



A softer Skutskär

A design methodology on developing
public life in a small town centre

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ACEX35 Urban and Rural Design and Planning

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Abstract

Skutskär, the central town in Älvkarleby municipality with around 6000 inhabitants, is currently developing its centre since there is a will from the municipality to increase the attractiveness in the centre and in turn improve the public life; in other words the social life which occurs in the open public spaces, by increasing it. The size and scale of Skutskär places it into a rural context which isn't either the countryside or a city. This in turn gives special conditions and circumstances.

The thesis "A softer Skutskär" aims to develop a design methodology on how to work with increasing public life in a small town centre. The work is divided into answering the questions "What, how, and where?" within the framework of finding interventions and ways of working to increase public life in a rural context centre. This gives the research question "How can public life be increased in the rural context of Skutskär centre?".

The design methodology summarizes the research on public life into five key factors which are needed for increasing public life: streets, public and private, microclimate, activity, and scale. The key factors continue

throughout the methodology by looking at different references, mapping analysis methods, and design tools based on the key factors. All of this information is tested on the specific site, Skutskär centre, to explore the rural preconditions. Is there a difference compared to increasing public life in a city? The thesis shows that the key factors and what you need to achieve might not differ in the rural scale, but instead what is needed is to broaden the perspective of what these key factors could look like. The metrics for the amount of people that is seen as a street full of public life might not be the same in a city compared to a rural centre, and the main meeting place could be outside the food shop or by the bus stop.

A discussion summarizes the findings of the thesis, and in conclusion the material does not present a finalized answer, but instead it offers ways of building an argumentation and presents another way of thinking when planning in the rural context.

Keywords : rural, centre development, public life, design methodology



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The thesis

Introduction

Introduction

Ever since the rapid urbanisation in the beginning of the 1900s which transferred the Swedish population from the countryside to cities and towns, the gap between the cities and the countryside has grown. Po Tidholm describes the polarity in the book "Läget i Landet" (2017) and that the more urbanised Sweden became, the bigger the need was to differentiate the two areas. The city represented prosperity and modernity, and the countryside on the other hand became an asset and provider to the city, or in the best of scenarios a romantic getaway on summer vacations (Tidholm, 2017). The narrative and planning research has for a long time been city focused, but in the 1970's a movement followed by a variety of governmental initiatives focusing on the countryside from 2007-2019 was created (Åkerman, 2020). This was a start of characterizing the qualities, strengths, and possibilities of the countryside.

A town can be described as an area with 200 or more inhabitants. Today around 88% of people in Sweden live in these towns (SCB, 2023). The definition "town" in this thesis include all of the cities, which can be defined as towns with a population larger than 9 600 people (City Index, 2018). The smaller towns, not classified as cities, vary in size and characteristics but often have some kind of relationship with a close by city. Clusters of towns are gathered in different municipalities, and every municipality has a central town which gathers the main commercial and public functions.

In between the cities and the countryside we can find the smaller towns. These are characterized by some of the aspects of the countryside that Tidholm refers to, but instead fall into what another author, Nils Björling, describes in the report "Planning for quality of life as the right to spatial production in the rurban void"(2023) as the "rurban void". These are spaces which can't really be defined as rural but also not urban. Therefore the rurban void might not correspond to either of the defined political goals that follows a clear narrative distinction between the rural, the countryside, and urban, the city. (Björling, 2023).

The rurban void can for example include towns placed by an existing or former industry, or towns centred around a railway station. The small towns often have a similar structure as the city but on a smaller scale. They have the demands and face challenges similar to cities because their size is linked to both commercial and public functions. In the report "Mer med mindre - Attraktiva och hållbara bomiljöer i mindre byar med människan i centrum" (2015) Gehl architects describe that a difference between the cities and small towns is that, because of their size, the smaller towns face an even bigger challenge with decreasing population, a lack of youths and aging population, large distances between functions, and shops having a hard time to keep open which makes the centre feel less alive (Gehl architects, 2015).

One of these towns in the rurban void is Skutskär. Skutskär is the central small town of Älvkarleby municipality with around 6000 inhabitants in Skutskär and around 10 000 in the whole municipality. It's located by the outlet of Dalälven into Östersjön, only 1 hour north of Uppsala and 30 minutes south of Gävle. The origin of the town is connected to the forest industry and saw-milling which for a long time has been the identity of Skutskär. The existing pulp factory is the largest private employer in the municipality (Älvkarleby kommun, 2023), but many people also commute to the nearby cities Tierp, Gävle or Uppsala. Skutskär centre was developed during the 1960-70's, and allow for most of the everyday necessities. Similarly to many of these small towns, the centre struggle with inactivity and a lack of attractiveness. The municipality wants to improve this and increase the public life; in other words the social life which occurs in the open public spaces.

Because of the small towns size and therefore limitations in resources and economy, while at the same time having the same demands for the public life and spaces, finding what interventions would have the most impact where is even more important. To tackle these challenges, does the rurban void demand other strategies?

Background

In the general plan for Älvkarleby municipality "Översiktsplan för Älvkarleby kommun år 2050" (2020) they state the need of a design program to clarify the centre and strengthen the identity of the public space (Älvkarleby kommun, 2020). During the fall of 2022 and spring 2023 the design program "Gestaltningssprogram Skutskär centrum" (2023) was developed in collaboration between the municipality and consultants, and was approved in the spring of 2023 (Älvkarleby kommun et al., 2023).

The need for the design program is one way for the municipality to work with the state national goal "Gestaltad livsmiljö" (Designed living environment) which is connected to the UN Agenda goals 11, "Sustainable cities and communities" (Älvkarleby kommun et al., 2023). In the program, different aspects and areas are highlighted and showcase the needs and conditions for the development of the centre. Some area specific interventions are suggested in the different areas, and volume ideas for how the centre can be densified present another vision for Skutskär centre. The densification is in line with the goal in the general plan stating the growth of Skutskär with 600 housing by 2050 (Älvkarleby kommun, 2020). The design program is defined as guidelines for the further development of the town centre.

Before the creation of the design program there was also a "centre development group" consisting of the main land owners in the centre: Coop, Älvkarleby hus, the municipality. The earlier work include public dialogues gathering information and opinions, and design collaborations with student groups in Gävle on how to develop the centre.

Problem formulation

Skutskär centre today lacks a spatial identity and attractiveness. According to people living in the municipality, the centre has a lack of meeting spots and destinations that attracts people, and its expression is relatively anonymous. The centre struggles with low activity flows, a lack of clear passages, and a protracted division of functions which misses a defined central point.

To tackle these challenges there has been many initiatives, but not many that are long-lasting. For example during the pandemic all of the municipalities

focus turned to their most important core responsibilities, meaning that the development of the centre was not prioritized. When talking to the main land owners, Älvkarleby Hus, and Älvkarleby municipality, asking them what hinders they see in the development of Skutskär centre one of the aspects was the lack of money and labour to be able to transform the centre. According to one of the participants in the centre development group, the group has been active for many years but seem to not land in any new concepts for how to improve the centre.

Aim

The thesis aims to develop a design methodology on how to improve public life in a small town centre. The aim is to find what creates good conditions for public life, how these are represented in Skutskär centre, and how you can work with improving the public life in the centre by increasing it. The methodology will take into consideration the local context of Skutskär and the special conditions given by its rural context.

With a point of departure in the problem formulation, the current plans and visions, the research in the thesis aims to act as a complement to further develop Skutskär centre, and create an even more developed argumentation on why different interventions should or could be implemented.

The results of the research are not to be seen as a finished result, but as a part in the rural discourse and an inspiration and toolbox for further centre development both in Skutskär and other municipalities that face similar challenges.

Research questions

This thesis sets out to answer the following research question:

- How can public life be increased in the rural context of Skutskär centre?

This question is further divided into the two sub-questions:

- What increases public life and movement in a public space, and how does it translate to a rural context?
- How can you identify places where public life could be increased and which interventions could be placed there?

Method

The method for answering the research questions is a mixture of literature studies, design explorations, analyses, interviews and surveys together with relevant people in the context of Skutskär.

Survey

A survey was sent out to the Facebook group "Du vet att du är från Skutskär-Älvkarleby-Furuvik med omnejd om du..." in august 2023 asking people from the local area about their opinions and suggestions on the development on Skutskär centre. The group is chosen because it is one of the more active local groups where information is shared between the inhabitants in Skutskär and the nearby urban areas. The survey as a method helps to anchor the interventions and get a better understanding of the local context.

Interview

Interviews with the main property owner and the municipality has been made over digital meetings and e-mail. The people have been recommended by the municipal architect and they all are or have been part of the "centre development group". This group is a constellation of representatives from Älvkarleby municipality, the main land owner, Älvkarleby hus, and some of the main business owners in the centre. They work and have worked with different ways of developing and improving Skutskär centre. By talking with the people working with the centre development I get a better understanding of the challenges and needs.

An interview has been made with a practicing architect at Gehl architects working with centres in smaller municipalities to get a better understanding of the challenges and how they are dealt with in practice.

Literature

The literature studies have been focused on literature on public life development from a pedestrian perspective. The method of Jan Gehl's "12 quality criteria for the pedestrian landscape" have been a point of departure for further literature studies. The literature anchors the analysis and interventions to research and helps to create a better and more reliable argumentation.

Analysis

The analysis have been mainly map-based with the aim of finding the current conditions for Skutskär centre based on different aspects important for public life according to the literature studies.

