



SQUARES IN NATURE

MAKING SPACES INTO PLACES IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT OF BENGTSFORS MUNICIPALITY

Bengtsfors municipality has been involved as tutors during this project. We want to thank you for the help along the way and for the days we got to visit the municipality!

ABSTRACT

To understand the local context of Bengtsfors municipality, analysis was made to put the conditions and challenges into words. With that knowledge, a gap between available space in nature and a perceived lack of places for activities and social interactions was shown, which opened up the project idea of making spaces into places. With this aim in mind, the work started out with questioning what a good place is and how to create it. To find the answer connected to this particular area, we divided our research into two tracks. One track was about reading published material and learning about placemaking in different perspectives. The other track was to talk with the inhabitants of Bengtsfors to learn from the places that are more and less appreciated today.

Our research was then summarized to a concept strongly connected to Bengtsfors municipality; Squares in nature- combining the wishes of more meeting places with the central asset in its beautiful nature. To show how to implement our concept, we did a design proposal nearby the lake Bengtsbrohöljen. A square in nature for winter bathing. This should be seen as an example for the municipality, and other stakeholders, how they can develop new places that are suitable for their specific local context and appreciated by the ones living in Bengtsfors, as well as showing a concrete proposal that could add value to the inhabitants and visitors of Bengtsfors.

KEYWORDS:

Making spaces into places

Common and public places

A good place in the context of Bengtsfors

Squares in nature

Winter bath

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STUDIO INTRODUCTION

Planning and design for sustainable development in a local context

The theme of the studio is planning and design for sustainable development with focus on small or medium sized Swedish municipalities characterized by both urban and rural areas. During the autumn 2020, the municipality of Bengtsfors in the north part of Västra Götaland region is the point of departure for the studio.

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Teacher: Ida Röstlund

The overall aim of the design studio is...

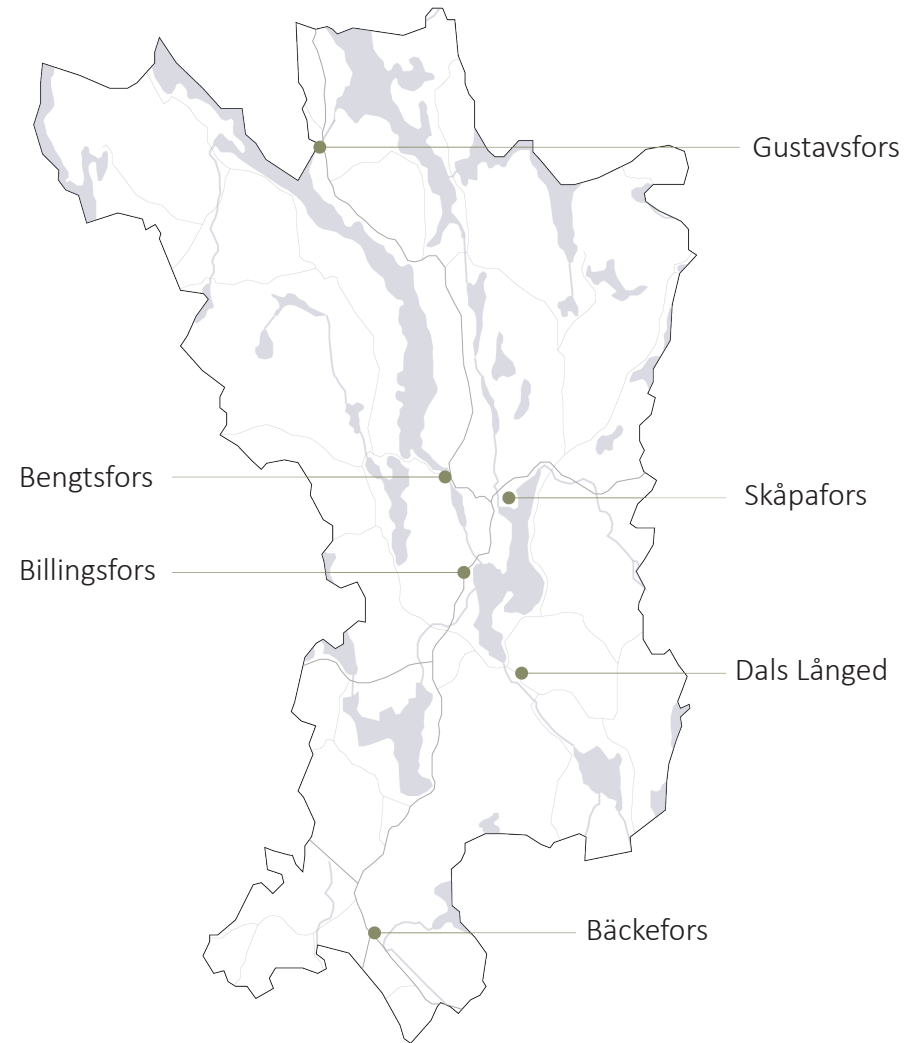
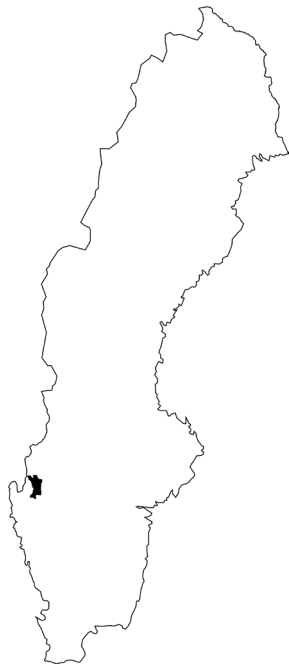
... to increase knowledge and understanding of the planning, design and development problems as well as possibilities of small and medium sized municipalities in the perspective of sustainable development.

... to train the ability to describe, analyse and interpret the local situation in a broad perspective, including spatial and architectural characteristics as well as environmental, social and economic aspects.

... to with a point of departure in an understanding of the conditions of place in a local as well as in a broader context, work out and try visionary principles of planning and design of spatial structures and the built environment, in support of positive and sustainable futures.

BENGTSFORS MUNICIPALITY

Bengtsfors municipality is located in Dalsland, between Lake Vänern and Norway, and has just under 10,000 inhabitants. The municipality is best known for its scenic surroundings and its 399 lakes. It has five towns, of which Bengtsfors is the central one. (Bengtsfors municipality, 2020)



BACKGROUND

THE LOCAL CONTEXT OF BENGTSFORS MUNICIPALITY

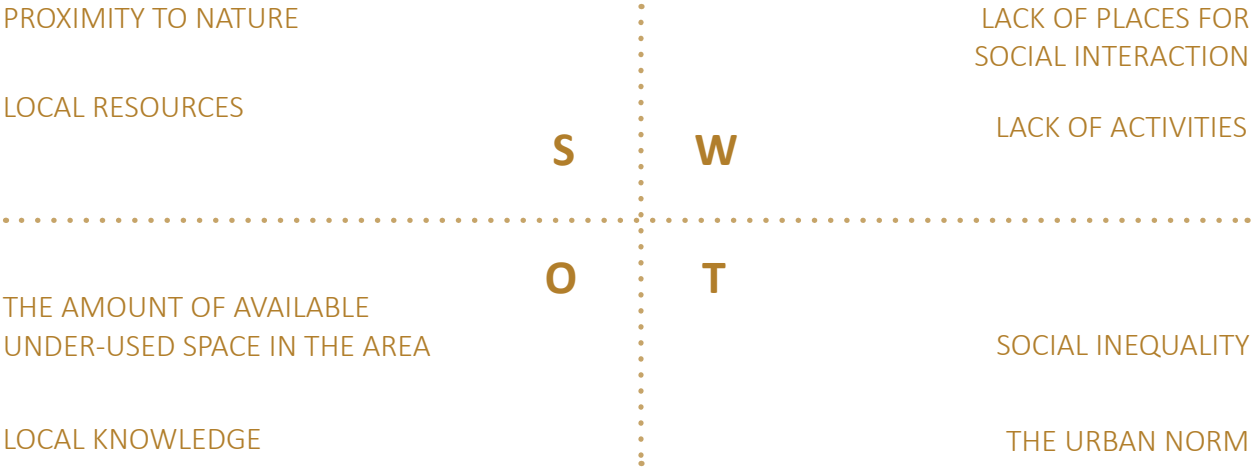
INTRODUCTION

This project is about focusing on the gap between the perceived lack of places for meetings and activities and the large amount of space in nature available in Bengtsfors municipality. We want to show how architecture can attract residents to take advantage of their surrounding spaces that are not currently used to its full potential today - investigating how to make *spaces* into *places*.

SWOT - ANALYSIS

To understand the context and base the development on the specific conditions for Bengtsfors municipality, a SWOT analysis was made in the course, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. With the analysis as a starting point, this project will present an example on how to directly use the strength in the proximity to nature, counteract the weakness in the lack of places for social interaction, use the opportunity

in the amount of available under-used space in the area and counteract the threat of social inequality in the municipality. In the long run, the project can use the strength of the local resources (materials, commitment, Stenebyskolan, cultural heritage), counteract the lack of services and activities, use the opportunities in the knowledge that exists in the municipality and counteract the threat of the urban norm.



