NEET

NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING

NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING:

ARCHITECTURALLY ADRESSING SOCIAL ISOLATION

ひきこもり

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**Not in Education, Employment or Training:
Architecturally Adressing Social Isolation**

Master's Thesis in Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability
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Notes on translations

Some passages from Swedish-language texts have been translated to English for use in this thesis. According to APA style guidelines (APA, 2022) these passages are to be considered paraphrases and not direct citations. All passages have page numbers stated so that readers may directly reference the original Swedish-language text.

Names mentioned in citations

All names mentioned in cited interview studies are made up, anonymized by the respective studies' authors.

AI Disclosure

I have used the tool ChatGPT by OpenAI as aid in creating select illustrations and translating passages from Swedish-language texts to English.

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Abstract

How can architects address the needs of inactive NEETs? "NEET" is a sociological classification of young people aged 16-29 that are **Not in Education, Employment or Training** and have been so for at least six months. In my thesis, I focus specifically on the subgroup "inactive NEETs": young people who for various reasons, often connected to mental health issues, are not even applying for jobs or education. Many of them still live at home with their parents.

Through phenomenological research I try to understand and represent the *lived experience* of this group of individuals. Through this research I encounter themes of social anxiety, apathy towards society, fear of exploitative work and experience of childhood bullying to name a few examples. There is also a high prevalence of neurodevelopmental disorders such as Autism and ADHD among inactive NEETs.

After concluding my research I start a process of thematic analysis and synthesis around central themes of purpose and "being of need to others". A case study is conducted of an organisation in Umeå that works exclusively with treating inactive NEETs. I encounter clues that pique an interest in Animal-Assisted Interventions: the use of animals to improve mental and physical health seems like a novel approach for architectural experimentation.

The themes are synthesized with programs and a speculative architectural proposal is developed: a combined cat shelter, cat-café, internet café and co-living space run as a social enterprise.

Keywords: NEET, Inactive NEET, UVAS, Hikikomori, Animal-Assisted Interventions, Social Sustainability

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Introduction

Background

In Sweden, the term Unga som varken arbetar eller studerar (UVAS) is used to describe NEETs. The definition of UVAS according to the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society Affairs is young people between age 16-29 that have not had an occupational income exceeding 48,300 SEK or studied more then 60 hours in a full calendar year (MUCS, 2022). In Great Britain, where the NEET term was first introduced, the age span is defined as 16-24 (Office for National Statistics, 2025). In Japan, the term "Hikikomori" is used, but that term differs from the term "NEET" as it exclusively refers to socially withdrawn individuals that live at home (Uchida & Norasakkunkit, 2015).

During the past 15 years, the amount of NEETs in Sweden has been around 7-11% of the population in the age span 16-29, with relatively little difference between males and females (MUCS, 2022). Compared to other countries in Europe this percentage is rather low, for example the percentage in Turkey can be as high as 28%, or Italy where it is 23% (Eurofound 2016). However, the amount of young people with mental health issues or disabilities is twice as high in Sweden (14%) compared to EU average. (Finlay et al., 2010). There are no national statistics of the percentage of NEETs in Sweden that live at home with their parents, but for example in the Uppsala region it is almost 50% (Regionkontoret Uppsala, 2022).

Although the proportion of NEETs has fallen since the end of the COVID19 pandemic, the NEET phenomenon is still a large social issue. Young people are particularly at risk of developing long term issues as a result of getting stuck in NEET status at an early age (Regionkontoret Uppsala, 2022). The phenomena of young people who continue to live at home with their guardians without seeking employment or education after completing secondary school has also been the subject of multiple studies, under the term "Failure to launch" (Sweco, 2014).

Vi-projektet in Västra Götaland

In august of 2020, a two-year project targeting NEETs was launched by the folk high school administration of Västra Götaland County with funding from EUs European Social Fund. The goal of the project was to reach 1000 young people in the age span 15-24 that were NEETs at the time, or at risk of becoming NEET. The project's aim was to enhance cooperation between local authorities and organisations to better target NEETs and at-risk youth and to better inform NEETs and at-risk youths about the social and health programs that are available to help them into employment, education, training or mental health treatment (VGR Folkhögskoleförvaltningen, 2022).

The total budget of the project was close to 100 million SEK (11.4 million USD). This underscores the great sense of importance that Västra Götaland County placed on approaching the UVAS phenomenon.

Glossary

NEET
Not in Education, Employment or Training

Inactive NEET / NEET-by-choice
NEET individuals that are not actively seeking education, employment or training.

Unga som arbetar eller studerar (UVAS)
UVAS is an equivalent local term used by Swedish institutions when referring to NEETs. It is defined as individuals aged 16-29 that have not had an occupational income exceeding 48,300 kr or studied more than 60 hours in a full calendar year.

Hikikomori
Japanese term that roughly translates to "pulling inward, being confined". The term refers exclusively to withdrawn, socially isolated individuals that still live at home with their parents. It has no upper age limit.
Also the name of a municipal organisation in Umeå that works with inactive NEETs.

Neurodevelopmental disorder (Neuropsykiatrisk funktionsnedsättning, NPF)
Neurodevelopmental disorders are a group of mental conditions negatively affecting the development of the nervous system. The most common examples of neurodevelopmental disorders are autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Animal-assisted intervention (AAI)
The use of animals in a variety of settings (therapy, schools, hospitals etc.) to improve the health and wellbeing of humans.

Work-integrating social enterprise (Arbetsintegrerande Socialt Företag, ASF)
A non-profit business that helps individuals that helps individuals with special needs to get into the job market. The schedule and nature of the work is often tailored to the individual's needs.

Aim

The aim of this thesis is to research the sociological group known as inactive NEETs: young people between ages 16-29 who are Not in Education, Employment or Training that are not actively seeking education or employment. Based on this research, I will develop a concept of an architectural program targeted at improving the wellbeing of inactive NEETs and helping them live a more meaningful life.

One of the most interesting problems of this project is the reclusive nature of inactive NEETs: how can architecture engage individuals that in many cases rarely leave their homes, and mainly live their lives online? At the outset of this thesis I had no idea of a clear-cut architectural program or typology to focus on. Therefore, the groundwork must first be done to understand the situation and lived experience of inactive NEETs in order to eventually uncover their needs and the role architecture may play in improving their lives.

Research Questions

Main research question:

How can architects address the needs of people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training?

Secondary research questions:

How can architecture engage socially isolated individuals that in many cases rarely leave their homes?

How can architecture be a platform upon which people build more meaningful lives?

How can Animal Assisted Interventions be implemented in architecture?

How can architecture interact with non-physical, geographically decentralized internet communities?

Delimitations

The thesis is focused on NEETs that are not actively seeking work, education or training. In scientific articles this subset of NEETs are referred to as "inactive NEETs" or "NEET-by-choice". Individuals that are NEET but are actively seeking employment or preparing for studies, suffer from physical illness, or choose not to work or study in order to focus on caring for family (i.e. homemakers) or sick or elderly relatives are not part of the focus of this thesis.

The focus of the architectural implementation is on improving the lives of those who have already become inactive NEETs, rather than preventing more young people from becoming inactive NEETs in the future.

The thesis mainly focuses on the NEET phenomenon in a Swedish context. More specifically, the site of the architectural implementation is located in Gothenburg, Västra Götaland County.

The thesis does not employ the same strict age upper age bound (29 years) of NEETs as defined by Swedish authorities; individuals older than 29 may be considered in the analysis and results of the thesis.

The architectural implementation is meant as a speculative concept, it doesn't focus on funding and economic feasibility.

Theory

Speculative architecture based on phenomenological analysis

The main theory of this thesis is to use a phenomenological research method to investigate the *lived experience* of inactive NEETs. This phenomenological analysis will then be used as the basis for the proposed implementation. Instead of trying to investigate the needs of inactive NEETs, the focus is on identifying themes in inactive NEETs lived experiences that can act as clues to what a theoretical architectural program might be.

Phenomenological analysis

The phenomenological research method is a qualitative research method, where the researcher attempts to convey understanding of a subjective experience to an audience, so that the audience may better understand that experience. Phenomenological research allows the audience to "walk a mile in the shoes" of the subject being researched, so as to understand their *lived experience*. In phenomenology, researchers attempt to put aside their past experiences, biases, everyday understanding, and presuppositions about what they are studying in order to learn to see the phenomenon with fresh eyes without those blinders on. The lived experience is sought, which is the experience a person lives through before we take on a reflective view of it (Beck, 2012). Getting at essences and away from researchers' biases is key in this qualitative approach.

A structural perspective on the causes of mental health issues

Mental health has become an important and hotly debated subject both in Sweden and abroad. However, I as the author feel that popular discourse around mental health is predominantly focused on the individual level, while the structural issues that create mental health crises are left less addressed. To prevent mental health issues, it is posited that it is up to the individual to make certain positive lifestyle changes. And to treat accrued mental health issues, it is up to the individual to seek professional help and "open up to others about your feelings". The debate is colored by an individualist view of how to deal with social issues, and a communal perspective on mental health is lacking. Thus the focus of this thesis is looking at causes and interventions for mental health from a *structural* perspective, in how the structure of modern society shapes and has shaped the life experience of people who suffer from mental health issues, and in particular how the structure of the built environment shapes, and can better shape, those experiences.

Method

The methodology of this thesis has been structured in to the following chapters:

Identification of themes in qualitative interview studies of inactive NEETs
The chapter *Lived Experience of Inactive NEETs* presents findings from qualitative interview studies of inactive NEETs. These findings have been grouped into themes that are later used in the thematic synthesis. In this chapter I attempt to understand the *lived experience* of inactive NEETs and present it in a way that makes the reader grasp the subject matter of this thesis from an inside perspective.

