HOW PUBLIC IS PUBLIC SPACE?

- a cross-disciplinary study of the democratic city

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ABSTRACT

For decades we have been able to follow urban cities using concepts that promote commercial interests rather than public, in their fight for attention on the global market. Using terms like "branding" or "profiling", the focus that should be on the commercialisation of public space is instead disguised as development proclaimed to make the city more "attractive". This development however risks turning public space into private and diversity into uniformity when cities as a whole and, more specifically, public spaces are planned. Today we see the impacts and consequences of it in public space, and in the end on its democratic functions. This thesis is set around questions that discuss the gap between research done on the city by social sciences, politics, and actual planning leading to architecture that shapes public space.

By using a cross-disciplinary approach architects can broaden their understanding of this relationship between public space and democracy. This thesis therefore includes studies from Sociology, Cultural Studies, Geography, and Critical theory. It is also a series of design elaborations where the theories are being tested through collages. These allow a quick look at an alternative reality of a place and ask questions though visual representation, as well as spatial analysis. In building on and collaborating with scholars from other fields, architects have a great chance to learn from and include meaningful knowledge into the practical work of architecture. This thesis argues that a cross-disciplinary approach should not only be seen as a means to interesting design but that it is also imperative to secure our public spaces as democratic agents. With awareness of the mechanisms at work in city planning on the one hand and insight in the research of other disciplines on the other, architects have a great chance to strengthen both their own role in planning, and the democratic function of public space.

CONTENT

Is democracy a physical (public) space?   **INTRODUCTION**

> *"Politics shapes the very homes, streets and cities in which we live, defining the spaces and places in which we are able to pursue our lives. From the national border to the wire fence; from the privatisation of land to the exclusion and expulsion of persecuted peoples; questions of space and place, of who can be where and what they can do there, are at the very heart of the most important political debates of our time."*
> (p. 1 Cermonà et al., 2012)

During the last decades we have been able to follow a trend of entrepreneurial urbanism sweeping across Western cities, concepts that promote commercial interests rather than that of the public are used in a fight for attention on the global market to attract a new type of financially strong citizen (Franzén et al., 2016). By borrowing terms from advertisement, like "branding" or "profiling", the focus that should be on the commercialisation of public space is instead disguised as development proclaimed to make the city more "attractive". These types of neoliberal solutions became popular as a universal cure to the dire situation many cities found them-selves in after the oil crisis in the mid 70's, not least industrial cities (ibid.). Today the term neoliberalism is widely used when talking of economic concepts promoting privatisation, deregulation, globalisation, as an argument to cut down on governmental spending, and when promoting free trade (*Neoliberalism*, 2021). Though the use and definition of the term has changed over time (see e.g. 30's economic scholars vs. the extreme version in Pinochet's Chile in the 80's) it is the definition of neoliberalism as a mean to deregulate the public space that this thesis will focus on. The solutions that neoliberalism brings to the field come in different versions of entrepreneurial urbanism, and when talking of city development not least the concepts of BID and gentrification (Franzén et al., 2016). The definition of BID varies some from country to country because of differences in legislation. In Sweden it work as an association with the aim to improve a district in such a way that makes shopping more attractive and in turn increase the property values (ibid.). The local BID brings together real estate owners within a district with the local city policy makers, the membership is voluntary, and the joining members agree to pay a fee to finance the improvements and development goals (*BID* 2021, Franzén et al., 2016). What this means is that the public is joining the private in the outspoken objective to make parts of the city more attractive to an affluent part of the population and in affect shutting others out while improving the finances of real estate owners (Franzén et al., 2016). In Göteborg we can at present time find five such districts (*BID Sweden* 2021).

Gentrification can instead, in short, be described as a way to use the creative sector, artists and small-scale businesses, to make an area trendy and interesting

to the same affluent class, with an increase in property value as a consequence also here (*Gentrification* 2021). I will talk more of this in relation to my test site, but what is important to remember is that none of these models for "improvement" are natural occurrences in a city but rather deliberately put into action. This development might be good for the economic interest of a few but also risks turning public space into private and diversity into uniformity (Franzén et al., 2016 & Peck et al., 2009, Olsson, 2018). Within the field of architecture I think we need to be aware of this movement away from democratic values in public space, learn to identify the strategies used to gain control over the public space, and find ways to mediate its impacts. This gets even more relevant as we see cities, like Göteborg, getting increasingly segregated despite, or because of, the "development" (Shehab & Salama, 2018, Olsson 2018). Money has always dictated the urban life but as the comfortable middle class is growing the incentives to include everyone in the development are shrinking (Bauman, 2011). This thinking is heading for a disastrously unequal society and to find a sustainable future for the city we will need to make sure that the democratic values we tender still have a place in the public space.

Though I in this thesis mostly focus on the consequences of the neoliberalisation of city developing policies I want to make it clear that I am therefore not saying that "the old" way of planning was better. Planning an entire neighbourhood on political ideals, like during the housing project in Sweden 1965-1975, is of course also problematic. As a person with a background in social anthropology and arts I have learned to constantly question the status quo, and the aim for this thesis is to raise a concern over what *type* of development that is happening and *who* gets to decide about that development, a development very much including architecture and city planners, as well as commercial interests and branding. But most importantly what does that mean to the public space, like the quote that introduced this chapter we should keep asking ourselves *who* is occupying it and with *what*?

Cross - disciplinary study in Architecture

I know I am not the first and surely not the last to see the benefits of doing a cross-disciplinary study. Combining different fields' expertise to help answer a question obviously makes the picture more complex and potentially harder to see as a whole, but then again so is reality. Harry Francis Mallgrave (2018) notes in the introduction to his book *From Object to Experience* that in all fields of

disciplines, from philosophy to neuroscience, the last decades have meant a shift away from "(…) the dichotomies that have held us captive in the delusion that we can exist apart from our environment without any real consequence." (p ix). What this means is that we cannot create in a vacuum separated from reality and expect to make good architecture, we cannot continue separating ourselves from other fields of research. The concept of dichotomies; culture vs. nature, man vs. woman, public vs. private, now being questioned, have for the longest time had science locked into parallel research tracks when instead they would have everything to gain in working with each other. Now arising from the ashes of this narrow-mindedness are cross-disciplinary practices, more as a rule than an exception (ibid.) "Yet" Mallgrave concludes, "strangely, this revolution in thinking has gone practically unnoticed by architects." (2018, p ix). I do not know if that is completely true, I can think of many collaborative and innovative architectural research projects or bureaus (MediaLab at MIT, Raumlabo or Studio Ossidiana to name three very different approaches) but I still miss the wider perspective in the architectural practice and education. In the book *The Open City* Richard Sennett (2019) describes the need to see research as layers of functions and/or meanings for different people, again to gain a more complex picture of reality, and to not get stuck on finding *one* solution (p.14). In my understanding this also requires going beyond one's own discipline and turning to those who can make sense of the layers not covered by architecture.

Cross – disciplinary of course also means adding our own design practise to the mix. Combining design with theory is a tricky business but luckily we are fortunate to be able to work with design in a wide range of ways, from sketching and computer modelling to abstract brainstorming. In this thesis design is a means to bring about reflection and discussion about the public space rather than a ready-to-build design proposal. My empirical work is that of collages, sections, and spatial analyses of public space without the objective of finding one *solution*, but many *reflections*. Through text, design and reflection the aim with the cross – disciplinary approach is to show the strength in lifting the gaze and challenge the identity of the architect as a lone rider.

Research Questions

With my research questions I hope to discuss the gap between the research done on the city by social sciences, politics, and actual planning leading to design proposals. This is a large undertaking but the aim here is not to come up with

a solution to e.g. gentrification but rather to look at the discrepancy between the different actors in society that in one way or another are involved in the planning, or deconstruction, of public space, private or public. I ask myself how public *is* public space actually? My research shows that there is a large gap between the *knowledge* acquired about public space in research and the *will* of people in power, be it commercial or political power.

To get to the bottom of my initial question and name of this thesis, *How public is public space?* I have broken this, and my other questions, down to different levels of understanding and the following section I give a brief account of how they have structured my work.

How public is public space?
This first question I ask in general terms to get a context and an overview of the meaning of public space in architecture as well as in other disciplines, but also as to understand specific physical spaces on my test site. *How public is THIS public space?*

How do we relate to and care for our public space today, is it a place for democracy?
This second question as well has a level of general understanding of public space as a possible carrier of democratic values, and as something I look further into through design elaborations. What happens when we lose the sense of the public as something that everyone has a right to? This process is often slow and subtle so I ask this question to see how our relation to public space has changed over time and where we stand today.

Can architecture/architects be a guardian of democracy/democratic functions in the public space?
Lastly, I look at the understanding gained both through literature and design about public space and its relation to democracy. I ask *if* and if so *what* we as architects can do in our practise to straighten this relation.

I believe these questions have a strong relevance to the field of architecture today. We can see it being debated both in popular press (e.g. Thörn, 2008), as well as within research (see e.g. Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001, Franzén, 2016 or Olsson, 2018) but mostly within disciplines other than architecture. I like to think that this thesis, built from one part critical studies and written analysis, and another rooted in design elaborations and reflections, can contribute to finding a bridge from debate into practise as well as discussing the gap between the social sciences, architecture, and urban design.

As I am dealing with complex structures and definitions I want to use this section to motivate the location I test my thesis on, give an overview of what methods I use, and in the end talk a little about what I am *not* doing.

To understand the impact that different aspects of neoliberal politics might have on public space and democratic values there has been a need to first define what those values are (here called democratic attributes) and connect them to existing, interesting examples where I could find them. For the design process I have however chosen to work with a specific, local site, the Göteborg neighbourhood known as Nya Kvillebäcken (fig. 1). I intend to test my ideas about public space on this now 10-year-old project in northern Göteborg, as it is a location that has been under scrutiny for its insensitive reconstruction. Just a few years prior to the rise of Nya Kvillebäcken this area hosted a diverse set of small-scale businesses and associations on affordable sites. After an intense discreditation campaign it was levelled with the ground to give room to a middle and upper class housing district. It is therefore reoccurring in literature, press and debate as something of a textbook example of a gentrification process and as such it is a suitable site for a cross - disciplinary study through the lens of public space and democratic functions. I do not intend to do a retake on the entire area but will use it as a place

to zoom in on. There is a great difference today to what this place once looked like, and not least to *who* was occupying it, compared to now.

The method used for this study is best described as Cross-disciplinary Research through Design (Martin & Hanington, 2012). First by locating, reading and analysing literature I gain an overview of the different fields connected to the subject, the background and understanding I need to support both my process, the theoretical writing, and design elaborations. Thereafter I transfer the literature to design in a process of understanding theory from an architectural perspective through design. Lefebvre calls this transduction; he says research "entails a constant feedback between the conceptual framework and empirical observation" (1967). What this means is that the idea (the theory) is processed through a new element (in my case the public space or democratic functions) so that it morphs into something new and can feed back to, and create new understanding of the original idea. My design is therefore not to be understood as suggestions of actual change or interventions but as a critical study of the public space and a process of understanding the theoretical framework.