GO AGAINST THE URBAN NORM - EMPHASIZE THE RURAL

As a result of global urbanization, the urban norm is growing stronger. In order for cities to function with an increasing population and a dense environment, planning is required. This contributes to a general norm for how an area should be developed, with focus being directed towards the urban and away from the rural. While urban areas are planning for an increasing population, many municipalities in rural areas are facing the opposite problem. Areas with decreasing population require a different type of planning for development, but not less important.

This course is about focusing on these rural areas, to contribute to sustainable development adapted to its specific challenges. It is not reasonable to follow a general strategy for planning for a sustainable future. Instead, the site's specific opportunities and threats should play a major role. Going against the norms and understanding strengths and weaknesses linked to each specific context is the key for development in the right direction.

As the density in cities increases, nature becomes more and more distant. Reintroducing this proximity and integrating nature into cities is today an important part of urban planning. The importance of greenery has received increasing attention to support ecosystems, human health and be able to manage climate impact. The challenge that many denser urban areas face, to reintroduce what in previous planning has been replaced by built structures, rural areas can prevent as nature is largely still preserved. Emphasizing the rural by taking advantage of this asset and strengthening its accessibility is a great opportunity for municipalities such as Bengtsfors on the path towards a more sustainable future.

PROJECT AIM

MAKING SPACES INTO PLACES

WHAT MAKES SPACE INTO A PLACE?

One opportunity identified in Bengtsfors municipality is the amount of available space in the beautiful Dalsland landscape. Despite this, there is a weakness in a perceived lack of places. Spaces and places are both land areas, but their preconditions vary. In a place there are people and activities. A place can make room for a lot of people and lots of events, but also be an area where one person likes to sit down for a while alone.

In cities with a dense environment, planning is required to reserve neutral spaces for people to meet, sit down in the sun or shadow and for having public events. In rural areas there are many such spaces but which are not used as they have the potential for. Having available space is not equal to having enough places. Sometimes something beyond land area is needed to attract people. Here architecture can be a tool for transforming spaces into places and attract people to experience the potential of their surrounding environment.

In Sweden nature is available for everyone, in perspective that everyone is allowed to access and spend time in nature. That does not mean that nature is available for everyone in a more practical way. Some people feel obstacles connected to access to nature and could feel unsure because of lack of experiences or knowledge. People with a high interest in outdoor life have no problem accessing nature and are in general not in need for any facilities, many of them barely need a path. For them, the space is enough. Other people need more to feel that nature is interesting and relevant to visit. The space is not enough, they need a place.

The aim of this project is to with architecture develop a space in nature into a place and by this make nature available for a larger number of inhabitants.

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

This studio, *Planning and design for sustainable development in a local context*, has as the name imply a theme of planning for sustainable development with focus on a small or medium sized municipality in Sweden. As architects, we have the opportunity to influence and create sustainable change in society through the built environment. By planning, designing and maintaining a built environment that focuses on reducing our energy and resource use, we can reduce our climate impact. With spatial design a sustainable lifestyle can encourage people to make sustainable choices and actions in everyday life, and contribute to a positive societal change.

Sustainable development is often described with three different dimensions: environmental, economic and social sustainability. These three dimensions are equally important to be able to create and maintain sustainable societies. They are also strongly interconnected and you can therefore often see a positive impact on all of them even in a work focused on one of them. With this project, we have chosen to mainly focus on the dimension of social sustainability.

“Social sustainability focuses on individuals’ quality of life and how a sustainable, healthy and just society can be created where everyone is included, regardless of gender, sex, background or disability. A part of social sustainability is to involve citizens, which is expected to lead to increased understanding, engagement and knowledge. Depending on the local context, different issues are prioritized” (Smart City Sweden, 2020, chapter Social Sustainability)

We think that Smart City Sweden well formulates how to look at and work with social sustainability. Therefore, our vision with this project will also be to improve people’s quality of life and contribute to a sustainable, healthy and just society. By creating place for meetings, integration and recreation in connection to the local context and conditions, we can contribute to a positive social development and a sustainable future for the municipality.



IMPACT OF NATURE

As mentioned earlier, social sustainability according to Smart City Sweden (2002) focuses on individuals' quality of life and how a sustainable, healthy and just society can be created. To achieve a good quality of life, nature has a great impact. According to Ottosson and Ottosson (2006) in Naturvårdsverkets report *Naturen som kraftkälla - Om hur och varför naturen påverkar hälsan*, historical knowledge and individuals' everyday experiences of nature's health effects have now been supported by scientific facts. In recent decades, research has provided in-depth knowledge of how people are affected by being in nature - how nature can act as help in crisis management, stress management and mental recovery. Various studies confirm the health effects of nature and conclusions are drawn about the restorative effects of nature on humans and that only the sight of nature can have a stress-reducing and health-promoting effect.

Access to nature in daily life is very important. There is a profit in nature close to urban areas, but you also have a need for nature that seems magnificent and untouched.

Based on this and the common feeling of well-being in connection to nature, we want to develop a project that makes use of this asset and extend its present in people's daily lives. We want to use architecture to make nature attractive and accessible and thereby in a larger perspective contribute to good health in the municipality.



NEW PLACES THAT EMPHASIZE THE IDENTITY OF BENGTSFORS

Based on Bengtsfors municipality's surrounding proximity to nature, the aim *Making spaces into places* is about creating places out of currently under-utilized spaces and thereby highlighting the potential that exists but which for various reasons does not attract people today. The municipality's access to nature has great opportunities to take advantage of, to strengthen the identity. The focus needs to be directed inwards to emphasize what Bengtsfors has and away from the general urban norm.

To understand what characterizes a good place in Bengtsfors municipality, the residents' voices are of highest importance. They know best which places work well and less well in the municipality today and what attracts them to specific places becomes essential to create new, appreciated places for them. The focus will thus be on learning from the advantages and disadvantages of existing places when new ones are to be designed, not on improving the places that already exist. Therefore, we move away from the city, where places already exist, and pay attention to the areas in the municipality that have the potential to be used more, transforming them into places where the identity of municipality is emphasized.

SUSTAINABLE DIRECTIONS

In order to develop the municipality from a sustainability perspective, paths to follow were in the early stages of the course concretised into sustainable directions. These formulated directions are partly based on specific conditions in Bengtsfors that were identified in the SWOT analysis, but also related to the overall global vision of sustainable development. The following page shows four of the directions formulated together in the studio that goes in line with this project idea.

MAKE NATURE ACCESSIBLE

Common in studio:

Nature is a great asset in Bengtsfors municipality. By increasing accessibility and investing in green areas and lakes, physical and mental health can be promoted among Bengtsfors residents.

Our project:

By creating attractive places from today's under-used space that do not have a specific purpose, nature can become more accessible to Bengtsfors residents. Architecture can be used as a driving force to attract people closer to their surrounding nature.



STRENGTHEN THE IDENTITY OF BENGTSFORS

Common in studio:

A strengthened identity gives Bengtsfors residents increased self-confidence and creates opportunities for the municipality to develop through local involvement. It also strengthens Bengtsfors for marketing purposes and makes it visible as an attractive municipality for new residents and the ones living there today.

Our project:

A small town life close to nature provides great qualities of life, which can be taken advantage of to a greater extent. Formulating an identity is about paying attention to strengths and this can be emphasized by making Bengtsfors' qualities visible.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EXISTING RESOURCES

Common in studio:

By using existing resources and materials, a connection to history is created as existing knowledge is strengthened. Taking advantage of local resources, materials and labor, one can achieve more sustainable processes environmentally and socially.

Our project:

A resource awareness is important for working with a sustainability perspective. The focus will be on developing a proposal that is possible to realise with the resources (material, knowledge, labour) available within the municipality.

DEVELOP LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

Common in studio:

Commitment to a local context gives a sense of responsibility and pride. A growing sense of responsibility creates a society where people show care for each other and the countryside.

Our project:

Interest and engagement can be found among the residents in Bengtsfors municipality and by taking advantage of this and valuing local knowledge in the development, commitment among the residents is encouraged. Making it easy to be a part of the process makes it possible to strengthen the integration and bring the residents together by creating something to collectively feel responsibility, pride and care for.

In order to make spaces into places in a way that is customized for Bengtsfors municipality, the work consists of three parts with different focus.

RESEARCH PART 1

What attracts the residents of Bengtsfors to a place?

The research is divided into two parts. The first part is led by a citizen dialogue where the aim is to create an understanding of what the inhabitants of Bengtsfors municipality appreciate and desire today. Our formulated questions and visions serve as a framework for the process. To carry out the citizen dialogue we use digital media as physical meetings are not possible due to the pandemic situation. Citizens' voices will be collected through a survey.

RESEARCH PART 2

How is a good place defined based on facts?

The second part of the research is about reading published material connected to the field. The material should give credibility to our method, strengthen our standing and give a wider perspective.

DEFINITION

What is a good place suited for Bengtsfors?

In the next part of our work these two tracks together sums up in a definition: what is a good place suited for Bengtsfors municipality? The citizen dialogues take care of the context of Bengtsfors and the published material answers what a good place is in a theoretical perspective. After identifying our definition, decisions are made about what the design proposal will entail and where it will be located.

PROPOSAL

How to apply this into reality?

The third part of our work is about designing a proposal based on our definition, to communicate our concept. This proposal will show a concrete example on how to continue the work in the future.

