength, allowing for a number of different political relationships with the rest of Europe and

internationally, yet still enabling close co-operation on socio-economic and environmental issues at a regional level.

The Nordic countries have a shared social and economic model that led, historically speaking, to some of the poorest countries in Europe rapidly developing into one of the most prosperous regions in Europe in the post-war era. Nordic cities are also consistently rated amongst the highest in the world across a number of quality of life and economic equality indicators.

The key political debate in the Nordic countries now is the question of how to both maintain and more precisely target investment programmes in order to sustain the traditionally high levels of economic participation compared to most of Europe, as well as the high levels of trust in public institutions this invariably creates. If the high cost, but globally competitive, Nordic business and socio-economic models are to be sustained, investment in cities will need to be more strategically targeted towards reducing creeping economic imbalances and the lack of social inclusion experienced in many Nordic cities in recent years. In this context, a rapidly globalising world presents both challenges and opportunities.

Likewise for individual cities, environmental challenges also present opportunities in terms of urban infrastructure upgrades, green space enhancement, design innovation and job creation. The articles in this issue act as a patchwork of overlapping themes and, occasionally, contrasting approaches taken from a range of planning scales and projects across the Nordic region, but with sustainability and environmental design quality as a common thread and thematic focus.

In very different times, the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen wrote that ‘to travel is to live’. I hope readers enjoy this journal-based journey. ●

Paul Woodville, guest topic editor, architect and urban planner, HRTB Arkitektter, Oslo. Course leader at the University of Oslo, and external examiner and guest lecturer, Norwegian University of Science and Technology



Cities for Friends and Lovers

Paul Woodville discusses Oslo's car-free city centre plans

Lewis Mumford, the American critic and urban planner, famously asked why we can't just 'forget the damned motor car and build cities for friends and lovers'. This is a frustration frequently shared by design practitioners, planning authorities and developers alike, given the huge amount of time and often sub-optimum economic resources that are spent dealing with the consequences of using cars, from road access and noise pollution, to parking and pedestrian safety. And this even before the wider environmental impacts and economic costs beyond an individual project's boundaries are taken into account.

Jane Jacobs took Mumford's point even further proclaiming that it was 'not the TV or illegal drugs, but the automobile that has been the chief destroyer of American communities'. Of course, not all communities are urban. Many social historians have pointed out that the introduction of Henry Ford's mass-produced Model T cars directly contributed to rural development by bringing isolated rural communities closer together, while also opening up a wider range of employment, education and life options. As a young man growing up in rural Michigan, Henry Ford himself 'couldn't wait to get out of the farm', a sentiment shared by many people who grew up in isolated rural and suburban communities, lacking local employment opportunities and badly served by public transport.

Few aspects of urban planning in Norway are quite as politically and culturally divisive as transport planning, often pitting individual against collective interests and urban against rural voters, with suburbs and small towns inevitably ending up as the key political battlegrounds in many elections.

In recent years there has been a growing tension between commuters driving into Oslo city centre from the suburbs and the surrounding region, and its residents. Oslo has a history of being one of the most pro-pedestrian or anti-car cities in Europe. With the exception of a few busy roads, the vast majority of pedestrian crossings in Oslo are pedestrian-priority crossings. Oslo was also one of the first cities in Europe to introduce congestion charging, which still causes heated debate today.

An even more striking policy proposal was put forward by the Green Party in the run-up to the 2015 local elections: to transform Oslo into Europe's largest car-free city centre. The 2015 Oslo city elections were won by a Labour-Green Party coalition who immediately set to work implementing this flagship policy.

FROM POLITICAL POLICY TO PLANNING PRACTICE

The subsequent question of how this policy might be implemented in practice required a degree of clarification. The exact definition of car-free was never set out during the election campaign itself. Would it still be possible to deliver goods by van? What about residents and disabled access?

The task of developing an implementation programme was handed to Oslo's city planning authorities, working in partnership with some of Norway's leading urban design and mobility planning consultants. Together with various sub-projects, this huge urban planning

1 Concept plan for Oslo's Car-Free Liveability Programme. Source: The City of Oslo

programme is called *Bilfritt Byliv* (The Car-Free Liveability Programme), and the process was also intended to help develop a shared definition of a ‘car-free city centre’.

Initially the term city centre was easy to define. Oslo has three concentric ring-roads: an outer ring-road (Ring 3), an inner-city ring-road (Ring 2), and a city centre ring-road (Ring 1). During the election campaign, the proposed extent of the car-free zone was to be contained within and broadly by Ring 1. In terms of size, this zone effectively encompasses most of Oslo’s central retail, leisure and business district. It is believed to be the largest car-free zone project in Europe, apart from Venice.

The term car-free has taken somewhat longer to define. Alongside comprehensive community and business consultation processes, a series of pop-up projects were quickly established to test out how city centre streets might be used and redesigned for pedestrian use. Rather than simply banning car access overnight, this approach has allowed for a transitional phase whereby policy measures and physical design changes can be introduced gradually and tested before full implementation, in order to give businesses and user groups time to adapt.

One of the most immediate changes in this initial phase was the removal of all on-street parking spaces in the city centre. However, dedicated spaces for disabled access were retained, and the total number of disabled spaces was increased as a whole. As on-street parking was gradually removed, this freed up large areas of hitherto unusable street space for new uses. Alternative uses were tested in a series of temporary and semi-permanent streetscape projects, from children’s playgrounds to pocket parks, outdoor cinemas and sculpture parks.

An even more fundamental element of the programme is gradually being implemented across the city centre. As part of the ongoing process of closing off streets to traffic and converting secondary streets to strictly one-way or cul-de-sac access streets for delivery vehicles, through-traffic has now more or less been removed from the city centre. Extensive analysis and evaluation of these trial measures has formed the basis for producing a new legally-binding zoning plan that now covers every street and public square in Oslo city centre. This zoning plan quite literally provides a roadmap for further design measures that will be implemented over the coming years.

Even before this initial phase of testing and evaluation was concluded, online protest groups were set up by those opposed to the programme. A new political party was established to campaign against Oslo’s congestion charging scheme and the ongoing Car-Free Liveability Programme. This party gained four seats in the 2019 Oslo city elections. Nonetheless, the Labour-Green Party coalition behind the programme retained their majority, with the Green Party gaining even more votes in 2019 than it did in the 2015 election.

Opinion polls covering a demographically representative sample of the population also show that the majority of people in Oslo are in favour of the car-free programme. The majority also agree that the centre of Oslo should be ‘as car-free as possible’. There was also a direct correlation between levels of support for the Car-Free Liveability Programme and the age of respondents, with younger people overwhelmingly in favour of the programme.

URBAN QUALITY AND CAR-FREE LIVEABILITY

When he moved to Los Angeles, the architecture critic Rayner Banham wrote that as a city specifically designed for the car Los Angeles could only ever be fully appreciated from behind a steering wheel. Compact city centres with historic street patterns not originally designed to accommodate cars, however, pose an entirely different set of questions. Like a lot of European cities, Oslo has medieval origins, but its urban core proper has a street pattern based upon a Renaissance-era city plan that was expanded with neoclassical urban extensions during the 19th century period of industrial expansion. The car was a latecomer to Oslo’s streetscape and certainly not part of its original plans.



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2 The approved city centre zoning plan for Oslo’s Car-Free Liveability Programme. Source: The City of Oslo

Nonetheless, almost all major urban change will cause uncertainty and inevitable political friction.

Comparisons have been made with the introduction of smoking bans in pubs and restaurants in most European cities. Before this legislation was enacted, people assumed that it would lead to a widespread decline in the city centre economy, whereas in fact the opposite occurred as new user groups and spending patterns emerged and people started to use city centres differently.

Even before the Car-Free Liveability Programme was enacted, only seven per cent of shoppers in Oslo city centre travelled into the city centre by car. Despite the ever-increasing restrictions and strict barriers to car use, detailed market data for the period leading up to 2019 (prior to the pandemic) suggests that Oslo city centre’s retail economy as a whole performed similarly to other retail destinations in Oslo. In the same period, market data also shows that restaurants and cafes experienced substantially greater turnover growth compared to other destinations. One of the reasons behind this is that as people begin to report increasingly higher levels of satisfaction with the urban environment, they visit the city centre more frequently and use it for longer periods of time. As more of the retail economy moves online, this might ultimately prove to be the saviour of the city centre economy, while car-based shopping centres increasingly struggle to compete with the improved leisure, cultural and dining offers in city centre-based retail destinations.

Extensive research carried out by Norway’s Institute for Transport Economics into the impacts of the car-free programme on mobility patterns found that some of the biggest challenges were initially experienced by delivery



companies. However, many logistics companies have now established mini distribution terminals at the edge of Oslo city centre where packages delivered by road can be transferred to electric bicycle-driven trailers. Noise and air pollution levels are also reducing, with all the public health benefits that this entails. Moreover in 2019 Oslo reported its first ever year without a single child, pedestrian or cyclist being killed by a car.

Anecdotal evidence alone is no substitute for the detailed analysis of air quality, road safety and noise data. Yet, as with processes for measuring occupant comfort inside buildings, occupant comfort in the spaces between buildings also ultimately comes down to understanding how people experience environments as a totality and the more subjective feedback that they provide on this. Although not yet completely car-free, visitors to Oslo almost invariably comment on the relative lack of cars and the startlingly low traffic noise in the city centre. In

a recent letter to one of Norway's leading newspapers, *Aftenposten*, a visitor from Norway's west coast, who had not been to Oslo for several decades, wrote how astounded they were by the changes and concluded that 'the human being had finally been reinstated over the car as the most important object in the city'.

The initial zone for the Car-Free Liveability Programme has recently been expanded to encompass an area to the immediate east of the central business district. The outer limits of Oslo's vehicle congestion charging zone (which covers most inner districts) have also been extended several times in recent years. As both zones have been expanded before, there is a real possibility of them being expanded many more times as development densities increase and the corresponding public transport offer improves accordingly. Another key driver for further change is the rapidly-changing demographic of people living in Oslo and their very different priorities and lifestyle choices compared to preceding generations.

A NEW NORMAL?

The term 'peak car' is used to refer to the point at which car usage peaks in cities. Oslo reached peak car over a decade ago. This can partly be explained by changing mobility and employment patterns; however, it is also due to fact that the proportion of young people taking driving tests has also peaked and continues to fall.

Several decades before the current Labour-Green Party coalition was elected, a newly-elected local politician invited a group of architects and urban planners to dinner to ask for their opinions on future directions for the city; their suggestion: 'Whatever you do, do not ban cars from the main high street in central Oslo'. This group of architects and planners were born in the immediate post-war era. As Oslo's Car-Free Liveability Programme becomes a reality, this generation might end up being one of the few who, for the majority of their working lives, experienced Oslo filled with car traffic and witnessed its main public spaces being used as car parks, for a number of decades. The Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, once wrote that 'normal is what you are used to'. ●

Paul Woodville

3 One of the many electric cycle delivery vehicles now in use in central Oslo. Source: Posten

4 Fridtjof Nansen Square Source: The City of Oslo and Oslo City Museum

5 The same place today formerly a busy roundabout and well-used car park

Bioclimatic Urbanism: Ideas from Arctic Sweden

David Chapman describes how the country adapts to its harsh and changing climate



To many, the Arctic is a barren environment of snow and ice populated by polar bears and military activity, and a place of high resource opportunity and geo-political tensions over assets, trade and movement. To its circumpolar community of around 4.5 million people, the region is a northern sea with a southern coastline of communities spanning Europe, Russia, Canada and America. The European Arctic (Finland, Norway and Sweden) is highly urbanised with a population of around 1.5 million people.

Its urban centres are small in comparison to other parts of Europe: Tromsø in Norway has a population of 70,000, Luleå in Sweden around 50,000 and Oulu in Finland around 180,000, yet the settlements have high levels of services and facilities.

URBAN DESIGN FOR WINTER CONDITIONS

Urban designers in cities and regions are trying to address issues that come under the sustainability umbrella, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, green transition, circular processes, accessible life spaces, equality in mobility and more. Smaller settlement sizes (and footprints) mean that most European Arctic settlements are compact and many have denser urban centres, good public transport, infrastructure for walking and cycling, and easy access to nature.

Oulu for example is a summer and winter cycling city. In Sweden Luleå has a well-developed electric bus network. Skellefteå is just about to complete one of the world's most advanced and largest timber buildings: a new City Culture House and hotel complex. Kiruna is a settlement that is famously being rebuilt to enable future resource extraction. Overall, urban design in Arctic Sweden places significant emphasis on making places compact and attractive. However, attractiveness in Scandinavia is a concept that goes further than being pleasing or appealing. Broadly speaking, attractiveness in Swedish urban design is produced by addressing societal challenges and local opportunities which could be translated as 'think global, act local' in design terms. A major opportunity for Arctic settlements is winter itself.

In Swedish Arctic urban design, this idea of attractiveness has two major challenges at the settlement scale: significant

1 Luleå, Sweden. The city's winter ice road is an ephemeral route for soft mobility and an important public space



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seasonal climate variation and rapid climate change, which point to an approach of bioclimatic urbanism.

Luleå is a coastal town located just below the Arctic Circle. It is the capital of Norrbotten, the country's northern-most region and classed as a winter city. This is because in winter temperatures stay below zero, precipitation falls mainly as snow, and these conditions extend for up to half the year. As the settlement is high-latitude, the winters are also dark with little sunlight. In summer, the situation is almost the complete opposite: the months of June and July have almost 24-hour sunlight and cloudless skies. The region's long coastline and sandy beaches attract tourists from across Europe. To put this in context, last December Luleå had a total of just 5 hours of sunlight in the month and in January the temperature was well below -30°C , but it was still the Swedish city with the highest number of sun hours for the year, and recorded some of the highest summer temperatures.

In the European Arctic, it is important to try to imagine that the winter weather is powerful enough to force a physical change in landscape and settlement forms. The interaction between built form and the winter season creates a hybrid public realm in winter, by design and by nature. Importantly, this interaction is powerful enough to alter some urban concepts usually considered static. For example, changes happen at the townscape scale of a settlement, the image of the city, its

legibility, the urban structure, the network of streets and spaces, right down to the details of streets.

The European Arctic is also a highly attractive tourist destination with visitors seeking high-latitude winter cities to explore life above the Arctic Circle, the delights of snow, frozen seas and the mythical properties of the Northern Lights. The population of Rovaniemi in Finland is circa 50,000 and before COVID-19 the city received around 500,000 tourists a year, which is projected to double by 2030. With most tourists visiting for winter, this creates significant safety issues, as people are unfamiliar with the Arctic conditions. It also creates management and service problems as the settlement has major seasonal swings in human density.

CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES

All of this is complicated further by climate change. Conditions in Luleå, Rovaniemi and Tromsø are rapidly changing as a result of it and are experiencing double-speed climate change and 'arctic amplification': climate change speeds up the closer you are to the North or South Poles.

The average temperature of Norrbotten has risen over 2°C in the past 20 years which has created far more complexities for urban design than this small number suggests. The average temperature is now above 0°C , which means that there are many more design challenges related to rain and ice, where historically snow and dry air were the major issues to contend with. It also means that temperatures in winter are now fluctuating rapidly. Today, they can vary by $20\text{--}30^{\circ}\text{C}$ within hours, creating a diversity of issues, such as a lack of ambient lighting, stronger winds and local flooding. There is also less certainty about how weather conditions will be during the day, significantly affecting people's mobility choices.

These are the complexities of winter cities and the experience of extreme climate variation (from -30°C to $+30^{\circ}\text{C}$ across the year) in the context of rapid climate change. This has been noted by the IPCC's latest report highlighting the risks to Arctic coastal settlements and the need for future scenario modelling.

Traditionally in winter cities, the established urban design principles are to maximise solar access, reduce wind and manage snow. However, with a developing knowledge base in winter city urbanism and climate change, it is clear that winter has far wider implications for urban design.

Recent research into winter cities shows that people's use of the city in wintertime is a product of the interaction between urban form and winter conditions. It has also shown that people's

2 Skellefteå Sweden. The city's highly designed waterfront is lost with winter snow
3 Luleå, Sweden. Climate change is deeply affecting Swedish winters making the public realm dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists

The average winter temperature is now above 0°C, which means that there are many more design challenges related to rain and ice, where historically snow and dry air were the major issues to contend with

mobility choices and public space use is changing with on-going climate change. Here climate change is a lived experience with a major impact in winter.

ADAPTED DESIGN APPROACHES

To address this, new approaches in urban design focus on designing for winter: blue-green planning becomes blue-green-white planning addressing the design of spaces turned white by winter snow. These strategies address the structure, function and design of public areas, spaces, streets and paths with snow, slush and ice. They seek to establish an attractive built environment where walking and cycling are prioritised and inviting as everyday activities all year round. Because the winter season is dark, these plans also address the structure, function and design of an area’s lighting system. At a technical level, these plans must address how urban form is modified by the winter season, the effects on the network of streets and spaces, and the implications for urban space management, especially related to the sustainable removal and storage of snow.

However, it is important to remember that there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to the design of winter cities. Plans need to be seen in the local context and the local implications of seasonal climate variation.

These types of seasonal plans are being piloted in settlements such as Luleå and Kiruna through initiatives such as the Kiruna Sustainability Centre. In part, the importance of this type of bioclimatic urbanism is the understanding that if we are going to achieve the targets for climate change, sustainability and green transition, we will need to bring forward urban design ideas that work all year round and not just in the brief summer season.

Oddly, in Arctic Sweden the worst conditions for city use occur when temperatures are close to 0°C. These temperatures are increasingly common due to global warming and produce cold rain, wind, slush and ice, all of which are major barriers to mobility. So in the future the Arctic may have much to learn from more southern locations. ●

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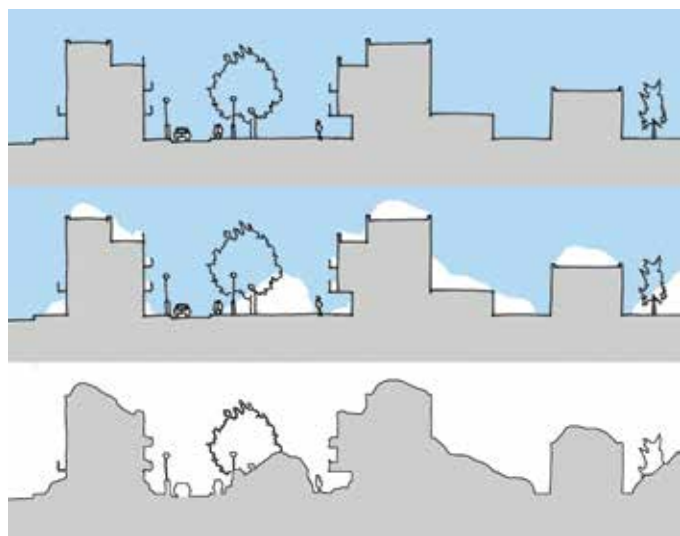
This article draws on research from the Architecture Group at Luleå University of Technology, and a detailed background can be found in: Chapman, D., & Larsson, A. (2021). *Practical Urban Planning for Winter Cycling: Lessons from a Swedish pilot study*. *Journal of Transport & Health*, 21, 101060.

Larsson, A., & Chapman, D. (2020). *Perceived impact of meteorological conditions on the use of public space in winter settlements*. *International Journal of Biometeorology*, 64, 631–642.

Chapman, D., & Larsson, A. (2019). *Toward an Integrated Model for Soft-Mobility*. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*, 16, 3669.



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4 Byske, Sweden. Norwegian tourists visit northern Sweden bringing a significant benefit to the economy
 5 Top: Section through the urban form of the street. Middle: Section of the street including winter snow and ice deposits. Bottom: The remaining space comprising the public realm in winter
 6 Luleå Sweden: Residential streets can all but disappear in winter

A Feminist Approach to Promoting Social Sustainability

Bettina Werner and Amalie Gammelgaard show how to achieve inclusive urban spaces



All forms of urban planning draw on a cluster of assumptions about the ‘typical’ urban citizen: their daily travel plans, needs, desires, and values. Shockingly, this citizen is a man. A breadwinning husband and father, able-bodied, heterosexual, white, and cis-gender.’ (Leslie Kern *Feminist City*, 2020).

Historically, feminist and urban scholars have made research contributions about gender and the city. These contributions highlight one issue in particular: there is a continuous need for further research, acknowledgement and examples of feminist urban planning, and engagement with gender.

Unfortunately, examples of urban interventions that specifically address gender are few. Even though urban planning is more participatory in relation to citizen engagement, statutory planning processes have limited influence on different communities within a city. Scholars and organisations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organisation have published and suggested methods, frameworks, checklists and other tools targeting gender awareness and sensitivity in the urban planning agenda. However, this knowledge seems to get lost in translation when attempts to realise these theories and ideas in real-life urban interventions are carried out by planners, architects and other city makers.

The project Buens Torv is one attempt to emphasise existing knowledge about gender in urbanism, and to foster social sustainability in the local community. Social sustainability has arguably received less attention in public discourse than economic or environmental sustainability. Social sustainability addresses wellbeing on a societal scale, including factors of equity such as welfare, education and equal opportunities, as well as social cohesion and gender equality. Inclusive design processes and community engagement are cornerstones in designing for social sustainability. It is important to understand how to build community in the design process and enhance opportunities for community members to exercise democratic participation in the decisions that concern them.

A feminist approach to architecture and urban design emphasises intersectionality – the interconnected nature of

1 The painted stairs during Carpark Festival

social categories such as race, class and gender – and our embodied experiences when visiting both familiar and new places. Feminist architecture actively seeks to design and co-create spaces with women, non-binary people and other marginalised groups (racially, socially or economically), with a strong belief that such a design will benefit all users of the space and promote social sustainability.

In a collaborative project with social entrepreneurs URBAN13 and architecture firm AIMbyliv, COurban design collective are developing a pilot project on the border of Copenhagen and Frederiksberg municipalities. Under the main highway bridge Bispeengbuen, Buens Torv, which loosely translates as ‘the bridge square’, is an attempt to create physical interventions in a public space based on a feminist theory of design, architecture and planning, giving careful consideration to continuous citizen involvement in the process, with a strong emphasis on women and girls’ use of the space.

Whilst we often refer to women and girls’ experiences of public space, we are of course aware that trans, queer and non-binary people’s experiences differ greatly to those of both cis-men and cis-women. However, similar to other fields of research, there is a lack of sex and gender-disaggregated data in the field of urbanism. In order to address issues with gender mainstreaming by continuing a binary categorisation of men and women, the project has emphasised an intersectional approach as a tool to reveal the complexity of gendered experiences, also touching on tensions with race, ethnicity, class and age.

WOMEN’S LIVED EXPERIENCES AND URBAN HEALTH

Women’s experiences are arguably different to men’s experiences. The way in which we perceive and behave in public spaces is determined by a series of gendered notions relating to what is expected of the body that we live in. Our perceptions of safety and trust may have a great impact on if and how we decide to use and spend time in a public space. As women, we experience safety in the city and the area that we are working in differently to our cis-male friends or colleagues. Kern reflects on the validity of such individual experiences saying: ‘While my own embodied experiences aren’t universal, I know they resonate because women have been talking and writing and sometimes shouting about these issues ever since urban life became a pressing social concern’. Besides safety, there are many other layers that play a part in whether or not we use a public space and how it makes us feel. Factors of wellbeing (e.g. noise pollution, access to green areas, active transportation) that we have encountered through our work as social scientists and urbanists enable us to define behavioural patterns, and identify areas of challenges and opportunities to improve and make our urban spaces more inclusive.

When moving the COurban office to the area under Bispeengbuen in October 2019 and observing day-to-day life in the area, we noticed that the majority of users were young men. This raised questions of how the area could become more appealing to a greater diversity of people, and it called for more formal observations, a digital survey and data recording on the users of the space to understand the circumstances that we were trying to intervene in.

Through our work with health-promoting urban design, we also know that our cities can support mental, social and physical health if the context is compelling. However, physical health is often associated with physical activity, an area where we see great variations in engagement depending on different demographic groups. Many urban opportunities for exercise are dominated by young men, and the area under Bispeengbuen is no exception. This challenge can be tackled in different ways. There could be a focus on designing other types of space for physical activities to attract a more diverse user group. We could focus on creating spaces for passive activities that enhance social and mental health for an individual’s overall wellbeing. The latter is emphasised in the project Buens Torv.



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A FEMINIST URBAN PILOT PROJECT

Buens Torv was created as an urban development project which, across professions, disciplines and involvement, explores feminist architecture and equality in a public space in Denmark. The area under Bispeengbuen has a history of hosting undesirable activities such as drug dealing; it is dark, concrete-heavy and it is hard to get an overview of the area. All of these would in theory make any public space feel unsafe. In the last few years, URBAN13 has been developing the area and step-by-step they have introduced more facilities and interventions. The main built features today are a culture house, a shared office space and a diner. After the first year on site, URBAN13 together with several local associations raised funding to build street sports facilities.

2 The basketball court and clubhouse
3 Girls from Street Society have participated in the process.



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With our background in social science and many years' experience working with citizen participation, a thorough involvement process has been important from the start. We decided to gather a small reference group of some of the girls and young women already using the sports facilities in the area. As they were familiar with parts of the area, they could give important first-hand accounts of their experiences both alone and with their friends or family members. The girls and women in the reference group also represent different ethnic groups.

The interventions in Buens Torv were decided using an extensive literature review and case analyses of other projects under the umbrella of feminist architecture and inclusive design. We especially looked to other projects in Scandinavia and projects where users' experiences and desires were clearly included. On this basis, we decided on three interventions: wayfinding through signage and paint on the ground and urban furniture; an indoor meeting space inspired by a greenhouse; and, an art installation to create a more pleasant visual and sensory experience in the area. In preliminary research for the project, there was a lack of good examples in Denmark. Copenhagen in particular – often highlighted as a destination for those interested in both classic and modern architecture and urban design – lacks this particular focus.

Through two workshops we collaborated with the girls to specify the colour scheme and layout of the wayfinding information. Previously collected movement data over the area also contributed to the alignment of the paths. The same reference group was later invited to help paint the steps by the big central slide

and to give their input on the atmosphere and activities that the indoor greenhouse could hold. By summer 2021, we had painted the stairs, slide and a couple of the concrete pillars. The greenhouse is finished, and we are working on the interior. The art installation was scheduled for autumn 2021.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the key challenges encountered while implementing a feminist approach at Buens Torv is a general misconception of what a feminist approach can contribute, especially how it benefits the majority of users. The same is true for implementing the approach in a Danish context, where there is a lack of examples and cases to learn from. In addition, there is a general lack of knowledge, acknowledgment and data in academia, the political agenda, and among city makers regarding feminist urban design and architecture. Feminist architecture might seem like a narrow or niche perspective to urbanism, but it builds on broad contributions to feminist, anti-racist, health and gender science.

The approach to Buens Torv recognises that the urban space that we are working with is dynamically interconnected and interferes with social structures such as race, gender and class in the neighbourhood. We are aiming to create a case study of how to use a feminist approach to urban design in Denmark and, through thorough evaluation, determine which practices and methods work best in this context. Our findings so far are the need for momentum, continuous dialogue and relationship building with the user groups who are engaged. It is also crucial to build a toolbox of methods to use over time, and to allow for engagement in different forms and media. From this process we have seen great engagement in the project from other practitioners and urbanists who, like us, see the need for this approach, as well as the lack of funding and political will to explore it at a larger scale.

Ultimately the intention is to enable better community building and promote social sustainability. We look forward to diving into the findings from Buens Torv, as it can stand as a positive example for how to create more attractive and safe spaces for women and girls, as well as others, filled with a greater diversity of activities. The following few months will put the theory to the test. ●

4 Site plan of URBAN13's area with colour suggestions for the wayfinding

5 The new greenhouse with rendered colours for wayfinding. Photographs and illustrations: Asal Mohtashami, Erling Brodersen, Jacob Corneliusen, Courban

Bettina Werner and Amalie Gammelgaard, COurban design collective

The project Buens Torv is being generously funded by Frederiksbjergsfonden, Tuborg Fondet, Frederiksbjergs kommune, Flüggerfarver and 3xBYG



1

Green Thresholds

Susan Carruth and Kåre Stokholm Poulsgaard aim to reconcile environmental requirements with social sustainability

Architects and urban designers are experiencing a growing pressure to clarify the value of their ideas. Design competitions come with ever-expanding lists of documents and simulation requirements, and developers are adopting stricter certification requirements. In Denmark, Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) is set to play a much larger role in design and construction, with the Danish government introducing limits for CO₂ in new projects from 2023 onwards. Such regulations also appear elsewhere: in 2020 in the UK, the Greater London Authority has introduced a Circular Economy Statement for new developments in the city.

This growing focus on documented sustainability and performance by decision-makers in the built environment is laudable. But the enhanced emphasis on environmental and technical aspects of sustainability must not be to the detriment of more traditional concerns such as experiential richness and the social synergies engendered by design. Amid the explosion of demands for sustainability certification, ironically social sustainability risks losing out.