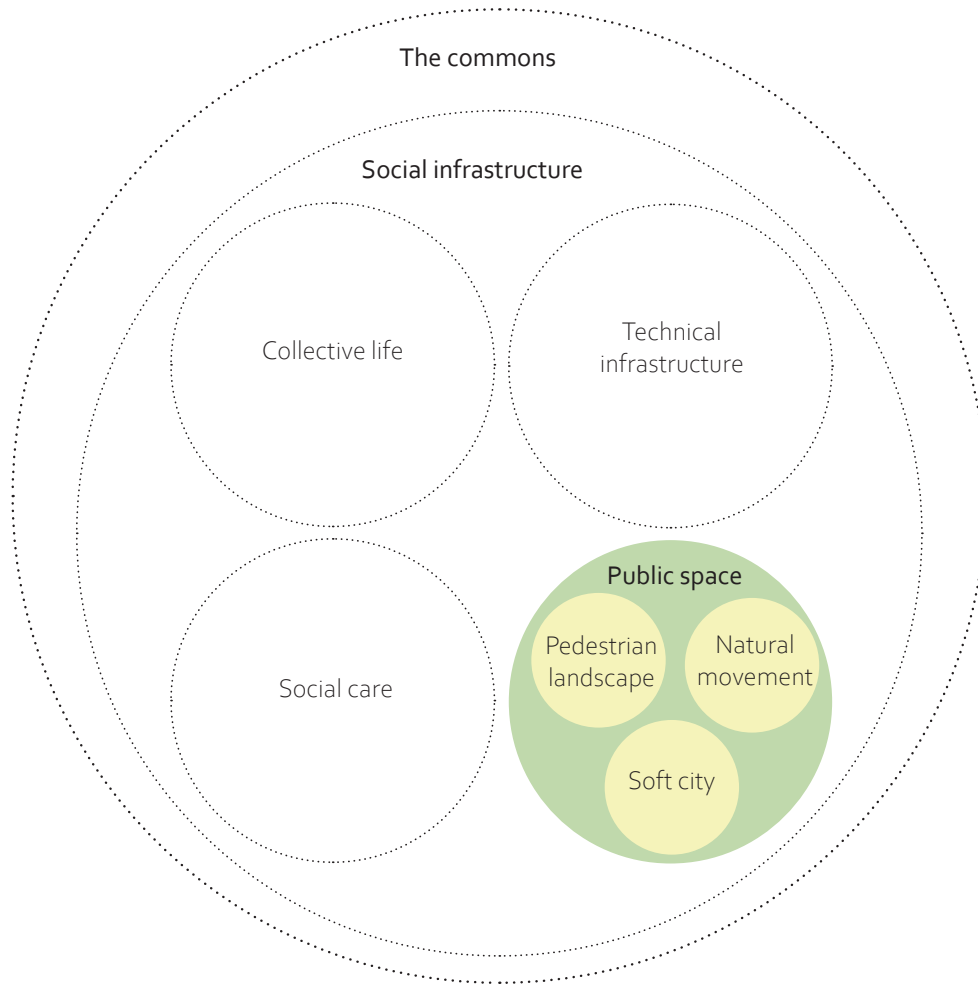
The maps are created using different tools and methods depending on the analysis that are made. For example to analyse the microclimate in the centre, a program called Autodesk Forma is used. When analysing the streets, different photos and studies of the existing pedestrians and biking paths are highlighted. The analyses showcase one type of analysis per key factor, but there are multiple more ways of how the key factors can be analysed. The chosen analysis was delimited to the knowledge of the author and the time and resource limit of the thesis.

Design explorations

The design explorations was a way of analysing the spaces through sketching with a point of departure in the map analysis and the literature. The sketches act as way of visually translating the research and analysis into architectural interventions and qualities using different design tools.

Process

The literature, analyses, interviews, design explorations, and the survey have all been part of an iterative design process where the research question has been redefined, questioned, and narrowed down during the process to more easily frame the challenges Skutskär centre is dealing with.



*Delimitations within the discourse on public life - see research chapter on page 13.
Division created by the author.*

Delimitations

In the design program "Gestaltungsprogram Skutskär centrum" (Älvkarleby kommun et al., 2023), a workshop was conducted to define where the borders of the centre lie. The same border is what this thesis will use as a physical delimitation (see image on p. 11). The centre development is discussed connecting to the larger scale outside of the borders, but limited to interventions within.

The discourse on public life is large and therefore the thesis is limited to developing methods and ideas on how the physical spaces have an impact on public life. Within this discourse the main point of departure is the theories in "Cities for People" (2010) by Jan Gehl, which is then complemented by other theories such as "soft city"

and "natural movement" to expand the toolbox and the complexity of the research.

The frame of the thesis and the aim limits the level of detail to a conceptual level. This is because the aim is to propose a design methodology based on research with suggestions of tools and interventions, and not a finalized proposal.

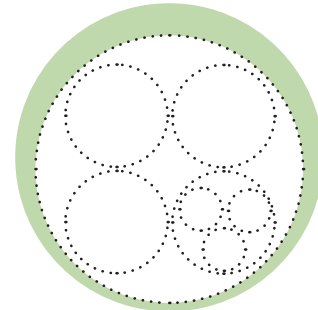


Delimitation of physical research area - the more concentrated centre, and the larger centre.



What?

Research, public (life), key factors



What is public (life)?

To find out how to increase public life we need to start by figuring out what public life is. What is seen as public life might in a first reflection be the busy shopping streets of a city, and that is not a wrong depiction but it also contains a lot more.

Public can in general terms be described as what we share and something we have or use in common. What that means in practice could be something different. You are welcome to walk on a public street, but you're not allowed to put up a bench anywhere you want and so the public aspect of it might be your right to walk there but not necessarily do something in the public space.

The research on public life and public space is vast and therefore this chapter starts by both putting the research into a larger discourse and narrowing down the research area to what this thesis focuses on. To get a better understanding of the different ways of reading the term public, this chapter gathers research on what can be seen as public and how different researchers have thought about working with public life and what that might be. The chapter starts with presenting a more broader perspective which further on is delimited in what this thesis talks about when talking about public life. In summary the delimitation of the research can be described as exploring the social life which occurs in open public spaces and how the physical spaces can help to increase this life. This is exemplified by concepts such as "the pedestrians landscape", "soft city" and "natural movement" which are explained in the chapter.

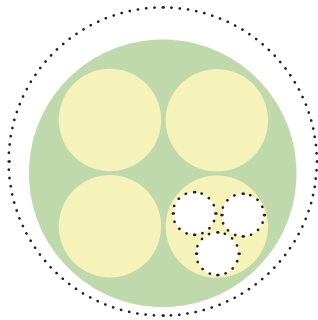
Using this framework as a point of departure, the research is then summarized into five key aspects on how the physical spaces have an effect of public life.

The commons

Another word that can describe the public is the term "commons". In the book "Sustaining the commons" (2016) by John M. Anderies and Marco A. Janssen they describe that the term originally came from the way societies - communities, handled their land areas in medieval Europe. The land was not owned by one person, but "held in common", hence the word "commons". The co-ownership came with a set of rules to follow. (Anderies, Janssen, 2016)

Today the term can include different types of resources, both cultural and natural, such as clean air and water, but also public roads and school education. The overall rule is that it should be open access and not protected only for a certain group of people (Anderies, Janssen, 2016).

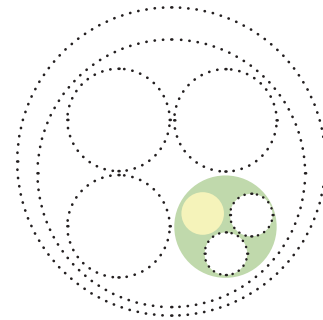
In the book "In search of new public domain" (2001), Maarten Hajer and Arnoud Reijndorp describes a discourse within "the public" which differentiates the "public places" from the "public domain". The public domain, like the commons, can be seen as a broader perspective of what we share. Meanwhile the commons more highlight the sense of ownership, the public domain refer to the exchanges and social shared experiences between people. Hajer and Reijndorp write that even though public space in essence is a space that is freely accessible, it does not necessarily mean that it is every public space is public domain (Hajer, Reijndorp, 2001). This in turn raises the question what we actually mean when talking about the public, for whom, and which qualities constitutes it?



Social infrastructure

All aspects of the public can be seen as creating a social infrastructure. In the paper "Social infrastructure: why it matters and how urban geographers might study it" (2022) Latham and Layton explain different meanings of the term and what they entail, divided into four concepts.

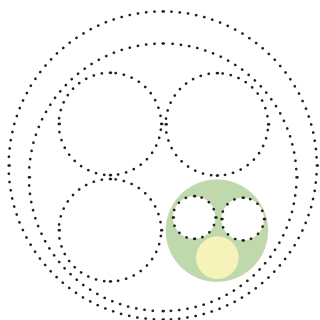
1. People in themselves, apart from the physical spaces, support and create the community - the "collective life". The social infrastructure consists of all of the informal, often overlooked, activity that life consists of.
2. The technical infrastructure and the people maintaining them, for example sanitation and energy, are central parts of keeping people together, and an unjust distribution and access of these to these affect the social life.
3. Social care, meaning for example hospitals, education, and other nurturing labour, including people working in these fields, are traditional spaces for social infrastructure. They support and maintain the community in becoming healthy and safe.
4. Lastly, social infrastructure can be understood as "the public and quasi-public spaces and places that support social connection" (Latham, Layton, 2022, p. 661). In the paper, the authors presented a study that showed how unequal access to safe and functioning public spaces, such as sidewalks, stores, parks, and cafés, had an impact on the mortality rates of the 1995 Chicago heat wave. These spaces are essential in developing good and inclusive urban neighbourhoods.



The pedestrian landscape

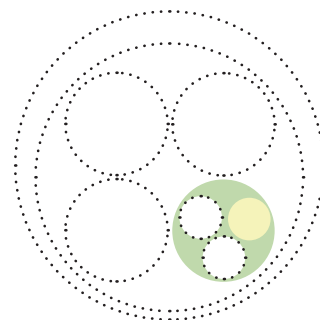
In the book "People cities: The life of legacy of Jan Gehl" (2016), and the book "Cities for people" (2010) the work of Jan Gehl is introduced. He offers an opposition to the modernist view of the city and believes that good architecture isn't about form, but about the interaction between form and life (Gehl, 2010). This way of looking at the city welcomes the people and puts humans life in the centre. He writes about the need of shifting the focus from building cities for cars to cities for pedestrians and cyclists. "All four objectives - lively cities, safety, sustainability, and health - can be strengthened immeasurably by increasing the concern for pedestrians, cyclists and city life in general." (P. 6, Gehl, 2010). This can be evaluated in terms of what is called "walkability" (Gehl, 2010). In the book "Soft city" (2019) by David Sim, the author describes that by walking you spontaneously stop, look around, take in your surroundings and most importantly it offers the most opportunities for connecting with others. Walkability does not only include a person with two legs, but also other help equipment you have when moving around, for example a wheelchair or a stroller (Sim, 2019).