RESEARCH

WHAT IS A GOOD PLACE SUITED FOR BENGTSFORS MUNICIPALITY?

RESEARCH PART 1

WHAT ATTRACTS THE RESIDENTS OF BENGTSFORS MUNICIPALITY TO A PLACE?

CITIZEN DIALOGUE - HOW AND WHY?

A citizen dialogue was an important part of this project to adapt the place development to those who are meant to use it. In order to reach a larger number and a variety of inhabitants, a survey was sent out in different medias and to a variety of groups via contacts established earlier in the course. As the course in 2020 had limited opportunities to visit Bengtsfors, a survey was chosen for communication so that the inclusion would be as 'random' as a meeting on the street on site.

In the survey, the residents had the opportunity to point out places on a map that they like to spend time in and if there are places in the municipality they like less or desire. For each of them, they had to answer questions about the chosen place, such as what makes it good / less good and what he / she does there. A picture of the place could be attached to increase our understanding at a distance. The survey also included more general questions about how a good place is described and what is required to attract the residents to a site.

The survey responses act as a basis for the project's final outcome, but also provide the municipality with a basis for continued development of sites. The places that have been pointed out as appreciated and the explanation for why, can teach about what defines a good, functioning place in Bengtsfors. The aim is to show a proposal of how the answers can be interpreted when new places are designed in nature.



PATTERNS ON A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

The map where the residents have pointed out their favorite places follows certain patterns. You can see a clear line from north to south in the municipality of where people like to spend their time. The movement pattern is adapted to nature and follows the landscape's vertical corridors. Creating new places in the municipality can either handle this information counteractive, with actions that expand the horizontal movement, or strengthening, by capturing the people in the paths they are already moving in.

What can also be read is the connection between appreciated places and the proximity to water. Water is a great asset in the municipality that has a great value to fulfill the wishes for a place in beautiful surroundings and with a nice view. Water is in itself "enough activity" to attract a variety of people to a place.

The answers from the survey also show that many appreciated places are located outside the town areas, which indicates that the residents like spending time in their surrounding nature. When developing new places in the municipality, this valuable asset should be taken advantage of. The urban norm states a way to develop areas in a successful way, but with Bengtsfors's unique conditions, imitating urban areas is not the answer.



"This is my favorite place in Bengtsfors municipality"

KNOWLEDGE FROM THE SURVEY

To describe a good place in general, many of the inhabitants in Bengtsfors municipality use the words: safe, beautiful environments and calm. To describe their personal favourite places, beautiful environment and nice views were once again the most common definitions, together with the possibility to eat or drink coffee and spend time with friends or family. People in Bengtsfors municipality enjoy spending time in nature and a lot of people have nature related leisure interests.

Many people indicate walking as something they do in nature. But there are significantly fewer who state that they walk connected to their favorite place. A conclusion we make out of that is that the places people walk are not good enough to be considered "a good/favourite place" and also that walking is such an activity that often is located near people's homes and not anything one goes away to another place to do. Besides walking there are a lot of people that enjoy picking mushrooms and berries in the forest, as well as exercising in nature in different ways.

A common opinion is that people want something to do. Few of the participants state concrete activities, our feeling is that they just want to do anything. They want a place to go together with their dear ones, with the opportunities to just hang out, eat something and enjoy the beautiful environments that Bengtsfors offers. Most people think it is either okay or positive that there are unknown people at the place at same time, but many still want the opportunity to be for themselves in the presence of others. People do not want to have to interact with others, but are okay with sharing the place.

When discussing what defines safety, the reason why a place feels unsafe is that it is unadopted or empty from people and that a safe place is a one where there always are people. Our conclusion is that a safe place in the town requires other aspects than a safe place in nature, so what kind of place people were thinking about when answering the question might have affected the answer. And still there is a difference between people in general, what places are experienced as safe, for example if one feels safe in the forest or not. The feeling of safety does not necessarily need to be in direct connection to actual safety, one can feel unsafe in a safe place and vice versa.

In the same way, the answers from the survey shows that the feeling of whether a place is accessible or not means different things to different people. In general people in Bengtsfors think an available place is a place one rather go by car or are able to walk to. To handle the different aspects of accessibility we see it as an option of choosing between two different tracks. The first track is to create a place with different options, easily available by car from one direction and a longer hike from one direction for example, to create a place with a broad accessibility. The other track is to make a conscious choice to exclude some people and instead focus on creating a place for those who prefer a different kind of place in relation to how to get there.

To the right some parts of the survey is shown.

Who are you?

How old are you?

I identify myself as:
 Female
 Male
 Non of them
 Do not wanna answer

Do you live in Bengtsfors municipality?
 Yes
 No

If yes, where?

Are you born and raised in Bengtsfors?
 Yes
 No

If no, where did you grow up and how long have you been in Bengtsfors?

What do you do for a living?

Do you want to show us some of your favorite places in Bengtsfors municipality?

We are curious about where you like to spend time when you are not at home. On the map, you can mark one or several places in the municipality that you like. This can be a place indoors or a place outdoors, everything from the library to a spot in the forest.

I like this place

Press the button above to get the pin out on the map. Hold the pin and move it to the location you want to mark. You can zoom in on the map to get a more accurate placement of the pin. Press the green check mark when you're done.

< >

What is a good place?

How would you describe a good place?

Answer with words or short sentences

What should be available in a place for you to visit and stay there?

Is there any type of place you miss or wish for in Bengtsfors municipality?

What do you think is the best thing about Bengtsfors municipality in general?

"I think a good place is..."

CONDITIONS
PLACE FOR EVERYONE FOR ACTIVITY PLACE FOR DOGS
MEET PEOPLE I KNOW EASY ACCESS THE FEELING OF PARTICIPATION FREEDOM
PLACE TO SOCIALIZE WITH LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE
BEAUTIFUL ENVIRONMENT
CLEAN AND WELL RESTAURANT PLACE WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS **ACTIVITIES** FEW
MAINTAINED **OPEN** **VIEWS** MEET PEOPLE I KNOW SCENIC NEAR THE LAKE PEOPLE
SAFE ADAPTED TO THE HUMAN SCALE WORKS IN ALL WEATHERS WIFI **FACILITIES** NICE ATMOSPHERE INCLUSIVE
RELAXING WARM AND COSY OPPORTUNITIES FOR BATHING WORTH SEEING **CALM**
BIKE PATHS



...Relaxing, scenic, freedom.

Woman, 71 years old



... I have always liked being close to water, so the possibility of water and swimming may be the answer.

Man, 47 years old



... A beautiful meeting place with some activities to do and with space to hang out.

Woman, 41 years old



... Something cosy to snuggle into, or a beautiful view.

Woman, 41 years old



... A quiet place where you can hang out with friends or family. As long as it's a bench, I'm happy, nothing special is needed.

Man, 15 years old



...Well maintained, lighting, gathering place, there are resources for staying there as benches, etc. That the place feels open, genuine and beautiful. No backs, but not in the center either.

Man, 24 years old



... A place where you can hang out with people. A place where you can also warm up during winter / autumn. Somewhere you feel safe even among people, so it is not a crowded little place but a place with many seats.

Woman, 15 years old



... Both lively and with movement as at other times can be exchanged for a completely quiet environment in nature.

Man, 41 years old

WHY DO SOME PLACES NOT WORK IN THE MUNICIPALITY?

The survey also illustrates common issues among the answers about places that people do not like. What mainly stands out are the places that feel abandoned, like parking lots and empty large places in town areas. Here, space is available but without seats or activities they become nothing. Even in green areas, a large lawn can provide many opportunities, but it may require support through design to make the place active. The feeling that a place is abandoned sums up the inhabitants' voices around unpopular places, a feeling that contributes to an unsafe environment.

A place's reputation is created based on the people who are at the place. A lawn, for example, can either be appreciated or unpopular depending on which activities or groups it attracts. How a place is used cannot be directly controlled, but by controlling the design of a place, certain scenarios can indirectly be supported or counteracted.

“Half the center consists of a large parking lot - waste of space. A better designed living environment would make the place better”

- About the backside of Storgatan in Bengtsfors

“This place is mostly just a large gray area. More thoughtful places to sit and more greenery would make it nicer.”

- About the public square in Bengtsfors

“This could have been a nice park. It used to be an active place in the community with some sport activities (boule) but now it's just a big lawn where some gangs sit and talk in their cars.”

- About a place nearby Stenebyvägen in Dals Långed

LESSONS FROM THE SURVEY

89 people responded to the survey and together marked out 128 places on the map. The amount of responses from the citizen dialogue provided a good basis from a wide diversity of residents. This shows that the interest in being involved in the development of places can be found among the residents. However, using digital media instead of talking face to face comes with some sources of error that are important to consider when interpreting the answers.

The survey tool

- The mapping tool was perhaps a little too difficult for the older generation, many who started answering the survey stopped when it came to setting up places.

- Therefore the block with general questions about places should have come before the map tool. Now some missed to answer them as they may have closed the survey when they did not understand the mapping tool.

- A little unclear / difficult to understand how the survey / program collects answers. It does not seem that you need to complete the survey in order for answers to be registered.

- Source of error- Have they accidentally pointed out places? When there are no explanations linked to some places, sources of error compared to if we were able to meet people in person and talk to them.

General reflections

- We should have needed more time to be able to get back to the participants again, to ask additional questions linked to the information we received in the survey.