Green certification and LCA tools provide clearly defined measures and metrics for environmental sustainability via parameters around materials, energy and emissions. However, the social sustainability of projects, based on concerns about the human scale and how liveability and sustainable lifestyles are engendered through design, are less easily measured. The lack of clear-cut parameters for social sustainability takes on added pertinence when thinking about the massive number of trade-offs considered throughout architecture and urban design projects. In resource allocation, qualitative issues risk losing out to their quantitative counterparts simply because their concepts are perceived as less readily understood and definable in a game

where numbers, documentation and hard facts are key.

To make the most of the current drive towards documentation within sustainability, we need frameworks for social sustainability that can embrace shifting project demands, both by enabling dialogue and the early clarification of ambitions, and by defining parameters for evaluating and documenting whether ambitions are followed through at later stages.

CRUCIAL INDUSTRY RESEARCH

As an independent research arm of 3XN Architects, GXN Innovation seeks to generate practical knowledge on how to create sustainable environments across environmental, social and cultural dimensions. In the Architecture Shapes Behaviour research cluster, we pay particular attention to human experience and social sustainability through PhD projects, collaborative research and industry consultancy. This work aims to develop frameworks for healthy social spaces and dynamic, diverse communities by considering the interplay between physical space, the health and wellbeing of individuals, and collective culture.

1 Artist's impression of Stockholm's Rissne neighbourhood. Courtesy of 3XN Architects



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The GXN research project Green Thresholds seeks to bridge the technical and social aspects of sustainability across the scales of architecture and urban design, by investigating residential thresholds: the edge zones where buildings meet the landscape, and private interiors meet public space. Using a live 3XN project as a case study, we wanted to increase knowledge on how to balance ‘thickness’ or a rich social life, and ‘leanness’ meaning reduced energy use and emissions, through the design of urban thresholds. Leanness thus describes a reduction in the context of resource use, emissions and energy as exemplified by LCA. This drive towards leanness is the default of much sustainability discourse today. In comparison, thickness describes an abundance or richness of social, cultural and biological diversity and possibilities for multiple interpretations and flexible use.

The Green Thresholds project revealed a lack of criteria for capturing psychological aspects of wellbeing, social inclusivity and equity in architectural and urban design at present. While many certification systems include social sustainability through the narrow lens of indoor climate and health, even those that focus more holistically on social sustainability, such as the WELL certification, do not embrace the full richness of social and cultural experiences, arguably due to the difficulty in evaluating and documenting such criteria.

NEIGHBOURHOOD REJUVENATION

The Green Thresholds project was developed to support 3XN in redeveloping the Swedish neighbourhood of Rissne. Over the years, this Stockholm suburb has become a socially vulnerable area with one of the highest crime rates in Sweden. The redevelopment of Rissne was therefore initiated by the local municipality to rejuvenate the area by creating a denser and more diverse neighbourhood.

3XN and Swedish developers Balder won the masterplan competition with a proposal to transform the area with the design of ten new buildings, a new public park of 14,000 m², and a new transport hub with train, metro, and bus services creating better connections for public transport and providing access to Stockholm’s city centre in less than 15 minutes. GXN was responsible for developing a behavioural strategy for the new neighbourhood seeking to revitalise the area through a series of

interventions in the thresholds between buildings that could create spatial synergies to meet the needs of residents, while also creating a safer community.

The Rissne project is representative of an emerging Scandinavian design tradition where nuanced, elegant and sustainable thresholds are increasingly regarded as an important element in successful residential projects. Such thresholds refer not just to entrances and façades, but the entire edge zone between buildings and open urban space, including interfaces between walls and the ground, public zones and private domains, and enclosed gardens and communal landscapes.

In the Rissne project, the design of the edge zones between buildings was particularly important in securing both the social and environmental aspects of sustainability. The curving and open building design proposed by 3XN Architects recasts streets as shared public and semi-public spaces between different housing blocks. These spaces emphasise the critical role played by architectural thresholds in shaping the social fabric of a neighbourhood, encouraging or disrupting key characteristics such as privacy, stewardship and community engagement. As a high percentage of embodied resources is captured in edge zones, particularly within the facade, their design and material specification also significantly influence emissions and energy consumption.

Engaging with the 3XN team for Rissne while reviewing three representative edge zone conditions, we developed a visual taxonomy of threshold design. It included outdoor areas that support social meeting spots, balconies, terraces, gardens and landscaping that provide both the integration, and when warranted, the separation of public and private realms. From this we synthesized three types of threshold categories: the safe barrier; the friendly neighbour; and, the open edge, all of which aimed to meet many of the socially and environmentally sustainable considerations of the project and others like it.

In the context of the Green Thresholds project, the precedent analysis and taxonomy was used to explore the interplay between the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Learning from the Rissne project and parallel precedent studies, we saw that materiality stands out as an important factor when it comes to a sense of safety and privacy. Varying facades of timber frames, modular screens, glass or metal can all provide permeability, sun shading, views of nature and privacy. Another key aspect is how edge zones can use greenery to their advantage, both environmentally and socially. In Rissne, soft unmanicured landscaping serves as a buffer zone between public and private space in the

2 Proposed thresholds in the Rissne neighbourhood

larger parts of the masterplan, while garden landscaping was introduced to provide social spaces and promote community engagement between buildings. Finally, the importance of layering edge zones, designing them in such a way that they address many needs, for example, possibilities for shelter or seating as well as separation and privacy, ensures a higher degree of social possibilities while limiting carbon expenditure.

MEETING CHANGING DEMANDS

A central purpose of the Green Thresholds project was to provide the tools and methods for working with both social sustainability and environmental life cycle assessments in the day-to-day life of architectural practice. The nature of the design process explored through the Rissne project turned out to be a key factor in this balancing act.

Rissne revealed two key stages in working with social and environmental sustainability: firstly, in the initial stages of design where there needs to be open dialogue to guide the design development, and secondly, where there is a need to evaluate and benchmark the design as it evolves. Green Thresholds, therefore, sought to develop a framework for both early and later stage evaluation.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY DIALOGUE AND EVALUATION

The creation of a framework to manage social sustainability expectations across different project phases began with mapping social sustainability criteria from more than 10 certification systems, plus other sources, to create a master document. The criteria were then organised into eight focus areas. Each of these were split into relevant core ambitions, and finally into a series of means to achieve each ambition; not an exhaustive list but rather a way of generating ideas at a concrete level.

The tool was built with a script in Rhino so that sections could be easily modified and the diagram calibrated when edited; for example, for an interior project, the entire urban life and landscape section could be removed.

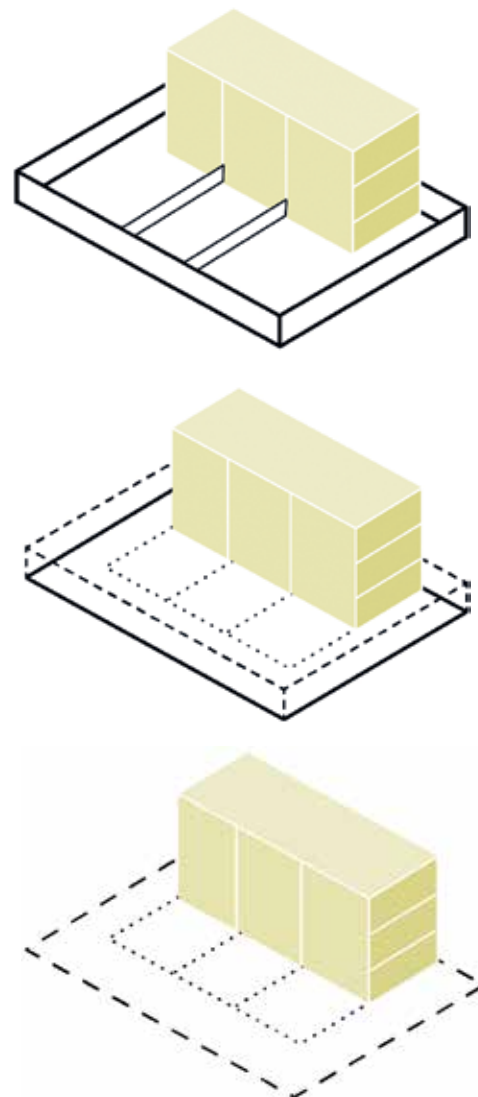
This tool was intended to function as both a dialogue tool and an evaluation. However, as much as it proved successful in setting up a framework for discussion and setting priorities, its use as an evaluation tool proved challenging. The majority of the criteria in most certification systems focuses social sustainability criteria in the field of health and comfort, relating to daylight, thermal and acoustic comfort, and so on, which are all measurable and quantifiable. The broader ambitions and methods in this tool, including aspects such as walkability and the option to linger, remained reliant upon traditional methods of critical evaluation, subject to individual interpretation as well as ambiguities within the design process.

LCA DIALOGUE AND EVALUATION

For LCA, the challenge is the inverse of that in social sustainability. Numerically evaluating a project is axiomatic, whereas a dialogue tool to guide design from the earliest stages presents greater challenges. LCA is commonly used at the end of a project or once the design is well developed, as a way of checking compliance. Our task was to engender LCA as part of the design process from the beginning, in order to help designers understand how their decisions impact on a building's life cycle.

In an attempt to solve this challenge, the LCA dialogue tool was created in a form similar to the social sustainability tool, namely that of a layered wheel. The inner section relates to each stage of the life cycle, from production through to end of life scenarios. The middle layer breaks these stages down into their component parts following the lead of LCA evaluations, including raw materials, transport and manufacture. Finally, the outer layer of the wheel proposes design approaches to consider, for example design for disassembly, reuse of existing structures or material harvesting.

However, the challenge has been how to make the tool specific enough through concrete proposals that fall under an

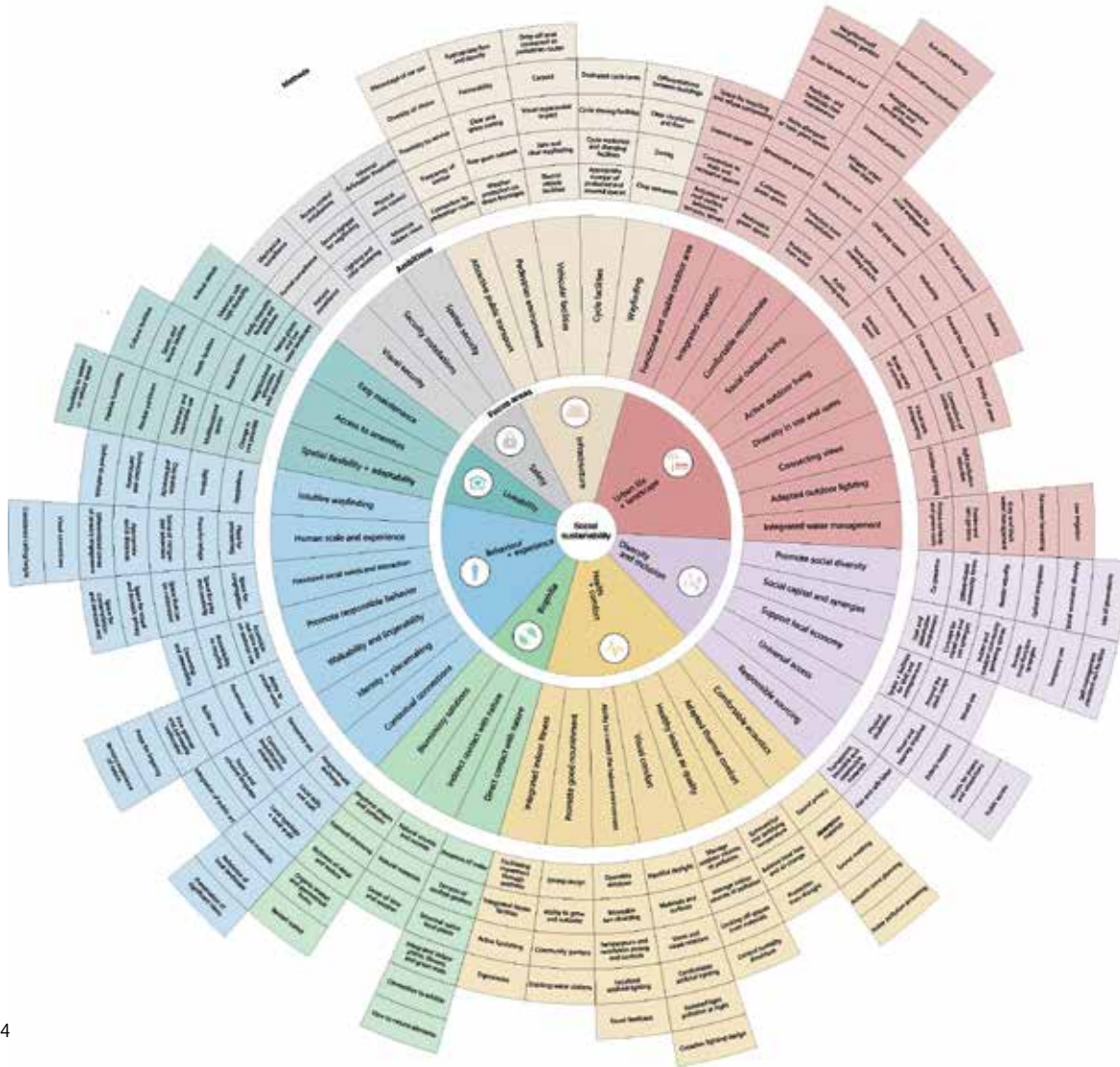


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The challenge has been how to make the tool specific enough through concrete proposals that fall under an architect's remit, without becoming overly inclusive or unlimited in its scope and intention

architect's remit, without becoming overly inclusive or unlimited in its scope and intention, for example by attempting to list every possible environmental performance determinant. We, therefore, ultimately turned to a different approach of steering the LCA into being a design and dialogue tool, rather than an end-game evaluation, through what we termed mini-LCAs. These are small-scale studies, which zoom in on particularly onerous components, for example a balcony. By breaking the LCA down in this way and using it to compare options at an early stage of design, we take the best of LCA's natural benefits such as easy measurability, and make it quicker and more immediate.

3 Three representative edge zone conditions of Threshold design
Top: The Safe Barrier
Middle: The Friendly Neighbour
Bottom: The Open Edge



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DISCUSSION

Interestingly, we found LCA and social sustainability to have an inverse relationship: the later stage evaluation of designs, through concrete LCA tools and definitive numbers, is a proven and accepted methodology, while mapping out potential design decisions at early stages that will affect the LCA is a complex task. Conversely, devising an evaluation for social sustainability in the Rissne project proved difficult, due to the difficulty in translating qualitative criteria, often relating to specific cultural and subjective values, into quantifiable and measurable ratings. While we sought to develop a simple, user-friendly system for producing a social sustainability rating, the exercise also showed current shortcomings in rating methodologies as it remained difficult to put hard parameters to concepts as nebulous as safety and inclusion.