When Gehl (2010) writes about public life he points out different kinds of public life and describes that it isn't only how many people are walking in a place, but also how long they spend time there (Gehl, 2010). An example of this is in Hamar, Norway, which is described in the report "Mer med mindre - Attraktiva och hållbara bomiljöer i mindre byar med människan i centrum" (2015) by Gehl Architects. The architecture firm has had a long collaboration with the city to improve the feeling of increased public life. In Hamar, a public life analysis comparing the main pedestrian street in 1997 and 2013 show a decrease of unique people, but an increase in the amount of time spent in the spaces (Gehl architects, 2015).



Soft city

A development of "the pedestrian landscape" is the book "Soft city" (2019) by David Sim. David Sim in collaboration with Jan Gehl developed the idea of "the city for people" into "the soft city". The notion of soft city originates from the Danish phenomenon "hygge", meaning "the everyday togetherness; the cozy, convivial atmosphere that promotes well being" (Sim, 2019, p. 2). It is a notion that is based on a gentle pragmatism where a quality of life is founded on "taking care of the ordinary and everyday things, and making the best of limited resources. This pragmatism is built on the possibilities and limits of human senses, by obeying laws of nature and living with the realities of climate and changing seasons." (Sim, 2019, p. 2) David Sim's expression soft city means to show how, by just using a bit of care, the harsh reality of everyday things can be softened a bit to allow for a bit more comfort. This is an idea which the authors addresses might seem a bit naive in relation to the urgent state of the world, but he also points out how there is an epidemic of poor health due to people living their life indoors, sitting inside with artificial light, mainly transporting themselves by car, and so connecting others and spending time outdoors is more important than ever. The challenges of this is what the concept of "soft city" addresses. (Sim, 2019)



Natural movement

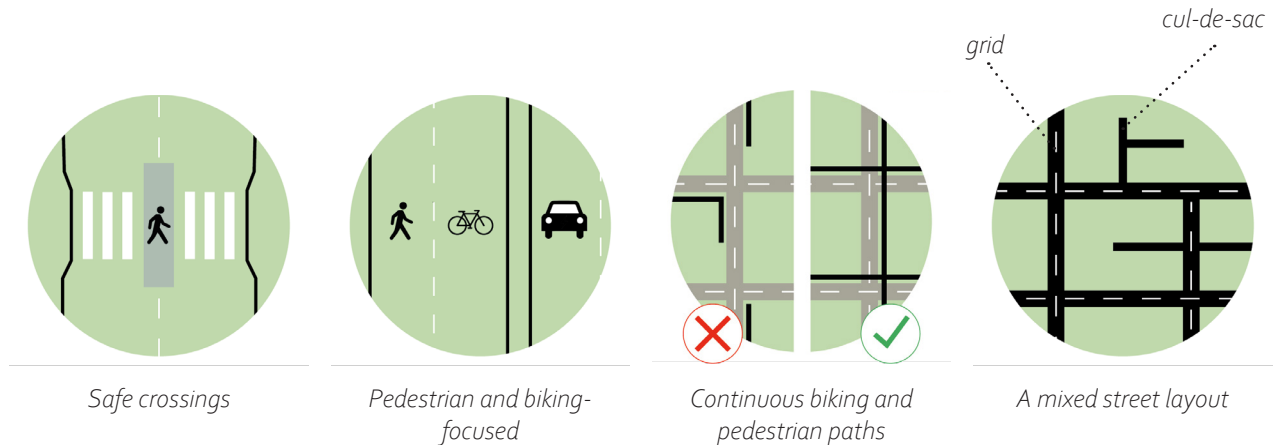
In the paper "Natural movement: or, configuration and attraction in urban pedestrian movement" (1993), Hillier et al. discusses the theory of attraction and spatial configuration, and how they in turn have an effect on movement. The theory of attraction is the natural movement to and from different places. The spatial configuration of the grid layout tells about how streets, squares and pathways are linked together. When referring to movement it is the movement of people, whether in cars or by foot. (Hillier et al, 1993)

The ideas in the paper (Hillier et al, 1993) is theoretical and therefore it is hard to definitely describe the actual causal effects the spatial configuration has on movement, but what can be seen is that places that are more centrally connected have a higher chance of movement. Natural movement is the factor of pedestrian movement that is determined by the grid configuration itself. This does not always consist of the largest component of movement, but contributes to the most consistency. (Hillier et al, 1993)

The natural movement can be described as a relation between the three factors: movement, configuration, and attraction. If there is a presence of attractors, meaning places where you want to go, there will likely be movement. The configuration of a grid layout, like how central some paths are, also affect movement. (Hillier et al, 1993) How the paths are connected and where things are placed are key aspects of understanding how natural movement is created, and in turn how public life occurs in some places but maybe not in others.

Key factors of public life

Based on my research I've summarized and formulated five key aspects in the physical space: streets, public and private, microclimate, activity, and scale, that I see mainly contributes to the increasing of public life. If all of these key factors are fulfilled in a space, there are good conditions for public life to be increased.



Streets

The main aspect and goal of working with the streets to increase public life is to create a safe environment where pedestrians are put at the top of the hierarchy in the street network. How to achieve this can be done in many different ways. Since public life consist of movement, room to walk is one of the main priorities when trying to encourage it.

Increasing room to walk can be working with the street network. In the book "The Routledge Handbook of Planning for Health and Well-Being" (2017) authors of two different chapters: Burton, Giles-Corti et al. describe how a more connected, grid-style street network is better for walkability since it allows for people to choose where they want to walk. They also write how a cul-de-sac layout allow for dead end streets that are calmer where children can play more safely on the street, but since it is concentrated to only one road the amount of traffic can also be higher. According to the authors, a combination of the two: grid layout and calm cul-de-sacs to create both calm and spread out traffic is therefore optimal to achieve the most movement (Giles-Corti et al, Burton, 2017).

The design of the street network is further described in the paper on natural movement by Hillier et al (1993) as working with connectivity and centrality. The authors argue that the way these paths are connected have an impact on whether a path is considered a "through-

movement" or a "to-movement", and that different types of land use might be suitable for the different types of paths. This creates a hierarchy of the grid layout with some paths being more central since by choosing it you can reach many other paths. Others are less central, and can be more or less placed in the outskirts of the network (Hillier et al, 1993). These might for example have a cul-de-sac-layout. By thinking of how central a street is, we can get an understanding of why or why not public life exists in this space based on how connected it is to its surroundings.

After defining the street network, increasing movement is also about how the areas are designed. According to Sim in his book (2019) the pedestrians should never have to walk on the car road and should have their own space to walk on. The sidewalk needs to be wide enough for people to walk beside each other, and preferably the same goes for bike lanes (Sim, 2019). This can in turn look differently depending on the road, the speed, the hierarchy in the street network and the context of the area. Sim also writes that it is important to keep both the pedestrians paths and the biking lanes continuous without dead-ends. If the paths need to cross a car road, make sure to keep it safe. This can for example be done by widening the space of the sidewalks, making the crossing shorter and slowing down the traffic. You can also use means in the middle of the road to highlight the crossing and offer a place to stop before crossing the second road lane. (Sim, 2019)



Public and private

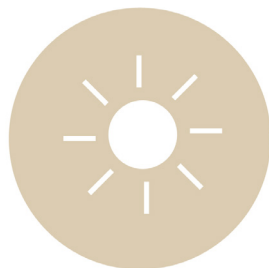
By defining the public spaces as either public or private and also defining the zones in-between, it is easier to guide a person in how to act and what to do in a certain space. It also defines different senses of ownership according to Burton in the chapter "Mental well-being and the influence of place" in the book "The Routledge Handbook of Planning for Health and Well-Being" (2017), which can encourage people to spend time in the public space since they feel like they can partly claim it as their own. For example if you want people living in a residential area to use the yard next to their house, chances of them spending more time there increases if they feel like it is a safe space. If so, people might sit on their balconies or feel comfortable enough to leave toys on the ground in the playground for the next day. Sim describes when the space feels private it is easier to see it as an extension of your own home (Sim, 2019).

What makes a space feel public or private can be determined on many things, for example how dense the environment is and how close the everyday functions are to each other. Burton (2017) writes that a higher density environment has the advantages of minimizing the distance between function and thereby encouraging walk. But density done wrong instead turns negative when the privacy is compromised. Therefore Sim (2019) argues that to create identity of a space and an increased ownership we need density with the right mix of functions, uses, and building types, and not solely density

in regards to measurements.

Public and private spaces are based on the experience of a space of being either public, private, semi-public, or semi-private. It is feeling if you are welcomed in a space, if this is your space or if you are a guest. It can also be a question of feeling safe. Burton (2017) gives an example that mixing late night bars with a noisy environment with residential living can cause stress for the residents. At the same time, housing with no commercial properties on the bottom floor can leave the street empty and missing "eyes on the street" which increases the feeling of being unsafe (Burton, 2017). Working with "eyes on the street", a term much used by another urban theorist Jane Jacobs in the book "The death and life of great American cities" (Jacobs, 1961), can look quite different depending if the area is private or public. But in most scenarios completely blank façades should be avoided (Burton, 2017).

In a study done in Melbourne, Australia. 69% of all of the registered activities were done in or around a semiprivate front yard, and the remaining 31% in the streets (Gehl, 2010). These places between a building and the street are called edge zones and can be front yards or entryways, but the most important aspect is that it offers a gradient between what is private and what is public. What is private in this case does not necessarily have to be a home, but it can also be the inside of a store and allowing the store to take place also outside of its entryway. The edge zone is a zone where you linger, which increase the change of social interaction (Burton, 2017).



Sun exposure in the winter and shading in the summer



Block strong winds



Greenery to cool, shade, and block



Building form to regulate temperature

Microclimate

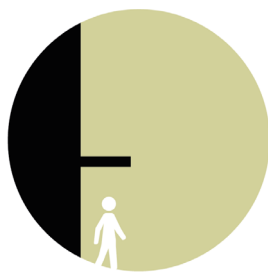
To increase the time spent in a place it is important that it has a good local microclimate, since this increases the enjoyment. The goal of working with microclimate is to create Outdoor Thermal Comfort (OTC), which addresses the liveability and vitality of outdoor areas, improving the physical, environmental, and social conditions in these spaces. (Aghamolaei et al, 2022)

In the paper "A comprehensive review of outdoor thermal comfort in urban areas. Effective parameters and approaches" (2022) by Aghamolaei et al. they divide OTC into two categories: environmental-based and human-based. The environment-based parameters look at the weather, climate and the physical characteristics. In the human-based parameters, the authors found that gender, age category, metabolic rate, and clothing insulation are the most important factor that influences personal comfort. Social aspects also influence the OTC, such as how companionship can increase thermal comfort expectations, or if you are used to being outside in nature you have a higher tolerance towards the climatic conditions (Aghamolaei et al, 2022).