Last a few words on delimitations. To start with, this work is not looking at the public space through Participatory Design, a method that in recent years has gained a lot of influence but one I tend to question more and more. Participatory design can take on a lot of different shapes and depth and as such also have a very varied impact on the result (see e.g. Markus Miessens trilogy on the theme). Sometimes used more as a design input, at others as green washing but in some cases of course as a very valid tool for inclusion. The important question is how we will know the difference? Who is actually participating and what impact might it have on the community and the public space (Miessen, 2010)? This thesis is instead asking if there are other means to a similar end.

It is also not about city planning, as we know it. As much as this project is about *questioning* the planning and development of the city it is not a city-planning-project, nor does it aim to find a new universal method for planning. The thesis will not present the reader with a "better" blueprint of this part of town, nor is the aim to point finger and say this or that is wrong, just that it could be different and that we need to discuss how and why. Last this is not an attempt to redefine the theoretical definitions of public space or democratic functions as this has been done by many others before; scholars like Habermas (2003), Arendt (1998), and Lefebvre (1967) have all helped shape the understanding of public space that we have today and this thesis lean on their collected knowledge but will focus on more recent research for references.

For the disposition of this thesis I have chosen to divide the work into two theoretical sections for the first half, and for the second turn the focus to the empirical and design work. The thesis finds its end in a reflection rather than a conclusion. Organising the chapters like this is however not a reflection of my work process. The process of gathering material and understanding in what way the theories could inform the design has been far from linear, on the contrary. Working with the disposition has in itself been part of the design and learning process; as new knowledge informs the work old has shifted, lost or gained in importance both to the theoretical framework and the design elaborations. That is why the disposition in the end follows a classical narrative in an attempt to guide the reader from theory and context towards design and new understanding and reflections.

So to start off is the chapter called *About Concepts*, in it I have gathered definitions on public space, democratic functions etc. to give a common reference for future reading. In this chapter I also introduce some concepts of my own that greatly helped the process of turning theory into design. After concepts follow *About Context* and here I present the background both to the concept of neoliberalism in general but also its connection to the last decades of development in Göteborg. This chapter ends with a cross-disciplinary presentation of studies, theories and concepts that I find deepens this contextual understanding of public space.

The next chapter *The Site* is a short introduction to Nya Kvillebäcken, the site used for the empirical work. Here I take a look at the neoliberal development of the site along with a light spatial analysis. It is however in the *Design* chapter where the empirical design work is presented. After an introduction of the commercialisation of the public, eight collages are presented and reflected upon through some of the different perspectives presented in the concept and context chapters.

To finish the last chapter is not a conclusion but a collection of *Reflections*; about the democratic room, the potential of the public space, and observations to bring into future studies. It is not a presentation of solutions but rather a collection of suggestions and reflection on unsolved questions.
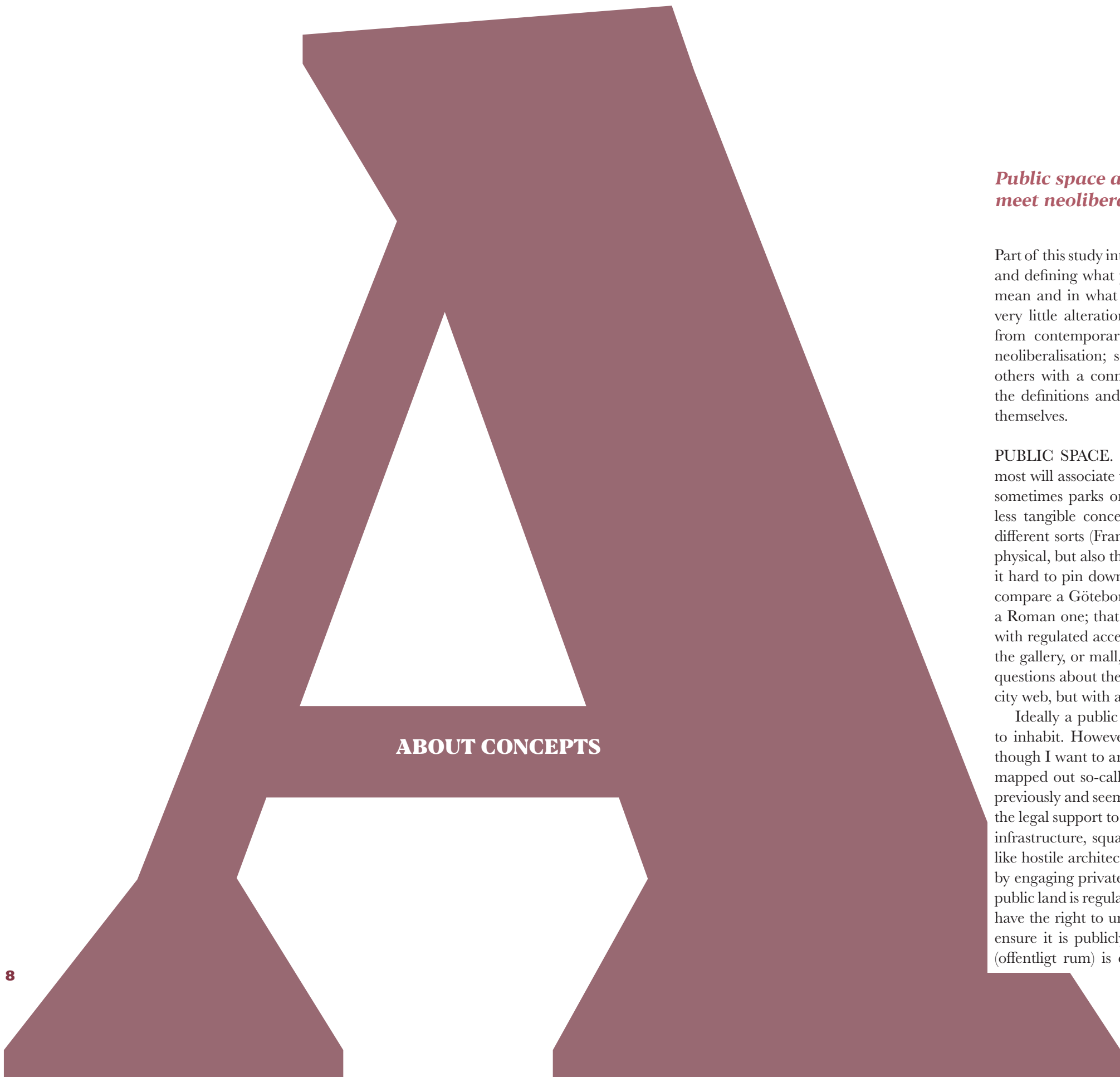
ABOUT CONCEPTS

Part of this study into the city and public space is also the process of understanding and defining what public space and democratic functions are; what these terms mean and in what way they may be connected to the built environment. With very little alterations I use the definitions of *public space* and *democratic functions* from contemporary research. These studies look at different expressions of neoliberalisation; some of the city as a whole, some of certain phenomena, others with a connection and relevance to my site. This section will focus on the definitions and later in the thesis I will go more into depth on the studies themselves.

PUBLIC SPACE. Let us start with the concept of public space. A term that most will associate with physical elements of the city such as squares, streets and sometimes parks or galleries. But it will also evoke notions of a social life and less tangible concepts of meetings, demonstrations and social interactions of different sorts (Franzén et al. 2016). It is this duality between physical and non-physical, but also the differences in culture and regulations of the city, that makes it hard to pin down as one specific thing. If we use the examples of a park and compare a Göteborg park; an open, city owned and managed, green space with a Roman one; that might be public in the sense of ownership but still fenced in with regulated access, would we still call the latter a public space? Probably. Also the gallery, or mall, a half open, commercial space with shops, raises interesting questions about the public space. Often they include named streets as part of the city web, but with access regulated by commercial interests.

Ideally a public space offers a place that all members of society feel entitled to inhabit. However it is not clear if that means it has to be publicly owned, though I want to argue that there is a need to insure it is. In 2017 The Guardian mapped out so-called POPS (Privately Owned Public Spaces) all over London; previously and seemingly public spaces are now owned by private companies with the legal support to set up their own regulations (Shenker, 2020). As part of larger infrastructure, squares and parks cannot always be fenced off but instead tricks like hostile architecture are used to make it uncomfortable to dwell in a place, or by engaging private security teams to literally keep people out (ibid.). In Sweden public land is regulated by PBL (the Planning and Building Act) and municipalities have the right to unconditionally buy land for the use of public space exactly to ensure it is publicly owned. In the Swedish national encyclopaedia *public space* (offentligt rum) is defined as "part of the built environment accessible to the

general public, e.g. streets, passages, galleries, squares and parks" (my translation 2021). What it does not define are the more social aspects of public space, nor does it, for obvious reasons, tell us what happens if the public space is not dictated by *general* interests but rather by *commercial* (Franzén et al., 2016).

DEMOCRATIC FUNCTIONS. Is it possible to define what a democratic function in the public space is? Let us agree it involves things like the right to demonstrate, to meet, to vote, and to socially interact. The first, second, and third are in different ways regulated and protected by laws, but how free are you to do the fourth without having to buy a coffee? This is where the neoliberal concepts really get important to notice, as they seek to profit from this function. Urban sociologist Sharon Zukin calls this "domestication through cappuccino" when the public space is being commercialised, often in the name of safety, and we are forced to buy a coffee to use it (Zukin as quoted in Thörn, 2018). Domestication, as in taming the wild, keeping the public satisfied. The act of domestication could also be related to what anthropologist Mary Douglas refers to as categorising the dangerous to bring order to that we do not understand. However in this case the regulations are done with the motive to not keep out the danger but the unwanted. It is in this *regulation* of the space that the neoliberal concepts meet politics and when it does democratic functions are at risk (Franzén et at., p. 39).

Both this reasoning about democratic functions and the public space are gathered mostly from the writings of Mats Franzén, Nils Hertting, and Catharina Thörn (2016) in *Stad till salu* (from now on called City for Sale). They also introduce other concepts that I have chosen to lose in favour of developing the connections between public space and democratic functions, and the physical city. Most importantly the authors make a clear difference between the public space and its democratic functions on the one hand, and the democratic processes that regulate or "develop" the public space on the other. The latter might just as well limit the democratic *functions* through a democratic *process* (Franzén et al., 2016, p 42). Though one being almost impossible to separate from the other I think of the former as connected to the physical space, the people who use it, and a bottom up perspective, while the latter appears as somewhat of an anonymous force that acts reversed, top town.