In other words, social sustainability and LCA have opposite and equal challenges for their inclusion in the design process, one being particularly applicable for early-stage discussions of value but disadvantaged at later stages, the other having the inverse problem.

There is something to be said for naming things. If we are not clear enough in the parameters that we use to define and evaluate social sustainability for example, there will always be a danger that they will be lost amidst the general pressure for documenting environmental performance and sustainability. More work is needed across the industry to arrive at better definitions of sustainability.

However, the Green Thresholds project has shown that it is arguably most fruitful to lean further into the native or inherent strengths of LCA and social sustainability's mode of operation respectively. Ultimately for social sustainability, clearly naming concepts and exemplifying in concrete terms during dialogue

and design development proved most meaningful. Likewise, capitalising on the natural clarity and calculative character of LCA tools through the use of mini-LCAs plays to this field's strengths while making it quicker, more agile and therefore more useful in design development.

As post-occupancy evaluation becomes more commonplace, and we learn more about the measurable impacts of the built environment on human behaviour and wellbeing, it will become more feasible to numerically define social sustainability in a holistic manner. Perhaps as LCA technology and climate consciousness mature, early-stage discussions pertaining to circular design will flourish. In the meantime, leaning into native strengths and modes through mini-LCAs and the social sustainability dialogue wheel offers a means of elevating and broadening the sustainability discourse. ●

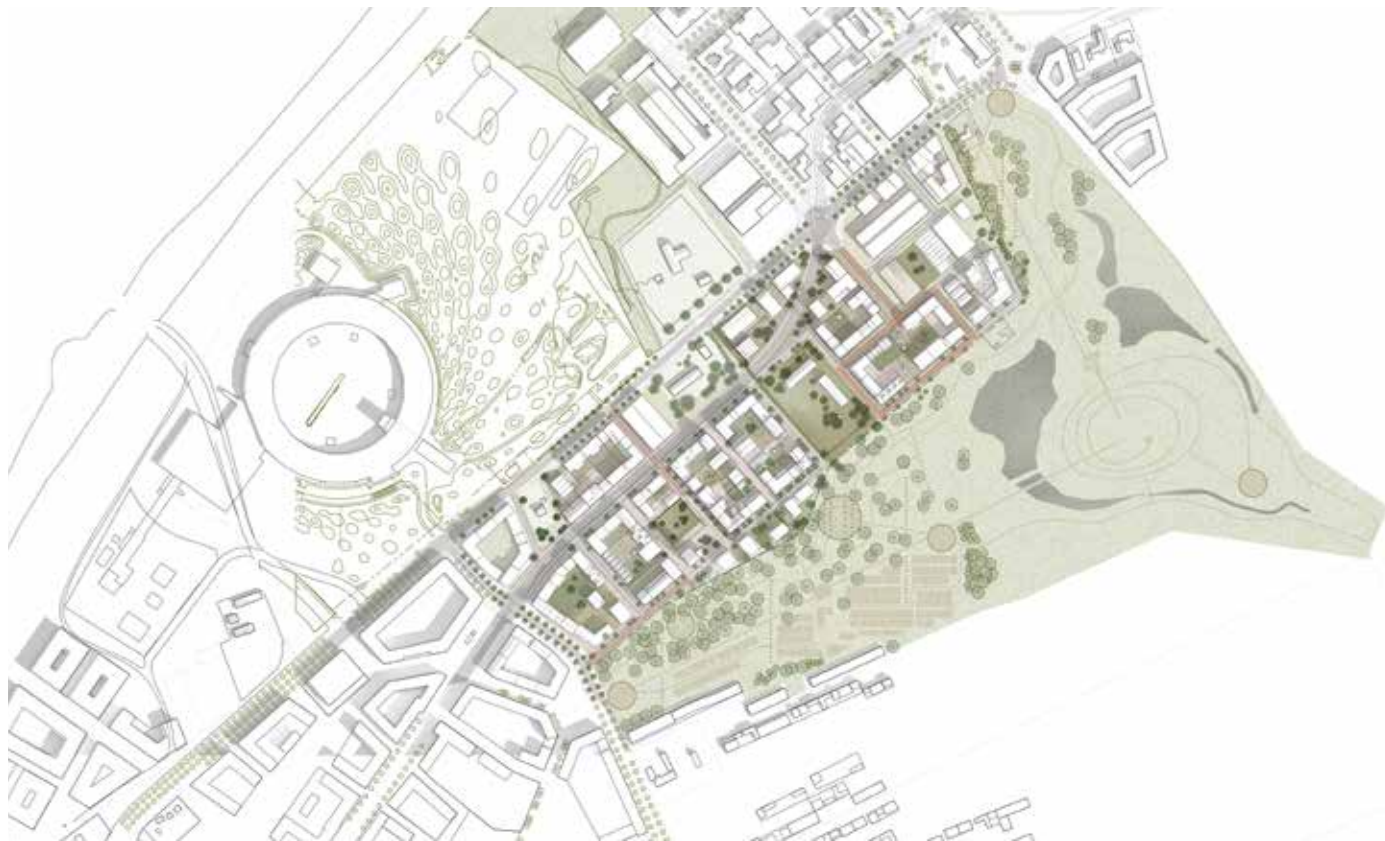
Susan Carruth, Partner and Head of Operations and Kåre Stokholm Poulsgaard, Partner and Head of Innovation, GXN

With thanks to Lotte Bjerregaard Jensen, Katja Lindschouw Frankvard, Vania Mahdi and Josephine Sjogrenfurst from Technical University of Denmark (DTU)

4 The Interactive Design Tool for Social Sustainability, with its recommended Focus Areas, Ambitions and Methods

Towards Integrated Energy and Climate Masterplanning

Andreas Eggersten Teder reports on Råängen where faith and science meet



1

Råängen is a new urban development area in Lund, a city in southern Sweden that originally grew around a cathedral dating back to 1123 AD, and Lund University, one of Scandinavia's oldest and largest institutions for higher education and research. Lund Cathedral is an important landowner in the city, but it is the first time in history that it has acted as a developer transforming its land into an urban environment and in accordance with the values of the Church. The development is planned on valuable farmland and extra care is taken to retain the fertile soil of the high-yielding land. Råängen (which translates as raw meadow) is being developed in conjunction with artists, architects, the local community, developers, contractors and university staff. Over several years these stakeholders have taken part in a dialogue process that now forms the groundwork for future chapters in the creation of this thriving new neighbourhood.

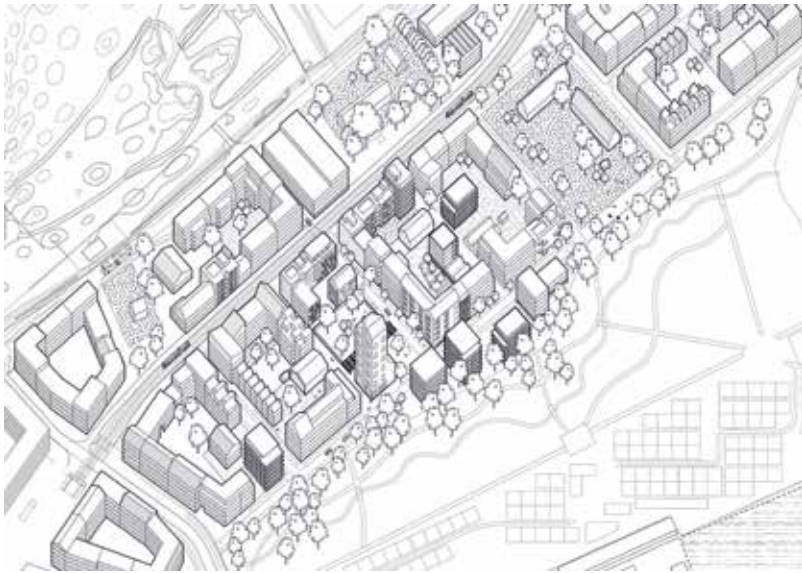
VALUE-BASED PLANNING

The Råängen masterplan is part of a larger development programme led by Lund Municipality in partnership with Lund University and Lund Cathedral for the wider area known as Brunnsög. The 450 hectare area of Brunnsög will accommodate 6,000 new homes, 600,000m² of workspace, a new park and state-of-the-art research facilities. The district will extend

the urban fabric of the city to embrace the research facilities and integrate the university campus into the new neighbourhood. Brunnsög will significantly increase Lund's housing and workplace infrastructure built around a new tram line that forms the backbone of a green mobility strategy, and aims to facilitate two-thirds of all future movements taking place on foot, by bicycle or on public transport. The Råängen masterplan is an important piece of the jigsaw puzzle and strengthens the connections with the existing urban centre and the new developments in Brunnsög.

The overarching sustainability goals for the development in Brunnsög are minimal climate impact, minimum construction impact on arable land and maximised sensory experiences to create a stimulating urban environment in which to live and work. Råängen aims to develop a responsive long-term approach that focuses on the quality and characteristics

1 Lund: Råängen masterplan. Source: White Arkitekter



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of the landscape, to inform an approach to building, models of ownership and ways of living. Innovative architectural projects will be developed over time and will respond to both the context and needs of the area. The timeframe for the development will follow the core values of the Cathedral, i.e. developing an urban environment that will stand the test of time and respond to questions such as:

- How can a neighbourhood balance the wellbeing of both nature and the community?
- How can the public realm invite and encourage local engagement and impart a sense of pride, ownership and appreciation of beauty?
- How can hospitality, one of the key values of the Cathedral, be integrated within Råängen and the subsequent development projects?

STARTING WITH COMMON GROUND

Each phase of the development relates to Lund Municipality's ambitious plan for Brunnsbög, but will be developed with a distinctive character, based upon a careful investigation of the themes relating to value, context and community. The Norwegian artists Brendeland and Kristoffersen have designed a structure that will set the tone and sense of place for the area. Described as 'a garden for everybody', it has been constructed to provide a common space that future buildings will be designed around. The artists' commitment to the common good, as well as long-term engagement in issues relating to land ownership, communal ways of living, vernacular architecture, craft and local materials take the form of a public walled garden completed before the first buildings have been designed. The public space

is enclosed on three sides by a 2m high wall made of recycled local bricks. The fourth side of the enclosure is open, facing south-east overlooking the wider landscape, and framing a view of the surrounding farmland and the horizon. Between the landscape and the garden, a lightweight steel frame forms a canopy under which a large wooden communal table is placed. This, the first permanent project on the site, provides a public space for people to gather, contemplate, hold conversations or play.

A MEETING OF FAITH AND SCIENCE

The masterplan forms the next stage of the development. The project is being developed around two large research facilities: MAX IV Laboratory and ESS. The decision to locate the international research facility European Spallation Source (ESS) in the area was made in 2009. Shortly afterwards, it was decided to build another strategically important laboratory, the MAX IV facility, just a few hundred metres away. Together the two facilities will attract thousands of international researchers to Lund every year. The facilities also provide a basis for the municipality to direct future urban growth in a north-easterly direction. The laboratories are very energy intensive and produce large volumes of waste heat, but the research facilities were built on the condition that 100 per cent of the energy demand be provided by renewable energy and will thus supply energy for the whole area and with minimal environmental impact. Approximately 75 per cent of the heat produced is recycled, with the unique potential to heat the entire development area of Brunnsbög and a large part of the city of Lund through the district heating network. The waste heat produced corresponds to approximately 25 per cent of the total annual energy demand of the district heating network of the city. The MAX IV research facility has delivered heat since 2014; the ESS facility will start supplying waste heat during the course of 2022 and is scheduled to be in full operation in 2025.

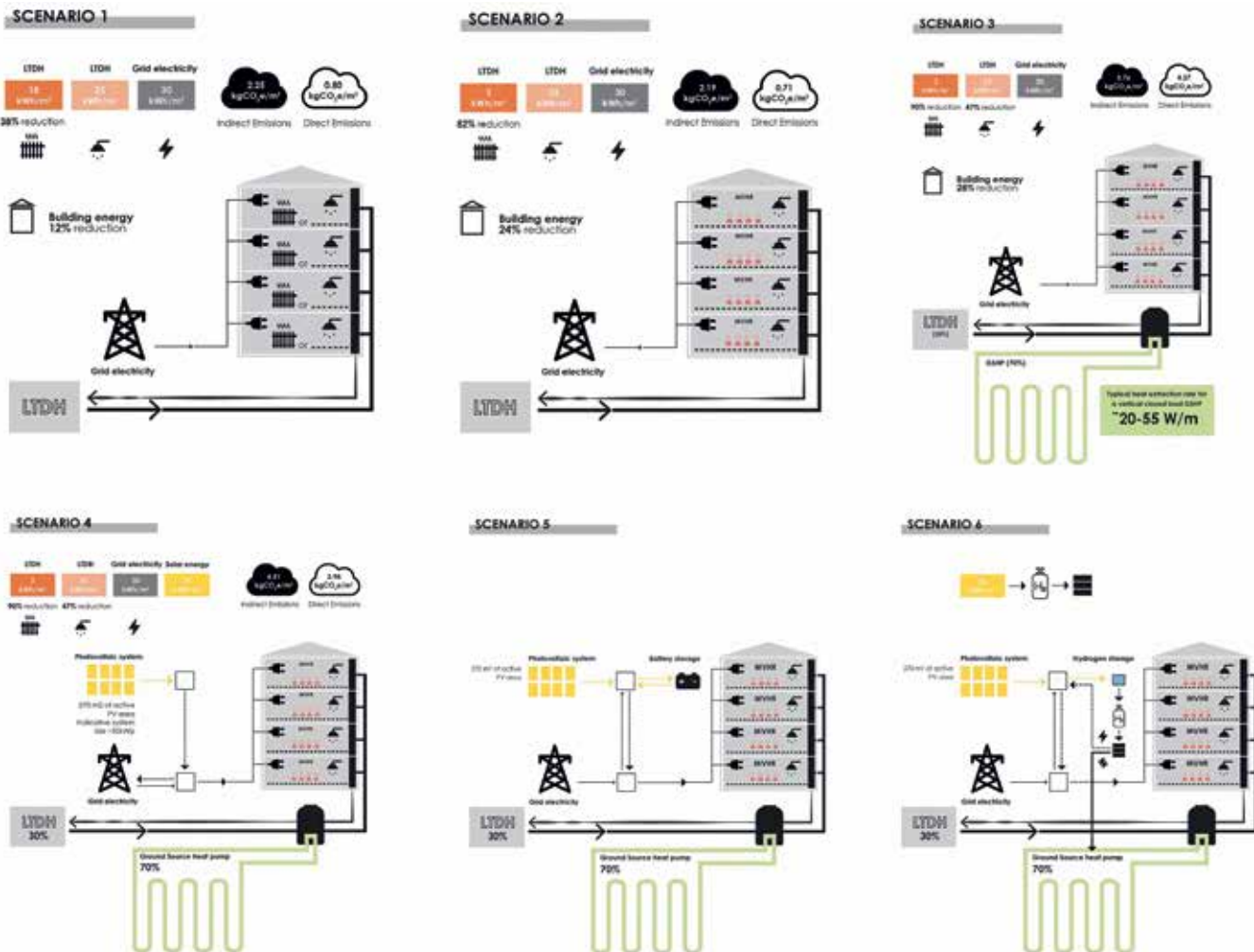
TOWARDS A CARBON-POSITIVE FUTURE

An energy modelling assessment was carried out at a very early stage of the process, before the masterplan was approved by the local authorities. The purpose of the study was to outline strategic measures for low-carbon technologies to strengthen the sustainability agenda of the Brunnsbög development and to encourage innovation on the journey towards a carbon-positive future, in line with the Local Roadmap for a fossil-free building industry 2030 (LFM30).