One way of working with microclimate in the Nordic climate is by something called "Winter City Planning" (City of Edmonton, n.d.). In the material "Winter Design Guidelines - Transforming Edmonton into a Great Winter City" (n.d.), the city of Edmonton has developed guidelines on how to design spaces from the perspective of a colder climate. This can be to avoid light-coloured

materials since the dark materials absorb heat better allowing it to passively heat spaces (City of Edmonton, n.d.). Another guideline is trying to block strong winds since they make spaces feel colder. This can be done by forming buildings to let the air flow on top of the roofs instead of down towards the street (City of Edmonton, n.d.). Meanwhile in a warmer place you might need a larger wind flow to cool off the spaces. The urban heat island effect is when an area retain a lot of heat because of the large amount of activity, a lack of greenery to cool the spaces, and a lot of materials that retain heat such as concrete and asphalt. (National Geographic, n.d.) To create a good climate you need to look at the site's specific climate and preconditions.

An important aspect of a good microclimate is greenery. When planting trees, deciduous trees work well in places where you need to shade in the summer, and let the sun in the winter. Evergreens are a good placement in areas where you want to block the wind to create a more comfortable climate. (City of Edmonton, n.d.) Greenery also has positive effects on the experience of a space. In the book "The Routledge Handbook of Planning for Health and Well-Being" (2017) Corkery writes about the theory of "attention restoration theory", and that people that work and live in high stimulating environments that require long durations of directed attention easily suffer from mental fatigue and diminished attention span. As a recovery from this, the theory suggest being in nature environments which have been shown to, among many things, reduce blood pressure (Corkery, 2017).

*Talkscapes**Developed edge zones**Playful environments*

Activity

The pedestrian landscape is not only about walking, but also about sitting and spending time in a place. We easily associate life in a place with an amount of people, but according to the studies of Gehl (2010) and Gehl architects (2015) - increasing life in a place is equally about getting people to stop and stay. This opens up for many kinds of activities. It can be shorter stops looking into a store-front, or meeting a neighbour in the entryway of a building. It can be longer stops playing in a playground or sitting in a park. Activity could be seen as the consequence of the other key factors since they all connect.

Both Burton (2017), and Giles-Corti (2017) write how increasing movement in the public landscape not only encourage physical activity, but also mental health, increased independence, social interaction, and increased safety with more "eyes on the street". In the paper "Cities Alive - Towards a walking world" (2016) Arup describes how increasing walking can have positive aspects of also economical factors since it can increase visitors and social capital.

Activity often happens along walls since the local climate is the best here. We also feel safer since our backs are protected and we can safely view the surroundings before exiting out into the world. Gehl (2010) describes how staying along the edges is a natural instinct of human behaviour and can be seen in the movement in squares to a conference room during an event. This also

applies to public seating, especially in open spaces. The shaping of the façade can therefore encourage staying by for example having smaller indents to lean on. (Gehl, 2010)

Gehl continues that the seating in public spaces needs to encourage social interaction, and that can be done by creating so called "talkscapes". Two people sitting next to each other in an angle encourages more social interaction since you don't need to turn your head as much when talking. Placing these areas in an environment with good microclimate, good views, and minimal noise also increases the enjoyment. Having to shout because of a lot of traffic noise does not encourage small talk. (Gehl, 2010)

Giles-Corti et al also brings up the importance of creating environments that allow for creativity, exercise and places for all ages in the pedestrian landscape. There are many benefits to incorporating play, for example increasing physical activity, supporting the development of others when trying something new, and social interaction (Giles-Corti et al., 2017). What is a playful environment can be many different things. For example, a boule court, a skate park, outdoor gym or just a fountain to dip your toes in during hot summer days. The activities should be inclusive and safe to not scare away certain groups of people, and should be placed so to not increase the risk of the place being misused. It is also good to include natural environments which aren't "pre-planned" to encourage exploration and experimentation (Giles-Corti et al, 2017).



The human scale

Scale

Even though places all over the world have different, cultural, economical, and social differences, what unites us are the basic needs of stimulation, positive experiences, a nice environment, and the physical "limitations" of how a human works - both physically and mentally.

Corkery describes in her chapter how the researcher Appeltan presents the theory of "prospect-refuge", which can be connected back to the hunter-gatherer era. This means that human beings prefer a position in a setting that allows them to see, have a prospect, but at the same time not be seen, in other words to "hide" or be a "refuge" (Corkery, 2017). Depending on the size and design of a space, this instinct can be more or less encouraged.

Scale is also about the variety in a space. Gehl writes how too monotonous neighbourhood can both feel tricky to orient yourself in, but also does not provide enough visual stimulation (Gehl, 2010). Even though "the beauty is in the eye of the beholder", having a surrounding environment which you find attractive affects your well being. What we find attractive is often linked to memories and associations. To enjoy your environment makes you feel more connected and proud of it. According to Burton (2017), people tend to respond better to buildings with more layering and depth, rather than façades that are experienced as flat (Burton, 2017).

To have a variety in movement in a space creates interest and curiosity - is this space about directing people in a certain way, exploring what is around the corner, or a place that is supposed to evoke a calm and a sort of oasis in the midst of everything else? The scale of the spaces can create different feelings - a large space can both be intimidating and allow you to breathe. In the book "Atmospheres: Architectural Environments - Surrounding Objects" (2006) Peter Zumthor describes how the human scale does not always mean having to be "human sized", but human experienced. This can mean a space experienced by one or by many, in turn give different emotions.

The human scale has different limitations based on the physical and biological functions of the human body. Human bodies move in a particular way, see a certain distance or can hear more or less well. In the book "Cities for people" (2010) Gehl describes these limitations which are presented in the diagram on page 21.

The human scale

Gehl criteria: Scale (p. 34-36, Gehl, 2010)

Sight

300-500 meters

Depending on the background and light we can identify that it is a human rather than an animal or a bush. We can also see events happening on the ground floor of a building or in a public square.

100 meters

We can see general movement and body language.

50-70 meters

When the person approaches we can start to recognize them, notice hair colour and characteristics.

35 meters

In a theatre, because of the slight exaggerated movement and make-up, emotions and body language can be felt.

22-25 meters

On this distance we can read facial expressions and the dominant emotions (happy, sad, angry, etc.) in a normal setting. This becomes even more detailed the closer we get to the person.

0.5-7 meters

On this distance more senses come into play. You see smaller changes in body language, glances, eye movement, blushing, and also experience other sensations such as a physical touch or a smell of perfume.

Sound

50-70 meters

On this distance we can hear a shout for help.

35 meters

One way communication can be held with a loud voice, for example from a stage or in an auditorium.

22-25 meters

Short messages can be exchanged

0.5-7 meters

A genuine conversation can be held. The closer we get the more intimate and detailed a conversation can be.



How?

Ways of working, inclusion, references

References

After getting a better understanding of what public life is and narrowing it down what it can be, and what we talk about when referring to public life in this thesis, we have an idea of what public life is in theory - but how can it look like in practice?

Keeping a centre alive is a struggle common to many municipalities in Sweden, and cities and towns all over the world. The goal is the same: to create welcoming and safe public spaces, but the preconditions on how possible it is to achieve differ largely depending on both the size of the town and the municipality. This does not mean that a small town should only pick references from other small towns. Instead it is good to look at a variation, and later on see what applies to this specific site.

Since many municipalities in Sweden face similar challenges it is good to learn from each other. One example of this is "Livskraftiga kommuner" (2016) which is a report created by Gehl Architects and Region Skåne. The report summarizes a series of workshop together with six connected municipalities during 2015-2016,

and is part of the common structural plan for the region. The aim was to highlight qualities in the individual municipalities and form strategies on how they co-operate beyond their boundaries to, together, create alive municipalities. Another example is the report "Mer med mindre - Attraktiva och hållbara bomiljöer i mindre byar med människan i centrum" (2015) created by Gehl Architects which gathers strategies and examples useful for development in smaller town. By smaller towns they mean towns under 15 000 inhabitants.

To complement the analysed reports an interview with Jonna Ekholm, senior urban strategist, at Gehl Architects who has worked with developing smaller towns has been made to get a better understanding on how the challenges can be worked with in practice and to gather references.

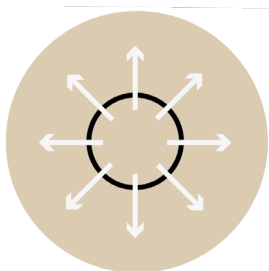
The gathered information and learnings have then been summarized into different ways of working, and references. The references create a better understanding of how the theories in the former chapter can look like in practice.

Ways of working

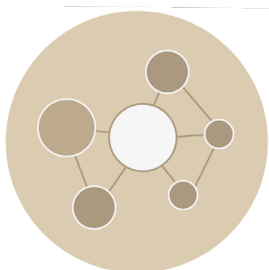
The following two pages present a summary of the learnings from the reports "Livskraftiga kommuner" (2016) is a report created by Gehl Architects and Region Skåne, "Mer med mindre - Attraktiva och hållbara bomiljöer i mindre byar med människan i centrum" (2015) by Gehl Architects, and the interview of Jonna Ekholm at Gehl Architects.

Strategy

To work with increasing life and longevity in towns it is wise to create a strategy on how to work with the questions. The strategies can for example be within in a municipality such as a design programme, or a report within a region to create collaboration between municipalities. By working across municipality borders you can analyse and make use of the different strengths and compensate the weaknesses. Similarly it is important to see ways of collaborating within the municipality towns.



Connect beyond the municipality. Find regional synergies with common process plans to find collaborations and make use of each areas different strengths.

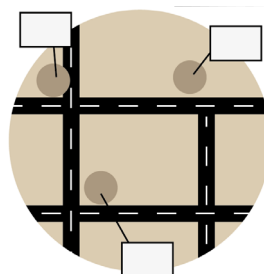


See the different towns within the municipalities in a hierarchy with different strengths and ways of collaborating.