To understand what *democratic functions* actually mean to the physical public space the definitions have been broken down and put together in new formations. What follows is an attempt to list what I, as part of my theory-toward-design process, have chosen to call democratic *attributes*. The attributes are physical and non-physical and I see them as meaningful for the democratic function of the public space. There is however no predefined list but it is rather a concept created for this thesis to translate the theoretical to the physical. What is below identified as physical, as well as non-physical, is therefore to be read as *my* understanding of democratic attributes according to the theories used for this study. The list could of course be made longer but the focus here has not been on making a comprehensive study of the attributes but rather to use them as a bridge from theory to practise.

I argue that the public space consists of a variety of attributes more or less necessary for us to inhabit it and use it as a common space, for recreation as well as an exercise in democratic function. It also consists of a lot of elements that we connect as natural parts of a public space but that are not actually public. Things like shops and cafés with their terraces are generally open to everyone but not everyone is welcomed. I would like to first draw some attention to six examples in the category of *physical* attributes in the public space to later move over to four examples of *non-physical* attributes. The distinctions between physical and non-physical have been made by separating the built and more permanent things from those created by the presence (or absence) of people.

THE SQUARE & STREET. Let us start with the Square, the very essence of public space and life, the backdrop of democratic functions as well as the most attractive of locations to neoliberal ideas and ideals. The square in itself is maybe not the most interesting thing here but the potential it holds. The Square is a central part of public life often situated on a geographically central part of the built environment. This is where demonstrations are held as well as where we like to sit and have our coffee whilst observing the life of the city play out in front of us. This is of course an idealised version of the Square and it might not function like this at all, reasons for why we will look into the empirical part of this thesis. The Street is more ambiguous than the Square as many streets or roads have no other purpose than to connect people with each other and places (a democratic function as good as any), but the Street can also be just as important to the public space and the democratic functions, and be just as big a part of it as the Square (just as some squares also never quite work as a functioning public space).

Blue Orange by Katharina Grosse

ART. Lets now turn to what attributes we might find on a square or street. Something that can be argued *not* to be part of a neoliberalisation of the public space is art. As many other municipalities Göteborg work with the "1% rule" where one percentage of the building cost should be dedicated to public art (Konstnärsnämnden 2020). Art in the public space, I argue, must be seen as nothing less than a gift to the people. It might of course serve as a tourist attraction (e.g. Manneken Pis), create debate (unintentionally like the water works on Avenyn, or intentionally like Blue Orange by artist Katharina Grosse in Vara), but often it is just something beautiful or an object used as a landmark and orientation. How many times have I not met someone by the statue Kopparmärra in Göteborg? In all these forms and uses art is by and for the people, and contribute to and generate a sense of belonging and cultural pride that makes public space special and locally anchored (Harrouk, 2020).

Public watch, Göteborg

WATCHES, BILL-POSTING & BENCHES. Some much less spectacular elements of the public space are found in the more practical and mundane, but oh so important roles of watches, structures for bill-posting, or benches. Watches, one could of course argue that the clock-watching is a modern kind of tyranny[1], but in today's technological online society I would like to think of watches as a way to let go of the phone and orientate myself in time by using what the public space provides me with. They are common elements of public space from a pre technological era, providing us with simple yet elegant timekeeping.

In the light of the online society, the structures for bill-posting provided by Göteborg City, gifts us with another delightful analogue feature of the public

Bill-posting, Göteborg

space. The structures are perfect examples of a publicly funded democratic function. Anyone promoting e.g. culture activities or sport events can use it, but the advertisements of restaurant, stores, or goods are prohibited (*Affischering*, n.d.). Like the presence of *physical* art I see the possibility to promote and spread "the word" in public about more ephemeral art forms or activities as just as important part of the creation of belonging to a place (Harrouk, 2020).

Of these three examples the bench might in many ways be the most mundane, but we should not be fooled by its simple appearance, it is also one of the more

political. A bench provides a break in the public space; meet someone for a chat, or just rest while waiting for someone or something. It is possibly the most simple of attributes to make a place more accessible. But what has happened during the last few years is that these seemingly friendly features have gone hostile. I am of course thinking of the concept of hostile architecture, often small interventions done to prevent people from e.g. skating, sitting, or in this case, laying down. Putting up extra armrests in the middle of a bench might look comfortable but it has the outspoken objective to make it uncomfortable for people (mostly hostile architecture turn on youths or homeless) to lie down and have a rest (*Exkluderande design*, 2021). From the earlier example of Pops in London we can clearly see that hostile architecture is a visual sign of a neoliberalisation of the public space, using design interventions to slowly push out the unwanted from places that would benefit financially from a more homogeneous and affluent population (Shenker, 2020). A personal observation is that in newly constructed areas (like my site in Nya Kvillebäcken) or recently renovated places (e.g. Brunnsparken, Göteborg) benches are not treated in this manner. The question is if it is simply because the planning already excluded the unwanted (my background analysis of Nya Kvillebäcken suggests this might be the case), if it is just a matter of time (see Esperantoplatsen, Göteborg), or has the trend turned around toward including everyone into the public space again, also lying on benches?

Hostile architecture

CULTIVATION. Though there are other attributes or elements of the public space that also could be mentioned here; man made short cuts, paths of habit where no planner thought of walking; weather protections for wind, sun and rain as well as in forms of sea-level rising; or larger infrastructural projects such as parking for both cars and bikes, communication and traffic solutions, I will leave them be at the moment and focus on something much more down to earth, literately.

Cultivating the land is a great example of making an impact on the very ground of public space. In Sweden the tradition of Allotment gardens is over 100 years old and there is a growing trend of city gardening or urban farming both in Sweden and in the world as a whole (*Allotment*, 2021). For many it is part of a survival strategy, when more than half the world's population reside in an urban context the need to grow food in your backyard or on abandoned fields in the city web becomes more than just a hobby (Helmfrid & Naturskyddsföreningen, 2012). When focusing on a Swedish context it is however more often the hobby aspect

[1] I cannot find the original source to this saying, I only remember it from a hand written note my sister had over the doorpost and as a child I thought it was the ulitmat truth. Think it might come from a movie.

Urban farm, Berlin

that brings people to dig in the soil. According to a report from Naturskyddsföreningen (2012) not only to understand farming in itself but also the bigger picture and the human impact on nature. I would also like to add a political aspect to the picture, brought in from a German context. Berlin has a long tradition of urban farming, when large parts of the city were in ruins after WWII and resources were scarce these plots of land were simply turned to fields of vegetables. Today the urban farms and gardens in Berlin use the same type of abandoned (in between) land but the incentive to farm is no longer only for the sake of gaining your own vegetables (Stockholm Resilience Center, 2012). Growing has also become a way to learn not only about sustainability but also the democratic processes of the public space. What can one do? What boarders can be challenged or moved through the legal (or illegal) cultivation of public space (ibid)? Or just simply how can one know the difference between the public and the private land in the cityscape, when borders between private and public often are physically erased and instead replaced by an invisible membership and access hidden in the understanding that some are welcome and others are not (Franzén et al., 2016).

ACTIONS & VISIBILITY. Moving over to the non-physical attributes I want to start with actions and visibility. Both are connected to a strategic placement geographically in the city, that is, if you want to protest, demonstrate or meet you also want to be seen. The two are closely connected as there is no point in making a point in the public space if no-one notices you, or to turn it around if you are not seen how will anyone know you exist?

The freedom to demonstrate is a constitutional right in Sweden and a strong tool to use in expressing one's democratic rights. Most often we see people using these rights on public spaces preferably in connection to the thing that the protest aims at, for this reason the most visible and accessible squares or streets serve as the best canvas. But visibility is not always connected to actions. It also has a more fundamental role in the public space; to be accounted for. If public spaces turn pseudo public (as the Pops in the example of London) and owners of the land can start picking and choosing who can use their land, some people will be unwanted and disappear from view (Shenker, 2020). As long as we live in a democracy the actions will stand its ground in the public space, but, I want to argue, visibility is at much greater risk when neoliberal interests take over.

REPRESENTATION & BODIES. The everyday-life visibility leads us into representation and bodies. These two are also very much connected since the representation happens through the visibility of bodies in (the public) space. When representation can be used as an action, highlighting inequalities or miss-representations, bodies are also private (Ahmed, 2011). The private body can be part of a representation without knowing or asking for it and it can very easily be displaced if it is not representing the right values or correlates with the desired image. As we will see in the next chapter this is often connected to class or whiteness (Bauman, 2012 & Ahmed, 2011). Bodies representing the wrong socio-economic group, skin colour, age, or even profession are in the eyes of neoliberal development less desirable (Franzén et al., 2016). In the area of Nya Kvillebäcken, my test site, the *idea* of the exotic was used to sell the new neighbourhood as diverse and ground-breaking, or as one commercial says a, "charming ingredient" (as quoted in *Den Urbana Fronten,* 2015). Representation reduced to the flavour of the food one can buy in the Market Hall.

Picture from Den Urbana Fronten, K.Despotovic

Representation and exotification, benches, watches, gardening, actions and visibility, the list can be made much longer, without them we lose the oh so very important parts of what make the public space democratic. Some of these democratic attributes will be explored more in the Design chapter, others will not. Working with the concept of democratic attributes has been important to develop an understanding of the transition from theory to design. However in the end they stand out more as tools of bridging, rather than tools for the development of the actual design.

ABOUT CONTEXT

To support my work, both theoretical and design, I have picked up a variety of books, articles and reports from fields of sociology, postcolonial theory, architecture, city planning, and culture studies that in one way or another can shed light on the development and definition of the public space that we see today. Mapping out the mechanisms that over the last decades have led to the kind of understanding of the public space that we see today, and finding answers to how we can do better, demands a broad approach. So before moving over to the empirical part I want to do contextualisation of the historical emergence of neoliberalism, the test site in Göteborg, and at the end of this chapter go through some additional theories supporting my discussion.

The Historical Context

It is 53 years since the spring of 1968, when the student revolutions swept across the world. The revolutionaries ambition and strive was to make the world a less hierarchical place, a place where also the little person's knowledge, experience, and will would count. In many ways they succeeded but not quite in the way they intended (Franzén et al., 2016, p 21). A few years following the upheaval of the late 60's, in 1973, the world was plunged into a financial crisis due to the oil crisis. The newfound individual freedom, whose original purpose was to flatten society and make it more equal; individuals working together for the good of everyone, instead turned toward the kind of individualism that characterise our society today; individuals working for the good of oneself (Franzén et al., 2016, p.17). When talking about power over the public space and who is setting the agenda of our common city it is in the individualisation of the late 60's and oil crisis we must start. This equally unexpected, as unholy combination paved the way for expressions of entrepreneurial urbanism when, often old industrial, cities saw themselves drained from businesses that for the longest time had served as the very backbone of the economy. In Göteborg it was the death of the shipyards that not only left the soul and identity of Göteborg bruised but also dug a deep hole in its economy (Franzén et al., 2015, Olsson, 2018).