- There are many who answered that they like to spend time in nature and a lot of people have hobbies connected to nature in different ways. We are happy that this was in line with our first thoughts about the project, that we from the beginning wanted to develop places in nature.

- Difficult to interpret the seriousness of some answers, an aspect of the survey that we did not count on.

- At first we felt that it might be irrelevant with age and gender but it feels like it became an important aspect linked to the above mentioned point regarding serious answers.

- We are grateful for the number of answers and that we reached out to so many people, the commitment despite just a survey sent by email that you can easily ignore.

- Another result compared to our first thought of talking to people in the city but also a result in general on which we can build our project. As we did not know how many answers we would get that was not sure from the beginning.

FEEDBACK WITH PARTICIPANTS

Due to limited time, we chose to not include the inhabitants further into the design phase. If this idea was to be developed in the future it would have the possibility for a larger involvement, developing the places from participatory design.

In this project we learn from the knowledge collected from the survey, the inhabitant's opinions about their municipality. Based on that we create a proposal with our own architectural preferences and knowledge.

RESEARCH PART 2

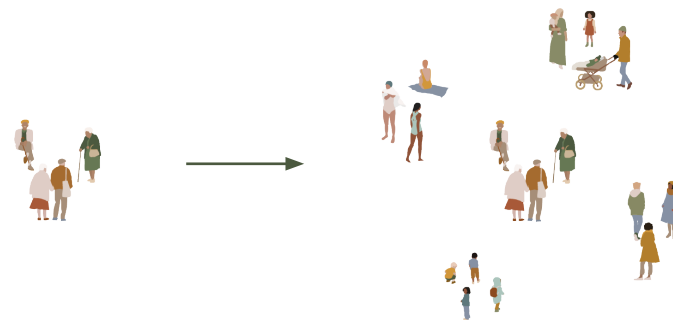
HOW IS A GOOD PLACE DEFINED BASED ON FACTS?

COMMON AND PUBLIC PLACES

Creating new places requires more than a new design, the place also needs to be contextualized to be established over time. Contextualizing the place is about having a clear idea of which groups can potentially use it. Who will feel belonging and ownership to the place and thus feel welcome to make use of it. Without an establishment of belonging, and clarifying who the place is for, the place risks becoming for no one instead of over time becoming for everyone (Foth, 2017).

Specifying a group and a purpose is about creating relationships to the place, that there are people with a feeling that the place is for them. This group can be permanent or temporary. It can be a group that is involved in building up the place or a group that has a reason to visit it for a specific purpose or activity (Dahl, 2017). Based on a group, the place needs to be spatially designed in line with the needs of the selected group to ensure that its connection to the place becomes clear.

When a place provides space for different individuals to be brought together and have an exchange with each other, or when it provides an opportunity for a group to gather, it can be seen as, what we describe here, a common place. Over time, the common place can attract more activities and groups and thus develop into a public place, a place that brings together different groups to have an exchange on the common surface (Hajer & Reindorp 2001).



HOW IS A PLACE CREATED?

A place is constantly evolving and reshaping, even without conscious planning. What PPS - Project for Public Spaces (2020) does with placemaking is a catalyzing / accelerating process where you consciously control how a place should be transformed and how you want it to develop. A form of forced placemaking. Automatic placemaking instead takes place more unconsciously in step with how the people who are on the site choose to use it.

A place can both influence and be influenced by the surrounding context and society. On one hand, society influences and shapes a place through those who use the place and how they use it. On the other hand, a place can shape a society through its design. Depending on how a place is designed, it can influence people's behaviors, create social interaction and promote or inhibit certain interests.

In the report *Hållbar platsutveckling - Kunskapsöversikt Västra Götalandsregionen*, the authors Björling and Ohlén (2018) refer to Jane Jacobs' and Jan Gehl's theories on sustainable urban development, highlighting the importance of a small-scale environment that contains mixed functions. The environment should be useful for both those who live at the site and those who visit it, with the aim of creating a higher presence in the public environment. To attract various groups of people it is important that different areas have different

characters. To create environments that people want to stay in the importance of maintaining and investing in the places that exist is highlighted.

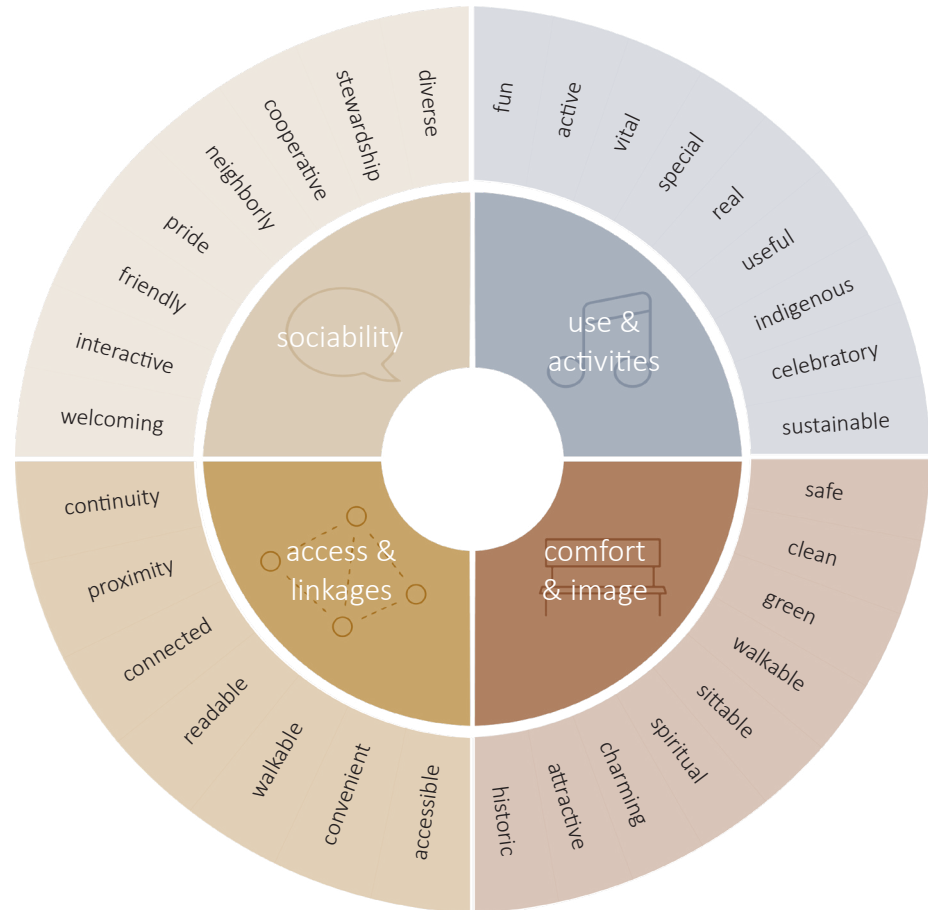
In the report, the authors also describe that the planning theorist John Friedmans emphasizes that each place has its unique conditions and thus also requires its unique methods for development. However, central to all methods he believes is to include local initiatives and see place development as a dynamic process and allow constant change.

Finally, Björling and Ohlén themselves argue that *"A central issue for discussing in which way site development methods can provide support for sustainable societal development is to clarify which societal challenges it is that site development can respond to."* (our translation from Swedish). It is also emphasized that there needs to be room to test and develop a place and that it is important to let the place change and refine over time. Site development should not be seen as a temporary investment, but rather as a continuous transformation. The transformation needs to take place with respect for the site's history and previous use, as well as include a critical perspective regarding whether a transformation is the right way to go.

WHAT IS A GOOD PLACE?

"In evaluating thousands of public spaces around the world, PPS has found that to be successful, they generally share the following four qualities: they are accessible; people are engaged in activities there; the space is comfortable and has a good image; and finally, it is a sociable place: one where people meet each other and take people when they come to visit."
- PPS, Project for Public Spaces (2020)

At their website PPS, Project for Public Spaces, summarize what makes a great place, in a diagram illustrating important qualities to consider in place-making projects- access & linkages, sociability, uses & activities, comfort & image. Together with their place diagram they present questions to have in mind during the process to ensure that none of the four qualities are being missed out.



PLACE DEVELOPMENT IN A HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

In the report *Hållbar platsutveckling - Kunskapsöversikt Västra Götalandsregionen* Björling and Ohlén (2018) describe how a number of counter-reactions to increasingly market-focused planning emerged in the 2000s, with the aim of highlighting the need for more democratic planning. There are a number of different movements that are emerging, with a shared view that an increased dialogue with citizens is central. These movements are also described as emerging as a reaction to the changing balance between the public and private sectors due to the majority of political and economic crises. From these movements comes an increasing focus on planning methods based on dialogue and flexibility, as well as the view of societal development as a complex system. The report describes this changed approach emphasizing the planner's role and ability to coordinate processes and different actors.

HOW TO MAKE A PLACE ATTRACTIVE: 8 KEYS

These eight keys are presented in a webinar with LINK arkitektur (2020) and describes their perspective on what attracts people to a place.