The starting point for the assessment was to identify energy performance criteria for the buildings, coupled with

2 Masterplan and building level strategies. Source: White Arkitekter

3 The Walled Garden designed by Brendeland and Kristoffersen architects includes a lightweight canopy and wooden communal table. Source: Peter Westrup



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smart-grid solutions that utilised the surplus energy from the research facilities in an effective way. The low temperature district heating system with minimal environmental impact was a very good starting point for optimising the overall climate change impact of the new urban district. The assessment was carried out based upon a base-case scenario for future urban development.

Energy performance and embodied carbon were assessed in the base-case scenario with energy simulations and embodied carbon calculations. The energy and climate performance of future urban developments were assessed, based on indicators in line with Swedish building regulations under six distinct scenarios for the neighbourhood's energy system; from a centralised scenario with district heating to a more decentralised scenario with a combination of ground source heat pumps, energy production technologies such as solar panels and energy storage in geowells, batteries and hydrogen fuel cells. The purpose of the study was to calculate and evaluate cost-effective strategies to reach a balance between energy demand and energy production across the neighbourhood as a whole. A key ambition was to minimise buildings' electricity demand, as electricity demand and production in the region are out of balance. Energy storage strategies were also evaluated on daily cycles, as well as seasonal changes. A further focus was the evaluation of strategies for dealing with demand peaks in buildings being planned for Råängen, to develop a robust and interconnected renewable energy supply system for the whole neighbourhood.

The six urban energy scenarios consider a range of established and emerging technologies that could be applied to reduce the operational energy of future buildings across the neighbourhood. The results of the assessment show that the improvement in energy performance which also reduce operational carbon emissions are achieved through passive building design measures, and heat recovery from ventilation systems. The

integration of ground source heat pumps into the district heating system can supply heat very efficiently across the neighbourhood but results in increased carbon emissions. The neighbourhood-level energy assessment also demonstrates that, in very energy efficient buildings, electricity demand represents the greatest proportion of energy consumption, and that the addition of solar panels (to partly offset electrical loads), provides clear opportunities to reduce the carbon footprint of the development as a whole.

Key lessons from the urban energy planning process are to:

- Set targets for the energy performance of the buildings before the land is sold
- Evaluate the carbon impact of development through load-matching scenarios at a high resolution, to find the right balance between energy demand and renewable energy production within the district
- Set up a carbon balance at a neighbourhood level, as well as setting targets for climate change impacts at an individual building level. ●

Andreas Eggersten Teder, architect and development manager, White Arkitekter

3 Alternative urban energy scenarios. Source: White Arkitekter



Trondheim's Urban Ecology Experimental Zone

Michael Grüner and Alise Plavina tell the story of a radical neighbourhood

The Trondheim neighbourhood of Svartlamon is a 2.2 hectare triangle of colourful, mostly two-storey, typically Norwegian timber houses with gardens full of flowers, vegetables and graffiti, tucked between railway tracks, a port and a now largely defunct industrial area. Its name has been in use for over a hundred years to distinguish this historically shabby neighbourhood of workers, sailors, alcoholics and small criminals from the finer Lademoen neighbourhood on the other side of the railway tracks.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

At the end of the 19th century, the area, then outside the city limits, was developed by the municipality as cheap housing for workers with small timber houses with gardens; some of them were originally located on the other side of the fjord, dismantled and then transported to Trondheim across the fjord before being reassembled in Svartlamon. However, during WWII, the German occupying forces developed the harbour as one of the submarine bases along the Norwegian coast. They tore down many houses in the area and left behind the massive 145m long,

110m wide and 22m high armoured concrete submarine bunker, Dora, that now closes Svartlamon off from the fjord. After WWII, the area was zoned for industrial use. In the following decades, many houses were demolished to provide space for industrial expansion, or physically and socially neglected by the municipality as the landlord.

In the late 1980s when the area was threatened with total demolition, the success story of Svartlamon as a community began when young people pursuing alternative urban lifestyles reclaimed the area and moved in, paying low rents or squatting in empty houses. The Svartlamon Residents' Association was founded in 1990 to coordinate the on-going conflict with the city authorities, campaigning for them to maintain the area as affordable housing. The conflict culminated when development plans were submitted by a local car dealership in 1998. With much protest and civil disobedience on the streets and at the city council offices, broadly supported by Trondheim residents as well as acclaimed artists painting artworks on the facades of the soon-to-be demolished houses, Svartlamon won the battle. The area was formally re-zoned for residential use in 1998.

A new plan for the area was developed through collaboration between the municipal town planning department and the residents themselves. It was approved by the city council in 2001 with the specific aim that Svartlamon should be developed as 'an alternative neighbourhood providing space for experimenting, trialling and testing in terms of housing, lifestyles, social interaction, participation, ecology and energy, communal services, art, culture and business development'. The zoning plan was based on the visions of the inhabitants and the concept of sustainable development, as laid out in the Brundtland Report and Local Agenda 21 principles. The plan also legally defined the area as an 'urban ecological experimental area', an unprecedented zoning category.

TODAY

Today Svartlamon is inhabited by around 240 residents (including 60 children) living in approximately 30 houses covering approximately 5,000m² floor area, as well as numerous cats, free-range chickens and ducks.

It is a community of self-confident, frank, yet (typically for Trondheim) friendly and sociable non-conformists who have been characterised as fusing serious social protest with a diverse and colourful community life. There is a strong cohesion within the community, with a high level of awareness when it comes to cooperation, working together and contributing to achieve common goals.

1 Strandveien 37: new build cross laminated timber (CLT) communal housing, by Brendeland and Kristoffersen architects. Photograph by David Grandorge

While having conflicting opinions on some issues, the residents share common values. Svartlamon as a community, characterises the ideology of creating one's own *Freiraum* (from the German meaning a state-free space in left-wing politics), and living an alternative, sustainable, non-materialistic lifestyle with like-minded people in an intentional community.

Over the years, Svartlamon has established several shared facilities, such as well-equipped workshops, a utility van, communal gardens, common fridges, a people's kitchen that uses bulk-bought containerised food, and the *gratisbutikken* – a shop where everything is free. Residents also contribute to a common 'solidarity pot' that provides financial support to national and international causes.

Non-commercial annual events like *Svartlamondagen* (Svartlamon Day) and the Eat the Rich festival open the area to visitors with live music played in courtyards, people gathering around firepits, food and drink, workshops for families, open houses and tours showcasing the different activities taking place in the area.

The initial conflict seems to be over, but it flares up again easily when sensitive issues are discussed: preserving the old buildings, and maintaining the low-standard but predictable long-term rental contracts, low rents and affordable housing in a booming city centre. A key ongoing discussion with the municipality involves extending the lease agreement between the housing foundation and municipality from 10 to 20, 50 or even 100 years. This would probably be considered a luxury for other alternative communities struggling to survive in the face of pressure from landowners and the authorities, but it is essential for Svartlamon to continue to thrive.

Svartlamon is unique, perhaps even on a global level, with perhaps only the Christiania district in Copenhagen sharing some of its characteristics. For the municipality of Trondheim the approach to Svartlamon has paid off as it is now an urban showpiece to national and international audiences. Svartlamon is even a part of the municipality's own branding to attract people to live and study in Trondheim. It also helps the municipality to 'walk the talk' in terms of their ambitions for hands-on sustainability experimentation, participation and diversity.

ORGANISATION

One key to the success of the community is its well-established organisation and decision-making process. The central institutional body is the Svartlamon Residents' Association established to develop and maintain the autonomy of Svartlamon, and to represent and pursue the interests of the residents. The association is not only intended to speak on behalf of the Svartlamon residents, but also to be a driving force for urban ecological development, social housing politics and anti-racism in the region.

The Association is built on the principles of equal democratic power to everyone and self-determination. There is a low threshold for active participation in decision-making, or for pitching proposals and new ideas. In this flat structure, there is no place for leaders or boards. Positions and duties rotate and are limited in time, decisions cannot be left to groups or individuals. The residents' meetings are taken seriously and are rigorously attended. Enough people must be present to have a quorum, triggering participation. Participants vary depending on the topic and are not always the same political individuals. Decisions are generally made by consensus. Meetings are characterised by supportive discussion about how to get the best out of any proposal.

The Residents' Association also elects representatives to the board of Svartlamon Housing Foundation, where both the residents and the municipality are equally represented, but the chair of the board must be from a third party. The Svartlamon Housing Foundation maintains the houses, manages rents and operates as a 'tenant' towards the municipality. In addition, the Svartlamon Culture and Commerce Foundation manages the



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2 Historic timber housing in Svartlamon in 1978 before re-zoning and refurbishment. Photo: Trondheim Municipal Archive

municipality-owned kindergarten, art and cultural facilities in the area.

ZONING PLAN

To the Trondheim city planning department, these determined residents have proved to be a demanding, yet cooperative partner in the development of the plan in the period from 1998 to 2001. Despite tensions on both sides, the municipal planners acknowledge the rewarding partnership with the Svartlamon residents and regard the plan as an opportunity to create diversity in the city.

The plan is the product of different teams of residents and town planners that were set up to develop selected themes. The residents put forward their demands and ideas in the larger context of Local Agenda 21, wider discussion about sustainable development and broader environmental issues, and highlighted Svartlamon as a possible showcase of the values that these ideas represent.

As a result, the four main goals of the legally binding plan are:

- to protect the neighbourhood as an urban ecological experimental area that can create new ideas for sustainable housing and commercial functions at local, national and international level
- to preserve and develop the existing cultural environment of both the old buildings and the local community
- to maintain a basis for affordable housing and commercial functions, and
- to build upon Local Agenda 21 principles of active participation, self-determination and autonomous decision-making as established in Svartlamon Residents' Association.

Having the designation as an 'urban ecological experimental area' as a legally binding zoning category means that future development of the area must draw upon the resources of its specific urban ecology, i.e. the available local physical resources (the built environment) and the available human resources (the community). The category allows for experiments that are both related to its physical design, i.e. testing new affordable housing, technological or



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'Maybe we should look at other similar communities,'

'...' (deep sigh from the participants)

'We have tried that for 30 years now, but there is nothing like Svartlamon. We always end up having to come up with something ourselves.'

Excerpt from a residents' meeting on how to deal with a new situation at Svartlamon, in this case growing resident numbers

architectural solutions, and the process, i.e. testing new planning, decision-making, building and collaboration models. The plan explicitly states that these experiments shall not be constrained by the standard building application process, and exemptions from building regulations and technical requirements can be considered.

For the municipality, the main urban design intentions are:

- the densification and re-establishment of previously demolished urban spaces (backyards, streets, alleys)
- the creation of a safe and family-friendly environment, especially with outdoor areas
- the preservation and maintenance of historically important buildings, and
- the evaluation of progress to assess the Svartlamon experiment and aid knowledge transfer.

The plan does not take separate plot divisions into account, nor does it include any private outdoor areas, only fully public and communal areas. The streets within the neighbourhood are zoned solely for pedestrian and bicycle access. Building categories are defined as either housing or multi-purpose. All outdoor green spaces are designated 'communal playing areas', a pre-existing zoning code that works for the flexible, shared outdoor space in this uniquely communal setting. The Trondheim Building Heritage Management office has also left its mark, regulating building lines, building dimensions, roof angles and even boundary treatments. But while historic preservation is a central focus in the plan, the plan and zoning code requirements clearly state that all new buildings must be architecturally distinct from the existing historic buildings.

PROJECTS

This unique plan has led to some unusual projects. The premises of the former car dealer have been converted to a concert hall and social space, artists' ateliers *ReMIDA*, a resource centre for artistic reuse frequented by children, and rooms for dance and music run by the Svartlamon Culture and Commerce Foundation. Most prominently, the former car showroom itself has been converted to a kindergarten with a progressive agenda, both in terms of its architecture and its pedagogy. Irregular shaped walls made from

cross-laminated timber (CLT) in both plan and section make it 'a demanding building for the demanding things we are doing here', as the kindergarten leader explains. The building is also open for community activities and has become the heart of the neighbourhood.

As part of the urban densification strategy, Strandveien 37 was built in 2007. It comprises a five-storey residential building designed for communal living, and a two-storey building with artists' studios, all built entirely of CLT. The building designed by Brendeland & Kristoffersen was the world's largest CLT building at the time.

The experimental housing project Eksperimentboliger (experimental houses) was initiated by local architecture practice Nøysom Arkitektur. Based on a simple open timber frame system designed by the architects, the future residents developed five very individual row houses. These were built by the inhabitants using primarily reused and ecological materials. The project was nominated for the EU's Mies van der Rohe Architecture Award 2019 and won Trondheim Energiprisen 2020 as an exemplary project to reduce carbon emissions.

The self-build project Selbukassa (self-build box) completed in 2020 represents a further step in scale and complexity. It consists of a three-storey building of approximately 300m² with four flats and is based on an old log building that was dismantled in the surrounding countryside, re-erected in Svartlamon and then extended with reused CLT from a former artists' pavilion. Windows, most cladding, flooring, wall coverings and interiors are reused or second-hand materials. Like the Eksperimentboliger, the project was supported with a subsidised loan from the Norwegian State Housing Bank.