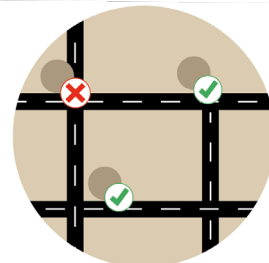
Analysis

In the references "Livskraftiga kommuner" (2016) and "Mer med mindre - Attraktiva och hållbara bomiljöer i mindre byar med människan i centrum" (2015), the writers present ways to start analysing the conditions of the centre and town.

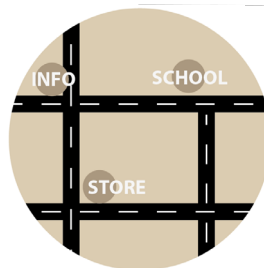
To better be able to identify where interventions are needed and where they have the most impacts, you have to analyse the existing spaces, their scale and how they feel.



Map out where people meet and life happens. Look both at the amount of time and how many people. See both the life on the street and the "invisible life" happening inside of the buildings.



Map out the spaces that support life, such as streets and squares and focus on where people feel safe or unsafe.

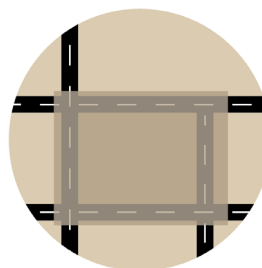


Map out the buildings and their context. Focus on density, scale and design on the entrance level.

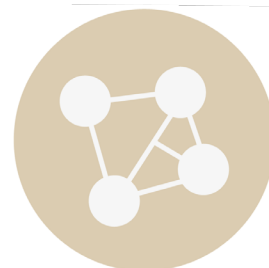
Interventions

After you've analysed and found different types of projects or when you start identifying projects there are some general factors to be aware of. In the same references by Gehl architects and Region Skåne, they've gathered some learnings on how to implement projects and interventions.

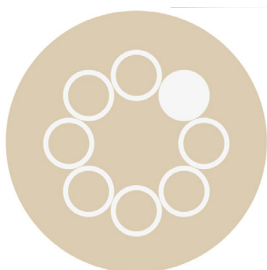
The learnings help to create different perspectives you can use when developing a centre and also developed both the analysis and the strategy.



Concentrate the centre, open up for more than commercial activities, and create activities which activate the spaces all year around.



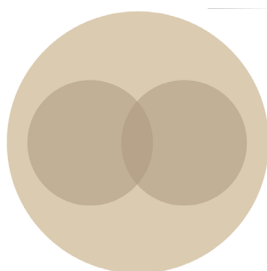
Connect the spaces. Make it easy for people to move between different focal points. Focus on mending the holes in the network and breaking barriers - both mental and physical.



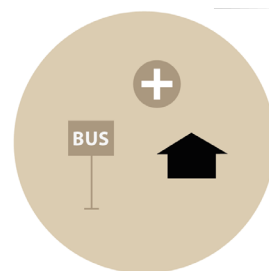
See the individual interventions as a part of the whole development.



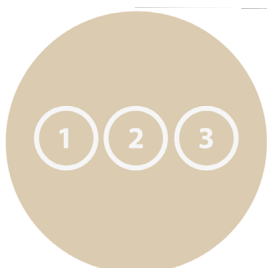
Think of accessibility, not solely as a way of reaching something but reaching it on equal terms. Everyone is at some point a pedestrian even though they got there by car.



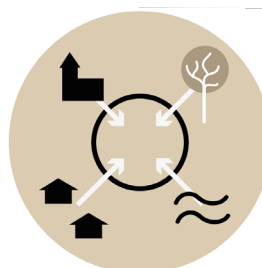
Find areas where interventions overlap and can collaborate to reduce double labour.



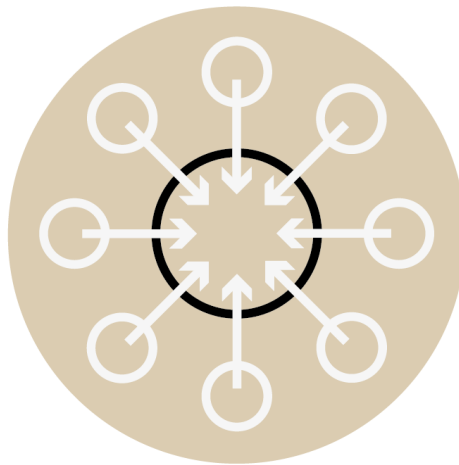
Focus on everyday spaces, such as bus stops, and use them as catalysts for development. Design the areas with care and see if multiple places for errands can be combined to create synergies.



Dare to prioritize. Not everything can be done at once.



Make use of the local context and bring in the nature and history to strengthen the identity.



Invite everyone to participate in the public space - create a variety of backgrounds, age and occupation. Include and engage public and private actors early in the process to make people feel involved and important opinions are brought out.

Inclusion

Another aspect that Gehl architects bring in their report (2015) up is inclusion and including different actors in the shaping of public spaces. These actors can for example be the inhabitants, the municipality (different functions: property management, strategic planning, etc.), business life, and consultants. An important part when both finding the places and looking at suggestions of interventions, is knowing the target group and to include and involve the local community, the users, in the process.

Target group

When doing an analysis of a placement for a specific type of intervention we make it easier for ourselves if we think about who are supposed to use this area. This does not necessarily exclude other people from using it, but instead we apply a specific "theme" onto this place. This is because there is a risk if we try to design something for everyone, creating a too generic space, it will apply to no one.

A place can have multiple target groups and their needs should be balanced together to find a common ground, or different zoning focused on different groups.

Saying this it is still important to create an inclusive space, independent of any physical or mental disabilities, so that as many people as possible from all social groups feel welcome. This is a foundational factor of municipal

and democratic work. The public spaces have to be inviting for everyone and accessible on equal terms. The goal in the long run is to create independence and inclusiveness for all citizens.

Involvement

To better anchor and engage people it is important to include people in the process of developing their local area. This creates a larger transparency towards the planning in the municipality, and also a stronger personal connection to the site which can increase the chance of the place being taken care of by the inhabitants. This can be done in different ways and on various levels, for example a form to fill in, a walk together at night to point out unsafe spaces, or collaboration with a local association such as a "byalag". By encouraging engagement from the citizens in public spaces, voluntary work can help to expand the available resources and minimize the budget of the project, which is of key importance when the economical means are low. This does not mean that the municipality in any way takes advantage of their citizens by not paying for some of the work in public space, but instead it can be a way of people feeling ownership of a space.

Involving citizens can be done in different ways and on different levels. The outcome of the level of involvement needs to be clear in the process by the ones who are managing it. There is for example a difference between making people be involved in the process or being engaged.



Connect with the association life and non-profit work that many people are a part of, and see where collaboration can happen.

On the community engaged platform WeSolve Better Together, Yunyue Pen describes a hierarchy in four steps of community participation: Information, Consultation, Collaboration, and Empowerment (WeSolve, 2024).

Information

By giving information to the inhabitants through for example a newsletter, an information meeting or through a website you let people know what is happening.

In general this type of involvement is a one way communication. In an information meeting there might be a chance of people also responding and reacting to a plan or a decision. This creates an engagement where the initiative of interaction is on the participant.

Consultation

A consultation is a start of a communication between the community and the manager of the project. It can be done by interviews, polls, surveys or a suggestion box. The wishes are taken into consideration and maybe asked to be developed. The public influence is limited since the decision-making is still on the managing of the project.

Collaboration

A collaboration is dialogue based, for example through workshops, mapping, idea collection and voting. The decisions are made together, for example through a dedicated work groups with representatives from different areas. There is an organization of events, and different tasks can be distributed.

Empowerment

When working with empowerment you give full control to the citizens and there is a continuous dialogue between for example the municipality and the community. This can be made by organizing events with workshops for the inhabitants and implementing the ideas created by the people, or community driven committees in collaboration with the municipality.

Odlå torg, Gaia Arkitektur

An example of a project which worked with involving the community in developing public space is "Odlå torg" (2023). "Odlå torg" was a research project done by Gaia arkitektur in collaboration with Region Dalarna and with funding from ArkDes. The project took place during a couple of months in 2021 in the village Sollerön, Dalarna, Sweden, and consisted of temporarily transforming parts of a parking lot together with local inhabitants into a central local square for the village. The transformation took place five times during the summer and tested different ways in which the square can be changed. The results of the project were documented in a report, and a handbook which pedagogically describes the 23 steps in how to create similar types of projects in other areas.

The project was successful, and a key factor was to involve the civil society to make it feel more anchored to the local context and to make people feel responsible for it. The projects also showed how using temporary structures can act as tests and a catalyst for further development and that the interventions can be constructed with quite simple measures. Paintings on the ground, renting a food truck and putting up some light can have a large impacts on the public life during an event.

Before starting the project everyone involved had to be on the same page regarding the following five principles for local development:

1. "The parts constitute of the whole, meaning that life in the whole society is a sum of all of the different local engagements and relations. Collaboration, not competition, creates strength.
2. It starts and begins in the physical place, meaning that the local places' base is its natural and human resources. The other scales, such as the municipality, region, and nation are organisational systems invented to, among many things, grasp the larger context, develop knowledge, and provide resources.
3. Humans are a part of nature, meaning that the natural systems are what make up our living conditions. We are active carers of our place.
4. We have a common goal, meaning that increasing life in each place is to increase life for the entirety.
5. Everyone is responsible, meaning that we all have our different roles to play. The challenge is to find collaborating forms which guides us towards the common goals, and avert action counts and affects. "

(translated by author, Gaia arkitektur, 2023, p. 5)

Inspirational projects

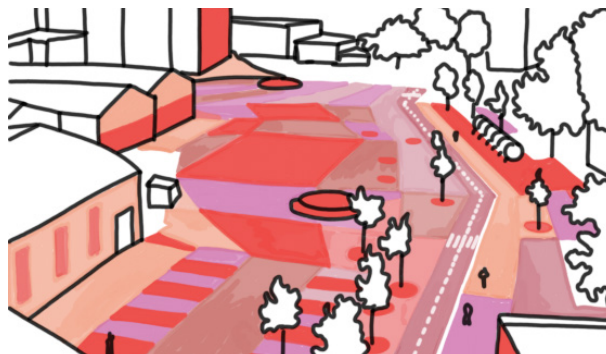
The six projects on this page show different ways of working with inclusion and to activate public spaces.