Analysis of case studies
In the *Case Study* chapters I present my research of two case studies that were used to both gain more insight about inactive NEETs and offer clues for what the architectural program might look like. The first case study is of a municipal organisation in Umeå named *Hikikomori* that works exclusively with treating and helping inactive NEETs so that they may move forward with their lives. During my interview with Hikikomori, they noted that they wished to work more with *green health* - the concept of using nature-based therapy to improve mental and physical health. This suggestion led me down the path of investigating Animal Assisted Interventions that ultimately led to my second case study.

The second case study is of the combined cat café and cat adoption agency Purrfect Café, located in Gothenburg.

**Animal-Assisted Interventions**
The chapter *Animal-Assisted Interventions* presents my research on AAI, and motivates why AAI may be a promising therapeutic tool for improving the mental well-being of inactive NEETs, in particular those who are on the autism spectrum.

Thematic analysis
In this chapter I present my own thematic analysis that has been extrapolated from the findings of the analysis chapter. This subjective analysis is based on broader societal themes I have reflected on in the research. These themes are later used in the Thematic Synthesis chapter.

Thematic synthesis
The chapter Thematic Synthesis investigates a synthesis of themes from the *Analysis* and *Thematic Analysis* chapters. This synthesis is what ultimately is used in motivating the speculative architectural program.

Analysis
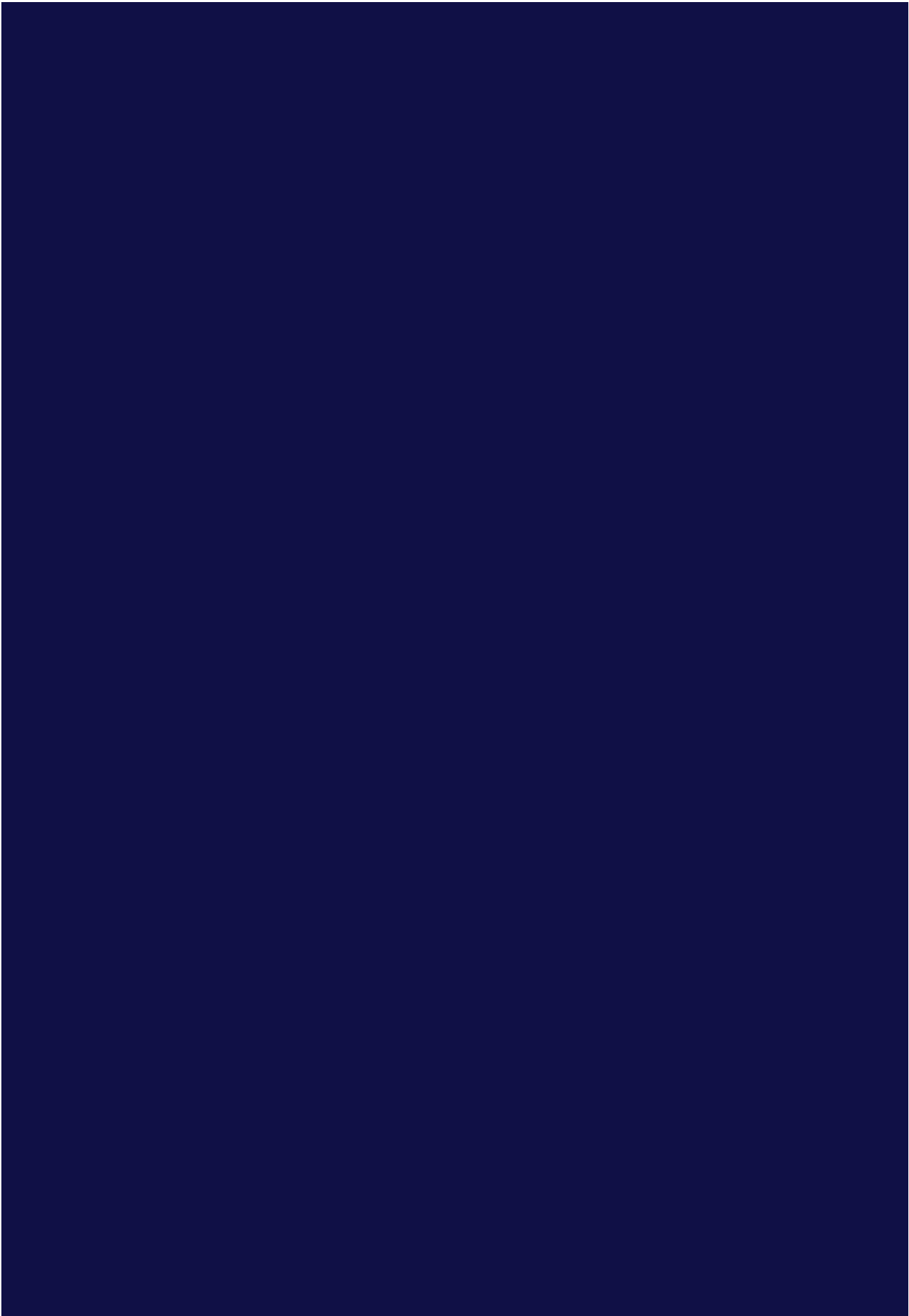
Lived Experience of Inactive NEETs

The foundation of this thesis is to gain a phenomenological understanding of the lived experience of inactive NEETs. To begin, I have searched research portals for qualitative interview studies with inactive NEETs. From these studies I have compiled snippets of interviews that have been structured into common themes. Three of these studies were conducted in Sweden, while the fourth was conducted in Britain. The fourth study, which was conducted by British psychologist James Gordon, was the most in-depth and specifically targeted at "affluent NEET-by-choice" individuals, in other words individuals who come from affluent conditions (ie. able to be supported by parents) who choose not to work or study even though they express that they are able to. While the three Swedish studies may include participants that have various valid reasons for why they at the time were not able to apply themselves to work or studies, participants in the study by Gordon offer insight into more purely existential reasons for why they choose to not work or study.

Difficulties finding work

In a study conducted by Willén & Sjölin (2021) subjects professed anxieties over not being employable - because of not having a complete upper secondary school degree, gaps in their resumées caused by prolonged spells of depression, lack of experience and other issues.

> [Peter] describes a barrier they see in getting a job as follows: *"That's where I have a bit of a problem—I have a lot of gaps in my CV, mostly filled with internships and deep depression. I went a long time without doing anything; I was unemployed. It's a bit difficult to get called to interviews because of that."* (p. 31)

> Sophie is 24 years old, they say: *"Sometimes it feels like the employer looks at my age and thinks she is so young that she probably knows nothing and chooses me out because of that. Feels like you should be no older than 25 but have the experience of someone who is 40-50 years old. How does that make sense?"* (p. 33)

Similar concerns are voiced by participants in a study by Larsson (2021):

> *"School is very tough; it's hard to get good grades because even the smallest mistake lowers your grade, and this causes many to lose motivation and eventually drop out. If you drop out of school, you can't get a job, because almost all jobs require a secondary school degree."* (Interview person 2). (p. 31)

The subjects of both studies seem to agree that it is near impossible to enter the Swedish workforce without a secondary school degree. One subject even reports being successful and well-liked while doing an internship at a restaurant, but ultimately not being hired solely because he hadn't finished secondary school (Willen & Sjölin, 2021, p. 30). And as noted in my interview with Hikikomori Umeå in the Reference Project chapter, not finishing secondary school is often a result of the bullying or difficulties to adjust to the school environment that made the individual isolate themselves at home in the first place.

Anxieties over entering the workforce

In interviews of British inactive NEETs conducted by psychologist James Gordon (2020), subjects profess their anxieties towards work as a double-edged sword. On the one hand they see the task of becoming employable and starting a career as a daunting task that requires completing an almost insurmountable project of radical self-transformation, a project that they as individuals are solely responsible for without any outside help. On the other hand they voice concerns over if partaking in the "rat race" of regular society is at all desirable, out of fear to lose their sense of self and cross unacceptable personal boundaries in order to remold themselves to fit into the stress and social requirements of normative society.

> *"I've got multiple friends... like mechanical engineers or accountants um, so... some of them now have several kids, they have a wife and um some, you can tell, they are not exactly cheery chappies. They've a lot of debts they're living with after buying a house for 350, 400 grand house and earning 40 grand a year and still, you're in a sense indebted, especially when you have kids. Then you're in this process where you have to keep on the train, there's no getting off so that is in itself very stressful... that definitely feeds back and in some ways reinforces my belief that the stress of these things potentially outweighs the rewards, as they stand."*

From Robbie's perspective, to have "made all the right steps" entails the loss of one's sovereignty and to then end up trapped is a risk that is not worth taking, particularly from his position of being protected from the vicissitudes of having to earn his own subsistence through his family's wealth. Robbie's belief that work, schooling or doing anything following another's schedule is "inherently stressful" is supported by his perception of the misery of those who represent the end-product, the assorted career-people in his life. (Gordon, 2020, p. 67)

> " From Robbie's perspective, to have "made all the right steps" entails the loss of one's sovereignty "

Social anxiety - difficulties fitting in "IRL"

Interview subjects in the sampled studies recall experience of how not being able to fit in socially at school and other arenas have led them down the path to NEET status, and made it difficult to find friends and community in normative society.