BEYOND SVARTLAMON

Svartlamon is not only developing within its boundaries, but it is now also spreading outwards. The municipality of Trondheim has asked the Svartlamon Housing Foundation to take over two nearby 1960s blocks of municipal flats. The group gladly accepted the opportunity to actively take part in the current debate in Norway about the third housing sector – non-commercial, affordable housing for those who cannot or do not want to enter the private market, yet do not qualify for subsidised municipal housing. The new satellite project Mellamon consists of 38 flats for couples and families from a mix of backgrounds, and will continue the Svartlamon housing model beyond the boundaries of the original plan. ●

3 Eksperimentboliger – experimental self-build and reuse housing. Photograph by Kjersti Lie, Wikipedia Commons

Michael Gruner, architect and sustainability consultant, and Alise Plavina, architect and sustainability consultant, Pir 2 Architects



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Community Engagement in Aarhus

Stephen D Willacy shows how temporary structures can help to engage people in urban design

Aarhus is Denmark's second largest city, with a population of 352,000 inhabitants and increasing by 4,000-5,000 citizens annually. This in turn, increases demands on how to support sustainable neighbourhoods, community building, citizenship and the health and wellbeing of its citizens. This article focuses upon the softer values where informal and non-regulatory urban design governance tools can be encouraged.

Some key trends have gained traction over the past decade during my time as Chief City Architect. They relate to engaging with people in local neighbourhoods, as well as to more general discussions using temporary physical installations. Here I will explore different scales of engagement, in particular relating to experimental approaches, where temporary physical urban interventions at a 1:1 scale proved to be a useful engagement tool for gathering feedback and observations before settling on more permanent ways forward.

Urban development must harness the social and environmental capital of the city. The social capital here is seen as a combination of resources: building in a manner that nurtures strong local communities characterised by trust, and people working together to create a more liveable city. It is about creating places with equity, good health and wellbeing where many different types of people feel comfortable, actively getting involved and engaging in the city.

In the following examples of soft power, people-centric urban environments are encouraged so as to develop high quality places that foster citizen empowerment.

THE INSTITUTE FOR (X) DISTRICT OFFICE, GODSBANE

Since 2009, Godsbane, Aarhus' former freight yard has been taken over with permission from Aarhus City Council by Bureau Detours and Institute for (X). X stands for the undefinable, open, temporary, changeable and the creative. The freight yard area has now become a recognised community commonly known as Aarhus K (K for Kultur), a platform for art, music, culture, start-ups, entrepreneurs and makers, and for events, concerts and courses based on the many different activities. A temporary community has grown organically without a plan. The groups have arranged containers – old freight carriages combined with

1 The Liveable Building Site Fence. Photograph by Stephen D Willacy



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lightweight structures – to create small intimate alleyways, yards and passages with unique landscaped pockets, which are characteristic of the local Latin Quarter. By constantly adding and adjusting pockets of spaces in a seemingly ad-hoc fashion, a wonderful world for small start-up businesses has been created.

As the whole area is being planned and transformed, the Mayor's office has entered into an agreement with Institute for (X) to create the 'best possible community' in Aarhus K. The organisation's *Bydelskontoret* (neighbourhood office) will use its years of experience to function as a watchdog, at the same time being a 'stone in the shoe' for the local authority planning processes, and contributing towards making a new quarter which has attitude and a strong identity. Institute for (X) have been heavily involved in the masterplanning, with the Council's different teams, in the design and implementation of the *Grøn Kile* (Green Wedge), integrating climate change mitigation, SUDs strategies, landscaping and the needs of different minority groups into the plan.

AARHUS Ø – LIVEABLE BUILDING SITE FENCE

Since 2007, the abandoned container harbour in Aarhus has been changing into an enormous building site. Currently it has a population of approximately 500 people. During the process, a number of temporary activities – a beach bar, beach volleyball, allotments and *Domen* (the Dome) – have become popular attractions with the community during the summer months. As new projects come along, activities pop up in new locations.

The idea of creating temporary activities has been further developed into the most recent project, the 'liveable-building-site-fence'. This is a partnership project between the developers and the City Council, and the Council have created a framework for the project. Located parallel to the Bassin 7 building, the project includes a promenade of temporary shops, eating places, cafés and different club and society spaces, all designed and

made by Institute for (X) and inspired by the community. As the buildings expand, the success of this quirky world of loose-fit containers, small pockets of gardens and terraces grows. The promenade of relatively cheap low rent structures face onto the permanent harbour, beautifully designed by BIG Architects, with its floating bathing and water sports facility. The combination has created a popular new destination in the city.

THE INFINITE BRIDGE

Gjød and Povlsgaard Architects designed *Den Uendelige Bro* (The Infinite Bridge) for the 2015 AROS exhibition *Sculptures by the Sea*. The temporary sculpture proved so popular during the event that the City Council decided to make it permanent. It connects land and water in a wonderfully poetical way. The structure is designed to be disassembled during the winter months and reinstated between April and October. Weddings take place here every weekend and the place is truly a melting pot of social diversity.

GRAVEN

A street in the historic heart of Aarhus, Graven has changed character over time from car-centric to people-centric. Small cafés, restaurants and shops slowly started inhabiting the narrow pavements with chairs, tables and produce, forcing pedestrians to walk in the road. As this caused concerns about people's safety, the Council, through negotiation with the owners, created special summer conditions where cyclists and vehicles are encouraged to go slowly through the area, giving more space for street furniture on the road itself.

RUNDHØJ TORV

For many years Rundhøj Square has been an eye-sore, and in 2014 it was voted Aarhus' ugliest public space with its abandoned and dilapidated petrol station next to a small shopping centre on the edge of a social housing district. Aarhus Mayor's Department invited Kondens Office for Democratic Architecture to develop a strategy for the site with the local citizens. With limited resources, the three partners developed a new-found community spirit and started by constructing *Omdrejningspunkt* (Turning point), consisting of two red shipping containers with a roof terrace. Thereafter an oasis of urban gardens was established, combined with community designed and made furniture. This has grown steadily with many new initiatives including a new meeting house called *Lampen* (The Light) made of transparent corrugated sheeting which lights up the square in different colours to create the right atmosphere.

Gradually other new initiatives are being established; for example, a new red sandbox and a stage have been made

2 The Infinite Bridge.

Photograph by

Stephen Willacy

3 Store Torv, Aarhus

Festival Week.

Photographs by

Schönherr Landscape

Architects

reusing another temporary installation and is built on 500m of disused rail tracks in a former industrial area in central Aarhus. Another initiative in the pipeline is the conversion into an outdoor cinema of a former vehicle ramp down into the neighbouring basement car park. Altogether, a new democratic public place with a variety of informally made pockets for social interaction, and for all ages and ethnic groups, has been created.

Aarhus Festival Week takes place at the start of September every year. Since 2007 the festival has constructed 1:1 urban experiments, often asking 'What if?'. For example, in 2010, it wondered how people would react to transforming the oldest square Store Torv into a forest for ten days? This proved very popular with both festival visitors and politicians. As Laura Hay, the Alderman of the City's Department of Technical and Environmental Services said, 'The Store Torv forest clearly showed that beautiful and interesting urban installations can create life and atmosphere as well as contribute to making Aarhus an attractive city for both locals and visitors'.

EMPTY SHOPS, MORE STREET LIFE

For some time now, the number of empty shops in Aarhus' historic central squares and streets has been increasing, causing concern. The Council, working with the city's retail organisations, have decided to be more proactive. Firstly, a water sculpture called *Vand Dragen* (Water Dragon) in central Aarhus – a source of much contention for many years – was removed after considerable public debate. As part of a three to four-year planning process, new types of temporary and innovative urban landscapes and furniture designed by architects Schønherr were installed, to encourage people to use the space in new ways. This has created the opportunity to observe and talk to people about the future use of this historic and beautiful area. Specially designed lighting integrated into steps by Kollision Architects has created a strong sense of security in the evenings and extended the use of the square. So far, the small islands of green and softly formed seating have proved very popular and generated useful feedback.

BISPETORVET

With the success of the forest project at Store Torv, the Council started looking at the neighbouring square Bispetorv. In order to reappraise its urban qualities, a process was created by building large-scale models and positioning different scenarios for a whole annual cycle of possible activities. The models were helpful in talking to the different actors in the city including city councillors. Once agreed with the citizens and councillors, a temporary scheme was built with high-quality materials and trees planted around the square, creating various pockets of space and a snake of benches lining the new urban space. The trees have grown over the last five years and the space has proved successful for many different urban activities; it has also been very popular during the pandemic.

INSTANT CITY STRATEGY – GELLERUP

Over the last decade or so, Aarhus has been working towards transforming one of Denmark's largest and most challenged housing districts, Gellerup, into an attractive and integrated part of the city. One of the urban transformation strategies has been to open up the previously isolated island community by making a new network of roads, connecting it to local neighbourhoods. A large proportion of the population is under 18 years of age. Large-scale projects like this often take many years to deliver and younger generations often miss out on the transformation. To counteract this, the Instant City Strategy was initiated along the new main street, the Karen Blixens Boulevard. A series of 'urban acupuncture' initiatives were set up in order for local associations, sports clubs and other groups to inhabit the open spaces.

One of the biggest challenges in Gellerup is the high unemployment rate. The Square One project came about to help local



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unemployed residents to find work. It is a partnership between the local social Housing Cooperation Brabrand Bolig Foreningen, Aarhus City Council and the local construction and development company A E Enggaard. Square One is a temporary structure designed and built to be flexible and demountable so that it can be relocated when a new long-term development for the site is completed. It is a co-working space for creative hands-on entrepreneurs, where they can test, develop and grow their own businesses.

CONCLUSION

Well-designed informal temporary settings are useful tools to kick-start dialogues and engage with all types of people. They can also provide qualitative feedback through observations, surveys, phone messages and different forms of social media. Another and often overlooked feature is the playful feeling created in such informal settings. The fact that these are relatively small investments mean that politicians are more willing to take risks and be open to innovative and experimental approaches to place-making. ●

4 Store Torv Aarhus Festival Week. Photography by Martin Dam Kristensen
5 The Square One project in Gellerup, Aarhus

Stephen D Willacy, Honorary Professor, University of Dundee and former Chief City Architect, City of Aarhus

Water as Public Realm in Nordic Cities

Karl Dubois examines the increasing use of water as public space



Only a few decades ago, few people would have imagined that urban swimming would become such a popular activity in the Nordic region. Few would have predicted the extent to which urban swimming and public access rights to water would have become so integral to urban planning processes. How can water be designed and managed as public amenity space? What benefits can these spaces bring to rapidly-growing cities and to the quality of life for their residents?

As in many parts of the world, the transition from city centre-based port operations to dedicated container ports has led to the extensive redevelopment of urban waterfront sites in Nordic cities. Building on the decades-long process of opening waterfront industrial zones for commercial and civic development, water itself is now increasingly being seen as an important public space in its own right. Water is also being programmed for an ever wider and more intense mix of public amenity and recreation activities, with extensive public access rights being secured in both local planning policies and through historic national legislation. At a detailed level, masterplans and zoning plans are increasingly making use of planning law to very precisely designate, and thereby legally protect, waterfronts and specific areas of water for public amenity functions.

On a purely pragmatic level, the push towards more compact urban forms and increasing urban densities means that physical space is at a premium. In many cities, water bodies provide a

hitherto underused source of outdoor amenity space. However, as well as addressing a number of practical urban planning issues, this trend also mirrors several remarkable cultural changes.

Using water for public amenity functions is not an entirely new phenomenon. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, outdoor lidos built into the sea and along river courses were hugely popular in northern European cities. Major swimming competitions were held in harbours and urban river courses in many cities. The post-war era decline in the popularity of outdoor swimming and the move towards more formally zoned and indoor leisure activities have direct chronological parallels with the relative decline of traditional high streets, outdoor markets and the vitality of public space in general. Interestingly, their resurgence has also been somewhat parallel.

Perhaps even more significantly, many contemporary waterfront projects are increasingly seeking to break down both

1 Copenhagen Harbour Bath. Source: Claus Logstrup

the physical and cultural barriers between man-made urban environments and their immediate landscape contexts.

Oslo Opera House, designed by Snøhetta, provides one of the most direct examples of this approach. The project's striking architectural form and distinct white marble surface is frequently interpreted as mimicking the ice that often fills the Oslo Fjord, a water body that acts as a large municipal skating rink in winter, and a free one at that. In summer the building's extensive and publicly accessible roofscape acts as a major urban space, providing a location for everything from outdoor concerts to informal picnics and quiet sunbathing. All of this happens on a single white marble surface that slopes gently into the Oslo Fjord, unhindered by barriers or fences.

DESIGN ICONOGRAPHY

As with many design movements, early pioneer projects often act as paradigms for more widespread applications. Some of the more iconic urban swimming and waterscape projects in Nordic countries have happened at the same time as some of the largest urban waterfront property developments and property booms. Copenhagen-based BIG Architects' Amager Strand and White Arkitekter's Kastrup Strand have both acted as common reference points for many subsequent projects, both in the region and internationally.

The most distinctive projects are used extensively in marketing and branding campaigns, attracting both tourists and inward investment. For better or worse, the huge publicly accessible Oslo Opera House roof that slopes down into the fjord has now become one of the most Instagrammable tourist destinations in Scandinavia. At the same time and almost without exception, it has been taken to heart by the citizens of Oslo as one of the city's most attractive and important public spaces. In addition to countless other design prizes, the project was awarded the EU's Mies van der Rohe Architecture Award in 2009 because of its immense contribution to the city and its public realm.

TROUBLE AT SEA

However, the recent intensification in the use of water as public space in Nordic cities has not been without its challenges and conflicts. A public bathing area in the Tjuvholmen area of Oslo, a former port facility in central Oslo, has been a flashpoint for many of these conflicts. A zoning plan for the whole area was developed following a design competition in 2002. Twenty years ago, people did not envisage just how popular the proposed public bathing areas would become and how intensively they would be used during the long Nordic summer evenings.

In 2014, following complaints about noise from neighbours living in the surrounding residential blocks, signs were put up by residents' association property management bodies detailing restrictions on opening hours and activities. This measure has been highly controversial and contested, given different interpretations of the original planning conditions, and the extensive rights to roam and public access rights enshrined in law for many years in Nordic countries.

Further north in Trondheim, waist-height railings – not normally present alongside waterfronts in Nordic cities – were recently installed to deter people from swimming in areas of water also used for sailing motorboats into private moorings in a new luxury residential development. Many legal experts claim that even these waist-height railings, which have openings fitted with swimming ladders to provide direct access to the water, are in direct contravention of both right-to-roam legislation and national legislation protecting the right to direct public access to the coast.

The most direct urban parallel with this conflict between swimmers and motorised private leisure boat traffic is perhaps the conflict between pedestrians and car users. In 2021, the city of Drammen, west of Oslo, introduced a ban on jet-skis in its extensively regenerated harbour area, citing the specific safety risks to swimmers and the wider issue of noise pollution.



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2 Oslo Opera House in winter. Source: Snøhetta / Ketil Jacobsen

Fronted by a famous politician leading a flotilla of jet-skis into the harbour, this water-based protest against the ban provided an interesting example of water being used for the most traditional of public space activities – a public protest.