After decades of using the efficiency of Fordism as the motor to rebuild post WWII Europe, and in Sweden turning society from the poorest to one of the wealthiest in Europe, we now get to see the same mechanisms tearing the economy apart, the efficiency had clearly met road's end (Franzén et al. 2016, p.17). This is when Post-Fordism or neoliberalisms enters the scene; often with a type of one-size fits all solution. Cities are rebranded or profiled to attract a new type of citizen

and the market is invited to "save" the day, the economy, and all the individuals, in a naïve believe that it, this anonymous market force, would act in a spirit of altruism (Olsson, 2018). But even though jumping on board the neo-liberal train might be good for business, I argue, it is not all that good for democracy, because in this new relationship between private (the market) and public (politics) the first victims seem to be access and diversity. Without acknowledging the importance of keeping the public space truly public, and safeguarded from commercial interest, we will lose an important part of what makes society democratic.

The Göteborg Context

To understand my test site I also need to understand the politics of Göteborg, as well as the broader trends of neoliberalism, in the book *City for Sale* (2016) by Mats Franzén (sociologist), Nils Hertting (political scientist) and Catharina Thörn (cultural theorist) they discuss both. *City for Sale* breaks down the concepts of entrepreneurial urbanism in the context of Sweden, and more specifically how it has affected and played out in Stockholm and Göteborg over the last decades. They also go through some of the consequences neoliberalism caused their inhabitants. Gentrification and the increase of rents, and loss of democratic spaces are some, but most importantly they address the problematic relationship that these strategies create between the public interest, in terms of the politics, and the private, in terms of the economic interest of a few. This is true for most cities when engaging in development projects that have an entrepreneurial signature, but in Göteborg it got an extra boost from what is generally called "The Göteborg spirit" (Göteborgsandan) (Olsson, 2018 & Franzén et al 2016). The Göteborg spirit has been blurring the lines between public and private interests for decades and is best described as a local consensus culture where politicians and officials acted outside of their authorities and the official set of rules connected with being in office, to reach a common goal. This might sound efficient and good but in truth it is highly undemocratic, as it often has meant crossing the line of autonomy and creating incentives for corruption. Great efforts have been made in recent years to unravel the distrust this has caused for politics in Göteborg but during the initial years of development taking place on my test site in Nya Kvillebäcken this was still part of the process (Despotovic & Thörn, 2015). The development of the site follows a clear gentrification process (more of what that means in the next chapter) but it is not the only concept used in the name of development. Apart from gentrification, *City for Sale* also illustrates the *complexity* of several other urban entrepreneurial

concepts like BID, new public management in relation to democratic processes and public space. The lines between these strategies are not watertight; on the contrary, concepts are mixed and adjusted to legislation and local context, and culture. Though the means might differ, the goal they all share is an increase in property value. In her study of Helsingborg Lina Olsson (2018) questions if this really is something that a municipality should be involved in. In Helsingborg the exploitation of the harbour area inevitably led to an increase of the property values in the neighbouring sites just as it is expected to in Nya Kvillebäcken. When success is measured in economic growth this becomes the most obvious path to go, but the question remains if the municipality really should be a driving force in a neoliberalisation of the land owned by the common? A process that benefits the already financially strong and disfavours the public.

Class, Whiteness, and Master suppression techniques

Neoliberalism does not act on it's own, though the strategies are often played out according to a very deliberate plan there are other forces at work in society that are less conscious. So to understand this relationship between the developers and the public I find it as important to incorporate also the understanding of *human behaviour* in relation to public space. Human behaviour *too* affect the relation to the public space and the possibilities for developers to act, some will argue that interpersonal relationships in the public is a result of the neoliberalisation (Bauman), others that it is due to on-going positioning of power (Ås), or both (Ahmed, Franzén et al.). Though I will dig deeper into the meaning of the following theories in my design reflections, this section is a brief account and summary to gain an initial understanding and overview.

CLASS. While *City for Sale* has taught me about the political and commercial structures that shape the city, not least in Göteborg, and in different ways include or exclude people depending on undesirable preconditions, other studies have been necessary to bring understanding as to why those structures emerged to begin with. First I want to present sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who has spent a lifetime studying the human behaviours that shape Western society. Not least the shift in public mind from a common to an individualistic world-view that has paralleled the neoliberal development of the public space into commercial space.

Bauman's (2012) *Collateral Damage* depicts the unequal society and compares (as the title suggests) the unwanted people in the hyper commercialized city as inevitable casualties of war. When the middle class no longer feels a need to fight for a common cause and common good, it becomes "content" (Bauman's term) and is then willing to scarify diversity for a pleasant shopping experience. Being content, as it turns out is fatal to the un-privileged in society and, I would like to add, in the long run also to the democratic functions of the city. These un-privileged are in *Collateral Damaged* defined by the term "underclass" as someone "*falling outside* any meaningful, that is function and position oriented, classification. The 'underclass' may be 'in', but it is clearly not 'of' the society" (Bauman 2012, p.3). If the un-privileged are without "function" or "position" who will guard the underclass' place in the public space seeking to profit?

WHITENESS. In the book *The Hegemony of Whiteness* (2011) by the feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, the unprivileged is instead defined as "the other". The two are related and intertwined but if Bauman in the former deals with class, Ahmed deals with race. In my understanding of the shift of the public space from a place of democracy, and in effect diversity, toward one of commercial and monocultural interests, the meaning of "the other" plays an important part. But it also raises the question of whose perspective we study inclusion. When Bauman talks about who is excluded it is ultimately a question of money and power, when Ahmed does the same it is in relation to whiteness.

   Whiteness is instead a way to orientate oneself and others in a room. In phenomenology this is referred to as the body's extension into the room through lived experience (Ahmed, 2011). The orientation starts from the body as the epicentre of the room from which the world spread out, but this is based on the assumption that all rooms are neutral and that all bodies are equals (ibid.). When Edmund Husserl, one of the phenomenology founders, talks about how his thoughts through experience can read the surroundings and feel it without seeing it he refers to a comfortable body. A body that does not stand out, feels misplaced, or questioned. Instead Ahmed shows how someone seen as "the other" never will be the centre of a room and from that perspective some things or actions will be out of reach. Husserl starts from what is the norm (the white man) so if one is not the norm the perspective will shift from oneself to the norm (ibid.).

   I believe that this might be an overlooked aspect when planning for public space since the ones planning/developing so often also belong to this norm, both the one of Bauman as well as Ahmed. Hooking onto each other these are therefor a great sources when learning about spaces with inherent structural discrimination

in different forms and to me indispensable in the understanding of democratic functions.

MASTER SUPPRESSION TECHNIQUES. Lastly, I want to say a few words about what Berit Ås in 1976 identified as *Master suppression techniques* (*Master suppression techniques*, 2021). Normally used in interpersonal relations, and though identified by Ås as something done mostly by men, toward women the techniques might be used by anyone seeking to diminish its opponent. She originally listed five techniques; Making invisible, Ridicule, Withholding information, Double bind, and Putting to shame later adding Objectifying, and Threat of force (ibid.). In my empirical work I argue that the *Master suppression techniques* are used, probably unconsciously, as a tool in neoliberal development programs, on space and the people inhabiting it. The techniques are inherently hierarchic, often used by a group toward a person not welcomed or belonging to that group (*Master suppression techniques*, 2021). In the case of the gentrification of Nya Kvillebäcken "the group" would be the development consortium and "the subject" the people occupying the area. In the work with the empirical part of this thesis I also lift other types of hierarchic structure connected to urban planning and maintenance of the public space similar to those of the master suppression techniques. Recent years have meant a growing awareness about the inequalities in the structure, and not least the infrastructure of the city (Boverket, 2010) and several municipalities have adopted a practice of equal planning and maintenance of the city (TT, 2015). However I see a risk that these great intentions easily might be hijacked by neoliberal schemes in the same way as participatory design has been to green wash projects into inclusion. Equal or feminist planning is complex and conflicting interests might arise. If used for urban entrepreneurial projects one could easily see developers picking the cherries in the cake to create an image of awareness, whilst at the same time using one or several of the master suppression techniques to enforce the preferred agenda.

I have in this thesis chosen to work with Nya Kvillebäcken as a test site on which I have done eight collages to find understanding and meaning to the theories concerning functions and values of public space and democracy. As stated earlier I have chosen this site because of its history and the research done on it, but also because of its complicated relationship to concepts of gentrification, branding, class, exotification and not least inclusion.

Before moving into the design and empirical work this short chapter serves as an introduction to the test site. Together with an orientation of the neighbourhood of Nya Kvillebäcken and an overview of the places used for the collages.

The Gentrification of Kvillebäcken

The concept of gentrification has probably never been more clearly expressed in Göteborg as when it comes to Nya Kvillebäcken. The sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term in 1964 to describe the processes where the housing of low-income residents were taken over by the middle- or upper classes, as their contracts would end. Little by little this process would push out the financially weaker classes in favour of those with money (*Gentrification*, 2021). The word *gentry* has the same etymology as *gentleman* or *gentlewoman*, a historically landowning class in Britain (*Landed Gentry*, 2021), as such *gentrification* describes a relationship of those *with* versus those *without* ownership, and with ownership comes power (Despotovic & Thörn, 2015 p. 236). In the shift from lower to middle or upper class residents one also finds what Neil Smith calls the *rent gap*. The gentrification process is after all about finding ways to increase the value of the properties. With the term *rent gap* Smith describes the desired effect obtained when property and land values are linked to the development from decay to luxury and from lower to upper class (Despotovic & Thörn, 2015).

In Nya Kvillebäcken the new housing stock was ready for its first new tenant, but mostly owners, in February 2013. Though the narrative told by the developers and the City of Göteborg is a straightforward story from slum to vibrant city, obtaining the desired rent gap, reality is not quite as simple. In the book *Den Urbana Fronten* (2015) Catharina Thörn (culture theorist) and Katarina Despotovic (photographer) describes the history and controversy of Kvillebäcken from early 20th century via the aftermath of the financial crises, both in the 70'a and the 90's, up to the new district that occupies the area today. Here we can read of a neighbourhood, and in truth, the entire Hisingen island that was hit hard by the oil crisis of the 70's (2015, p.52). Before the crisis the shipyards did not only serve

directly as the employers of thousands but also enabled a myriad of small-scale businesses (*Varven*, n.d.). During the 80's Göteborg took its first steps of rebranding itself from an industrial city towards a knowledge and event city at the same time as many of its inhabitants, not least in our area, are unemployed. In the area surrounding Backaplan rents are low and properties stand vacant and flea markets, common-interests associations, small-scale businesses and restaurants find their way to the area (Despotovic & Thörn 2015). At the same time, in the same area, real estate investors like Wallenstam and NCC started buying cheap properties as future investment for exploitation of housing and offices with the understanding that the "right" development the profits are set to be high. However during the 90's it looks like they might not get the yield they hoped for as a proposal to slowly develop the area is suggested partly due to the new economic crisis of the early 90's. The wish is to develop with gentle interventions focusing on helping the small scale entrepreneurs develop and grow (Franzén et al, 2016). But the proposal is never settled and for yet another decade Kvillebäcken is trapped in what Gabriella Olshammar calls a ""permanent makeshift" where many of the tenants for a long time had short-term contracts or temporary building permits" (my translation, Despotovic & Thörn 2015, p. 52).