"[A turning point has been] from childhood to adolescence, just like, not developing your social skills to actually deal with people, I probably would be more well-adjusted to like actual doing a lot if I had actually developed those skills but I think it's too late for me and I don't want to at this point" (Ben). (Gordon, 2020, p.79)

" Your bedroom is kind of like your cage "

"So I think the issue of being a NEET is that you can easily become quite lonely and isolated, like because like your bedroom is kind of like your cage in a way, that you're just kind of there all the time and you have no need to really leave" (Oliver). (Gordon, 2020, p. 93)

Larsson (2021):

Young Adult 1 and 2 share that they did not want to talk to their friends about how they were feeling during their school years. The reason Young Adult 1 chose not to tell friends about their situation was that they thought the friends wouldn't understand and didn't want to "out themselves as someone struggling with mental health." They further explain that mental health issues were a hidden phenomenon and not as prominent in the media as they are today. Instead of opening up to friends, Young Adult 1 chose to withdraw and spend more time at home, which in turn led to losing friends and eventually becoming isolated. (Hallgren & Henriksson, 2020, p. 23)

It can be that one is being bullied and perceived as different already at a young age, for example interview subject 8 says: *"I've noticed how those who are little, shall we say odd, they almost always get left out because they maybe don't follow societal norms. You can notice how a person always sits alone and maybe you see how that person never has any friends in school, for example."* (Larsson, 2021, p. 30)

Finding community online

On the other hand, many interview subjects report finding connections in gaming and online communities. The internet has created a fundamental shift in how people meet each other and find community. Being physically isolated at home, or for other reasons not meeting many friends, doesn't mean that a person lacks a social life anymore. For many young adults the strongest friendship and sense of connection that they have may be with people they have never met in real life.

Edward reports that a sense of community has eluded him until last year when he turned 20 and discovered an online NEET support community.

"I've talked more to people on the server and it's helped me a lot, since there's people in similar situations, I feel a lot more comfortable talking about myself with people, I learned a lot about myself over the last year and a half thanks to that" (Edward).

Edward reports a belief that self-knowledge requires another, preferably a

community where one feels one's place is secure, where one feels an object of kindness and acceptance for who one is. (Gordon, 2020, 96)

Larsson (2021):

Gaming is also a protective factor from a social perspective, as many "gamers" have friends through online games and Discord, where they can be themselves without being bullied and make friends on equal terms with everyone else. Many gamers have a large network through gaming, even if they might not have a large social circle or many friends outside the gaming world. (Larsson, 2021, p. 39)

The study by Larsson (2021) was conducted online on a Discord server for NEETs, created by the Vi-project in Västra Götaland. Discord is a social platform that originally gained popularity among gamers, where people can create communities called "servers", which can be either open for the public or restricted to a specific group. These servers can then be subdivided further into "channels" for different kinds of activities and discussions. On these channels participants can chat either via text messages, group audio calls, or video calls. The following passage describes participant's experiences in the Vi-project server:

The study circles on the server are described as having been a positive experience for the young adults who participated in them. They mention, among other things, how they were able to develop their artistic creativity and drawing in the art room, as well as learn meditation techniques in the mindfulness study circle. Through these study circles, the young adults have been able to develop their abilities and skills, while also gaining more knowledge in various areas through informational meetings held on the server. One interviewee describes how her knowledge and skills in a game improved after joining the server. At the same time, the server has provided a space where the young adults say they have been able to be themselves without having to worry about others being mean or bullying them. *"It gives me a place where I can be myself and don't have to worry about people being mean. I also get to meet people who are like me or who were like I was when I was younger"* (Interview subject 2). (Larsson, 2021, p. 46)

" It gives me a place where I can be myself and don't have to worry about people being mean "

Feelings of aimlessness and lack of purpose

Another theme identified in interview studies is a hulking feeling of aimlessness and lack of purpose:

It's not only studies or work that can be affected by having a psychological disability—one of the interviewees describes how his diagnoses of anxiety and depression during his teenage years have led him to not know who

he is. He explains that he struggles to see the meaning of his life because of this, while also describing how his girlfriend has a clear plan for what she wants to study, work with, and so on. The absence of such plans is something he finds difficult, illustrated by the quote below:

"Since I was 12 years old, I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression, and that has kind of led to me not really knowing who I am, or what I'm meant for or... what I want to do with my life… If you look at my girlfriend, for example, she has big plans like 'this is what I want to do' and 'I'm going to study this because I want to become that,' while I'm just sitting there feeling like, well, I guess I could work in a preschool because I enjoy being with children—but even when I'm there, even if I really enjoy it, it still doesn't feel like this is why I was put on this earth." (Interview subject 3). (Larsson, 2021, p. 31)

The study by Gordon (2020) explores these feelings in more depth:

All of the participants describe an awareness that they are in the present condition as a result of inactivity, described as "doing fuck all" (Robbie), "it's kind of like being stuck where I am" (Colin) or: it's not really something that happened, it's more like something didn't happen and this is just the continuation of things (Alfie, 6). All but one of the participants report experiential claims about suffering connected to their inactivity. Participants report a feeling of stagnancy of their desire and a disquieting restlessness of thought. The most explicit illustration of this theme is made by Colin, who, having failed to decide on what to do with his life and not working for three years reports a feeling of uselessness:

"You feel, well its not really a feeling exactly, you're just useless, aren't you? You're sat around doing nowt productive. You're not really helping out much. I'm not much use to anybody. It's been close to three years, I don't know really, it probably sounds a bit cliché but you just kind of get numb to it, you stop giving a shit. It's not a good thing but, like... you grow numb to the feeling of being useless. I: What do you think or feel on those days? Um... its like I can't focus on anything, I guess. I just, I just feel like I would like to spend the entire day asleep" (Colin). (Gordon, 2020, p. 111)

" You grow numb to the feeling of being useless "

These feelings can manifest in a sense of restlessness and existential dread:

"I've stopped putting myself in the stressful, you know, trying really hard to, put myself in that uncomfortable position and get out there, but at the same time, you know I feel like things aren't happening. Like time isn't passing or something. I'm just, you know, you know, it's it's just nothing happens when, you you you don't have a job and you're not searching for one. It's just there's no progress being made whatsoever, so you just kind of feel quite empty."

I: How does that emptiness manifest itself?

"Well, when it's like... you don't have like a drive like that or like a force like that in your life then, then you start noticing other things, like "ooh..." because, you know, if I'm not worrying about... you know getting a job and making progress with a job, then, I, I'm worrying about myself, my self-image or my friends and relationships and things like that. It just leads to a lot of focus on the little bubble I have – instead of driving towards more progress" (Oliver). (Gordon, 2020, p. 112)

" I feel like things aren't happening. Like time isn't passing "

Lack of agency

One of the interviewees described feeling like "a fart in the ocean" (Interview subject 3) when asked about his sense of participation in society—at least when he is not working. At work, he can still feel that he plays a fairly significant role. This experience is also described as meaningful because it makes it difficult for him to see any purpose or future in who he is. He feels that there are high expectations to claim one's place in society and do something meaningful.

"If you ignore when I'm working—like as a substitute teacher— then I do feel like I have a fairly significant role as a person, and I've been really appreciated. It's always fun to be a… male role model in preschools, so that's really nice, and I feel very appreciated then. But outside of that, when it comes to society, I feel like a fart in the ocean… I don't know… The way things are right now, I don't really see the meaning or a future with who I am." (Interview subject 3) (Larsson, 2020, p. 45)

" The way things are right now, I don't really see the meaning or a future with who I am "

"I absolutely don't feel like I have control over my own life. The way I perceive life right now is that it's being monitored by EVERYTHING. For example, every month I have to report to the employment agency and write down absolutely EVERYTHING I've done and why. Being constantly monitored like that doesn't feel like having control over my life to me" (Interview subject 3). (Larsson, 2021, p. 47)

Feelings of guilt about living at home

As described in the Background chapter, as a result of unemployment many NEETs still live at home even into early adulthood. In the study by Gordon (2020), subjects are asked about their feelings about being dependent on their parents:

"I feel like quite a burden a lot of the time and, yeah I'm just, yeah I don't want to be dependent on others. I feel bad because it's not my house, it's where live, it's my home but it's not my house.

" It would feel better if everything was mine, so I took responsibility for it rather than, you know, feeling like, I, I, I'm a burden and I'm living in someone else's space "

I, I would feel better if I had an apartment that was "yeah! This is my place and I paid for it and the plates and bowls, I paid for those, the mess over there, that's mine, I made it." Like, it would feel better if everything was mine, so I took responsibility for it rather than, you know, feeling like, I, I, I'm a burden and I'm living in someone else's space" (Oliver). (p. 66)

