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REDESIGNING COMMERCIAL PUBLIC LIFE

- design for urbanity beyond consumption



CRITICAL SPATIAL PERSPECTIVES

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MT'21

In current climate challenges, consumption is crucial. Shopping is everywhere; in museums, train stations, schools. Consumption has to be reduced to achieve sustainable development. The history of urban development is connected to commercial expansion, making it hard to imagine a city without it. However, current tendencies show how retail decreases in city centres. Smaller centres are being depleted, in favour of online shopping or external malls. Trends of environmental awareness indicate a change in lifestyle towards less consumption. The extraordinary situation of the corona pandemic displayed a new emptiness in shopping environments. There are several reasons to believe that future city centres will contain less retail, making discussions on how cities would look like without shopping relevant.

The aim of the master thesis is to highlight an architectural discourse about alternative developments, beyond commercialization of public space. Through literature studies, reference projects and on site-observations, the thesis investigates the notion of degrowth and sustainable urban development together with social functions of physical shopping environments. The objects of observation are a pedestrian street, a city mall,

and a suburban shopping mall in the local context of Gothenburg. These sites set the scene for three speculative scenarios and design implementations.

The research shows that social qualities of shopping environments revolve around user diversity, atmosphere, and movement. The speculative design proposals intend to fuel discussions on alternative futures, with transformed social functions matching developments of degrowth. The goal with degrowth design is interpreted as increasing quality of life without the focus on economic growth. The importance of welfare, health, culture, social gathering, and creative expression are likely to increase. The first speculative scenario focus on flexible structures and transformative building processes; the second exemplifies local production and sharing of knowledge; the third illustrates a city where nature is given higher priority. The master thesis intends to set an example where architecture is being used to find opportunities and solutions in an era of climate emergency and social sustainability issues.

Keywords: public space, sustainability, shopping, degrowth, speculative design