The new narrative.
Photo: K. Despotovic

According to the mappings done by Despotovic and Thörn for the making of Den Urbana Fronten 52 local shops, business and associations occupied the neighbourhood before the development (2015). Out of those 52 only one ensured a place in the new premises that were built. Today the area consists mainly of housing blocks with 2000 apartments, about 30 businesses and Lundby library. The main difference is not the number of but the size and type of premises that the new offered. The old area hosted car mechanics as well as second hand stores, the Somali association and mosque as well as cafés, big and small (ibid.). Despotovic and Thörn describe it as a "class based restructuralisation of the city" (2015, p. 246) where a neighbourhood of many actors, owners and tenants, is removed to benefit capital strong investors backed up by the municipality. A development that the long haul will drain the city and its public spaces of diversity and inclusion (ibid.).

The development of peripheral areas is often motivated by segregation, but is the new area really more diverse than the old? In the next chapter I will take a look at what access to the public space actually might mean in the area of Nya Kvillebäcken using design explorations. But first let us take a look at the structure of Nya Kvillebäcken.
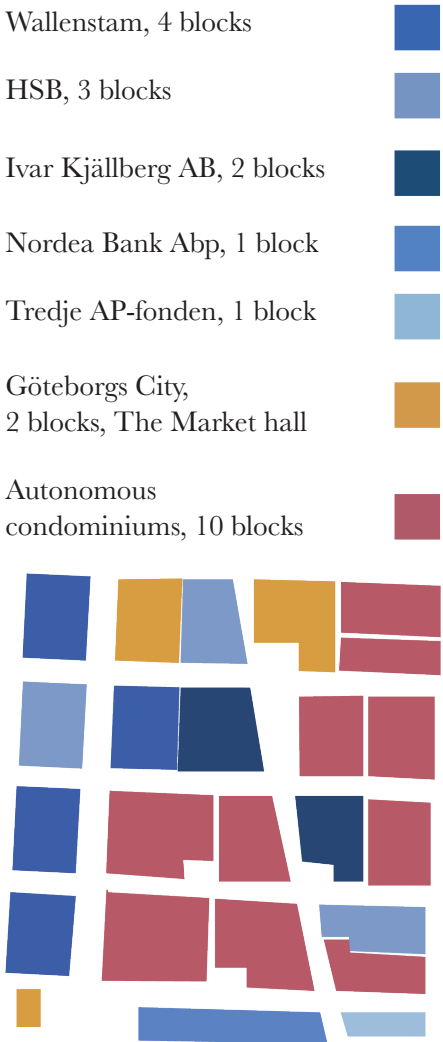
Orientation of the Site

Below two maps of Nya Kvillebäcken help us with some basic orientation. On the first spread the diagram to the left highlights the homogeneous housing stock. Out of the 23 blocks only two were disposed to renal apartments, the rest are condominiums half of which are owned and managed by the same large-scale real estate developers that bought cheap properties in the 80's. This of course raises questions about diversity and also what a development of condominiums does to the price of land and properties in the large area? Olsson (2018) has looked at the development of a central location in Helsingborg, driven and developed by the municipality, and though this is a more peripheral location the same concern applies, should politics be driving development projects that inevitably will drive up surrounding prices? The result is not just an increase of real estate value but might also have a displacement effect on the people living in the area as rents go up or rental apartments are converted into condominiums (Olsson, 2018).

The map facing the diagram points out a few locations that I find interesting from a public space perspective accompanied by some short reflections on what makes them stand out from a public space perspective.

The second spread shows the same map pointing out the places that I have used for my collages and adds some comments on why I chose to work with them. Though there are many interesting spaces and with the exception of the corner with a very popular coffee shop I have mostly focused on spots that display a character of being used as, of being planned to function as a square. As the initial collages were developed as series exploring the same location I have ended up looking at three spots.

Wallenstam, 4 blocks

HSB, 3 blocks

Ivar Kjällberg AB, 2 blocks

Nordea Bank Abp, 1 block

Tredje AP-fonden, 1 block

Göteborgs City,
2 blocks, The Market hall

Autonomous
condominiums, 10 blocks

Out of 23 blocks (not including the Market Hall) only 2 are renal apartments. Of the remaining 21 blocks 9 are owned and managed by large real estate developers and 2 are owned by larger investors. The last 10 are dispatched Condominium associations.

Kvillebäck's park previously a bit of a hangout for people with alcohol addictions. Now a playground.

The neighbourhood square.
Jöns Rundbäcks plats.
And Tuve Park

The main "square", though not officially considerer one. Home of the Market Hall and a restaurant.

Entrance to the library and local food store. Very anonymous and hard to find

Police station.

BACKA-PLAN

HJALMAR BRANTINGSGATAN

VÄGMÄSTARE PLATSEN

KVILLE TORGET

Public gardening. Two sites are tested. One next to the popular café Alkemisten and the other on Jöns Rundbäcks plats.

In my analysis of the area I consider this to be a the main square, yet it has no name. For some reason it has been planned with the intention of a square but has not been given such privileges. Because of its location and the unmistakable open areas it has all the potential of a public space, yet it does not quite reach the goal.
This place will be invested in five of the eight collage.

KVILLEBÄCKSPARKEN

BACKA-
PLAN

HJALMAR BRANTINGSGATAN

VÄGMÄSTARE
PLATSEN

KVILLE
TORGET

Finally reaching the empirical chapter this last half of the thesis is an account of the development, testing, and reflections done through design.

The commercialisation of the public

What defines a *square* as a public space? Earlier in this text we established the definition of public space as "part of the built environment accessible to the general public, e.g. streets, passages, galleries, squares and parks" (NE, n.d.). If we turn that definition around this means a square needs to be part of a built environment but *also* accessible to the general public to be a public space. I think most people can agree and understand the first part, a square is not much of a square if it is not in relation to buildings. However it turns out that for some developers the definition of the public space being "accessible to the general public" is not as obvious.

In their book *City for Sale* (2016) Franzén, Herrting and Thörn pin down one of the most important questions of access to public space in the discussion of the regulations of ownership. As seen in an earlier example from London ownership, over the public potentially gives you the right to regulate it, and if given the right to regulate the space you can control the access (Shenker, 2020 and Franzén et al., 2016, p. 53). The issue of ownership is as we have seen inherent in the concept of gentrification, though it does not always mean owning the deed to the land but could be seen as a type of entitlement. In

Frölunda Torg, Göteborg

Sweden the public is not as easily obtained but the same result can be achieved in other ways; through hostile design, by hiring private security teams, or simply locking the door. As an example we take a look at Frölunda Torg (the Frölunda Square), the shopping mall that also is the centre of Västra Frölunda, south of Göteborg. Inaugurated by Olof Palme in 1966 it was when the most modern shopping centre that Sweden had seen, today it is owned by a company affiliated to development company Skanska. According to their website the "square" is considered public space which means one e.g. has the right to photograph but at the same time we read on their web page that they "prefer that you announce

THE DESIGN

your presence in advance and (…) we gladly take a look at the material that will be published to give our *opinion* or tips (…)" (my italics and translation, *Frågor Och Svar*, n.d.) The spaces are also patrolled by a private security company that walk the premises day and night to ensure a "high level of security" (ibid.), the safety of whom is unclear. Skanska however owns not only the entire building but also considerable surrounding areas including sidewalks and parking. To quote Sorkin "No matter how you slice it, a shopping mall will never be a public square, nor men with guns the mark of the open city" (2013, p XIII).

The example of Frölunda Torg teaches us that the definition of public space can be ambiguous. There are however other ways to exclude the public without using physical elements; walls or looked doors. In *City for Sale* the authors have focused on what is known as entrepreneurial urbanism, a concept that e.g. come in the forms of BID (Business Improvement District) or gentrification projects (Franzén, 2016). In Göteborg they have looked at the area within the moat, know as *Inom Vallgraven* and the different politically and commercially driven "improvement" projects that have been developed since the financial crisis in the early 90's. In the 80's the tune was more inclusive but the 90's financial crises put a halt to different urban renewal projects that was originally planned (Franzén, 2016). Instead it was decided, in a dialogue between the city of Göteborg and the property owners, to focus on the refurbishment of the public space, in an outspoken aim to increase the value of the houses but also motivated as an intervention of public interest. This is not simply done by replacing cobblestone and re-painting the façades, it is also done by creating a new

Vallgatan, Göteborg

narrative about a place and accompanying it by inviting the "right" people to inhabit the streets and shops and give life to the story told (ibid.). Within the moat it was achieved by the creation of "(---) hegemonic " Sensescape": [when] the senses comes in harmony with the general theme, the room functions as including to certain groups and excluding of others" (my translation, Franzén et al., 2013, p. 191). This means that you do not even have to put up fences or look doors to exclude. Instead people with the wrong socioeconomic background, age, skin colour or profession are made to feel too uncomfortable to come. John Allen calls

this "ambient power" as a way to describe how soft values such as feeling homely, safe, and amongst like-minded can be used to give power over the public space to a small section of society (Franzén, 2016). But it has not always been like this. A report released by the City Planning Office (SBK) 1983 established that a certain type of development that risks excluding groups of society is not desirable. Then again in a new report from 1986 read that there is a need for diversity and chaos in the public space, because an arranged place is not for everyone (Franzén, 2016, pp. 180-181). These suggestions were later overruled and in 2004 a collaboration was set up much according to the BID-model to create an attractive city centre for "all" (ibid.). The narrative here as well as the one we have seen in Nya Kvillebäcken is that of cleaning up the dirt. The idea is that dirt is dangerous and by cleaning up the real estate value would rise, the dirt being both factual and the unwanted demographic (Franzén et al., 2016).

The concepts of dirt, controlling the narrative, limiting the access or use of the public space, and much more are explored in the next eight collage elaborations.

Theory will only get you so far in exploring the neoliberalisation of public space. The empirical part of this thesis is therefore set up as a series of eight design elaborations trying to bridge the abstraction of text with the physicality of the world we live in. To achieve this I have assembled the theoretical framework of spatial concepts mainly focusing on gentrification and commercialisation. With the process of developing the earlier introduced concept of democratic attributes I gained clarification on the connections between the theoretical and the physical place that is public space. In the end however, the collages mostly address the attributes focusing on the non-physical and actions related parts. This was not planned but rather a natural consequence of the design process.

Working with design elaborations has for me meant an investigation through collage techniques, using a photo of my test site and altering its reality, and as such testing different scenarios. A new scenario might raise new questions of access, diversity, democracy-making as well as concerns around its counterpart; e.g. exclusion, hegemony or silenced voices, leading to a new collage, and the work is pushed forward.