"I mean again there's guilt that I'm draining resources whilst providing none myself but I do make an effort to help, I cook and clean and do other stuff that needs to be done around the house. I guess I would feel more bad if it wasn't close family I was leeching off but, *sigh* it does feel a bit of guilt that I'm not better human or person, you know supporting myself, carrying my own weight. If I was to keep on living I... definitely want to become a more functional person in society and provide for myself. I think that would probably do my self-esteem some good but... I'm not sure how to re-integrate" (Edward). (p. 89)
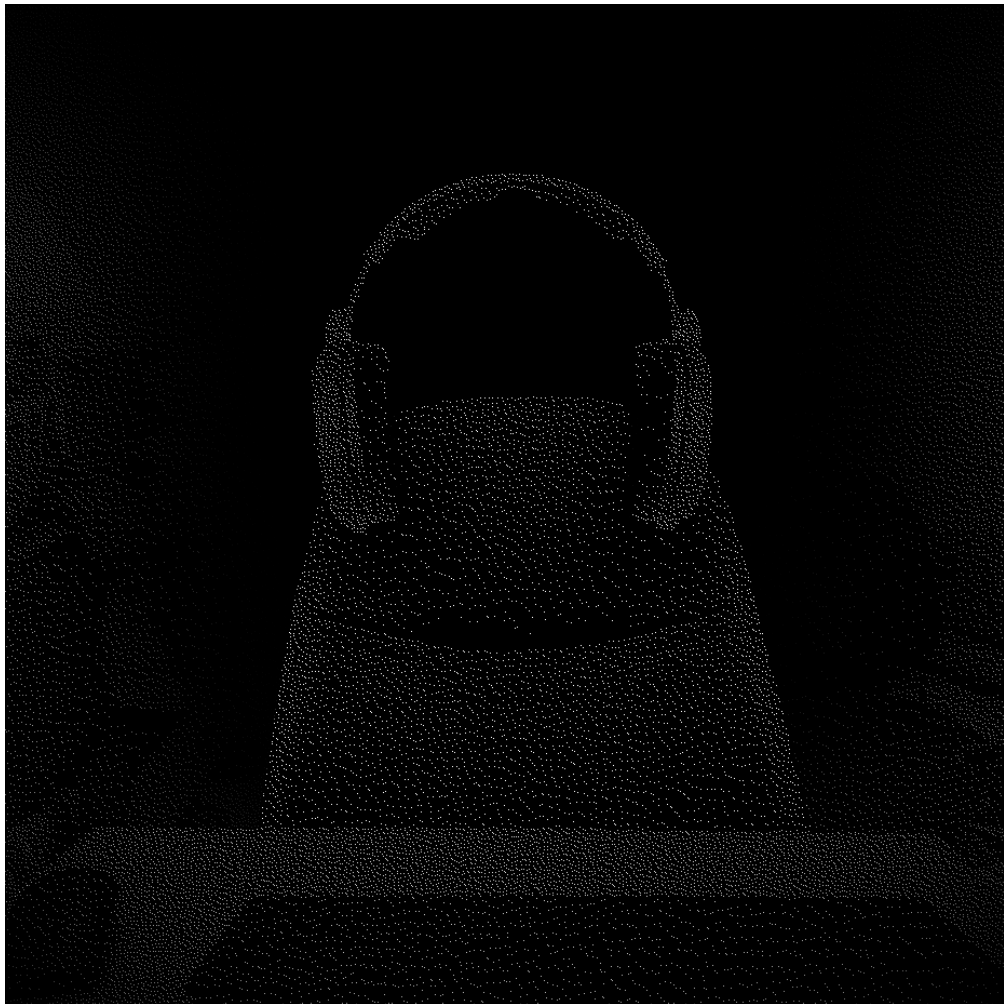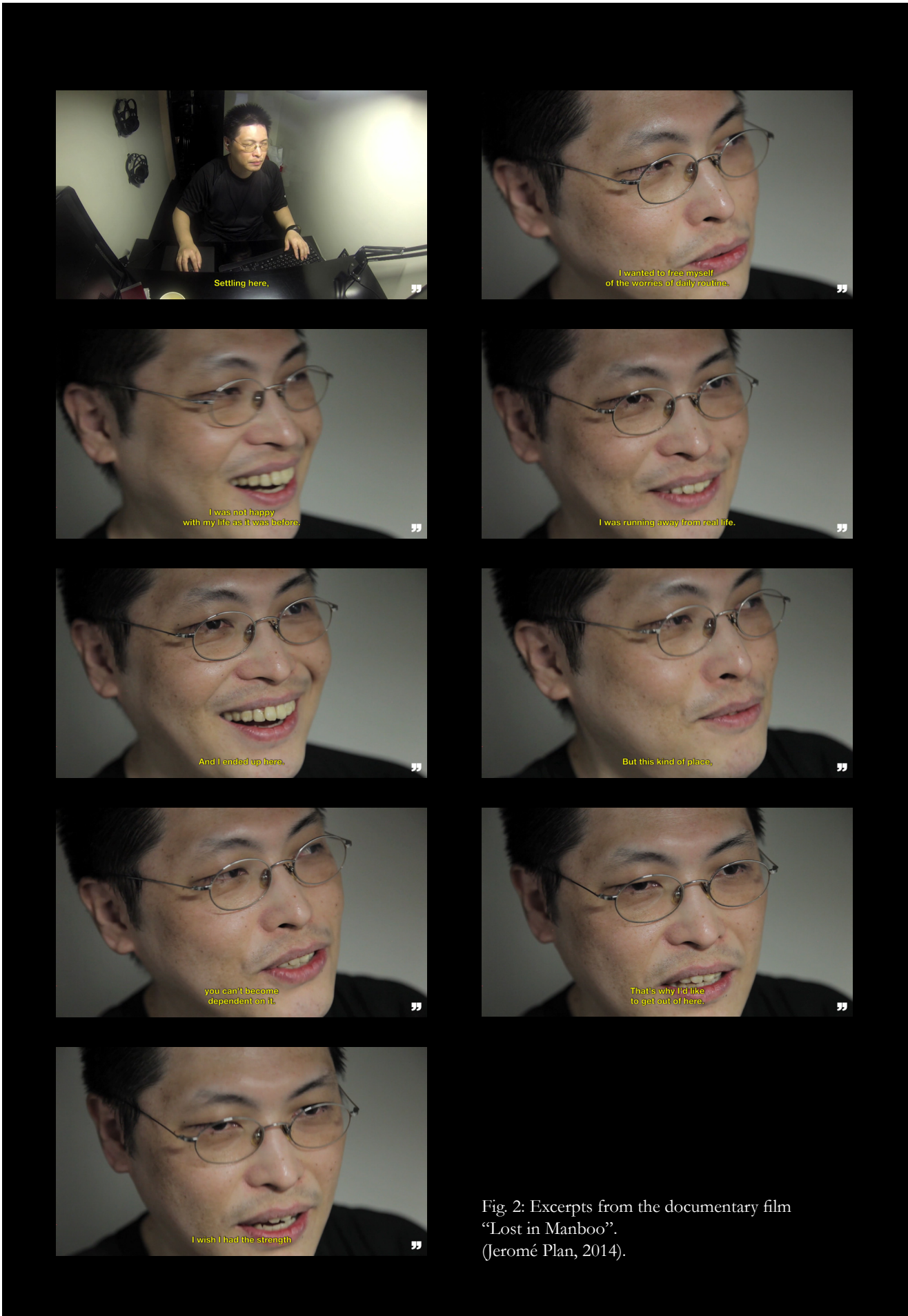

Fig. 1: Phenomological illustration

Fig. 2: Excerpts from the documentary film "Lost in Manboo". (Jeromé Plan, 2014).

Case Study - Hikikomori Umeå

"Hikikomori" is a municipal-led social service organisation located in Umeå, in the north of Sweden. The name of the organisation is of course based on the Japanese term "Hikikomori". Hikikomori was founded in 2013, and at time of writing employs three full-time employees and one part time employee. The staff consists of two social workers, one occupational therapist and one human resources specialist (Umeå kommun, 2024). The organisation is specifically targeted at NEETs in the age span 16-25, and engages around 20 participants at any given time. It is located in a small premise in central Umeå. To learn about Hikikomori, I conducted a video interview with one of their staff members - a social worker - in March of 2025.

Most of the referrals to Hikikomori come via the municipalities' activity responsibility for young people (KAA), while other referrals come from social services, schools or through direct applications. Because participants are usually referred to Hikokomori, a sort of pre-selection has already been done by the social services that the candidates have been in contact with earlier. Usually there is also one or more parents in the picture and the staff member stressed in grave terms the mental toll that the parents to the NEETs that apply to Hikikomori are under. Many of the parents have themselves taken sick leave or reduced their work hours because of the stress and anxiety that having a NEET child creates. So the negative mental health effects of NEET isolation do not just affect the NEETs themselves, but their family members as well. For this reason, Umeå municipality used to offer group therapy sessions for parents of NEETs. These sessions have sadly been cancelled due to budget cuts, but the staff member emphasizes how important it is to provide such resources to help relieve the anguish of struggling parents.

One-one-one sessions

After an applicant is selected as suitable by the organisation, and chooses to accept, they take part in a three-step program. The first part of the program is a series of one-on-one sessions with the staff. This part may take anywhere from three weeks to a whole year to complete, depending on the severity of the participants condition. The staff find it very important that all staff members get to know every participant. They interview the participants to let them tell their story, so they can learn about their issues, past traumas and experiences that have brought them to where they are today. Bullying is often a factor in their lives, as well as negative experiences trying to fit into school environments and past experiences with youth health services. The organisation finds it very important in these early stages to treat participants in the opposite

> " Bullying is often a factor in their lives "

way that schools and social programs usually treat them - by not demanding any responsibilities or requirements of the participants at all. If any participant fails to show up to the program, even several times, they are not automatically kicked out of if. There is no reciprocal demand of participation that leads to participants "failing" the program. If they stop showing up at all, the staff will contact them to tell them that they miss them and that they are welcome back at any time they may feel better. This is important in creating a base level of trust between the staff and the participants. The other part of building this trust is for the staff to become - in effect - good friends with the participants. Friendliness and personality is used to instill a sense that the staff truly care about the participants, in a way that no institution or social service has ever done before in their lives. They talk with the participants about their daily lives, their hobbies and interests, their dreams and desires. The particular staff member I interviewed professed to being an avid gamer, which has helped him immensely in connecting to young participants who very often have video games as a primary hobby. They also spend time just "hanging out" with the participants - playing cards, video games, laying puzzles etc. After the staff have gotten to know the participant, they move forward to one-on-one training to overcome daily challenges that the participants may be struggling with, such as walking home alone or taking the bus.

> " Friendliness and personality is used to instill a sense that the staff truly care about the participants, in a way that no institution or social service has ever done before in their lives "

Group meetings

When a participant is deemed ready they are invited to partake in weekly group meetings where they get to meet other NEETs. Three meetings are scheduled every week, which all of course are completely voluntary to participate in. One day of the week there is a common coffee break hangout ("fika") which is the most popular session, usually attended by 6-10 participants. Given that there are ~20 participants and not all participants have reached the group phase, this means participation is very high. This session takes place at a youth recreation center that the staff has built up strong cooperation with. During the "fika" the recreation center is empty, so it becomes a quiet environment where the participants can relax and feel secure. The "fika" has no specific program, it's just a hang out session. The participants play board games, card games, video games, draw pictures and have casual chats with each other and the staff. A secondary motive with organizing these "fika" sessions at the youth centre is to nudge participants to visit it in their own free time, although the staff member I interviewed admitted that this rarely happens.