Mix it up



Recreation and play



Work with the flow



Art and creativity



Take care of our basic needs



Everything is temporary



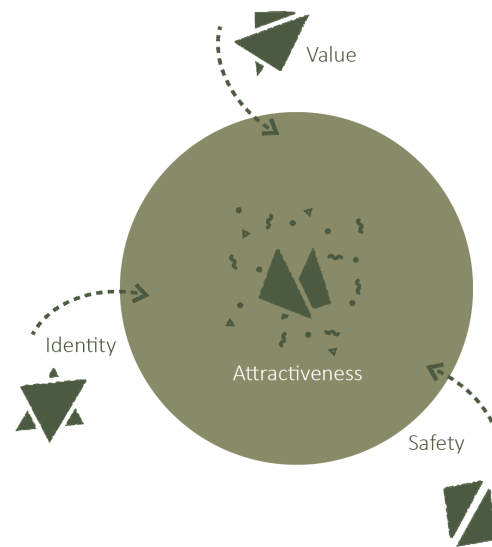
Be aware of the micro-climate



Bring in the nature

HOW TO MAKE A PLACE ATTRACTIVE: IDENTITY - VALUE - SAFETY

Another definition of what makes a place attractive is found in the report Place making in the nordics (2020). The illustration shows that a place needs to have an identity, be safe and have value to be attractive. In the report, Fred Kent, founder of Project for Public Spaces, defines that “Placemaking is about turning a place from somewhere you cannot wait to go through to somewhere you never want to leave.”.



DEFINITION

A good place in Bengtsfors municipality is accessibly located in its beautiful nature. The place offers room for several activities and different groups of people sharing space. It has simple functions such as seating that facilitate social interaction and comfort. It is lively with people hanging out without losing the feeling of calmness and safety. The place suits all weathers and is available to use all day, all year.

CONCEPT - SQUARES IN NATURE



THE CONCEPT

By creating new places in the municipality, sustainable development can be promoted. Our concept *squares in nature* is about framing a space in nature and adding a purpose for people to choose to visit that specific site instead of spreading, which otherwise happens in nature- creating common destinations. By doing this, Bengtsfors can use their strength in being surrounded by beautiful nature and counteract the weakness that people lack places to meet others.

A common interest to spend time in nature and willingness to gather and meet others exists. What is needed is established places in nature that are stated to be for several residents so that a sense of belonging can grow.

The existing places that have been pointed out as popular in the citizen dialogue are mainly those where people meet, or places in nature. These are two tracks that today are separated, but Bengtsfors has the opportunity and potential to combine them, by creating new common places for several people in nature.

Nature-related activities can be practiced wherever nature is present. The challenge is to take advantage of this common interest and bring these people together. To get people to choose the same place, we have developed this concept. It will be used to frame spaces in nature and use architecture to add facilities and values that make it obvious, common destinations - *the square in nature*.

APPLYING THE CONCEPT

To apply the concept of new common destinations in nature, the definition of a good place in the Bengtsfors context should be followed. First step is to choose a space for development. To choose the right space it is important to take advantage of accessibility and connections from different locations and with different transportations. Who owns the land is also an important parameter that will make a lot of impact on the possibilities for investments and content of the place.

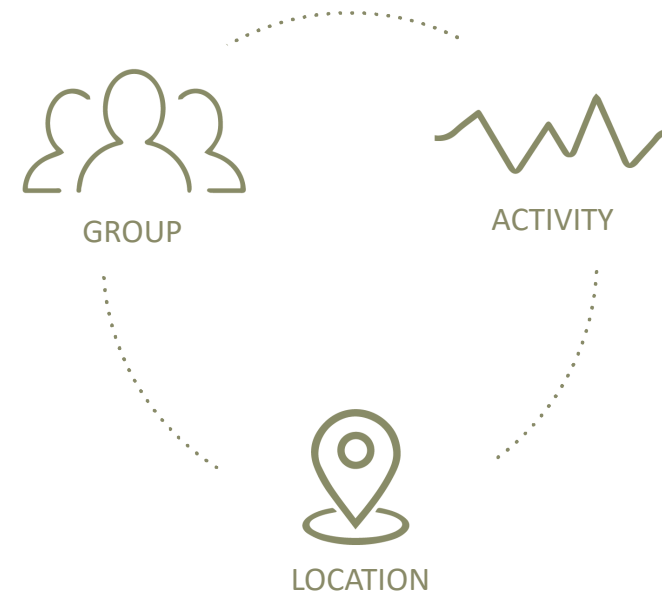
The place should enable different types of meetings, with those you know and those you do not know, as well as offer space where one can be alone. Being able to get an overview of the site is important for the security aspect. A simple function such as seating makes people stay on the site for a longer time. With light and heat, the use of the place can be expanded over the day and over the seasons. The place should be able to provide heat when it is cold and cold when it is hot. There should be sunny places, shady places and space under a roof to meet different weather conditions. Therefore, the orientation of the built structure on the site is important to keep in mind.

Even if the place results in a built structure, with walls and ceilings, or an open space with benches and a barbecue area, it is important that nature comes first and is present. Therefore, the project should be designed according to the nature on the site and adapt the architecture in a way that elevates and emphasizes nature (eg views, take advantage of height differences, do not cut down trees unnecessarily, etc.). Therefore it also becomes important to make conscious material choices where the material fits the site and ages with dignity.

As the place is public and the ownership of it may be different from the group of people who mainly use it, it also becomes important to think about maintenance. Making active choices about materials and design that minimizes the work required to maintain the site contributes to a longer and better lifespan. For example, choose materials that require little maintenance and fixed furniture to ensure that they remain.

In addition to following the definition, the new site needs to be contextualized. At this stage, decisions are made that are unique to each project- for whom and for what is the new place made for? In order to be established, people/groups with a sense of belonging to the place is required. Decisions should be made about which space is to be converted into a place, which group the place is aimed for and what the purpose of the place is. These parameters set additional frameworks, specific to each project, for which functions or spatial designs the new sites require in order to meet the needs of the target group or purpose.

The aim of specifying the place from the start is to create a common place for a group of residents to gather. By meeting the general functions from the definition, area is given to eventually attract more activities and groups and thus reach the long-term aim of developing the place into a public one, a place that brings together different groups to have an exchange on the common surface.



STAKEHOLDERS

We see choosing a clear target group as a major factor in our concept, to contextualize the place. By having a clear idea of which group of people may have an interest in using the place, one can make sure that a sense of belonging and ownership can be created. This feeling is important for a new place to be established, that there are people that feel welcome to make use of it.

As mentioned in the chapter about common and public, this group can be permanent or temporary. The initiative to create new places can come from an existing group, driving the process to create a common square in nature adapted to their interests, or be a strategy to create new groups around for example common interests.

This means that different groups can be stakeholders in a project like this. We see a big opportunity that for example orienteering clubs, scouting association or hikers can come together and use our concept to create meeting place developed for them.

Different stakeholders can give different final goals about the type of place to be created. Winter swimmers are a group that is not based on an association or a commitment. It is also a group that can change over time.

This provides a certain condition for the place to include more. For this proposal, the long-term goal will be for the place to become a public place over time, like a square in the city, which unites different groups and activities to share the same area.

Some target groups may find a transition from a common to a public place more difficult. If, for example, the scout association establishes a new meeting place for them, this target group is more stable and closed. The difference between members and visitors is clear. In such a case, a public place may not be the final goal. A common place is enough, with the goal of creating a new meeting place that unites a specific group.

LOCATION

Another aspect of a success implementing the concept is to find available land. In this case the municipality itself is an important stakeholder. To facilitate for the different target groups being able to create their common place, the municipality has an important role in finding good spaces for development. Both with their extensive local knowledge and expertise and by making the process of building permits smooth. They can also be a support for the target groups and be a part in the discussion around different solutions.

ECONOMY

To succeed in implementing our concept, collaboration between different groups is important. Except for a target group who can be part of the feeling of ownership in the beginning, all projects need financing. The financing could be solved in different ways depending on the target group. If it is an association they may have some economic resources. It can also be an initiative from the municipality to involve residents in a participatory process, letting them be a part of designing and building up the place.