In the first collage, presented below, the question was more a 'how will I do this?', and ended up leading the way of how to understand and develop the collages to ask questions of public space. The second and third instead became investigations into actions, visibility and access. Following comes the forth collage introducing the concepts of branding, imagineering, and master suppression techniques. The last concept led me over to the fifth looking at safety and the sixth discussing exotification, whiteness and "the other". The very last two goes back to the more physical attributes and look at a more down to earth practice, namely cultivation and how it can be used to understand the politics of public space.

What time is it?

Strange how there are no watches on this place to begin with! But is the shelter necessary? However the bus stop and its cabin has moved since the "square" was inaugurated and this ambiguous space could make use of a meeting place.

This is my first attempt at understanding the design process. In reading I had identified some elements or attributes one can find in the public space as having nothing to do with commercial interests. This sketch started from that analysis and those attributes, rather than the place itself. These are the kind of attributes that are only there for the public; I look at them as tools or a helping hand in

Strange how there are no watches on this place to begin with! But is the shelter necessary? However the bus stop and its cabin has moved since the "square" was inaugurated and this ambiguous space could make use of a meeting place.

everyday life, recreation or just beauty.

In this picture I ended up adding a large clock on the wall of the house, and a weather protection. Reflecting over the result I found it rather surprising that there is not already a clock in this place with its character of a communication nod! The weather protection on the other hand is probably not needed since there is enough space in the arcade surrounding the market hall to ride out rain or sunshine but it could also serve as a meeting point of its own, set aside the more commercial space of the Market hall it might be experienced as more neutral. The market hall could as well have opinions about who would use their shelter but in this case the property is owned by the Göteborg City, and so is the area in front of it. Yet again so is most squares, streets, and other infrastructure but it does not stop a neoliberal selection of who are made welcome or not.

Reflecting on the very first collage I lacked an element of friction, so I left the more physical attributes and turned to actions; a move away from the built, toward human behaviour.

Let's go to the streets!

Why would one demonstrate here? Without closeness to power there is no real reason to be seen protesting here, unless it is connected to a local context. Or?

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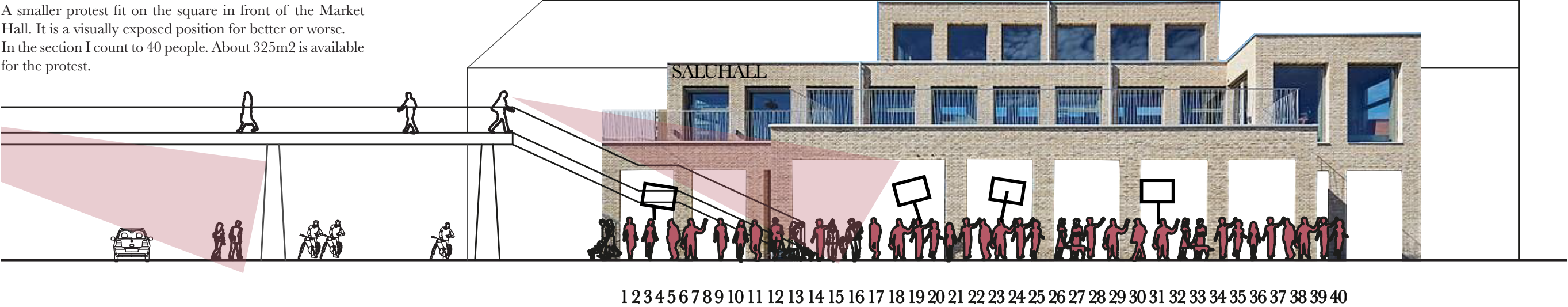
Some of the attributes of public space that I have identified as democratic are not physical; rather they create friction through actions in the public space. Demonstrating is one of them. Freedom of speech has a special place in Sweden as part of the 255 year old Freedom of the Press Ordinance, demonstrating is a way for citizens to use that right in a direct way. Taking to the streets has always been a way for the ordinary man, grassroots' organisations or other interest groups to make their voices heard. But for this to be efficient I see two things as crucial; proximity and visibility. Either the demonstration is in proximity to the location/phenomenon that the demonstration deals with (a new building site, chemical factory, harbour exploitation or the likes), or it needs to be visible to a source(s) of power. Unless the demo is dealing with something specific to the site, in this case Nya Kvillebäcken (which of course might be a possibility), the purpose of the demo loses some of its inherent strengths. If we instead look at the spatial aspects of hosting a demonstration on this square, we can see from the section that it is still a place that would manage a smaller amount of people protesting. They

would however be in a rather exposed position, both in a positive and negative aspect, surrounded by traffic, the pedestrian bridge, and the tram overpass, the protesters are both seen and pushed into a corner.

It is not only what happens in the public space but also the creation of the space itself that makes a functioning democracy. To quote Franzén, Herrting and Thörn:

> "*Democracy always holds a spatial dimension – how the citizens of a city are given space; take space; how the spatial resources in the city are divided; who move (can move) where and when; where* **demonstrations** *take place; who the image of the city is representative of its inhabitants and so forth.*"
>
> (my translation and bolding, 2015, p. 193)

I argue that in this there is an obligation to the public to also make sure areas developed in the peripheral parts of the city to stand equally tall when it comes to these spatial dimensions and capacities of democratic functions. Yet this collage does not offer any spatial or architectural solutions to the question. It is merely asking a question.

A smaller protest fit on the square in front of the Market Hall. It is a visually exposed position for better or worse. In the section I count to 40 people. About 325m2 is available for the protest.

SALUHALL

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40

Where's the power?

Disregarding the fact that this intervention takes very little account of the traffic situation, the new square with the placement of a City Hall makes more sense to the demonstration.

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Disregarding the fact that this intervention takes very little account of the traffic situation, the new square with the placement of a City Hall makes more sense to the demonstration.
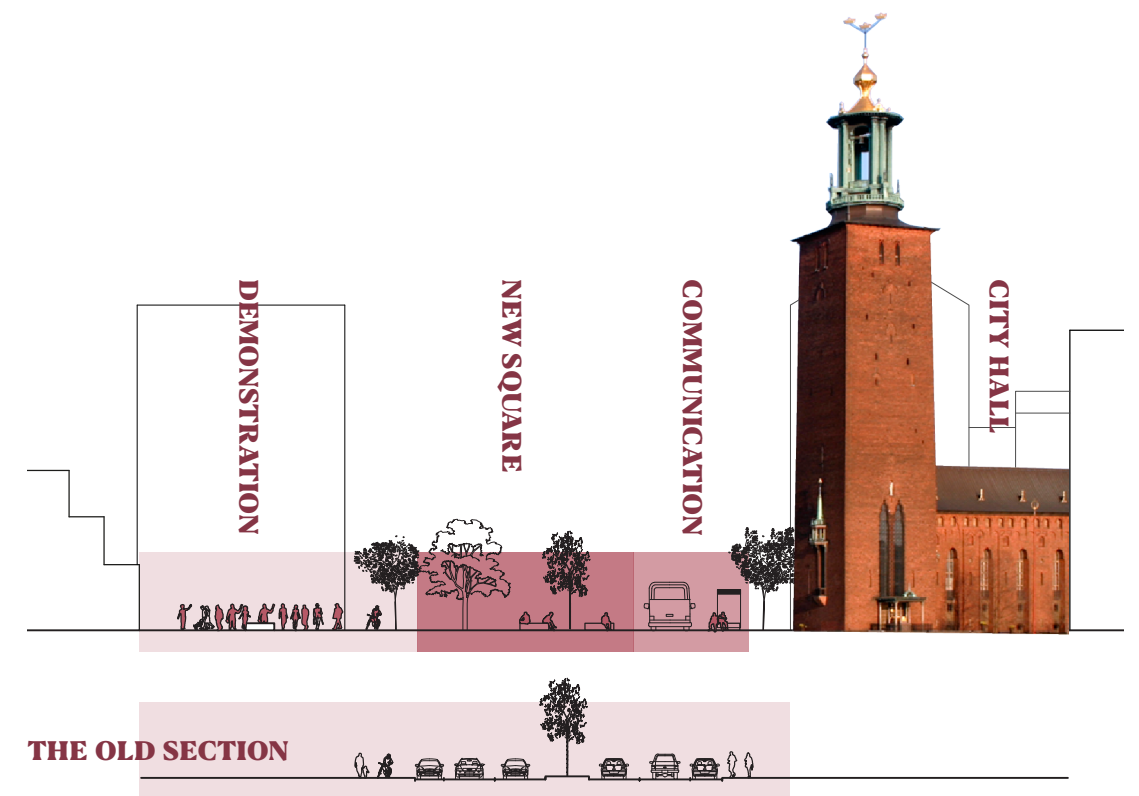
Adding on spatial change. If the first collage purely looked at the act of demonstrating, in this I tried out a thought that solved the problem of visibility and proximity. This new square has connected the two sides of the area into one big square. With the addition of a City Hall, symbolising political power, a new layer of visibility is added. This scenario also solves the issue of proximity; the problem lifted in the previous collage regarding planning in the peripheral part of the city. Part of making the city an efficient machine is centralisation, moving important democratic institutions back to the people, I argue, would balance that hierarchy of the larger city. Withholding important functions from the peripheral neighbourhoods is a way to *Make it invisible*, using one of Berit Ås' identified master suppression techniques on the city itself.

On a side note two public functions can be found in the neighbourhood, the Lundby library, situated in the house to the very right in the collage and a police station on Vågmästareplatsen behind us. Both of these buildings are hard to identify, maybe by adding the classical City hall from Stockholm I accidentally also touch upon an aesthetic aspect of visibility from the perspective of institutions?

Though the focus was never on traffic when making this collage the result raises some interesting problematics on the subject. The issue of traffic is a paradoxical problem since it on the one hand limits the movement of free bodies in the open public space, but being able to get from point A to B by car can very much be crucial from a class perspective for people working night shifts or in remote places. The question is how much motorism should the public space allow? In this scenario I allow public transports to be part of the plan hoping it will balance a democratic access to the city. In that regard this collage also challenges what sometimes is called the Traffic power scheme (Trafikmaktordning); a way to analyse infrastructure through the hierarchies that exist between different types of traffic (*Planka.nu*, 2021). The term comes from the network Planka.nu (that lobbies for a completely tax-funded public transport) in an effort to lift what they consider to be an unequal traffic structure. Drivers of cars, public transport, bikes, taxis, and scooters as well as pedestrians, joggers and disabled are all part of, and use the infrastructure that constitute the city web but on different terms. In the same category we find what sometime is referred to as feminist or equal planning and maintenance e.g. snow clearing. Adopting this strategy aim at clearing sidewalks

and bike lanes (mostly used by women and elderly), before roads (mostly used by men in cars) (Boverket, 2010). Both point at the same problem; the planning and maintenance of the city is not equal. According to Boverket (2010) women have less access to cars and therefore use public transport and bike more than men do. Research also shows that motorism is as much as six times more costly than biking, both in terms of construction, maintenance, health, cost of vehicle etc., yet infrastructure for cars are clearly higher on the agenda (Gagliano, 2015). I want to argue that this creates an unequal balance also of public space where the human body is set aside in favour of cars. An unbalance endorsed by the car industry and the structure of financing of infrastructure that should be questioned.