Another day of the week there is a lunch meeting where the participants get together and cook lunch in the kitchen in Hikikomori's premises. This meeting

takes place between 10-12 o'clock, but the staff member I interviewed professed that the time of day is an issue as many of their participants have very poor sleep schedules. Attendance is usually around 2-5 participants, plus staff that plan and oversee the activity. Some participants don't feel comfortable eating around other people, so it is ok to attend to the activity without actually partaking.

At the end of the week there is a "flex slot" with varying activities. Every third week the staff organizes an excursion or outdoor activity, like visits to museums, animal parks, study visits etc. There was a time where the staff enjoyed these outings "a bit too much" and started planning them every week, however they quickly noticed that attendance dropped off, so they had to reduce the regularity of the outings. Then every third week there is an in-premise activity, sometimes with an invited individual like an art teacher or a lecturer. Examples of these activities include painting, planting crops etc. Then every third week there is a more casual session where they just hang out in Hikikomori's premises and watch a movie or play video games etc.

The interviewed staff member emphasizes that they never communicate plans to participants more than a week into the future. The ability to plan for the future varies between participants, but some participants are in such challenging mental states that they can only focus on the "here-and-now". It may be difficult or triggering for them to attempt to think further into the future than that.

Planning for the future

When the staff perceive that a participant is regularly attending activities and there is a promising feeling of rapport, they are gradually advanced to the third part of the program. This is when the process "gets serious", where participants, if suitable, are prepared for a future in the "real world" where attendance and active participation is required. If they have not done so already, the staff start discussing plans of what participants want or need to do next in the future. Most of the participants move on to an adult education center (folkhögskola), with almost half of the participants attending one particular school close to Umeå that has a special focused program that is particularly suited for people with neurodevelopmental disorders who want to complete secondary school. Of special note for this thesis is that this school employs animal-assisted therapy and owns a therapy dog. Another ~20% move on to a work ability trial program that helps participants understand what kind of work they feel able to partake in. Some participants are helped into further medical contacts that they may require to move forward with their lives. Other kinds of future activities also occur. Throughout this process the staff are by the participant's side and help them in any contacts they have with other institutions, or help them with paperwork and registrations. The staff may personally join the participant in meeting with social services or other institutions.

Concluding and reconnecting

Shortly after a participant moves forward into future activities, the program is concluded. The participant is thanked for their attendance of the program. However, the staff member I interviewed stressed that while many of the participants like to thank Hikikomori for their help, the real heroes of the story are the participants themselves. He feels the work they put in is incredible and a show of real strength. In just two years time (or less, sometimes more) they have carried themselves out of total isolation, out of total fear and apathy against the outside world, despite all the traumas and terrible hardships they have experienced in their lives. The sense of awe that my interview subject professed towards the challenges that the participants are able to overcome was truly palpable.

> " In just two years time they have carried themselves out of total isolation, out of total fear and apathy against the outside world, despite all the traumas and terrible hardships they have experienced in their lives "

As part of the conclusion, the participant is encouraged to reconnect and update the staff of their progress. The staff always makes sure to schedule a reconnection with the participant in six months time in case they have not heard from them. This is to make sure that they feel well and are successful in their new activity. In some cases the move forward may have been premature, and the participant does not yet have the tools they need to thrive in their new context. In this event, even though the participant is no longer enrolled in the program, the staff still have the time and flexibility to devote several hours of their week to helping a past participant. And because every member of the staff is familiar with every participant they have the flexibility to delegate scheduled appointments in case of unforeseen responsibilities they need to attend to, no matter if it is to help current or past participants.

What institutions are most important in preventing young adults from falling into the inactive NEET trap?

The school system and social services were identified as the most important institutions to prevent young people from becoming inactive NEETs. As Hikikomori encounters a large number of participants with neurodevelopmental disorders, the importance of adapting the school environment to accommodate all student's needs was particularly stressed. Swedish schools have a legal responsibility to adapt the learning environment to all student's needs, but the interview subject does not perceive that this responsibility is being

> " Hikikomori encounters a large number of participants with neurodevelopmental disorders "

fulfilled, particularly because of lack of staff and funding required for schools to be able to seriously attend to all student's learning needs. The interview subject also identified the split in the Swedish school system between publicly and privately run schools as a further complicating factor.

The interview subject stated that there is research that shows that certain warning signals can be identified at a very low age (already in primary school) that with high probability predict that a young person will eventually become an inactive NEET. He feels that it is the responsibility of schools and social services to identify these risk factors as early as possible and work proactively to prevent a spiral of negative development in the young person's life. Other children or teenagers that eventually become inactive NEETs do not exhibit these signals, instead it may be an episode of bullying later in their life that traumatizes them enough to spiral into NEET. In such situations it is also important that schools and social services act quickly to help the young individual before it is "too late".

Characteristics of Hikikomori's participants

The staff member I interviewed says there is no overrepresentation of any gender. The participants are roughly 50% male and 50% female. However, he noted a stark overrepresentation of transsexual identities - something to the tune of 20% of the participants are trans identifying.

Along the socioeconomic axis, he notes that NEET problematics can occur in any family context. Participants come from all kinds of backgrounds. However he noted - while cautioning that this perception may be inaccurate - that many participants come from strong socioeconomic backgrounds. Intact nuclear families, where both parents are highly educated and work in high-wage fields,

" As for hobbies and interests, the most common was clear - videogames "

occur more often than not. I asked the subject if he notices high parental expectations as a problem in these participants' lives, but he answered that he could not say. Groveling in parental issues is not a priority, instead the parents are seen as a resource to ask for help in achieving the goals of the participants. Yet other participants may have very negative experiences with their parents, or no contact with them at all. Some parents may themselves be battling with debilitating illness that has prevented them from being the support needed in their child's life.

As for hobbies and interests, the most common was clear - videogames. Minecraft and Roblox were deemed the most common (Online multiplayer games centred around building and gathering in collaborative worlds). Some participants play first-person shooter games such as Counter Strike. He noted that many play very deep role playing games, such as the recently released *Baldur's Gate 3*. These role-playing games are the kind of games that can deeply engross the players for extended periods of time, up to several hundreds of hours.

The second most common interest was deemed to be East-Asian culture. Anime, manga (japanese comic books and animated series and movies), K-pop, (South Korean pop music) K-drama, (South Korean drama shows) etc.

Design of the premises

The premises are located in a typical municipal office in central Umeå and consist of a meeting room, a "living room" and a small kitchen. The meeting room has a bookshelf filled with puzzles and board and the walls are decorated with artworks that previous participants have made (not pictured). The living room has a large TV and videogames. The staff have tried to the best of their abilities to decorate the premises in a cozy, "home-like" fashion. The different rooms have windows towards the corridor that the staff have covered in draperies to create a sense of privacy and security, especially for new participants. Even though the premises are located in a shared municipal office building, Hikikomori has its own entrance that is not used by any other staff or visitors, in order to keep the space calm and secluded.

Suggestions for architects?

I asked the interview subject what he would like to do if he was given "a big pot of money". He answered that he most of all would like to see a complete overhaul of the Swedish school system, but reflected that this would be an enormous undertaking. In the world "as is" he said that he would probably want to expand Hikikomori's practice to other municipalities, help other municipalities set up organisations similar to theirs. But the most pertinent suggestion for architects was that he wished to work more with green health - ie. nature-based therapy. He reflected that most of the participants just sit at home all day and rarely ever go outside.

From top to bottom:

Fig. 3: Main room. (Hikikomori Umeå, 2025). Reprinted with permission.
Fig. 4: Living room. (Hikikomori Umeå, 2025). Reprinted with permission.
Fig. 5: Kitchen. (Hikikomori Umeå, 2025). Reprinted with permission.

Animal-Assisted Interventions

In the previous chapter, I write about how Hikikomori Umeå gave me a clue to investigate "green health", ie. nature-based therapy, to help improve the mental health of inactive NEETs. Another clue I received from that case study was how they referred to an adult education center outside of Umeå that has a program specialized for students with neuropsychiatric disorders and other difficulties. Upon further research, I found out that this school owns a therapy dog that is used as learning/behavioural aid at the school. Adding greenery and green spaces to buildings is something that has been explored time and time again in architecture, but the use of animal-assisted interventions seemed to me as a novel approach to explore, especially as its use is already being targeted specifically at people with neurodevelopmental disorders.

"Basically, what you're doing is showing them that they are a person of value and that they are a capable person of value"

Animal-assisted interventions is a form of nature-based therapy that uses animals in a variety of settings and activities to improve the health and wellbeing of humans. Examples of different kinds of interventions include animal-assisted therapy (AAT), animal-assisted education, resident animals at hospitals or treatment centers etc. Therapeutic dogs are the most commonly used animal in Swedish schools, and are used to help students with learning disabilities, low-self esteem, reading difficulties etc. Specifically, there are examples of them being used to help "hemmasittare" - children under the age of 16 that isolate at home - ie. the precursor step to NEET (Bäck & Jonsson 2022). In hospitals, nursing homes, psychiatric clinics etc. animals are used to spread positive emotions, break social isolation and promote physical activity, among other things.

Dixon et al. (2025) interviewed AAT practitioners to understand the benefits of using animals in therapy. As a first example, practitioners described how animals can improve self-confidence. Tending to an animal helps build feelings of self-worth, and the animals provide instantaneous feedback to the care the person gives them. To be able to provide care and feel the important feeling of "being needed" is important to help build self-confidence in people who otherwise almost always are at the receiving end of care. One practitioner describes it in the following words: "Basically, what you're doing is showing them that they are a person of value and that they are a capable person of value" (p. 5). Being approached or "chosen" by an animal is also a powerful feeling that helps build self-esteem. Animals are also good at "opening up" reclusive people, and their initiations of play may promote physical activity. As one practitioner describes it: "it's quite hard to say no to an animal" (p. 7).