DESIGN PROPOSAL

A SQUARE IN NATURE FOR WINTER BATHING

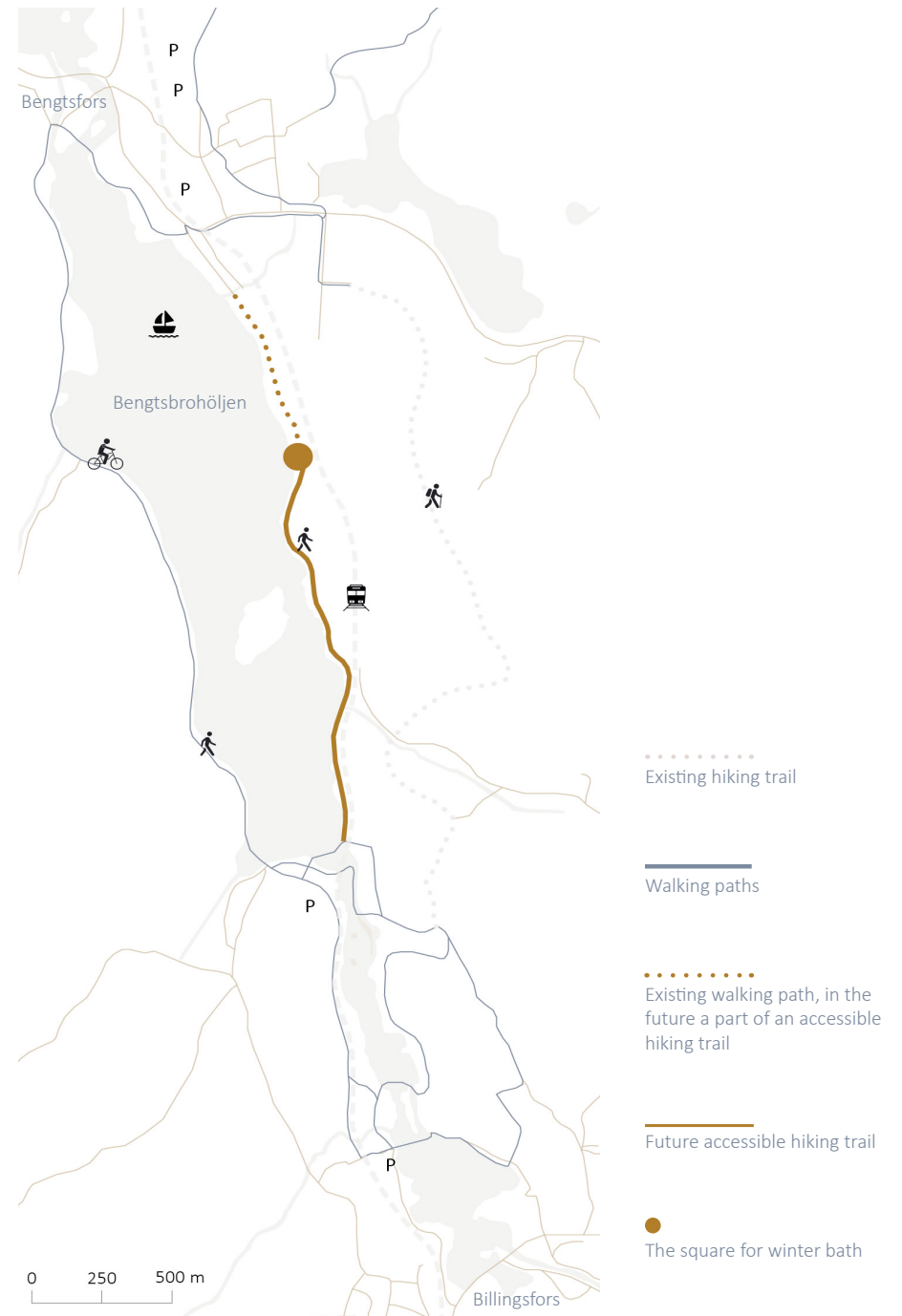
LOCATION

Choosing a place requires an understanding of its preconditions. As we were not able to visit Bengtsfors a second time due to the current pandemic, we began to map the places we visited during the visit in September, with the requirements to find a place close to nature that can be reached today but which is not used to its full potential.

We chose to investigate the cycle path west of Lake Bengtsbrohöljen which stretches between Bengtsfors and Billingsfors with the aim of creating a place along this path, to make it a destination and not just a transport route.

During a tutorial with the municipality, we presented this and then received a tip about the nature area that is on the other side of the lake. A point of land at this eastern side of the lake is a space recommended from the municipality to, in this proposal, apply the concept of 'square in nature' to - an underutilized surface with the potential to become an appreciated place.

A long-term goal for the municipality is to expand the network of hiking trails, of which an accessible one may pass this new place (Blüme, 2020). The hiking trail itself creates new connections in the municipality, closest between Bengtsfors and Billingsfors, and also enables accessible movement around the Bengtsbrohölje lake. In the long term, the new location will be a destination that makes this nature area accessible, but also a stop on the way for those who walk along the trail.



TARGET GROUP AND NEEDS

In this proposal of implementing the concept, we have chosen the group “people interested in winter bath” and the activity bathing all year around. Winter bathers is a group that is not based on an association or any commitments, so we chose that as an example to show that a clear common interest is enough to be seen as a group. We also saw in the survey that many people in Bengtsfors appreciate water and bathing and being able to bathe all year around is highlighted as a desired activity.

By creating a place optimal for bathing all year around, we reach a group of people who will feel connected to this place and be able to build a community around it. Here one can go to share a common interest, inspire each other and also have the same destination for an activity that nowadays can be performed anywhere. Parallel with that, other people that are not interested in winter bathing, can use the place for other activities or to hang out with friends.



I miss a place with the opportunity to swim in the winter

Woman, 74 years old

In order for the site to be established as the common destination that brings the group of ‘winter bathers’ together, it should be spatially designed and provide functions that promote the specific activity. A place for winter bathing should have easy access to the water, room for changing and the opportunity for storage. The place should offer different degrees of privacy and the opportunity to get warm.

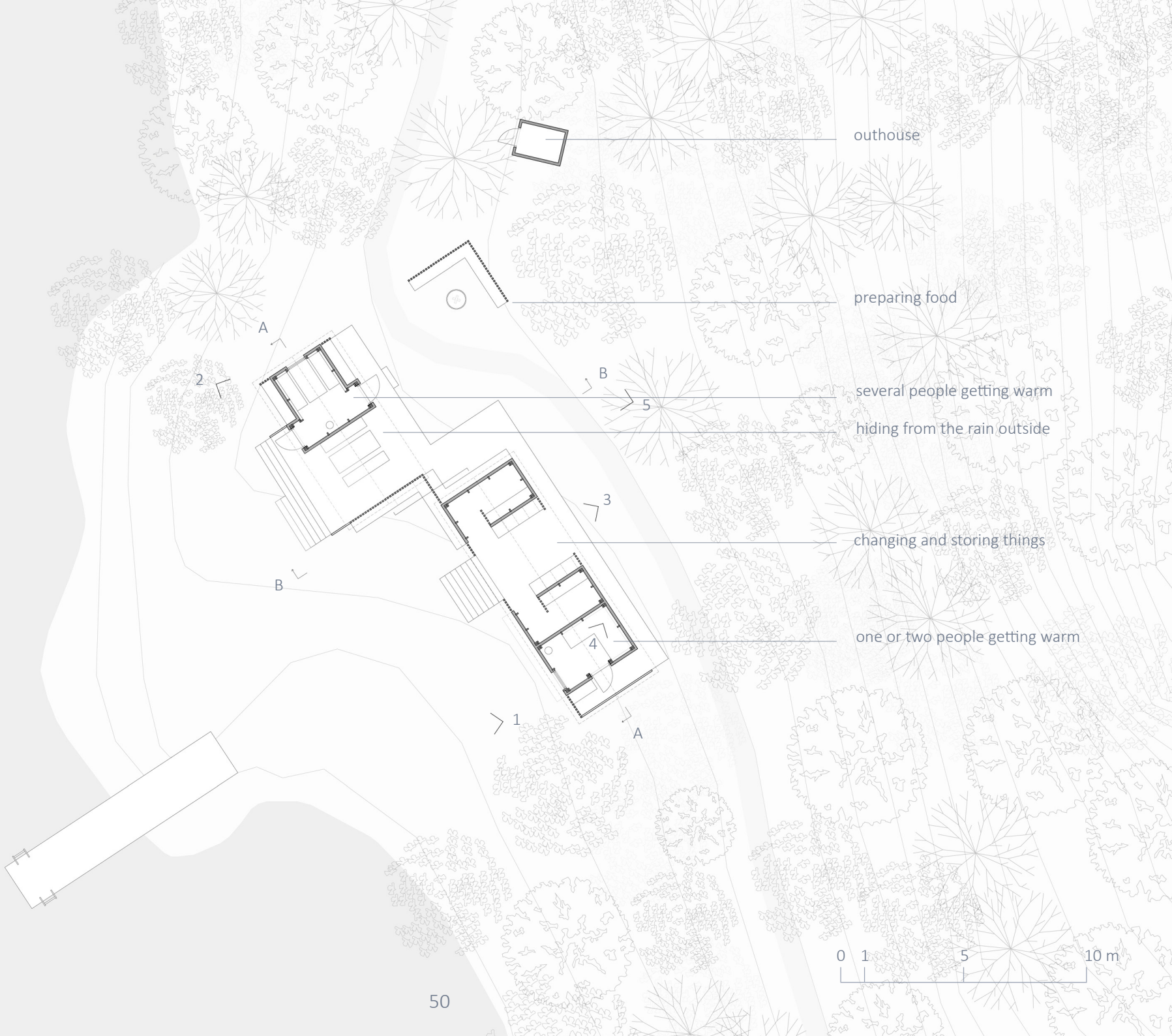
Based on the set definition, there are also general functions that, according to facts and residents, make this into a place you want to stay at for several reasons and not just pass by. This provides conditions for the common destination for winter swimming in nature to develop into a public place where different groups and activities share the same area. The square in nature for winter swimming will have the facilities that attract the ones interested in that specific activity to choose it as a destination. The jetty, the seating, the indoor cottages etc. will also attract other people and activities to spend their time here during all seasons

HOW?

Based on the needs, the selected area is completed with a built structure that adds functions that attract people to choose this place as a destination. There are seats and tables, outdoors and indoors, which makes people stay at the place for a longer time. The outdoor spaces create seating in the sun, in shadow and under roof to suit all weathers. With light and heat, the use of the place is expanded, over the day and over the seasons. Two changing booths and space for storage create a feeling of security when the place is shared with others. The common place offers separate, more private areas but also a general, open visibility of what happens at the place, which is important for the security aspect.