Large cities



Superblock, Barcelona, Spain

Gathering the traffic and turning the closed off streets into outdoor "living rooms" for the nearby blocks.



Superkilen, Copenhagen, Denmark

Involving the citizens ideas into the development of a public path and turning it into a strong statement. Different coloured ground is an easy way to divide zones.

Mid size cities



Bokaler, Malmö, Sweden

Turning housing façades into active ones by incorporating public functions. Narrowing down a wide street to gather the people walking.



Sommargator, Uppsala, Sweden

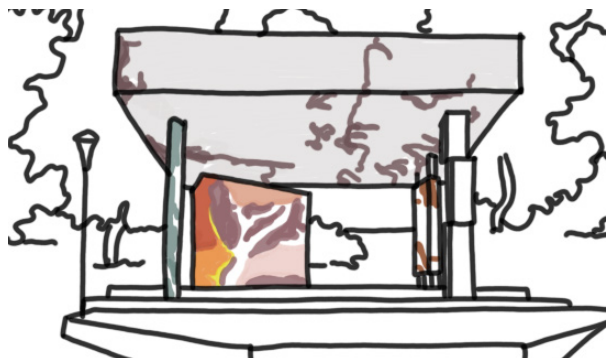
Temporarily turning a car road into a one way street during the summer. Giving the priority to the pedestrians and cyclists, and placing seating opportunities.

Small towns



Odla torg, Sollerön, Sweden

A temporary project working with the local community and turning parts of a parking lot into a new square.



Rock stage, Tibro, Sweden

Taking the local culture into consideration and involving the local school when developing the meeting spot.



Älvkarleby
municipality

Where?

The site

The site

By defining what public life is and how it can look like, we have a framework and perspective when going into a specific site. Since the aim is to see how public life can be increased in a small town centre, a site has been chosen which fit into a rural context and that have a harder time attracting public life.

Even though the method is developed to be able to be used more generally it is crucial to also connect the method to the local context and circumstances of the site. This is so we can see to the specific needs of the people which most likely are the ones who make up the existing public life.

Skutskär

Älvkarleby municipality (Wikipedia, 2024)

Inhabitants: 9 552 people (2024)

County: Uppsala county

Central town: Skutskär

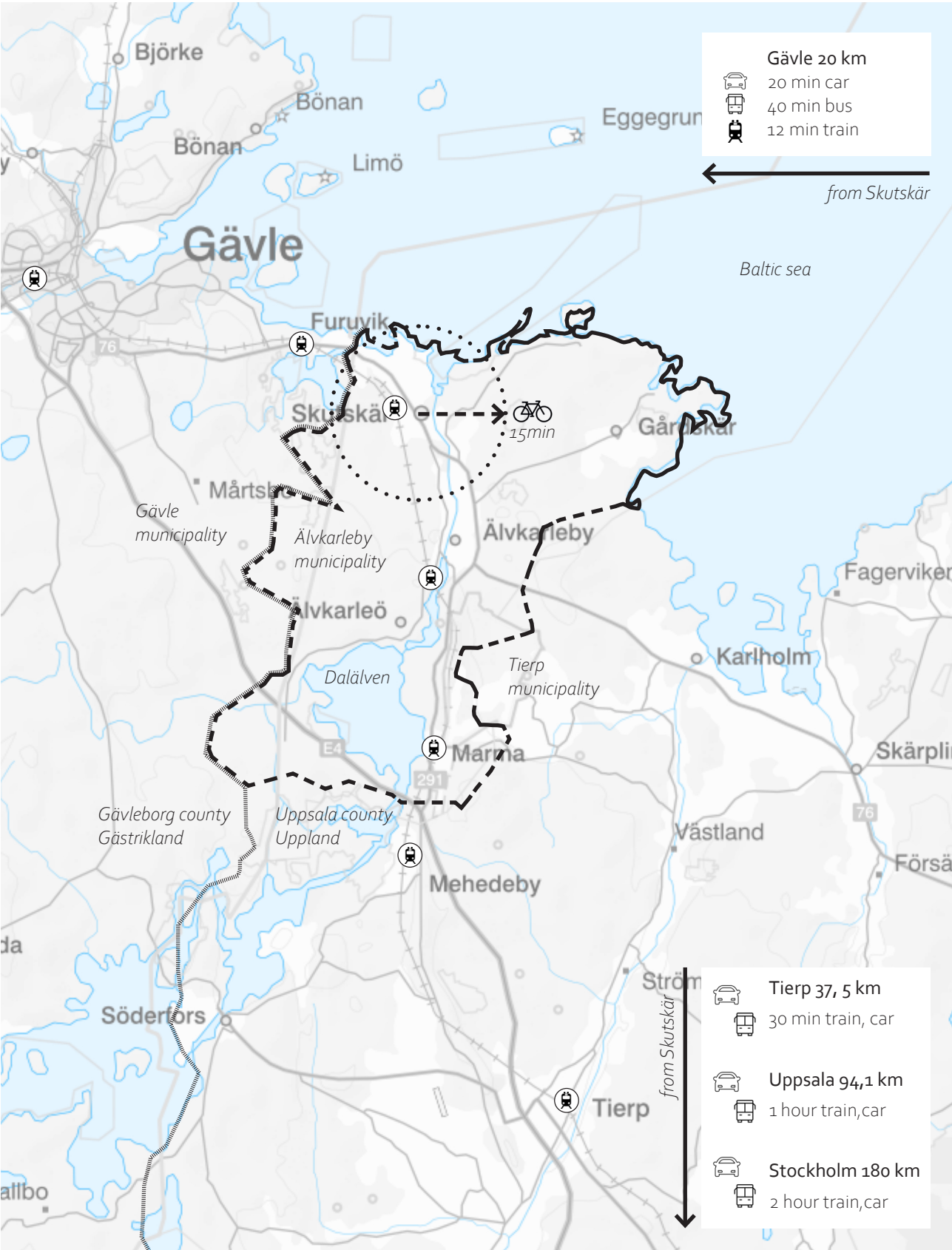
Inhabitants Skutskär: 6 606 people (2023)

Skutskär is located in Älvkarleby municipality and borders the northern part of Uppland and Uppsala county. Dalälven, which starts in Djurås, Dalarna, and runs through the municipality has been an important aspect from both an industrial and recreational point of view for the area.

Älvkarleby municipality is closely connected to industries such as Stora Enso and Vattenfall, as well as nature experiences and fishing. The good connections to public transport in the larger towns makes good places for housing when commuting to the nearby larger cities and therefore nowadays many live in the municipality and work in one of the closer cities.

Where? The site

Älvkarleby municipality



Älvkarleby municipality is located in the north of Uppland, by the Baltic sea and in Uppsala country. The largest closest city is Gävle. This creates a stronger connection for the municipality to Gävleborg country than the city of Uppsala.

Skutskär centre



Many of the center functions are gathered along Centralgatan. The center is surrounded by the railway, villa areas, and the river, Bodaån. There is a closeness to the water, but Gävlevägen forms a barrier between it and the centre..

Historical context

The history of Skutskär can be traced back hundreds of years, and has its strongest connection to the Harnäs mill that was located in the northern part of Skutskär in the middle of the 1600's. A blast furnace and a hammer forge was established, which led to many workers' housing being built, and a manor house. Many Walloon people came here to work and the mill owned land from Harnäs to Bodaån, north of today's centre. (Älvkarleby kommun, 2023)

In the late 1800s, the mill was developed into a saw mill which was the start of today's paper pulp industry, founded in 1901. During that time the owners of the mill and the pulp factory grew together in to one. The industry was a large part of Skutskär, and not only provided labour to the inhabitants but built up the society. Housing, shops, and schools were all established in the regimen of the company. (Älvkarleby kommun, 2023)

In the 1800's, parallel to this society, south of Bodaån, the existing farms that had cultivated the surrounding land, was complemented with new housing, and craft farms which were divided into a strict grid-network. This area got the name Bodarna (translated to "the Sheds"), since many of the villages names ended with -bodarna. (Älvkarleby kommun, 2023)

In the 1860's the whole area became Älvkarleby municipality along with municipal reform. (Wikipedia, 2025) The municipality had a societal responsibility, but the centre was still connected to the industry. In the 1940's, when Älvkarleby municipality started planning for a new municipal centre it was placed on the area of Bodarna, outside of the company land. In the 1950-60's the municipality got larger economical means and the societal responsibility for public services was shifted from the industry to the municipality (Darphin, 1980).

The development of the centre came to be included as a part of the "million program areas", which was a governmental program for housing in the 1960-70's in many areas of Sweden. This developed came to strongly characterize the structure and design of Skutskär centre. The expansion of the centre meant that many of the older houses were demolished in the 1960's and 70's, and the older traces can mostly be seen in the wide road street structure. (Älvkarleby kommun, 2023)

The existing street network is largely defined by Gävlevägen, road 76, which at that time was a part of the high-road from Uppsala to Gävle. This highway was later on replaced by highway 13 and E4 which runs further away from the towns. The large infrastructure such as road 76, and the railway, but also the access to water and seafaring before the introduction of the railway have all been fundamental aspects of the development of Skutskär. (Älvkarleby kommun, 2023)

The old thoroughfare until 1940's (Centralgatan)



Photo 1: AB Flygtrafik, 2021a. Skutskär, Älvkarleby socken, Uppland 1936. In the left upper corner you can see Skutskär church.

Placement of railway station until 2006.

Placement of the old centre connected to the industry.

National road E4 1962-1977 (Gävlevägen)

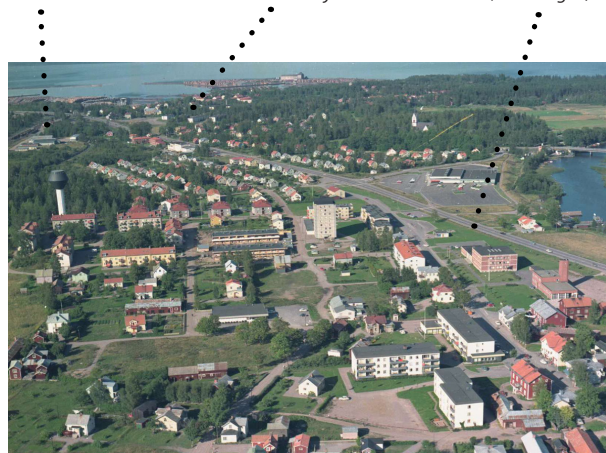


Photo 2: AB Flygtrafik, 2021b. Skutskär, Älvkarleby socken, Uppland 1967. In the right corner you can see Skutskär church, and below that what is today a Willys store, and further down the municipal house.