"It's quite hard to say no to an animal"

Additionally, the practitioners describe how animals are un-judgemental by nature, which is especially important when meeting patients with social anxiety or social development issues. These patients may feel expectations or judgment about how they should act in the presence of other people, whereas the presence of an animal "that just is" offers respite from the pressures of social mores. Feeling the warmth of another being through physical touch or cuddling releases calming hormones, which is especially important for people who may be otherwise bereft of physical touch. Finally, practitioners describe how the animals provide a calming presence just by being in the room, even when not actively partaking in therapy.

"Patients may feel expectations or judgment about how they should act in the presence of other people, whereas the presence of an animal "that just is" offers respite from the pressures of social mores"

The use of AAI in the treatment of people with ASD

A metastudy by O´Haire (2012) looked at a range of different studies of AAI (Animal-Assisted Interventions) being used to aid or treat individuals with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) and found improvements in five key areas: social interaction, Language and Communication, ASD Severity, Problem Behaviors and Stress and Well-Being. The most commonly reported outcome of AAI for ASD was increased social interaction, where nearly two-thirds of the reviewed studies reported positive outcomes. The reported outcomes were increased frequency and duration of social behaviors in the presence of an animal, increased socialization from before to after AAI, and increased social motivation and responsiveness. The second most reported improvement was a reduction of problem behaviours associated with ASD.

Another metastudy by Cleary et al. (2023) specifically investigated the effect of cat ownership in the households of families with an autistic family member. In the studies reviewed the authors noted that autistic people form a particularly strong bond with cats, while the cats in turn seemed to understand the autistic person was unique, often preferring them to others. Cat ownership fosters a sense of responsibility, with one study even noting that the autistic person's companionship with the cat became stronger the more responsibility they took over the cat. Another study noted that an outcome of this sense of responsibility were fewer depressive symptoms.

Case Study - Purrfect Café

Purrfect Café is a combined cat café and cat adoption center located in central Gothenburg, Sweden. The business was opened in 2021 by two veterinarians, taking inspiration from a visit to the first Swedish cat café, located in Stockholm (Widenheim, 2021). The main goal of the café is to help put up homeless cats for adoption, but the owner´s have stated that their secondary goal is to utilize the calming effects of pets to provide mental health benefits to visitors of the cafe. The owners have noted that the cafe is especially popular with visitors that have neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism and ADHD (Hjerpe, 2024).

The cafe is divided into two spaces that are separated by an "airlock" to prevent the cats from moving between the spaces. This is for sanitary reasons, as no animals are allowed to be in or near the kitchen of the café. The entrance space houses the café counter and front desk, a waiting room, a bathroom and a few staff rooms. In the waiting room guests are briefed about rules for interacting with the cats (no lifting) before taking any pastries and drinks they want from the café counter and entering the main space.

The main space consists of two different rooms - a main room and a secluded back room. The main room is where guests drink coffee and hang out with the cats. For the human visitors there are tables, chairs and sofas. For the cats there are cat trees, cat houses, shelves, cat toys etc. Strewn about the tables are catalogues of the cats that are currently available for adoption, plus literature about caring for cats, for any person that is interested in adoption. Behind the main room there is a smaller locked room that the cats can access through a hole in the wall. This room houses litter boxes and cages where the cats can retreat and rest out of view.

Most of the cats that live at the cafe come from the homes of owners who no longer can care for their cats. Only a minority of the cats are found on the streets or assigned to the café from other sources. At the time of visit, When a cat arrives at the café they usually spend a few days exclusively within the secluded back room, in order to be able to acclimate before being introduced to guests in the main room. Depending on mood and suitability, the cats will then spend a minimum of two or three months in the café before moving on to an adoption home. The cafe is open five days a week, but closed on mondays and tuesdays to allow the cats to rest without visiting guests. At night they are left completely alone, although the staff can monitor them with cameras if needed.

Fig. 6: Photo of flyer at entrance

Fig. 7: Café

Fig. 8: Café

Fig. 11: Exterior

Fig. 12: Photos of cats that have moved to new homes because of Purrfect

Fig. 9: Cats resting by window

Fig. 10: Inaccesible retreat room

Fig. 13: Waiting room

Fig. 14: Kitchen

Thematic Analysis

I would like to begin this chapter with some of my own reflections on themes that I have identified in the analysis step of this thesis. These themes will be used in motivating the design and programs of the architectural implementation.

Being of need to others in connection to feelings of worthlessness and insignificance

In interview studies NEETs report a feeling of low-self esteem, worthlessness and purposelessness, most strongly connected to being unemployed.

The concept of "self-worth" is strongly connected to if an individual feels they are *needed*. It is imperative to understand the importance of *being needed* to both a person's feeling of self-esteem, and a person's motivation to maintain social connections with others. Society and human socialization is ultimately based on fulfilling shared needs.

To put the concept of "shared needs" into perspective, one must first understand the role of individualism in modern post-industrial western society. Swedish society in particular is centered around the concept of egalitarian individualism. The idea is that the individual is offered complete freedom to create the life they themselves want to live, regardless of what background they are born into. To facilitate this process of self-creation, the state has taken over functions that traditionally were within the purview of family and community. The individual shouldn't have need for a wealthy family or a supportive community to make his or her way in life, and as a result the individual is not *needed* to fulfill a role in his or her family or community that would impede their path to self-creation. Thus, if an individual is in a position where they are not working, studying etc. then they may soon find themselves in a daily life where no one is *needing* them. At this point a looming sense of feeling lost, worthless or purposeless may grip the individual. However, it is important to critically envision that an individual's inherent *worth* doesn't have to be solely connected to their salaried work and economic productivity.

Offering alternatives to the normative lifestyle ("Villa, Vovve, Volvo")

Several "affluent NEET" interview subjects in the study by Gordon (2020) express anxieties over mainstream ideals of a successful life – both doubts over the quality and suitableness of such a lifestyle to the subjects wants and needs, and doubts over if they ever will be able to achieve the income and life skills needed to attain "the good life". In Sweden, this ideal is perhaps most iconically illustrated in the expression "Villa, Vovve, Volvo" (Villa, dog, car). Forming a nuclear family and attaining a single-family detached home is of course not the only popular measure of success in Sweden – but as access to rental properties are becoming more and more scarce all over the country, then increasingly home-ownership is becoming a requirement rather than a choice. In medium-to-large cities in Sweden, the prerequisite for home ownership is a salary and deposit payment that with all likelihood appears beyond daunting for an unemployed person at the start of their life. Affluent NEETs (Gordon, 2020) possess strong fears that partaking in the "rat race" needed to sustain a middle class lifestyle will leave them feeling unhappy, but in the context of Sweden partaking in the "rat race" is arguably becoming required to even have somewhere to live.

Themes of purpose and meaning in relation to video games, anime and manga

During my analysis, in particular when reading the phenomenological interview study by Gordon (2020), I noted a theme around purpose and meaning. Inactive NEETs express that the lives they live of inactivity and social isolation feels meaningless and that they themselves feel worthless - while parallely expressing existential fears about the meaningfulness of life outside of their homes. They worry deeply if they would find any joy and purpose in living a "normal" life. And one can not help but wonder how meaningful the jobs are that are available to people that are at the bottom of the labour market. So to escape reality many inactive NEETs choose to pass their time in the world of video games. Modern video games aren't just simple games of dexterity. I would like to make the point that they more often than not are a way for people to fantasise or roleplay living a life of meaning, of having purpose, of being of need to others - no matter if those others are real players in an online multiplayer game or computer-controlled characters in a single player game.

My contact at Hikikomori Umeå mentions Minecraft as one of the most popular games amongst the participants that he meets. Minecraft is an open-ended sandbox game, ie. a game with no set goals. There are no "levels" to complete, no "high score" to beat. Instead players create their own meaning within the game, set their own goals. The core gameplay could almost be seen as a form of work - collecting resources in order to "craft" tools and building materials. But the players are not alienated from the fruits of their labour - that labour is made evident in the elaborate buildings and structures they build with their gathered resources, whether when playing alone or collaborating with others in the game's online mode.

Stardew Valley and Animal Crossing are examples of social simulation games. The main object of Stardew Valley is to manage a farm, while in Animal Crossing the object is to construct and decorate a village. Just like Minecraft, these games are

open-ended. Both games have strong themes of community and collaboration. They construct a fantasy of idealized life where the player is of great value to his or her community, a fantasy of feeling needed by neighbours and townspeople.

A personal favourite of mine is the game Death Stranding - the object of this game is to deliver important payloads to people in need across a dangerous post-apocalyptic wasteland. To more easily traverse this hazardous landscape the player can construct bridges, ladders and zip lines that are shared with other players online. Whenever the player comes across a particularly useful player-built structure, he or she can send a "like" to the player that constructed it. And so much of the enjoyment of the game comes from receiving these simple messages of gratitude from other people. I've found myself spending many hours constructing structures just to help other players. The feeling of being useful for others is addicting, and something that I imagine is a driving force behind why collaborative online games have become so popular.

Why East Asian cultural expressions such as anime and manga is such a common interest with the NEETs encountered by Hikikomori Umeå or video game enthusiasts in general I as the author can only speculate. Video games have always been a strong Japanese export, and as such maybe an interest in other Japanese cultural products aimed at young adults is only natural and symptomatical. It may also be that the fantastical settings of anime and manga offer a strong sense of escapism. Social ineptitude is a strong theme in many animes and mangas, and they often tell the tales of isolated and shunned young individuals who uncover special powers or rise to achieve heroic acts. These themes I think connect to the feelings of social ostracisation and aimlessness that I have uncovered in my analysis. On the opposite side of the genre, we find the "slice of life" genre, which in contrast to tales of fantasy and heroism instead puts the reader/viewer in the shoes of regular individuals living romanticized lives in (nominally) realistic settings. Here I see echoes of the same themes of meaning and purpose found in social simulation video games.