With the exterior rooms created by the trees and the water, nature frames itself into a square. Together with nature, the added structure strengthens these spaces through, for example, useful facades that provide the opportunity for different types of meetings and that several people can be on the site at the same time, with or without interacting. The proposal goes in line with beach protection and makes the space close to the water accessible for more people to use.

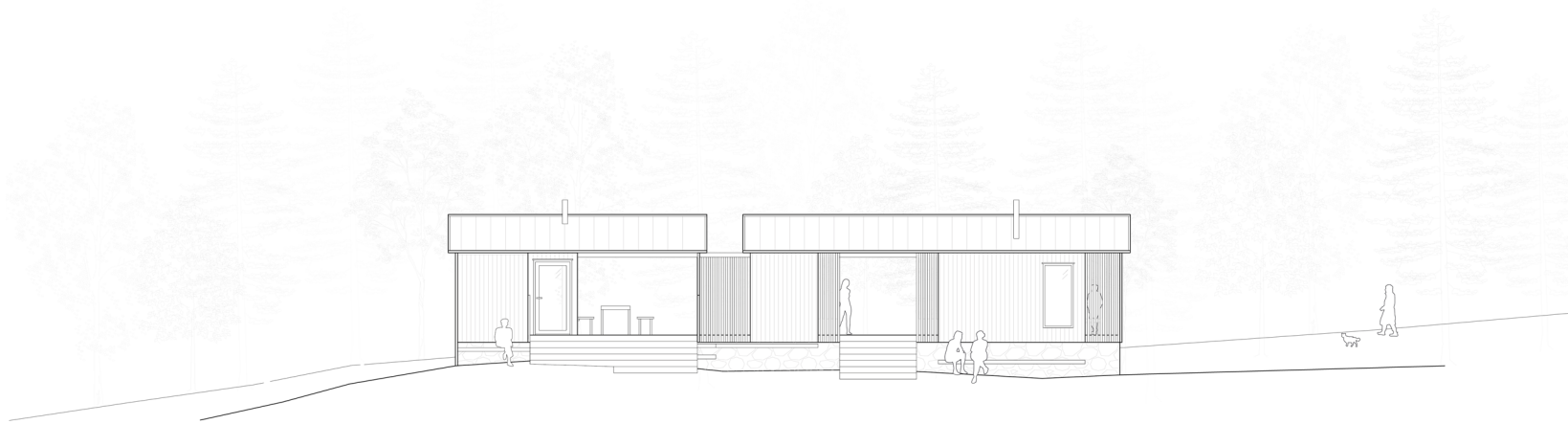
With the hiking path passing by the square, people not knowing about this place will discover it and be able to take a rest or spontaneous bath while passing by. The place is designed for winter bath, but it does not hinder people from doing other activities or take advantage of this common place without bathing. That creates a diversity of people and activities and will hopefully in a longer perspective develop to be the public nature place we strive for.



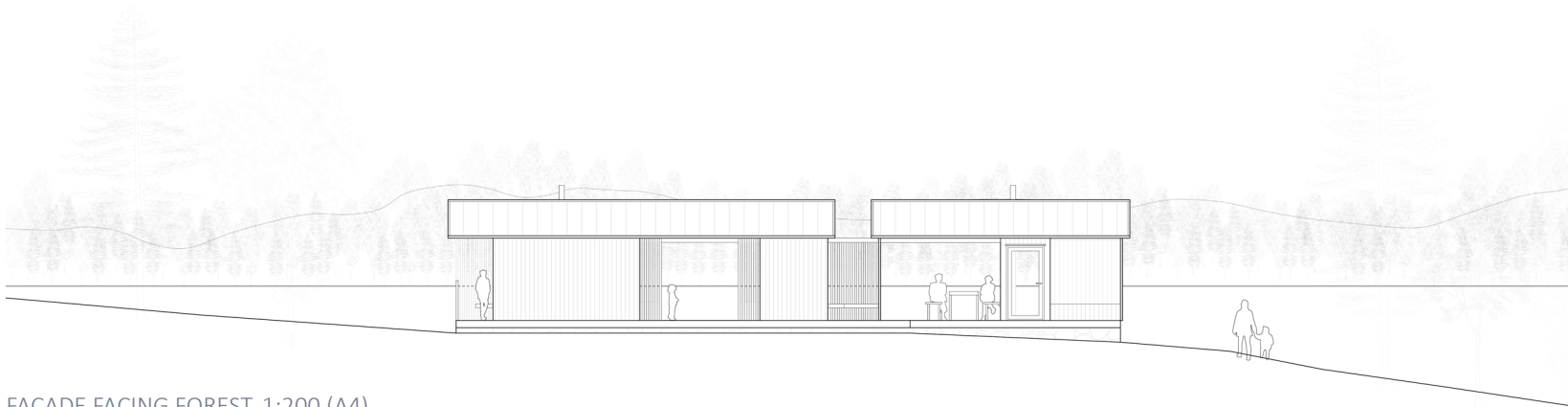
PLAN 1:200 (A4)

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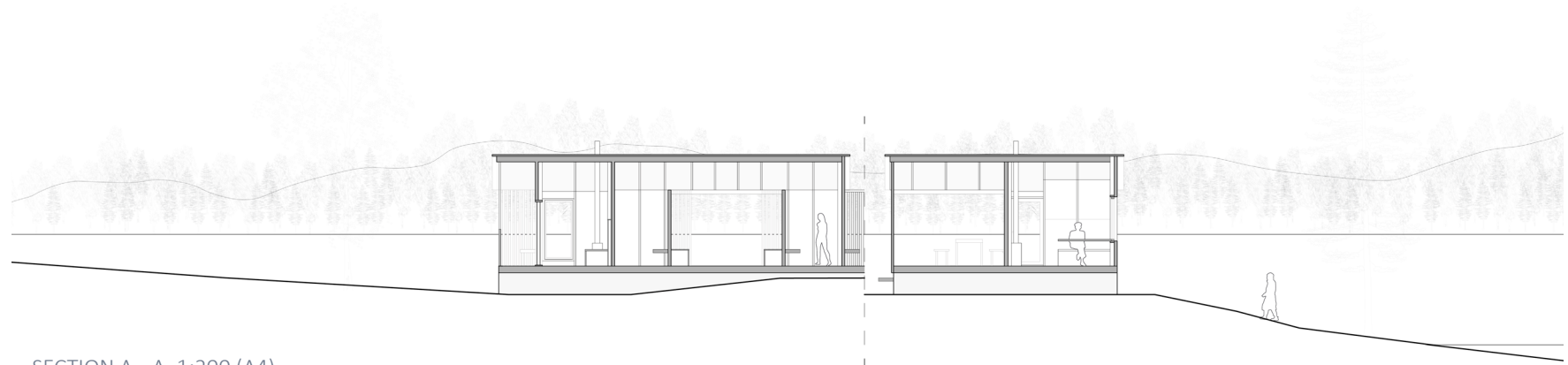


FACADE FACING LAKE, 1:200 (A4)

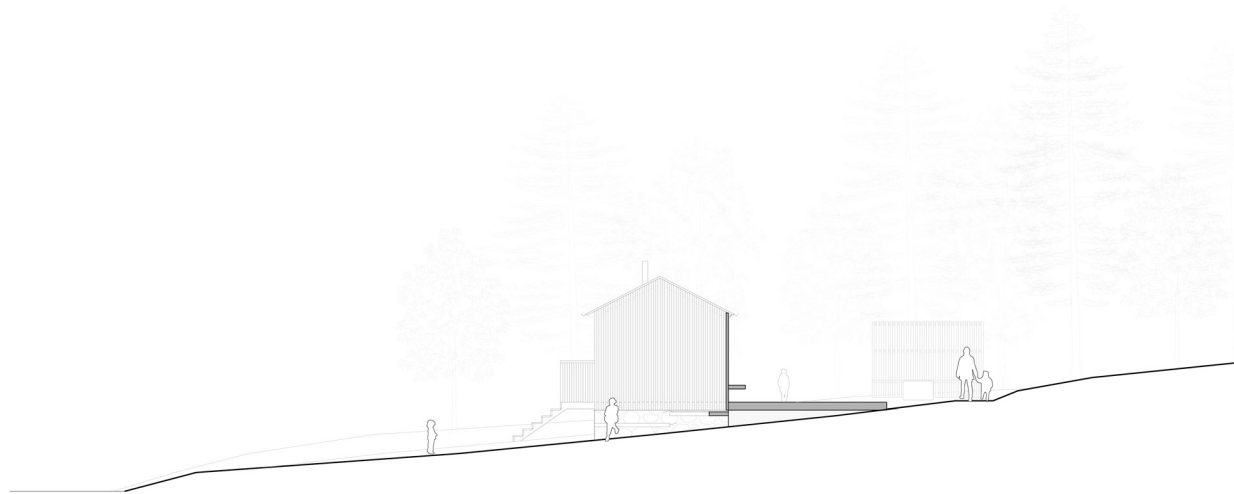


FACADE FACING FOREST, 1:200 (A4)





SECTION A - A, 1:200 (A4)



SECTION B - B, 1:200 (A4)



PERSPECTIVE 1

The jetty is a natural gathering place for bathers, during all seasons of the year. Two bathing ladders make it possible to share the experience of the winter bath at the same time, and help the flow up and down the water during well-attended summer days.