Fjords, harbours and rivers often form the largest open spaces in Nordic cities. Publicly accessible bathing facilities along urban waterfronts act as a focus for social gatherings, especially in the summer months. Public access to open-air bathing facilities thus provides an important opportunity for social interaction, as well as to swim for free, regardless of people's economic background.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

A further benefit of open-air swimming and leisure facilities is that they require far fewer resources, both environmentally and economically, when they are first constructed. They also consume significantly less energy than indoor facilities to run. In Oslo, the opening hours for indoor municipal swimming pools are reduced in the summer months as people flock to the city's free publicly accessible outdoor lidos and extensive municipal outdoor bathing facilities.

Moreover, in increasingly denser and hotter cities, water can provide a welcome relief during long summer days. The adaptive comfort theory, which is frequently applied to the design of low-energy buildings, can also be applied to the design of outdoor environments and the pressing issue of the urban heat island effect in large cities. In short, extensive research has shown that people's ability to either control or take individual action to moderate their thermal environment has a measurable impact on their thermal comfort levels and tolerance of higher summer temperatures.

Iceland also has a long tradition of using naturally occurring volcanic geysers and environmentally-friendly geothermal energy to warm up outdoor pools, which are such an important part of its culture



As well as public health benefits, increased access to water also offers the potential to provide common reference points and a much-needed sense of perspective on our own lives living and working in cities

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and national identity. The Danish urban designer and theorist Jan Gehl has also pointed out that the large outdoor communal hot tubs and pools in Iceland are perfectly sized to encourage social interaction. Several Icelandic commentators have even claimed that these communal hot tubs are Iceland's cultural equivalent to Italy's urban piazzas.

NORDIC AND INTERNATIONAL BATHING TRADITIONS

Across the globe, many cultures have bathing traditions that can be traced back over centuries: the Japanese Olsen pools with parallels to the geothermal pools in Iceland, or the Turkish bath tradition with direct roots in the Ottoman Empire and the Roman Empire before it. These Roman and Ottoman traditions were once an important part of civic life in Europe, and the physical spaces that they took place in acted as important social arenas in early European urban society. A number of these traditions also have very clear philosophies and rituals related to the health benefits of water. With typical Roman municipal efficiency, the Latin word *spa* is in fact a three-letter abbreviation of a Latin slogan *Salve Per Aqua* (health through water).

Many open-air urban swimming and leisure projects in Nordic countries take their design cues directly from their own historic traditions. The Icelandic sagas detail swimming activities going back over a thousand years. An existing ancient Icelandic stone geothermal hot tub, the *Snorralaug*, is believed to date back to the 13th century. The even older Finnish sauna tradition is thought to be several thousand years old and was recently placed on UNESCO's *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*. In recent years, waterside and floating saunas have become very popular in many Nordic cities, with urban fjords and harbours functioning as all-important plunge pools. As with the Roman spa, the sauna tradition has its own deeply engrained social and health rituals.

BACK TO NATURE AND THE NATURE OF CITIES

Experts in the science of swimming refer to a set of human physiological responses to being immersed in water that are referred to in biological terms as mammalian diving responses. These include a marked reduction in heartbeat rates and specific changes to breathing patterns and metabolism. It is these physiological responses that many people argue make swimming relaxing and pleasurable, even in the middle of major cities. Many writers have also referred to these physiological responses when drawing parallels between swimming and the idea of returning physiologically and metaphorically to early human evolutionary roots.

3 Oslo Opera House and floating sauna:
Source: The City of Oslo

4 Zoning plan for the Bjørvika harbour in Oslo, indicating different public functions zones for areas of water. Source: The City of Oslo

As well as public health benefits, increased access to water also offers the potential to provide common reference points and a much-needed sense of perspective on our own lives living and working in cities. Experiencing cities from the water takes us back to the very origins of most urban settlements, be they small towns established on river crossings or major cities that were once tiny pre-historic coastal settlements. Waterfronts in many cases have been continuously inhabited by humans for thousands of years. ●

Karl Dubois, town planning consultant (retired)
Article translated and edited by Paul Woodville



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Alvar Aalto: Town Planner and Ecological Designer

Paul Woodville reappraises Aalto's legacy

Internationally the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto is perhaps best known as the designer of glass vases and much-imitated bent plywood chairs. His most famous vase, the Savoy, was inspired by the characteristic landscape form of the 187,888 officially recorded lakes that pepper the Finnish countryside. The Savoy vase is still manufactured in Finland today and remains a global bestseller, nearly a hundred years after it was designed. Despite being internationally acclaimed as an architect, Aalto's work as a town planner however, is much less well-known. His town planning and urban design projects are also given surprisingly little scholarly attention compared to his architectural and industrial design projects.

Aalto's town planning projects made up a large proportion of his workload, especially in the later phases of his career. They included small industrial towns, large university campuses, a cultural quarter and a masterplan for the new town of Rovaniemi near the Arctic Circle. Alvar Aalto died in 1976, shortly after the 1970s oil crisis that initiated a wave of innovative approaches to energy efficiency and environmental design in town planning and architecture. He also lived and practised many years before the term sustainability was formally conceptualised and consciously applied to town planning practice. Nonetheless, there are many environmental design lessons to be learned from

Aalto's town planning projects. These projects can be characterised by three themes:

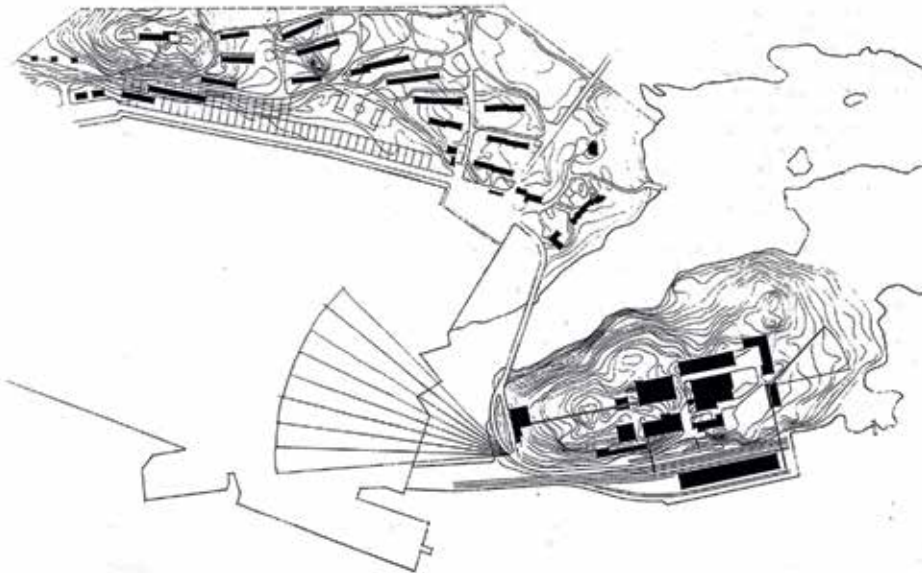
1. The sensitive adaption of urban form to site topography
2. A reinterpretation of classical and archetypal European urban forms
3. Organic design forms and the use of geological and naturalistic symbolism.

Aalto's design work can also be divided into three distinct but closely interrelated periods. His early career began in the 1920s with a number of Neoclassical projects, before he adopted a more recognisably Modernist International style in the 1930s. This approach, in turn, evolved into the more regionally adapted and distinctively organic design idiom for which Aalto is most famous.

THE EARLY MODERNIST

During the 1930s, Aalto was a member

1 Finlandia Concert Hall and Conference Centre, Helsinki. Source: Finlandia Talo.



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of the CIAM group initiated by Le Corbusier and Siegfried Gideon to promote Modernist town planning principles. He was recommended to the group by the Swedish Modernist architect-planner Sven Markelius, who later went on to lead work on Stockholm's ground-breaking 1948 masterplan, the *Generalplan*. During this earlier period, one of Aalto's most significant masterplans was for the factory town of Sunila in south-east Finland.

Aalto developed a comprehensive masterplan that encompassed both the wood pulp processing facilities and their associated administration, as well as extensive amenity facilities and residential areas for the factory workers and administration staff. In his book *Fine Building*, fellow CIAM member and English architect-planner, Maxwell Fry writes how Aalto recalled that 'the first lines' he drew in connection with the Sunila masterplan were the flow and return pipes for the wood-fired district heating system that provided cheap environmentally-friendly heating for the town. Sunila's residential areas were also carefully laid out to take solar orientation into account, in the classic Modernist tradition.

Even more significantly, Aalto's masterplan for Sunila's main residential areas is commonly regarded as Finland's first forest town. Finland's forest towns were inspired by many aspects of the English Garden City movement but, in addition to applying Modernist architectural design principles, took a more locally adapted and site-specific approach to siting residential projects in the heavily wooded and rocky Finnish landscape. With many

of the central design themes explored by Aalto at Sunila, forest towns went on to become one of the quintessential town planning paradigms in post-war Finland.

Aalto was especially skilled at adapting complex building designs to the Finnish landscape. Many people have made reference to the fact that his father was a land surveyor, who would work up his land survey drawings on a long white table that was placed centrally in the family home where Aalto would play and later help his father with his drawings. Aalto's designs and site planning drawings demonstrate incredible attention to detail and adaption to site topography and landscape features. Aalto later recalled that it was his work on his father's survey drawings that taught him to see the 'landscape as a functioning equilibrium'.

Aalto gradually became less active in the international CIAM Modernist planning group as his design approach evolved and became increasingly organic and responsive to immediate site contexts, local microclimate, regional identity and national traditions.

TOWARDS A REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Aalto's design projects became more closely integrated into the Finnish landscape, with his grassy outdoor public staircase leading up to the civic centre at Säynätsalo being one of the most famous and iconic examples. At the same time, this project forms a classic acropolis of civic functions. Many of his large-scale building and urban planning projects made even more direct reference to classical urban forms, with the large outdoor amphitheatre at Helsinki University of Technology being one of the most immediate examples. As a measure of Aalto's status in Finland today, after being merged with the Helsinki School of Economics and the University of Art and Design in 2010, Helsinki University of Technology was renamed Aalto University in his honour, and with a resulting intersection of academic disciplines that Aalto would surely have appreciated.

Aalto's synthesis of Finnish landscape forms and classical urban forms is a key aspect of his work, firmly rooting his projects in both a regional Finnish context and wider European urban and cultural traditions. His deep appreciation of Ancient Greek and Italian urban form stayed with him and evolved throughout his working life. Aalto considered the Italian hill town as 'the purest, most individual and natural form in urban design'. He frequently gave his competition entries Latin or Greek mottos, and stated how his acropolis-like Säynätsalo civic centre was built upon 'the inherited values from the time of ancient Crete, Greece, Rome to the Medieval and Renaissance periods'.

2 Masterplan for the factory town of Sunila. Source: Alvar Aalto Museum

3 Detail from the Sunila masterplan, showing district heating and communal utilities. Source: Alvar Aalto Museum.

Aalto designed another acropolis of civic facilities as part of what was to be his largest urban and regional planning project, the new town of Rovaniemi in northern Finland. This collection of municipal buildings includes the town hall, a library and a municipal theatre arranged so as to define a central public square and a series of smaller outdoor entrance spaces, also intended to provide shelter from the harsh sub-Arctic climate.

Like a Russian doll of interrelated scales, this collection of public buildings and the public space they generate formed the focal point of the post-war new town of Rovaniemi. In turn, Aalto's plan formed the focal point of a wider Aalto-led plan for the Lapland region of which Rovaniemi was the main administrative, cultural and economic centre. This 1950 regional plan was also pioneering as it was one of the first major planning process in Finland to include a broad team of technical advisers who carried out extensive, social and economic impact studies to inform the physical plan of Rovaniemi and its regional hinterland. The plan was also developed before regional planning became an official planning instrument in Finland in 1959.

In connection with his regional planning work and as a counterpoint to separating town and country, or natural and human environments, Aalto wrote that 'the underlying meaning of regional planning is to synchronise the development of town and country'.

In 1945 and somewhat ahead of his time in terms of his terminology and thinking, Aalto wrote of what he called the 'resilience principle' adding that 'the basic structural solution of the city has to be able to cope with all possible changes'.

AALTO'S DESIGN LEGACY

Towards the end of his career, alongside his work on the Finlandia Concert Hall in central Helsinki, Aalto worked on a major masterplan for the surrounding city centre district, an area that was to house Finland's most important national cultural facilities and public buildings. This plan was also intended to integrate a major urban motorway, parking and railway infrastructure with public space and cultural projects on a monumental scale, but at the same time with a distinctly organic landscape-based approach to urban infrastructure planning. After many years of work, only the Finlandia Concert Hall was built according to Aalto's masterplan. Had the rest of this radical masterplan been carried out, Aalto might be famous as a planner and designer of cities, and not just buildings, vases and chairs.

Aalto's compatriot, architect-planner Eilii Saarinen designed many significant buildings in Finland and an important earlier masterplan for Helsinki, as well as coming second in the masterplanning competition for the Australian capital Canberra. Saarinen once wrote that designers should 'always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context, a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan'. This integrated approach is especially evident in Aalto's projects, which, in the case of key projects such as the Sunila Factory Town, the Helsinki University of Technology campus and Rovaniemi New Town span from the design of the light fittings and furnishings to major buildings, public spaces and residential districts.

Aalto was fascinated and inspired by nature across all scales of design, but was by no means a romantic; indeed, he once stated that 'mechanisation and standardisation are an essential part of democracy' and 'that one has to exercise tact when approaching nature, that life has to be cultivated carefully but using technology'. Aalto managed to combine a practical approach to the technical and economic aspects of major public planning processes with a design idiom that was both inspired by and closely adapted to the Finnish landscape. An ever-increasing focus on sustainable urbanism and holistic urban design make Alvar Aalto's pragmatic but creatively integrated design approaches worthy of closer analysis.