Can we as architects draw inspiration from fiction and interactive media when envisioning the future of the built environment? Can concepts of purpose, collaboration and being of need to others be used to enrich people's lives, and to tackle problems of mental health and social isolation?
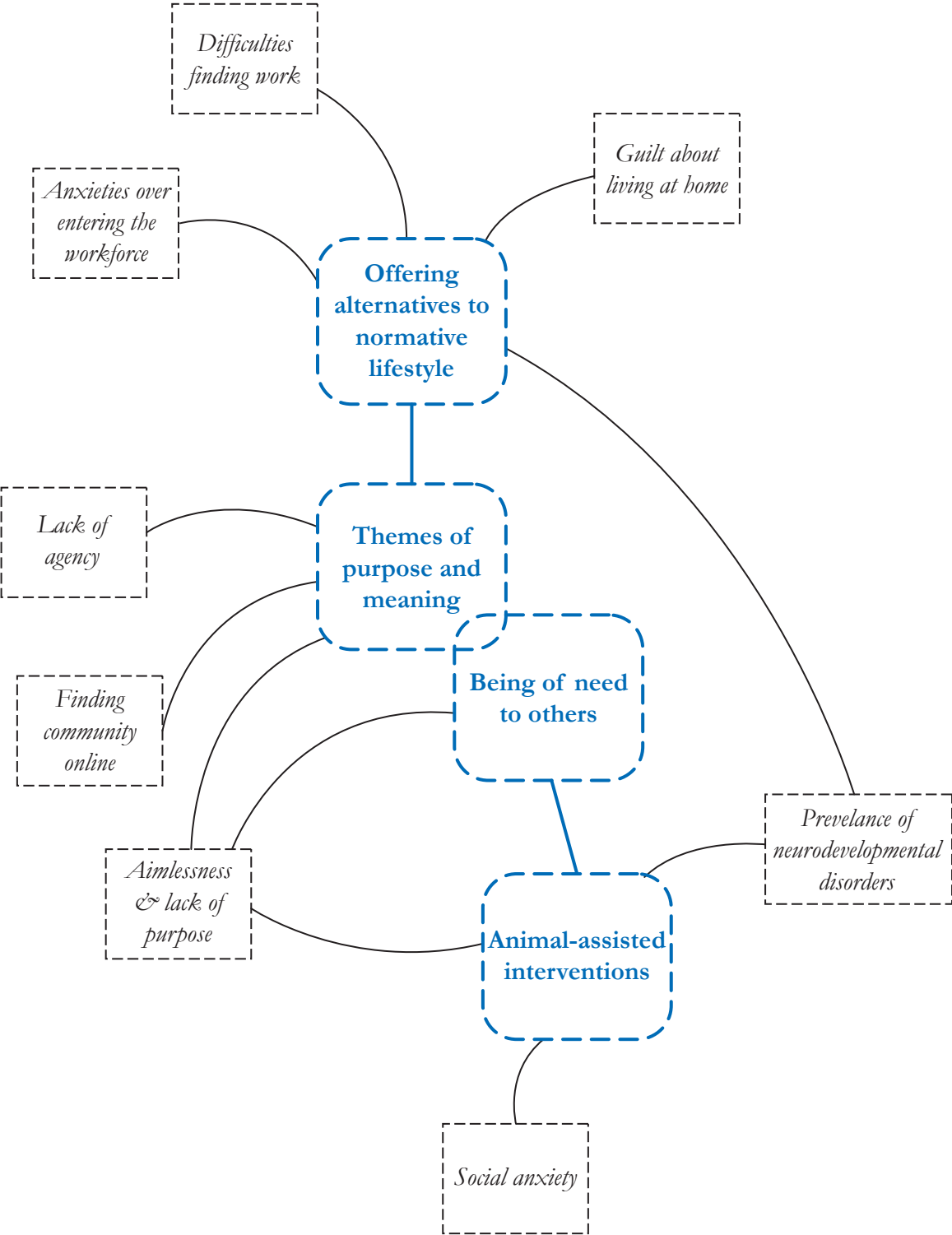
Thematic synthesis

Difficulties
finding work

Guilt about
living at home

Anxieties over
entering the
workforce

**Offering
alternatives to
normative
lifestyle**

Lack of
agency

**Themes of
purpose and
meaning**

Finding
community
online

**Being of need
to others**

Prevelance of
neurodevelopmental
disorders

Aimlessness
& lack of
purpose

**Animal-assisted
interventions**

Social anxiety

Fig. 15: Diagram of the thought process synthesizing the themes and concepts I've encountered
during my analysis

Fig. 16: Collage sketch musing on the idea of realizing themes from videogames in real life

Implementation

Thematic-programmatic synthesis

During my thematic synthesis I started thinking about programs that can connect to the themes and concepts that I had identified. At first I was exploring the program of an ecological farm configured like a garden allotment community, where inactive NEETs would be offered an alternative to the traditional job market and housing market. Tending to the farm animals would create a source of income yet also a sense of purpose, the illustrious feeling of "being needed by others", as well as the other benefits that animal contact afford to individuals that may be suffering from depression or social anxiety. But I soon arrived at an idea that I found much more interesting - to create a combined cat shelter and cat-café that is run as a social enterprise. The idea behind this program is the same as the one previously mentioned, to create an activity or job that gives participants an arena where they can care for other creatures and feel a sense of purpose by being of need to other creatures (and humans). Combining the programs of a cat-café with an internet café in the same space creates a place where people who mostly find community on the internet and in computer games can meet and connect with each other while also receiving passive mental health benefits from animal exposure. The space is also designing like an indoor garden to connect to more general themes of "green health". Lastly, the idea is to run the cat-shelter-internet-café as a work integreating social enterprise, which isn't focused on amassing profits, but instead on creating a meaningful alternative to the traditional job market for those in need.

The café is meant to be open to anyone, but in connection to it I have also designed a co-living space with 12 apartments where the inactive NEETs who run the social enterprise can choose to live. These apartments offer independence to individuals who most oftenly are at the bottom of the "housing market".
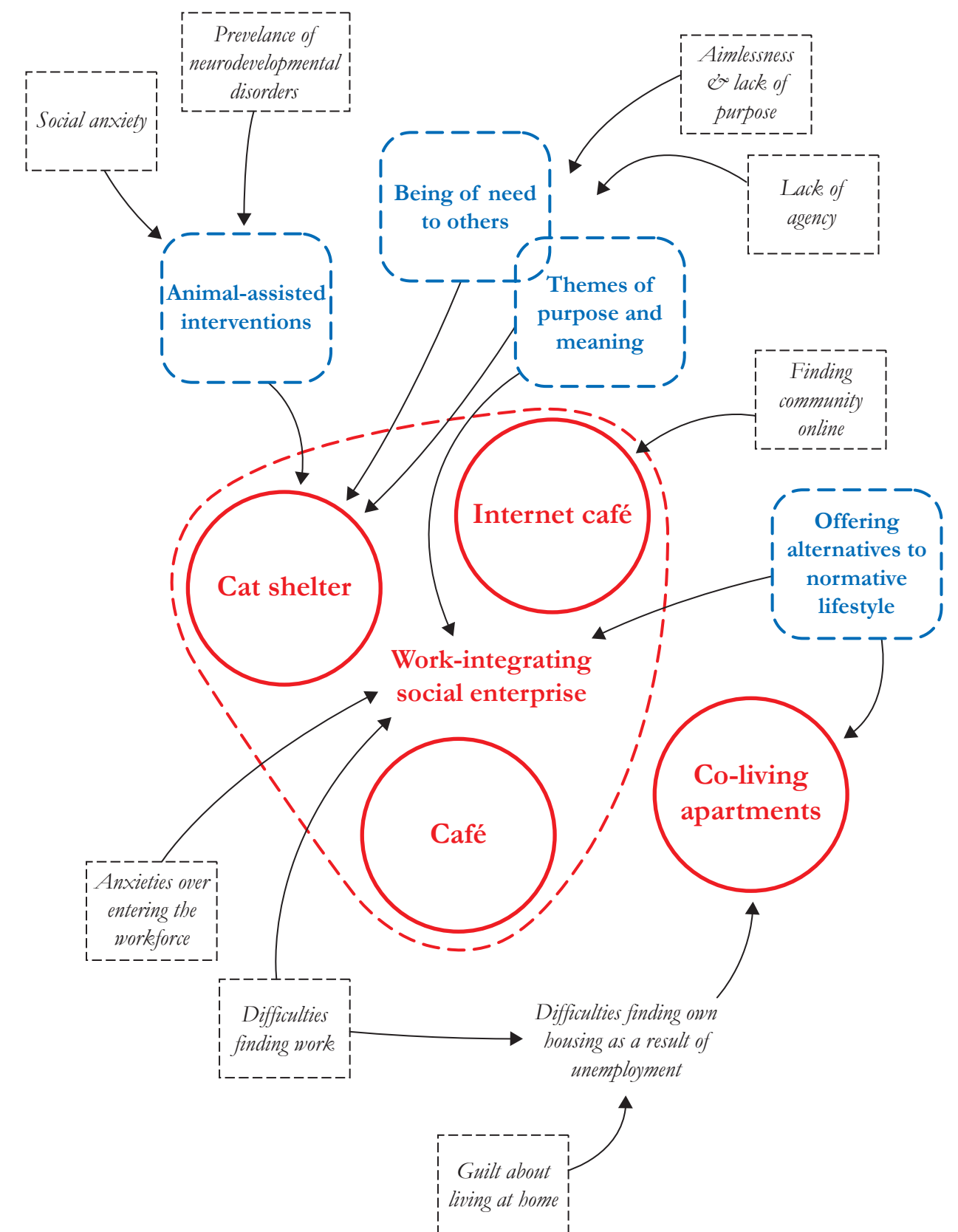

Fig. 18: Diagram of thematic-programmatic synthesis

Site

Kålltorp

Lunden

Härlanda tjärn

Delsjöområdet

0   200m

Scale 1:10 000

Fig. 19: Situation Plan

Delsjövägen

Direct proximity to
Apslätten Forest

Residential area with
street-level businesses

Horse Stables

0   100m   200m

Scale 1:5000

Fig. 20: Context

Site photos

Fig. 21: Site from southwest, looking northeast. Apslätten forest to the right.