DEMONSTRATION   NEW SQUARE   COMMUNICATION   CITY HALL

THE OLD SECTION

Rebranding is the key to profit!

Med lite fantasi
kan du känna doften
av nybryggt kaffe
från köket
i din nya 3:a.

KVILLEBÄCKEN

www.kvillebacken.se

Rebranding requires the original to be completely forgotten, the new narrative is more important than anything that was before. But still, in this place the old exist behind our backs... literally. What happens to the neighbouring Kville when this new actor enters the scene?

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This next series of three collages explorations might not be investigating the democratic elements/functions of the square as much as they explore the power of the narrative. Throughout this study it has become clear that the power of dictating and owning the story is just as influential in restricting the public space as political directives.

Though referred to also in the previous collage it was in the reflection over this and the next that I noticed an overlap with the concept of Master suppression techniques, and the narrative told about the public space. The master suppression techniques or domination techniques, as they also may be called, are usually not applied onto space but in interpersonal relations.

Like the previous this too could be said to practise suppression by *Making invisible*, a technique that ignores the subject and marginalizes it, very similar to how (re) branding work. In our case the subject is the old Kvillebäcken, the people and buildings that once inhabited this land but now are despatched to a fictitious history. Even the name is part of the new story, as this neighbourhood did not have a specific name. It also makes the neighbouring district of Kville invisible, the district behind us that is not (yet) gentrified, or developed to use the term applied to the process of Nya Kvillebäcken.

I call this image *Rebranding* since the act of rebranding is a way to actively alter the notion of a place to attract a new group of people, a tool that the developers of Nya Kvillebäcken have used from day one Franzén et al., 2016). After all, launching the new neighbourhood happened only after the old area was discredited, deemed useless and (made) empty. Once that was done a big campaign visualising the area filled with life and creativity was launched, the photograph in the collage is taken from such an ad (reading "With a bit of fantasy you can feel the smell of fresh brewed coffee from the kitchen of you new two bedroom apartment"). Rebranding is therefore also about covering up, eliminating or repackaging an area's old identity and part of owning the story comes the entitlement to choose when to tell the story of a place of danger and decay or that of a vibrating exotic part of town. What I also find interesting is how visually obvious that intention becomes when standing in the point of intersection between the old and the new. Behind us, not visual in the collage but in the picture below is the type of neighbourhood the narrative of Nya Kvillebäcken so strongly estrange to be associated with, yet it is there, staring Nya Kvillebäcken in the face.

In neoliberal development terms this is also a case of imagineering, a combination of imaginary and engineering. Imagineering does not stop at just telling the narrative through advertisement and media, it combines the imagined with the built, engineered environment, literally constructing a fantasy (Franzén et al., 2016, p. 118). Is this not exactly what has been done

here? An entire neighbourhood of creativity and communities erased to realise a cleaned up version of the middle class fantasy of a sustainable, cool, city district.

A fantasy realised by using the creative sector of artists and small-scale businesses, in a clear gentrification manner.

Safety for whom? What are the real reasons for people's experienced safety and how do we separate it from real danger?

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In regards to the Master suppression techniques this could be connected to the one called *Threat of force*. This image tries to highlight the question of safety as it played such an important role in justifying the demolition of the old area (Despotociv &Thörn, 2015). Safety is a complicated concept as it can be both experienced and factual. Often the focus lies on the former, the sense of fear that is not always justifiable statistically, yet politically popular.

To consider when talking about Nya Kvillebaäcken is that the demolition and re-planning of the neighbourhood was motivated by an *idea* of danger. According to a police interviewed by Despotovic and Thörn (2015) for *Den Urbana Fronten*, there were absolutely problems in the area, but they were actually focused on just two hot-spots (one outside of the new neighbourhood). He also regretted that the

media would tar everyone in the area with the same brush as it, apart from these locations, this was just as any other area (ibid p. 83). However it was not only media that used this image of the district as dangerous, when given the chance politicians did not miss out on enhancing the picture of an area in decay; dangerous, and beyond saving (ibid.). Obviously I am not oppose to police interventions and strategies against violent crimes, but I do feel very uncomfortable about the fact that 51 associations and businesses had to move out because people with financial and political interests and power saw them as part of a danger-problem.

This leads us in on discussing danger using Sara Ahmed's (2011) phenomenological perspective of "the other". What the developers appear guilty of here is nothing less than missing the perspective outside the norm that controls the room. Not being able to control the space according to the norms they normally were a part of led them to wanting to rearrange it. This is in anthropology sometimes discussed in terms of Mary Douglas' famous duality of purity and danger (1966); what we cannot categorise is dangerous, and things in the wrong place are dirty. The authors of *City for Sale* also recognise that the campaign for Innerstad Göteborg (the city centre) uses the norm (the white middle class) as the model for the pure and juxtapositions it against the dirt on the street, but at the same time also contra anyone that does not fit the development agenda (Franzén et al., 2016). The whiteness norm embraced by city development policies. Decentralising the norm could in effect mean a greater understanding of the safety concept and what effect a norm-based narrative might have on the larger narrative of a district or neighbourhood.

In the shadow of exotification.

In the shadow of exotification. "The other" is never the centre of attention, never the perspective from which we view the city.

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In this collage I wanted to further develop the idea of "the other" as marginalized in favour of the normative white citizen. In the book *The Hegemony of Whiteness* Sara Ahmed (2011) discuses the complexity that follows in the steps of whiteness as a norm. The aim is to reformulate the "question of whiteness as a phenomenological problem, where whiteness is lived on the background of experience"(Ahmed, 2011, p 126). Here she does not necessarily consider whiteness as something connected to skin colour but rather something that has been "received, or given over time", whiteness is as a way to orientate oneself in a room (ibid.). Phenomenology talks about the body as extending out into the room through experience and knowledge, in this orientation the body is the epicentre of the room, but that statement assumes all rooms are neutral and all bodies equal. Ahmed instead says that no room is neutral but that they all orientate in a direction, and that direction is very often white. This means that not all bodies can be the epicentre of a room and therefore also cannot extend itself in all directions (2011, pp. 127-129). When one of the founders of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, talks about how his thoughts reach out and reads the room around him without seeing it, he refers to a body that has an obvious place in that room, which is comfortable (2011, p. 129). But bodies that do not confide to the norm of whiteness stick out, Ahmed continues:

"[i]f whiteness lets bodies move comfortably through the room, and populate the world as if it was their home, then these bodies take up more space. Such bodies are characterized by movement and can also take on the shape of free mobility"

(Ahmed, 2011, p. 139)

What this means is that bodies outside the whiteness norm are much more limited in their movement. But they do not only have more limited mobility in rooms, it is also connected to meetings. When white bodies enter a room their whiteness follows, "it comes 'behind' the action: they are never 'pressed' in the meeting with things and others, because their whiteness 'passes unnoticed'"(Ahmed, 2011, p 135), there is no need to confront whiteness. The fact that we notice some bodies more than others tells us more about the space and what was already in place, then about who entered (Ahmed, 2011). Nya Kvillebäcken was originally coded around "the other" and as such it was also in many ways a safe place outside the norm. When the area became interesting through an exploitation perspective that

shifted. Now that white bodies entered the area they took their perspective and orientation with them and found something they could not categorise, something dangerous that needed to be rearranged. To take control over the room it first had to be demolished, erased, and re-orientated (re-narrated) in a way where "the other" would be noticed, identified, and possibly also questioned upon entry. Ironically the area used the exotic touch of the past to brand and sell the conceptual idea of Nya Kvillebäcken, but out of 52 businesses only the deli made it into the new area. Literarily with exotic flavours to be enjoyed by the new white middle class inhabiting the neighbourhood. A middle class that in Bauman's (2011) terms no longer feels a need to fight for a common cause and common good, it has become *content* and when content it is willing to turn a blind eye and scarify diversity for a pleasant shopping experience or a tasty exotic meal.

Cultivation and Art in the interstitial.

Growing as a way to learn about the democratic processes of the public space. What can one do? What borders can be challenged or moved through the legal or illegal cultivation of public space. Or just simply how one can learn about the difference between the public and the private land in the cityscape of today.

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The next two collages (previous page and next) and section leave the more existential questions and look at cultivation in the city. Though Göteborg must be considered to be a rather green city, the neighbourhood of Nya Kvillebäcken does not strike me as particularly green (though some condominiums are advertised with green courtyards and allotments). Ironically the new area is promoted as a new sustainable and green neighbourhood. I therefore decided to do two collages testing out a green structure on different locations. The idea was not to create an urban farm but to introduce public gardening to spatially test what would happen if part of the street, square, or park would function as a common garden.

In the English word *gardening* lays an understanding of enclosure, of sealing of a piece of land from its surroundings. Growing things in the public space might create a conflict that finds its origin in this idea of keeping the things we grow for oneself. At the same time the simple possibility to change the public space by gardening sends a strong signal of people having some sort of control over the public space. Nya Kvillebäcken also has a history of farming as part of the PR-campaign aiming to rebrand the area, so lets start there.

In 2011 the area of Nya Kvillebäcken is a wasteland, the old has been demolished and the new has yet to come. This wasteland is part of the narrative that reads that this is a non-place, the past is forgotten (erased). It is a clean canvas just waiting to be filled with new stories of a vibrant and interesting future, a lifestyle story told to possible future buyers and stakeholders. The ideal customer is the one that likes to identify themself as environmentally aware, creative (but not an actual artist), and a bit continental (Despotovic & Thörn, 2015). What better way to brand this new future than by setting up an urban farm? In 2011 a team from Stadsjord, a company specialised in urban farms that during the past decade has collaborated frequently with the city of Göteborg and real estate owners to farm on urban locations, are contracted. A representative of Stadsjord is quoted in *Den Urbana Fronten* to have said, "(…) I have been on the lookout for a real shit-space to work with. And then this shit-space and form of collaboration appears very timely." (Despotovic & Thörn, p. 164, 2015). The collaboration is named Kvartersodlat (roughly translates to Grown in the neighbourhood) and consists of 50 guest allotments and a café. All the soil has to be brought to the place as the

ground is polluted, the farming is kept going until the construction work starts (ibid).

Urban farms in this form turn into yet another step of gentrification. The effects it had when branding the new neighbourhood as ecologically sustainable are not to be underestimated, with it comes an increase in attractiveness and the long-awaited profit is attained by developers.