Planned development

The municipality has an ongoing work of developing their centre which can be seen in documents such as the design program (2023), the general plan (2020) and the ongoing or finished new detail plans. The studies varies

in detail level. Below the current ongoing or decided detail plans are showed. The town has the ambition of expanding, and a suggestions of further development and how that could look like is shown in the design program (2023).



General plan (2020)

Strengthened passage

Ongoing or newly decided detail plans (2022-2025)

Housing/commerce/parking

Green areas

Interviews

Representatives from the municipality and Älvkarleby Hus

Interviews with representatives from the municipality and the municipal housing company have been done to get a picture of Skutskär centre from the planners perspective. The representatives came from mixed departments, for example the culture and leisure department, and the trade and industry development department, but everyone has in some way been involved in the development of Skutskär centre.

The descriptions and needs of the centre could be summarized in these key points:

- **Further development of edge zones and stores** (dark entrances, larger edge zones for the stores, outdoor seating is missing, spread out placements, hidden entrances, some square market places, short temporal contracts to allow for "pop-ups", more activities of nights and weekends)
- **There is a lack of meeting spots** (cafés, central points, public art, spontaneous meetings, more playful elements for all ages, smaller zones creating a public "living room", cosy seating areas)
- **Car dominated structure and monotonous** (lacks details, large and similar scale, road as borders, squares instead of squares, relatively uniform 1970's structure and expression)
- **Unclear structure** (not very inviting, unclear entrances, protracted, scattered, more clear biking and walking paths - but there are good walking distances, undefined borders)
- **More greenery, less lawns**

The development of the centre has been an ongoing process during many years. One of the initiatives of the group was community dialogues based upon design proposals of the central walking street done by one of the upper secondary classes in Gävle. The public were then invited to give comments on the proposals and on the development of the centre in general. One of the interventions that was put into practice was the permanent closing of the south of Centralgatan. The material from the people's dialogue was later turned into a proposal done by an architect office, but when the pandemic hit the focus had to shift to the main functions of the municipality and the centre development had to wait. After the pandemic, the work continued and the design program was made. This is where the development stands today.

Working with all kinds of development there are special challenges to take into consideration. When asking the interviewees of what these challenges are, many answered: the limited economy, lack and labour resources, and everyone working towards the same goal.

What are the challenges?*

- There needs to be a more long term political plan which has a clear direction independent of who is on the political power. There needs to be a development which the municipality has the energy to maintain and upkeep the drive. There need to be a development plan, someone who has a drive for it, and a wallet with money. To have a will is good, but to see it through and get it done is better.
- The centre development group which has been active for many years has not landed in any new concepts. There is a "clash" between an architectural vision and the economic reality. It should have its foundation in what the residents need in regards to shopping and service, and what functions need a physical space (for example. service, café, repair shop). This is more important with the increase of E-commerce.
- The centre lacks a clear identity.
- It is a challenge to attract tourists to the centre.
- There are a lot of opinions to balance.
- Traffic issues such as noise, the road 76 as a barrier, and trucks parking by Preem are challenges.
- Large rainfalls, geotechnical issues, storm water management, and potential pollutions from for example filling masses are challenges.
- The tight economy and lack of resources are a challenges. Building an attractive centre costs a lot of money and needs labour resources. This work is tricky to accommodate in a larger extent in the existing employments, and hiring consultants for it is expensive.
- There are quite a lot of voluntary associations, for example "Active women", the sports clubs, the civil defence groups, and "Bandyklubben" who run both the second hand store and the community facilities at "Holmarna". There is no particular associations involved in the centre development. It is harder to get people to be engaged into something new. People put so much effort in their kids activities, so to have something other on the side is too much.

**The answers are translated from Swedish and summarized by the author.*



Peoples survey

In a survey sent out to the local Facebook-group "Du vet att du är från Skutskär-Älvkarleby-Furuviik med omnejd om du..." 61 people answered between the 17th - 18th of August 2023. The goal of the survey was to get a feeling of peoples experience of Skutskär centre, how the centre is used today, and what they feel is missing. Selected questions are summarized below.

The majority of the participants live in Skutskär or nearby, and the ages vary from the age groups 19-25 years to 65 years or older. Most people visited Skutskär centre a few times a month to a few times a week, and mostly during the afternoon and day, but also late afternoon. Few people are there in the morning. The most common activity to do in the centre is to shop for food or other articles. The second most common activity is going to the library.

Regarding if they like spending time in Skutskär centre, the majority of participants are either ambivalent or avoid the centre if not needed. When asked why, 32 people answered the question why they didn't like it and 15 people why they liked it. Why the participants didn't like it was mainly because there is nothing to do, and that it is an unpleasant environment to be in. No one described it as being unsafe. The participants who enjoyed spending time in Skutskär centre described it as feeling safe, and that it is cosy.

How would you describe Skutskär centre?

The centre of Skutskär is described in many ways. Some of the words used are boring, worn out, simple, functional, bland, safe, and small. The green areas are very appreciated, especially the newly built park. One person describes the centre as not feeling like a centre, another one that the centre is a place you just pass by. My interpretation of the answers is that Skutskär centre is a simple town centre which has what you need on a everyday basis, but it is not very aesthetically pleasing or enjoyable for many of the participants - apart from the newly built park.

What do you miss in the centre of Skutskär? What would make you spend more time there?

The many ideas on what is missing and what would make them want to spend more time in Skutskär centre can be summarized in these points below. Many of the answers wish for some type of outdoor seating by a café, also a better playground, and in general nicer looking spaces.

- More green spaces
- Seating, places to hang out
- Seating for elderly to sit and watch people pass by
- Something with water that connects to the closeness of Bodaån
- **Outdoor seating by a café or restaurant** (most requested)
- **Café** (most requested)
- The model of the old building needs to be fixed
- Playground
- Nice roads to stroll around on
- Clean up the façades
- Bakery
- Town square feeling is missing
- More smaller stores
- Housing
- "Everything"
- Nicer atmosphere
- Accessibility
- Market stands on a square
- Area with food trucks
- Green spaces
- Closed off car road (Centralgatan)
- No car traffic
- More places to walk
- Rebuilding the parking lot outside of coop so you don't need to turn on the walking/biking path
- More adults in the centre to calm the younger kids

"The new park is nice, but except for that it's boring."*

"Larger playground, café/outdoor seating, more beautiful façades, the library's entrance should be more visible/enhanced."*

"Functional. Small. The most important is there. Nice environment, but it isn't taken care of."*

"The feeling isn't of a centre, it's in need of development."*

"Generally speaking, the centre feels a bit flat and sprawled, a bit fragmented."*

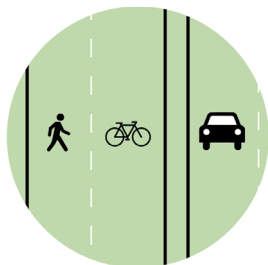
"It would have been nice if the closeness to the water, i.e. Bodaån, would have been clearer. A "square-feeling" is also missing and more smaller shops with interesting content."*

*The quotes have been translated by the author from Swedish.



Where?

Analysis, mapping, S.W.O.T.



Streets

Analysis of pedestrian paths, the types and their continuation.



Scale

A study of level of detail and scale in relation to the human body. Looking at distances and sight lines.



Microclimate

Analysis of the sun, wind and microclimate conditions.



Public and private

Study of places which might be perceived as public or private. A study of active façades and edge zones.



Activity

A mapping of existing meeting spots, destination, unsafe and safe places.

Analysis

Based on the key factors: streets, scale, microclimate, public and private, and activity, different analyses can be made on the site to get a better understanding of why the spaces are experienced the way they do. For example, a café might be doing bad because their outdoor seating lacks a good microclimate, or the centre feel larger and less accessible because there is a lack of continuous pedestrian paths. Analyses can also help to better explain why one seating is more popular than another one - maybe the scale on the second one is too large which makes the area feel unsafe?

In this chapter I've looked at how you can translate the key factors for public life into analyses and picked out different ways of mapping connected to important aspects for each one of them.

The analyses are then summarized and combined. By combining them we can find areas that might need interventions to improve one or multiple key factors and in turn improve the chance of increasing time people want to spend in that particular space. This together with a S.W.O.T. analysis give a foundation on where to place interventions.

Streets



The pathways only for pedestrians (and some combined with cyclists) are somewhat continuous, but contains some gaps. Some crossing could be made safer by signalling pedestrians presence, for example narrowing the road.

Examples of pedestrian paths



Centralgatan - central pedestrian street. Former car road which needs more of the human scale and active edge zones.



Pedestrian path from the railway station to the center. Hard to navigate and interrupted sight lines.



Sidewalk towards the center. A hierarchy with the car in focus because of the wide roads and narrow sidewalks.



Gävlevägen - pedestrian and bike path. The high speed traffic flows demands a larger separation of traffic.



Crossing Hårstavägen and Centralgatan. Pedestrian crossings, but no clear visual signals of it.



The transition from the separated traffic flows into a mixed traffic road in a villa area next to the center.

Public and private

Examples of edge zones



Active bottom floor can also mean residential balconies, like along Tebogatan. The balconies increase eyes on the street which makes it feel safer.



Passage to the library square. A small roof to stand under along the façade encourage stopping, but there is a lack of entrances which makes the area feel a bit unsafe.



Store front along Hårstagatan. Parking for bikes and big commercial windows invite activity.



A square by the crossing of Årstagatan - Centralgatan. The space feels too open to spend time in. More active façades could encourage more movement to the square.



The main walking path from the train station to the centre lacks both clear sight lines and public activity in the edge zones which makes it feel more private.



Centralgatan - central pedestrian street. The façades to the right in the picture lack activity. To feel more alive it needs to be developed with more engaging architecture.