Fig. 22: View from Delsjövägen of the lawn in front of the site
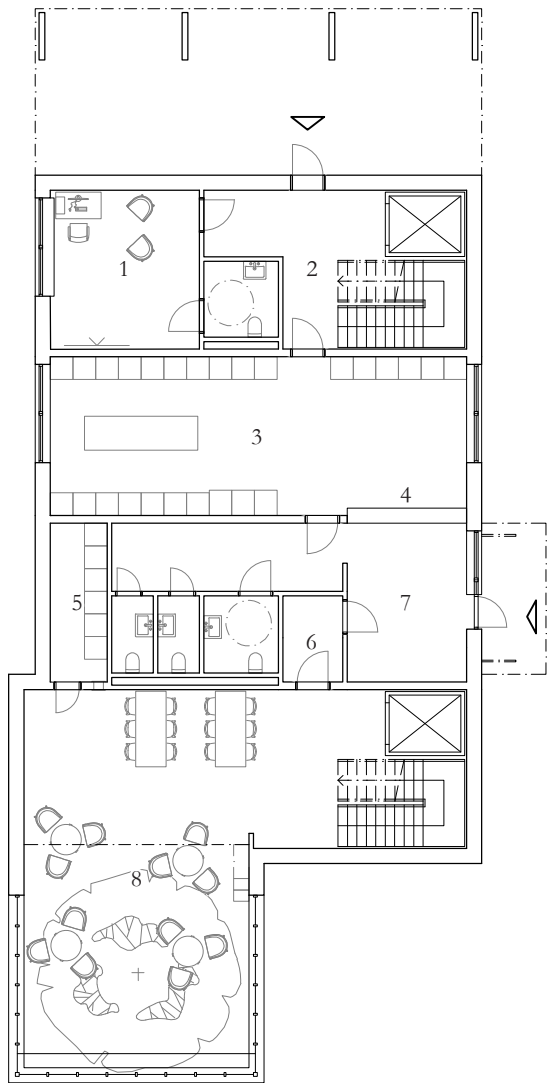
Context

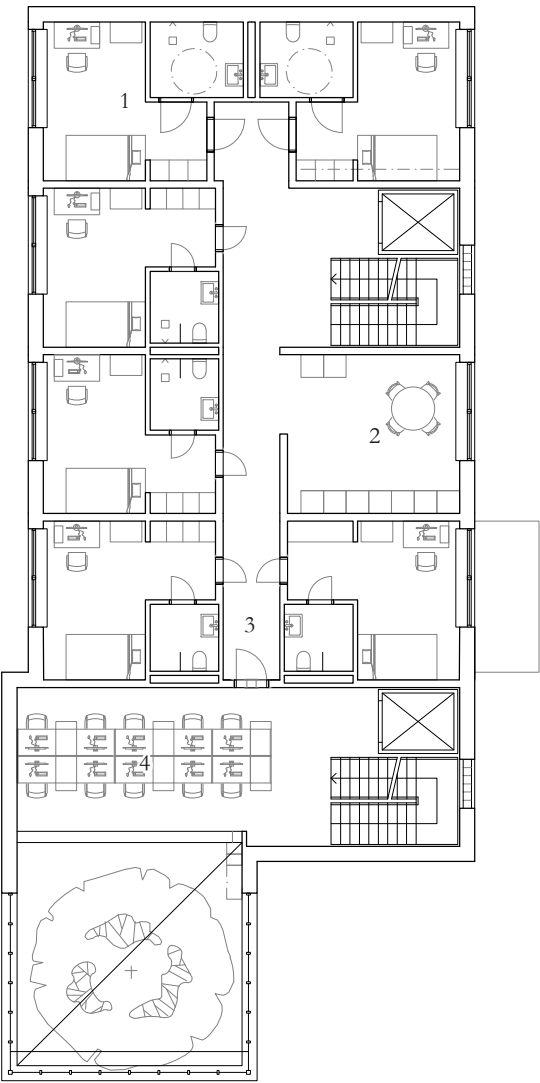Fig. 23: Apslätten forest

Fig. 24: Local architecture is dominated by 1940s buildings with plaster facades.
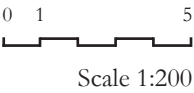
Plans & Section

1 Office
2 Residential Entrance
3 Café Kitchen
4 Service Counter
5 Cat Retreat Space
6 Sanitary Barrier
7 Visitor Entrance
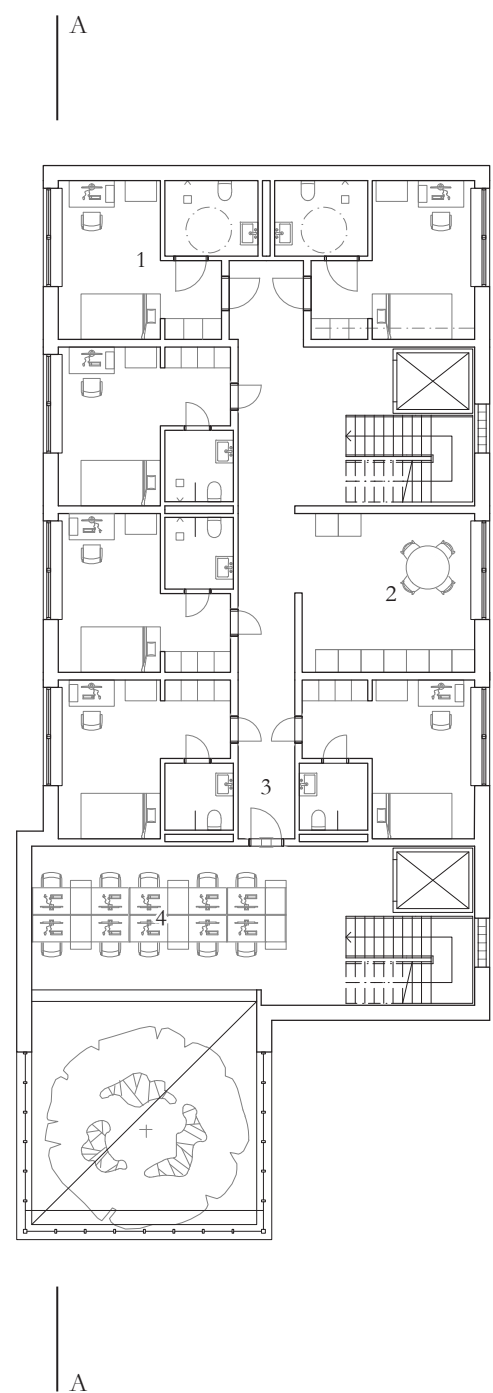8 Cat Café & Botanical Garden

Fig. 25: Ground Floor

0 1   5

Scale 1:200

1 Housing Unit (x6)
2 Residential Kitchen
3 Locker Access Door w.
Cat Hatch
(Private <-> Public)
4 Internet Café

Fig. 26: 1st Floor

0 1   5

Scale 1:200

Implementation

A

A

1 Housing Unit (x6)
2 Residential Kitchen
3 Locker Access Door w.
Cat Hatch
(Private <-> Public)
4 Internet Café

Fig. 27: 2nd Floor

0   1   5

Scale 1:200

Fig. 28: Section A-A

0   1   5

Scale 1:200

Café Section

Section drawing of the main café space. The ground floor is the café space, while the first and second floors contain the internet café. The space is designed like a botanical garden with an oak tree similar to those found outside on the site. Large blinds in the windows prevent the space from becoming overheated in the summer, and a cat stair provides a shortcut between the ground floor and the first floor.

Fig. 29: Section of Cat-café, Internetcafé and Botanical Garden

Furniture Detail

The internet café houses computer desks that also double as climbable cat furniture. A semi-enclosed space for rest is passively heated by the computers below.

Fig. 30: Isometric Illustration of Internet Café Desk

Discussion

Approaching the subject of inactive NEETs architecturally has been a challenging experience. At the onset of this project, I had no clue of what architectural proposal it might end in. When explaining my project to others, I was often asked the question "What is your proposal going to be?". I would simply answer "I don't know, and that is why it is so exciting". I am happy to report that I can answer that question now. My answer is not exhaustive, it doesn't "solve" the "problem" of inactive NEETs conclusively. To find a simple architectural "answer" to vast structural challenges, to be able to address immense questions around social ostracisation and existential apathy in one go is most certainly impossible. But I am surprised at where the process has taken me and the speculative proposal I have arrived at. And I hope my method of thematic analysis and synthesis can provide some inspiration for how to address structural societal challenges - by shifting focus from the "big picture" to looking at problems "from the inside". Examining people's inner feelings to find clues for how to address them, or at least create encounters with them.

To look at my work critically, it was challenging to even construct a project plan without a certain vision of what the project should result in. The project was driven by my strong interest in the subject matter, the answers would have to be found along the way. Originally the plan was to meticulously map the living spaces of inactive NEETs and present these mappings as phenomenological drawings and models. However, it was difficult to find inactive NEETs who were willing to share their living spaces in such detail, and I started to feel that exposing these intimate living spaces to the world had its own ethical problems. At a late stage in the project I discovered literature about methodologies of mapping user-created media on the internet, if I had discovered it earlier it may have been an interesting and viable way of conducting the mapping. My biggest regret in this project is that I didn't spend more time mapping the breadth of material that inactive NEETs have created on social media. A breadth of spaces for discussion and camaraderie among inactive NEETs exists on the internet, and the texts and memes that are posted there reveal a lot about the day-to-day experiences and existential anxieties that inactive NEETs encounter in their lives. The way digital communities reshape the individual's experience so that even socially isolated individuals can partake in belongings that are not visible in the physical world is an eminently interesting question for the field of architecture. It's a question that merits further investigation.

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