Earlier I have written about the urban farms of Berlin, if we instead turn to the borough of Saint Gilles in Brussels we find another expression of cultivation. Since a few years back the inhabitants of Saint Gilles can apply to adopt the piece of land that surrounds the neighbourhood trees (Campenhout, 2020). As the houses are narrow and host few apartments many have a tree of "their own" outside the

PROTECTION AGAINST POLLUTION

URBAN GARDEN

THE OLD SECTION
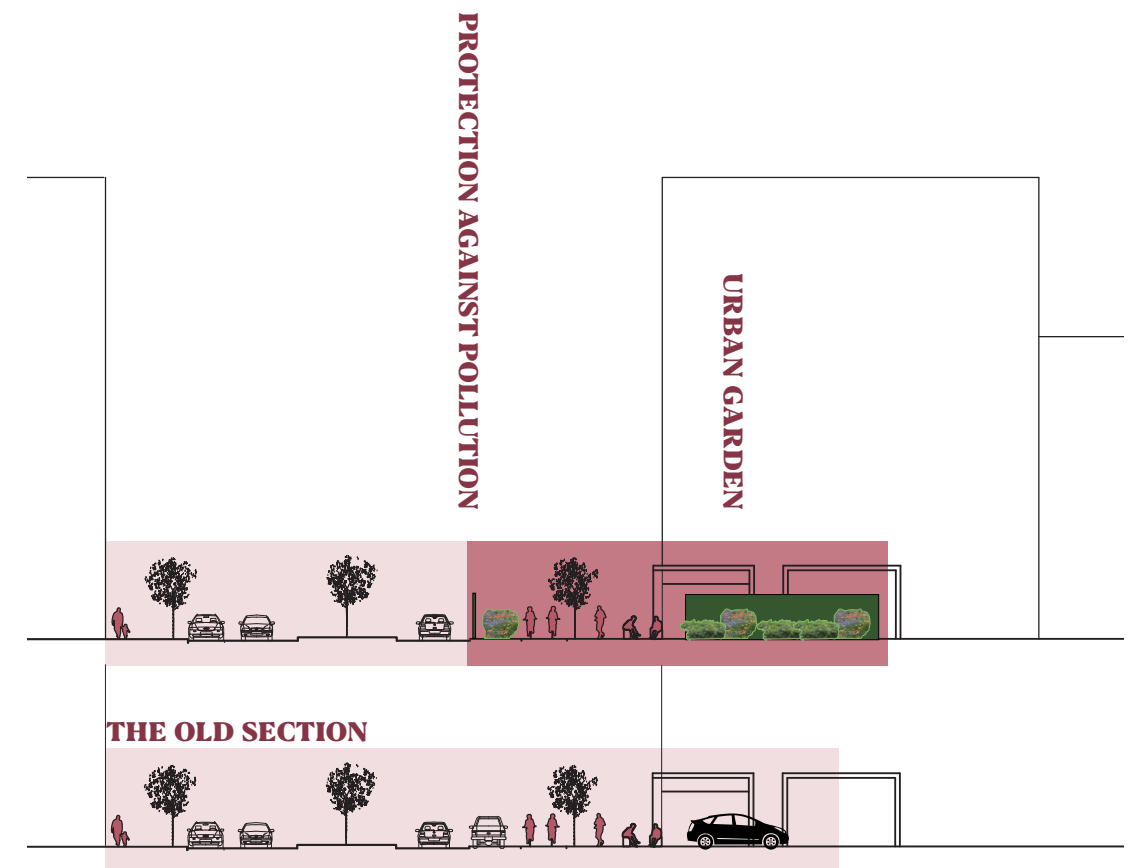
door. Apart from being good for biodiversity and air quality the initiative aims at fulfilling a wish to grow but also creates a sense of care for the neighbourhood. It is encouraged to cultivate in groups and it is seen as a way for people to meet on neutral grounds in the public space (ibid.).

Scanning the streets of Kvillebäcken it is clear that there are several spots where this type of cultivation, exemplified from Brussels, would function. The second of my cultivation collages explores one such space, the central Tuve Park. It is located on a sort of back-street location and could therefore serve well as a public garden with little to no car traffic. At the moment it is nothing but an empty field next to a row of benches. The space does not invite people to socialise as the benches all faces away from one another nor does it manage to tell us anything about its identity important to create a sense of pride and local belonging

The first collage instead challenges the urban environment with its infrastructure of cars, parking and bike lanes, as well as trying to fit in with more commercial interests next to a coffee shop. In this proposal it felt appropriate to screen the cultivation off from traffic, something that might have been less obvious had it taken on the form of the mini-gardens flanking the streets of Brussels.

There is another aspect of cultivation. Though the site in these collages might not be what we normally call interstitial, making them brought about this connection. Both cultivation and art hold the potential of starting discussions, of changeability, and education. Space can hold considerable power, and when left unclassified space means potential danger in the same way as the uncategorised objects/people/phenomena of Mary Douglas (1968). On the other hand this type of space opens up opportunities for those without power. The interstitial space is constantly created as a city develops; it is an almost inevitable part of the expanding (Saltzman, 2009). Montemayor and Kamel (2015) compare these spaces to *ecotones* existing in nature; the ever-evolving space where two biotopes meet. Geographer Doreen Massey differs between time and space when talking about development, a space, especially the interstitial, is under constant negotiation and therefore transforms over time, just as the ecotone (Saltzman, 2009). When we talk about the interstitial or the indeterminable space we often think of spaces in the city web that are left out of planning, spaces that have fallen between much like the narrative told about Nya Kvillebäcken. The urban farm set up in Kvillebäcken before the construction of the new neighbourhood could be said to exist in both an interstitial time and space created to justify the development. However in the smaller scale, between the sidewalk and the road, or along the façade leading over to the sidewalk, we find spaces in between one typology of public space and another, or between the public and the private. In this micro interstitial space we can many times find greenery helping to ease the transition from one zone to another.

Letting cultivation and art take over the interstitial spaces also manifests its ever-changing nature and the negotiations of the common that makes it interesting from a democratic perspective. A plant will grow, be harvested, moved or die, a graffiti painting appears to then be replaced, a dance show passes by. The actions and participation of people; conflicts or friction, engagements and empowerment, constantly rearranges a space. The interstitial space has a nature of in-betweenness not only in the city but also in politics and planning more so than other parts of town. It gives it more flexibility than other parts of the public that potentially also guards it from market forces, at least for a while and as such gains meaning through use.

REFLECTIONS

Why do we need to talk about public space? I wanted to write this thesis and investigate this often rather ordinary space simply because I see reasons all around me that bring me to question if the public space really is a space for the public, *all* of the public.

The world is complicated; reducing public space to a pleasant coffee experience for anyone who can pay is neither fair on the public space, nor the people it addresses. We will always have to live with the fact that the question that headlines this thesis never will be one we can fully answer. And that is okay. We do not need to figure out methods to measure or evaluate public space; we do not need to know the answer, not as long as we understand why we need to ask the question.

I have been writing about a definition of neoliberalism that aims to deregulate public space in the name of development but where the real incentives are economical return, I also wanted to discuss what that does to people, citizens, and bodies occupying space. The public space is found trapped in between the developers and the public where the neoliberal can be represented in the built, and the public in the life that takes place in the meeting with it. This is thus the form that the public gets in contact with the phenomena discussed in this thesis, when it is already constructed, cemented for years to come. Obviously the public opinion and understanding of the public will be affected if all we meet is the ready result and I believe part of our responsibility as architects is to let the public know the public space can be dynamic. That it can change over time. That it is first and foremost *ours*.

What's next?

During this pandemic the public space has sailed up on the agenda as an important spatial dimension, a place to just meet and talk or walk, as a place for recreation, as well as in the debates concerning the right to demonstrate injustice or not when restrictions cannot be met. At the same time I fear that other less "out in the open" type of processes pass by even more unnoticed than before. Göteborg, like many larger cities following the path of rebranding, is under heavy construction and reconstruction and who is guarding the public spaces that are now created and that will last with us into the future?

So, can architects do anything to redirect the process of making public space less public? The collages and sections, I believe, are also in a way a reflection on this

question. Within our profession we can question and challenge the design, and looking at the collages I find that I have done just that:

We can rearrange the public space to regain visibility.
Question for whom the improvement is done and why it is done?
We can plan it in regard to spatial balance between functions.
Make sure it is possible to use the public space for actions.
We can reclaim the public with art and cultivation, or explore the interstitial!

The democratic room

In apprehending the mechanisms of neoliberal urban development strategies lies the axiom that as long as we allow, developers will always try to maximise their return. In Sweden real estate developers hold considerable power, not only because of their financial capital but because the housing shortage makes it easy to manipulate the politics in a favourable direction. To turn the trend, or at least regain some control, I see a need to re-evaluate the status of the public space. The public space as a democratic room has to be allowed to exist in its own right!

So how do we change the status and understanding of the public? I see two main approaches; education, and challenging our politicians. Education on a broad front, architects, politicians, and not least the public are, I believe, mostly unaware of what urban entrepreneurial processes are at work in the development of the city. But it is also education in the sense of understanding the importance of inclusion in the public. During this thesis I keep coming back to the idea and concept of *Allemansrätten* (The freedom to roam). *Allemansrätten* has for generations taught Swedes about everyone's rights, as well as obligations, toward accessing and enjoyment of nature, it belongs to everyone and anyone is welcome. These undisputable rights, nature only share with the public space on a principle level, but not on a factual. What would happen if we got a similar set of rules for public space?

The second approach, challenging our politicians, is also an act of educating. You need no specific education to be elected to run the town. Let us not underestimate the difficulties of governance but let us also demand that the people we elect know what is at stake if they decide to sell off the common. Selling and deregulating is often a tempting way to go for a municipality in financial trouble, but recent surveys show that the long perspective of owning common facilities help cities save hundreds of millions (SEK)(Petersson, 2021). It is a question of owning the agenda and the control of inclusion.

This thesis has been all over the science and research map in finding ways to understand the question. The question of neoliberal processes dictating public space; the one asking us about inclusion, of class and whiteness; several questions about what the democratic room actually is, both physically and as something less tangible, maybe in a sense emotional, and my conclusion is that researching the questions do not generate ready made solutions, but understanding.

Paradoxically and maybe unfortunately, the more understanding we gain through critical or cross-disciplinary studies the harder it becomes to design.

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How pubic is public space, actually? This thesis by Matilda Lidberg dives into the neoliberal strategies used to develop the city of today and tries to untangle what impact they might have on the public space. How is the public space connected to the democratic use of the city and what happens when market forces wants to regulate that use?

By applying a cross-disciplinary approach ranging from sociology to critical theory and political science she lays out a complex puzzle of what challenges architects face in the light of planning for a democratic city. By translating theories to collage elaborations she also show how design can be used to challenge status quo, discuss different scenarios, and gain deeper understanding of the public space.