Many of Aalto's projects now feature in a new, EU-funded, Alvar Aalto trail aimed at encouraging international tourism



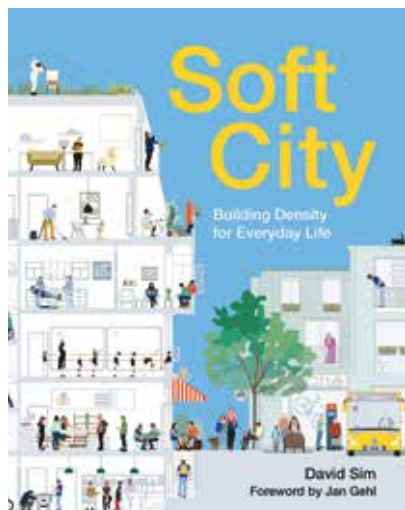
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Aalto managed to combine a practical approach to the technical and economic aspects of major public planning processes with a design idiom that was both inspired by and closely adapted to the Finnish landscape

and regional economic development in the more isolated rural areas of Finland. Aalto's work is both local and global in its context, asserting a clear vision of Finnish national identity while remaining international in its outlook and cultural influences. It is this synthesis that makes his work so distinct and very relevant to younger generations of designers working today both in Finland and internationally. ●

Paul Woodville, architect and urban planner, HRTB Arkitekter, Oslo

4 Alvar Aalto with a model of the Rovaniemi Civic Centre. Source: Alvar Aalto Museum.



Soft City – Building Density for Everyday Life

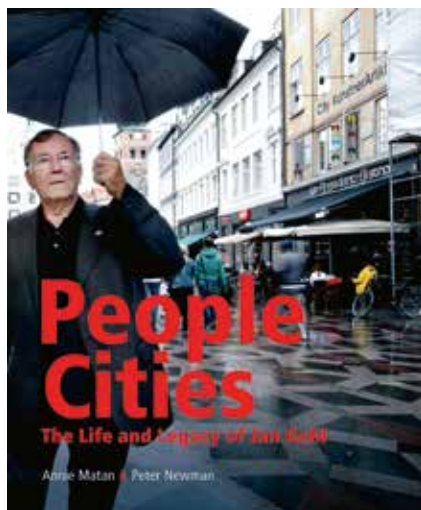
David Sim, 2019, Island Press £26.00, ISBN 978 1642830187

The title of this beautifully illustrated book is connected to *hygge* or hugging, exactly what could not be done during the pandemic. It means human proximity, conviviality and neighbourliness. Based on his experience in Scandinavia, Sim analyses the elements of the city and how they can combine to achieve these results.

Much of what Sim advocates will resonate with today's urban designers. Six principles are outlined and developed throughout the book: small scale, enclosure, from stacking to layering, joined-up, multifunctional, concentrated and walkable. The book has three parts: Building Blocks – living locally in an urbanizing world; Getting About and Getting On in a congested and segregated world; and, Living with the Weather in a time of climate change. It ends with nine criteria for liveable urban density, in which the author summarises his views of the future city.

In the first part we get the basic elements of a desirable neighbourhood: the perimeter block, high density but not high rise, vertical and horizontal mixed uses, continuous frontages, active frontages and 'accommodating larger elements while maintaining human scale'. One example given shows how continental Europe has a different approach to urban living from that in Britain: the German *Rathauskeller*, a popular restaurant that can be found in the basement of many German town halls, combining leisure and administration in one building.

The second part is about mobility and how walking and cycling encourage sociability. Sim dissects the various elements of the public realm and shows how they can work to favour pedestrians and cyclists and at the same time create a convivial environment. He develops Gehl's work in Copenhagen extending it to 'walkable buildings' and considering in detail each part of the public realm.



The third section considers the relationships between indoor and outdoor, not just in social terms as Jane Jacobs did, but in terms of climate. The elements here include ventilation, vegetation, the sun and water. It explores all of the opportunities for outdoor living in the city, from a strip outside the house through to balconies, sidewalk cafes and beaches.

The final part summarises the nine criteria for successful and liveable urban density: diversity of built form; diversity of outdoor spaces; flexibility; human scale; walkability; sense of control and identity; pleasant microclimate; smaller carbon footprint; and, greater biodiversity.

The book can be seen as a kind of toolkit within a theoretical framework, but it is more than that. Much of what Sim says will not be new to urban designers but its value is in the numerous examples, clearly presented and illustrated, and as a useful source for students and professionals. ●

Sebastian Loew

People Cities – The Life and Legacy of Jan Gehl

Annie Matan and Peter Newman, 2016 Island Press £30.00, ISBN 978 1610917148

This is a highly readable account of the work of Jan Gehl, one of the world's most influential urban designers. Seven chapters dissect Gehl's life revealing the influences that encouraged his people-centred view of architecture, not least that of his psychologist wife Ingrid. Gehl has had a lengthy academic career, written a series of influential books and has increasingly done more advocacy and consultancy work, changing both politicians' mindsets and their cities, including Melbourne, London, New York and Moscow. Without being overly technical, the book emphasises how ground-breaking his earlier methodological studies of life in public

spaces were. The interfaces and connections between people and public space had never before been so closely scrutinised.

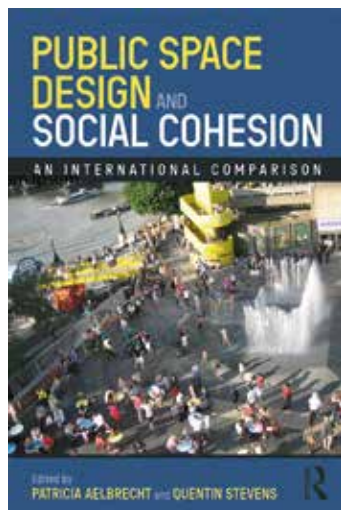
Published in 2016, the book now appears dated as we are more alarmed by the urgency of climate change, although the environment was never far from Gehl's mind. It is no coincidence that Copenhagen, where Gehl was instrumental in documenting people's use of city spaces, is now amongst the first cities to aim for carbon neutrality.

The genesis and scope of the various books by Gehl is revealing. *Life Between Buildings* (1971), Gehl's critique of modernism and a handbook for urban design, was well received but for decades not well known beyond a few Northern European countries. It became international with English language editions some 30 years after its first Danish edition, and is now widely translated and the best known of his books.

Illustrations, pictures and plans are included in this book demonstrating the transforming effects of his ideas. The language matches his philosophy of making cities and urban design more accessible to ordinary people. It is clear that he also responded to opportunities as they arose, for instance encouraging Denmark's response to the early 1970s oil crisis by ending motorway building and promoting car-free Sundays, 50 years ahead of the UK (which looked to North Sea oil and business as usual).

Gehl always wanted to engage people, and he encouraged residents of a modernist housing scheme to remake and humanise their environment by providing a much-needed playground, decried by some as 'an act of vandalism against architecture'. When Gehl retired from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts' School of Architecture, many left and joined Gehl Associates, expanding his practice. A child of the 1960s, Gehl embraced people and multi-disciplinary working. He said 'to be a good architect you had to love people', surely a good test for all urban designers and built environment professionals.

●
Tim Hagyard, planning manager CPRE (Herts)



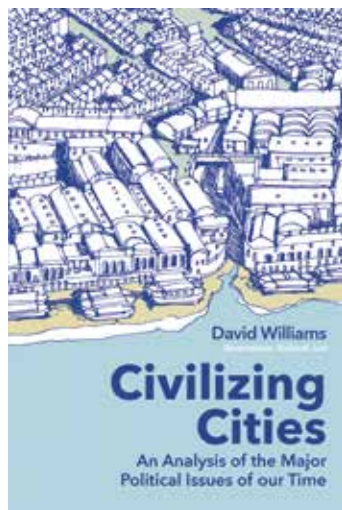
Public Space Design and Social Cohesion – An International Comparison

Patricia Aelbrecht and Quentin Stevens (ed.), 2019, Routledge
£44.99, ISBN 978 1138594036

We may think that everyone agrees on what social cohesion is and that it is always a good thing. Many academics and practitioners also think that public space helps to achieve social cohesion and that urban design is the means to produce good public space. This book challenges all of these assumptions and, after a theoretical introduction, analyses 14 case studies from a range of countries in both the Global South and North. The introduction is dense and complex as the authors cover a very large range of literature. Their quest is to find a 'more clear and rigorous working definition of public space and social cohesion', and this is exemplified in their confrontation with both homogeneous and mixed use neighbourhoods; there is no universal agreement about which is better and furthermore, opinions evolve with time.

The cases studies, by different authors, are framed by five themes: emerging typologies of public space; symbolism and sense of belonging; design elements that encourage social interaction; processes of engagement, participation and placemaking; and, reflections from urban design practices. The authors have varying perspectives on each of these and readers will agree with some and disagree with others.

Examples in the first part, Top-down Projects, include the Danish approach to democratic public space, participation in the design of spaces in Vienna, and the transformation of a park in Ankara into a more inclusive space. Somewhat different is an article about memorials and their effect on social cohesion, or one on estate regeneration where social control is a motivating element and different to others. The second part deals with Bottom-up Approaches where collaboration and participation in the



design of public space or neighbourhoods have increased social cohesion. Examples come from Colombia, a refugee neighbourhood in Lebanon, and Taipei; the latter differs from the others as the participants are not just local but come from the wider city, increasing its networks. The final part, Post Occupancy Evaluations does what few texts do and it is obviously very valuable. The contributors analyse: the impact on social cohesion of new spaces in Lisbon; amenities catering for immigrant communities in Amsterdam; a pop-up space in Philadelphia; two high-profile city centre parks, one in the UK, the other in India; and commercial streets in the Global North compared to those in the Global South. One chapter considers the effect on social cohesion of encountering the unfamiliar, the different or the dangerous.

There is a huge amount of interesting information in this book. However, it is profoundly academic and this is emphasised by the theoretical introduction to each case study. For practitioners, the case studies published on their own, without the academic language and with better illustrations, would be of much greater benefit. ●

Sebastian Loew

Civilizing Cities – An Analysis of the Major Political Issues of our Time

David Williams, 2021, Arena Books,
£18.99, ISBN 191 159379X

This is a big book, hugely ambitious and wide-ranging. It has 403 pages, and I confess that I have not read them all yet. The publisher had no more review copies, so I have been reading a PDF, which tests both my patience and my eyesight. But the book is very rewarding and enjoyable. Williams has spent his life in urban planning in Liverpool and elsewhere in economic development and regeneration. His style is animated and

engaging, not academic, and the book is very polemical. It is structured on several antitheses: socialism vs. capitalism, localism vs. big business, town centres vs. retail parks, density vs. sprawl, and more. He marshals great quantities of facts and statistics, but his passions and prejudices show plainly. I like the book because I share many of them: that's my prejudice admitted.

Williams' three guiding principles are density, diversity and democracy. The ten chapters are organised into three groups: Part 1 reviews the history of urban growth; Part 2 describes the decline of local economies, neighbourhoods, transport and diversity; and, Part 3 of course describes how to fix and revive cities: basically it's Survey, Analysis, Plan. In his introduction, Williams defines his comprehensive aim as 'a synopsis of all the issues that affect the quality of life in our towns and cities'. A sample subheading from each chapter indicates the range covered: Garden cities; Slum clearance; Urban entropy; Customer or consumer; Wealth generation; Personal mobility – reclaim the streets; Rearing the young; No people, no plans; Good design; Citizen power.

The prescription of how to make cities better in Part 3 is a bit mind-boggling in its wide coverage. Much of it is an analysis of the *National Planning Policy Framework* ('woefully inept'). But Williams is not content just to criticise it, he rewrites it. The outcome is very discursive and could have been edited to a more modest length, but it is very entertaining and educational. The NPPF's claims that it is based upon the principle of sustainable development are ridiculed. Elsewhere, Williams' prescriptions cover building conservation, tax laws, farming subsidies, the reform of the House of Lords, housing densities and much more. There is even a 14-page afterword on COVID-19. The book is so diverse that the index is much needed, but it is unfortunately not comprehensive enough. It is impossible to summarise it all, but much of it rests on the virtues of grassroots local government. The final words are: Think local. Act local. ●

Joe Holyoak

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Barber sets out his stall on the street

In September I attended an online talk by the architect Peter Barber, which he called *Street: Who owns the city*, part of the *Architects' Journal AJ100* Festival. Barber has become well known, at least within his profession, for designing several exceptional social housing schemes, all of them in London, which have won him many awards. His talk was the usual combination of revealing influences, attitudes and beliefs, and showing the work. His political stance is socialist, with three core beliefs related to housing: one, council tenants' Right to Buy should be abolished; two, put stronger rent controls on private sector properties; and, three, just build a lot more social housing for rent.

There is a consistency between Barber's politics and the architecture that he practices, a consistency rare among architects. But the reason that I am choosing to write about Barber's work here is not because of his political attitude, admirable though I find it. It is because of two characteristics which should make his work connect to and resonate with urban designers. One is the close attention that he gives to the ordinary, quotidian aspects of domestic urban life. The other is his employment of a familiar vocabulary of formal and spatial types: perimeter block, terrace, mews, street, courtyard and alley. He does this in ways which draw knowledgably on precedent, but at the same time often re-invent the type, and do it at an unusually high density.

Barber's domestic designs, like those of the Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger, maximise sociability, creating social connections through casual encounters. One factor in this is wherever possible giving each dwelling a front door at ground level, no shared internal access corridors. The site of one of his recent schemes, McGrath Road in Newham, was originally intended to contain two blocks of flats. Barber showed that the same density could be achieved with back-to-back houses, up to four storeys high, each with a front door either on the street or on the courtyard at the centre. He expects to see lines of washing being strung across this courtyard. He doesn't always get every detail right: in his talk he showed an endearing mosaic-photo of tiny square windows in the front doors of one scheme, inserted so that residents could scrutinise a visitor. But of course the visitor could also look in. So, the windows now contain a miniature art gallery of pictures, which Barber delighted in photographing.

Barber regards high density as a virtue, encouraging social contact and requiring him to find inventive ways of fitting houses together. Like another social housing champion, Walter Segal, he is often given difficult



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2

or restrictive sites. So he builds to the back of pavement, maximizing the built footprint and putting any shared outdoor space inside the block. He observes that 'When we design housing, we are designing cities', and his residential schemes, although very distinctive in their architectural character, are all normative pieces of urban fabric. Their language is invariably brickwork, composed to emphasise the solidity of the material, pierced with window openings, sometimes with chamfered surrounds. At McGrath Road, there is a sly reference to Red Vienna's Karl Marx-Hof, in its big parabolic brickwork arches which contain the houses' front doors and the windows of the dining rooms. But these too have a behavioural purpose, recessing the private indoor realm just a small way from the public realm of the street.

Recently in the *Architects' Journal*, Catherine Slessor wrote that Barber's use of the familiar form-types of street, square and terrace is 'paradoxical', because those types are also espoused by pressure groups such as Create Streets, whom she labelled

'reactionary'. I find this baffling: the director of Create Streets, Nicholas Boys Smith, may be an adviser to the Tory government, but the organisation surely shares some common ground with Peter Barber in its rejection of anti-urban forms of development, and in its endorsement of sociable, street-based, mixed use architecture. The political contexts may be different, but Barber's inventive use of the traditional forms of block, street and courtyard represents an exceptionally distinctive example of a new conventional wisdom in urban design, which transcends politics. ●

Joe Holyoak, architect and urban designer

1-2 Newham, London: two views of Barber's housing scheme. Source: Morley von Sternberg

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