PERSPECTIVE 2

A weather-protected place where the roof keeps the rain away and the indentation in the facade protects from cold winds. Here you can stop and sit down for a while on the walk around the lake, eat your fika, a rough day or admire a beautiful sunset over the lake.



PERSPECTIVE 3

The entrance to the bath is through this transparent building part, with a direct line of sight down to the lake and the jetty. Two separate changing booths provide the opportunity for changing and in the wall-mounted benches in the common space there are lockable drawers for storing personal belongings during the bath.



PERSPECTIVE 4

In this small cabin there is room for one or two people sitting on the bench, looking out over the lake and getting warm. This is a secluded place for calmness, peace and silence - an opportunity to be for yourself for a moment.



PERSPECTIVE 5

The path leads through the place and can be a stop on the way for the ones passing by. The built structure strengthens the exterior rooms and creates open and secluded spaces.



CONTINUING WORK



RESULT 1 - THE CONCEPT



RESULT 2 - THE PROPOSAL

CONTINUING WORK IN THE FUTURE

Our project has ended up in two different results, the concept and our design proposal. Bengtsfors municipality can take our design proposal, create it and from our point of view, achieve a good transformation from a space to a place in the context of Bengtsfors. The municipality can also take our concept and apply it to other activities or spaces within the municipality, and from that create new appreciated places. The concept can be applied to different contexts, be an initiative from a variety of stakeholders and be a useful method for sustainable development in the municipality.

THE CONCEPT

The concept of Squares in nature is a potential solution on how to handle the challenges by emphasizing the possibilities found within the municipality. The identified rural quality, under-utilized nature, can with our concept be lifted to contribute to a sustainable development of Bengtsfors municipality.

The project started of with a first impression that there was a common interest in nature within the municipality, but we were also aware that this might not be the case when we compiled the answers from the survey. We are happy that the results from the survey met our expectations and are grateful for the combination of luck and that we managed to interpret the pre-study correctly, that this common interest in nature is clear among the residents of Bengtsfors municipality.

One question we ask ourselves afterwards is how many different interest groups we managed to reach with our survey. As we released it and encouraged it to be spread to the inhabitants of the municipality, we do not know more than some basic thing we asked for, as age, gender etc., about which groups it reached. Are the majority of the inhabitants hardcore interested in nature or did we manage to reach people with a minor or non-existent interest in nature?

THE DESIGN PROPOSAL

We believe that the winter bath is a project that can be implemented relatively quickly and easy. Due to the smaller scale, it can be more easily received and understood by the municipality and residents. We spent time going through building details, such as how the walls should be built and how the wall meets the roof. Which makes it easier to carry out the project for real as no major revisions are required that can contribute to major changes in expression. We feel satisfied that we had time to get into the level of detail with the project even though we did not make any finished drawings on it. We worked at the level of detail which gave us a sense of security with the proposal, that we know it works as it is presented now.

The relevance of our project increases with the ongoing corona pandemic. To socialize outdoors is an activity well timed and the need for places for such activities increases along with the interest and appreciation of well-made such places. The fact that we also managed to choose an activity, winter bathing, which has received a real boost this year, increases even more the relevance of the project. On the other hand, if we had more time or had changed our schedule for the project, we would have liked the opportunity to talk to someone who has more experience to gain a greater understanding of the activity and get an even more well-founded result.

THE WORKING PROCESS

The first week of the project, when we wrote our program, was crucial to our results and the process that took us to it. We had a week to sit down and think through how we wanted to work and write a detailed program for our project. That we had a long time in the beginning to talk about our expectations, goals and work process, meant that we were all on the same wavelength from the start. We agreed on how we wanted the project to take shape and ensured that we understood each other, both as persons and architects. That we in the beginning talked about how far we wanted to get with the project, what level we wanted the result to be, meant that we had a clear common goal to work towards and that there were no misunderstandings about what one wanted with the project.

During the first week, we also created a fairly detailed schedule for the project where there were clear days for when certain steps in the process would be completed and when we needed to move on to the next phase to have time to finish what we set as a goal to have time to do. This meant that we managed exactly what we planned to achieve and that our expectations of the project were met.

On the other hand, we can ask ourselves whether the schedule we wrote should have looked different because there would have been room for certain things that we would have wanted to do if the project were to be reworked. An example, if we had had more time, would have been to get feedback from the people who responded to the survey. To take their information one step further by involving them in some way in the design process. Either through a contact at an early stage of the sketch phase to check if we were on the right track or at the end of the project to get input and feedback on the proposal we chose to work with.

The clear schedule we made up for our workflow made us all feel less stressed but also confident in being able to "start over" and think a few extra laps before deciding. This helped us not to go too fast and constantly stress on to the next task.

Due to limited time it was important for us to follow the set up phases to reach the final result we aimed for. If we had planned with more space, we might have been able to explore ideas that came along the way. On the other hand it made it easy not to float away and, for example, drown in the research part.

The first weeks in the project consisted of a lot of research and conversations between us in the group and we were careful from day one to take notes during our conversations and take time to write texts about things we discussed. This led to us having a lot of text for our booklet ready quite early but also that we could constantly read through what we had discussed so that we all felt that we understood each other correctly and were on the same path during the work.

Unfortunately, we could not be on site in the municipality more than on one occasion in the beginning of the course and therefore the supervision opportunities with the municipality was extra important. The regular tutorials gave us a lot of help, and new energy when we had some form of difficulty before these occasions. The fact that the tutorials gave a lot probably goes hand in hand with feeling that our ideas were understood. The tutors helped us in the right direction from start and we are happy that we managed to communicate what we wanted in a way that made it possible to take it on as a tutor to give good advices.

From the project we take with us our working method. It worked very well and we had an educational, relatively painless and relaxed time together in the project. One lesson we take with us is how important it is to discuss an expected end result right at the beginning of the project to ensure that everyone works along the same path and towards the same goal.

LESSON FROM THIS COURSE

For the next project, we will mainly take with us how rewarding and important the pre-studies in a project is. This is the first course where we do such a thorough study of the place we are to work with and thus also a course where we feel that all groups have succeeded in doing relevant projects for the place. Thanks to the initial study, we have felt that we know the context and thus had arguments for making our decisions, which has created a sense of security in your work that we have not experienced before. So in retrospect, we have learnt the importance of the initial tasks made during the first weeks of the course. It gave us a solid foundation to stand on when we then took on our In-depth projects.

CONCLUSION

We see our project result as a useful strategy for the municipality in their way of thinking about sustainable development in the future. The project shows that a good place in a rural context could be something else than a good place in an urban context. What is needed is to shift the perspective from the urban norm, by highlighting the unique aspects of the rural landscape and emphasize it.

With this project, we also want to emphasize the importance of involving the ones living in the area. They are the ones who know the stories and those who are part of today's and tomorrow's Bengtsfors. Having something to share responsibility for and belonging to promotes a feeling of participation. This project shows a way in which Bengtsfors municipality can take advantage of its unique assets in nature to strengthen the identity and unite the community. These aspects are important to promote in the planning to ensure a socially sustainable future that evolves together with the ones having Bengtsfors municipality as their home.

REFERENCE PROJECTS

Långed Park Project, Dals Långed

A place with a main activity (sauna) but which also offers space/opportunity for other activities and thus creates space for meetings between individuals and groups with both the same and different interests.



ArkNat

ARKNAT combines architecture with nature by creating shelters and hideouts for public use. The idea is to show how architecture can help us get in touch with our surroundings (ArkNat, 2020).



(ArkNat, 2020)

Biotope- arkitektur & natur

The goal of each project is to create space for good nature experiences, connecting people with nature through architecture. They are made to be maintenance-free and a lot of time is spent on well-worked details (Biotope, 2020).



(Biotope, 2020)

Timmertjärn, Ed

Transformation of existing space with few visitors into an appreciated place. Well-used because the right conditions for simple outdoor life exist. There are now illuminated walking paths, seating and play-ground- facilities that attract (Andersson, 2020).



(Visit Dals-Ed Facebook page, 2020)

REFERENCE PROJECTS

During the project, we have had several different reference projects that we have been inspired by in different ways. Two that we have had as a source of inspiration since the first days of the project are Arknat and Långed Park Project. From Arknat, we have mainly been inspired by their way of combining architecture with nature and that architecture can help us get in touch with our surroundings. Långed Park has inspired by showing that a place with a specific main activity, sauna, that also offers other activities creates space for meetings between individuals and groups with both the same and different activities and thus functions as a room for integration and is appreciated for a larger crowd of people.

On tutorials during the project, we have also been assigned two more reference projects that inspired us. One is Timmertjärn in Ed, which representatives from Bengtsfors municipality provided us with. Here we mainly took with us that in Timmertjärn they managed with quite small funds to transform a previously underused place with few visitors into a popular and well-used place. This by providing the right conditions for a simple outdoor life – access to firewood and barbeque, weather protections and easily accessible walking trails. The second reference is the architectural firm Biotope Architects, where we are inspired by their goal: To create space for good nature experiences in every project. But also, by their way of creating projects that are virtually maintenance-free and have elaborate and beautiful details.

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