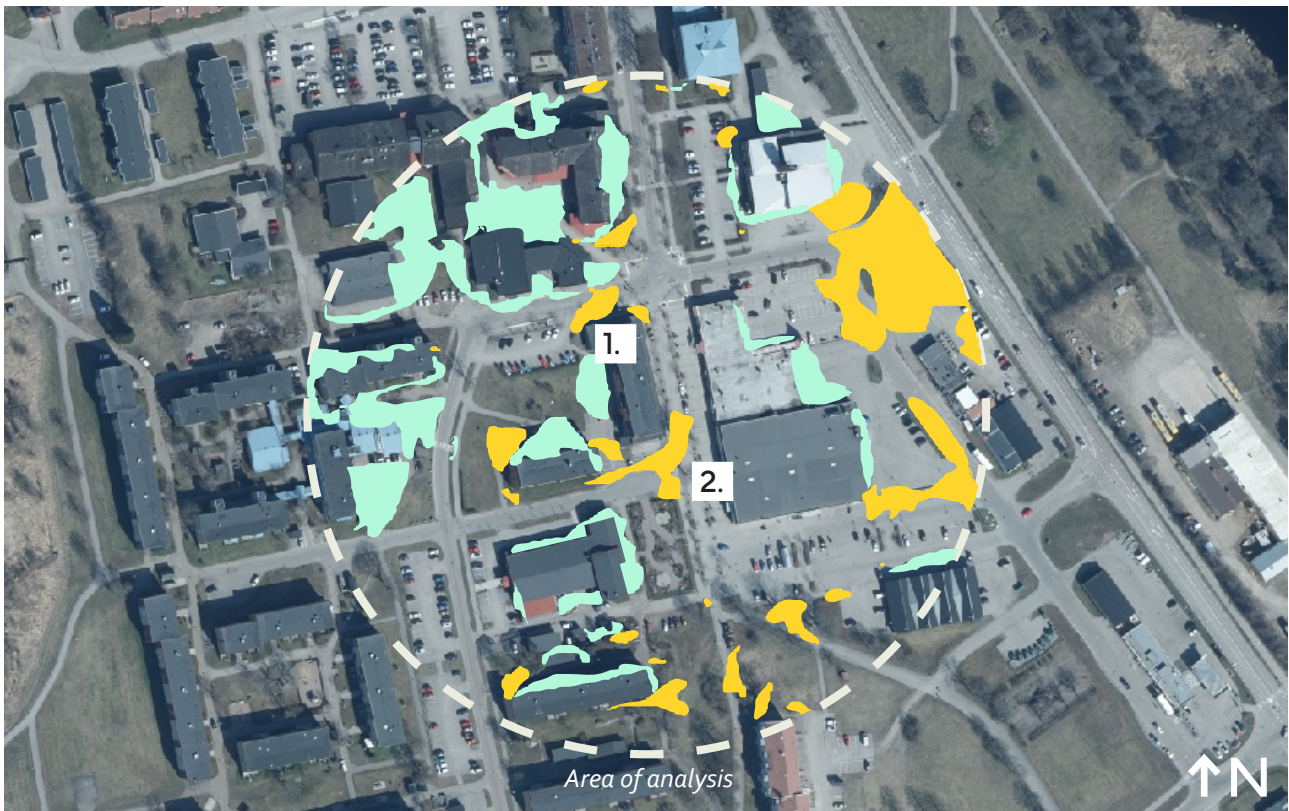
A lot of activity happens by the entrances. This map shows the main entrance placements in the centre and how private and public the spaces are experienced.

Experienced spaces

- Public spaces
- Semi-public spaces
- Semi-private spaces
- Private spaces
- Entrances and active bottom floors

Microclimate

General comfort analysis



The evaluation in the analysis is based on a combination of wind, sun exposure and temperature, and shows an average comfort throughout the year. The more dense the buildings forms are the better the microclimate become. In the more open areas, winds are stronger which makes it less appropriate for spending longer amounts of time.

Microclimate analysis, General comfort, Lawson LDDC criteria. Source: Autodesk Forma

■ Sitting On average 2.5 m/s, 5% of the time	not marked	■ Standing On average 4.0 m/s, 5% of the time	■ Strolling On average 6.0 m/s, 5% of the time
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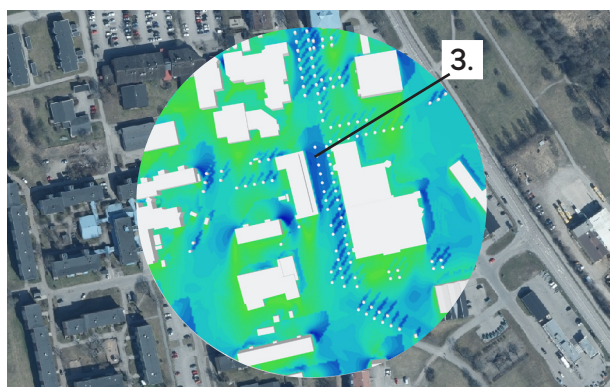


The store fronts along Ågatan have a worse microclimate which can decrease the chances of people wanting to go window shopping there.



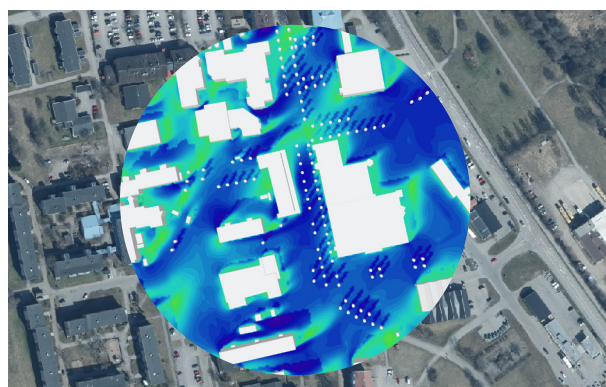
Placement of buildings in combination with the different wind directions in a location can create wind tunnels of wind spirals which could be the case in this area. Because of this, even though its sunny it has a worse microclimate.

Wind analysis



Source: Autodesk Forma

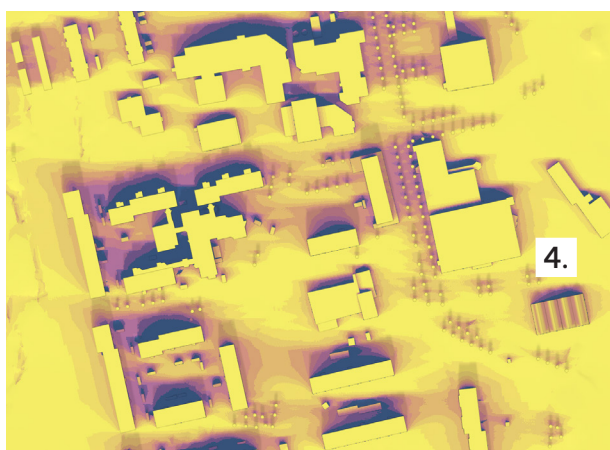
May, 14:00 o'clock. Wind from north
(second strongest wind direction)



Source: Autodesk Forma

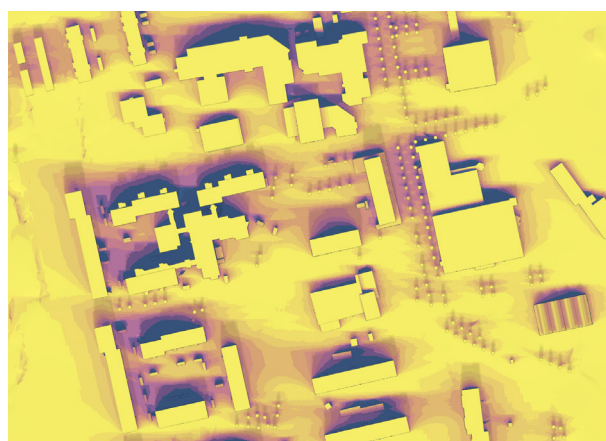
May, 14:00 o'clock. Wind from southwest
(main wind direction)

Sun analysis



March 15 - 14:00 o'clock.

Source: Autodesk Forma



May 15 - 14:00 o'clock.

Source: Autodesk Forma



Both the main and second strongest wind direction comes through the main centre street. Because of this we don't want to make the street too narrow or with too high buildings closest to the area of walking. This is to not bring down wind spirals or tunnels. Instead we want to block the wind from the south and north.



Some of the store entrances are turned to the north. This makes them quite dark throughout many hours of the year. The store entrances in the photo are quite dark which might not be suitable for café outdoor seating, but they have a good microclimate which encourages people to stop and window shop.

Activity



Activity might be more or less increased depending on how the space is perceived. In the design program (2023), a workshop was done pinpointing safe, unsafe spaces and destinations (Älvkarleby kommun et al., 2023)



Existing meeting places



Entrance to health care services. A roof protects the people walking in and out of the entrance, but it could be developed with some seating for those waiting for a taxi.



Square outside of the library which is the only public function. The size of the square is good, but it lacks activity.



The central bus stop. The space is marked as feeling unsafe, which might hinder people taking the bus. The bus stop is a bit hidden from the general flow of people.



The new pocket park. The park is marked as a safe space. It is enclosed, but still has a good overview of its surroundings.



Entrance to Coop. A large canopy outside of the entrance, space outside to put up a small market tent, and a bench for sitting all help to increase public life.

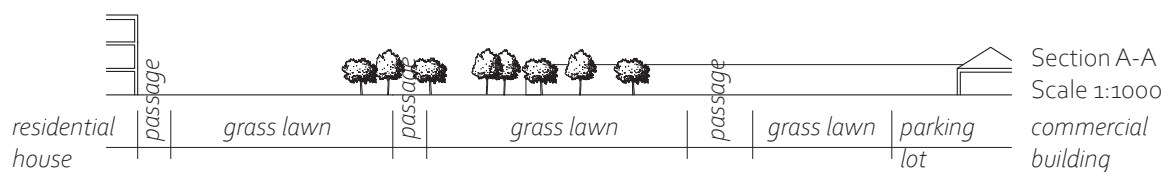


Entrance to Komvux. Many people stop and talk outside of the education centre after being there. This place could be developed to encourage even more interaction.

Scale



According to Gehl (2013) a distance of 500m diameter is a good area in which to concentrate a centre. When applying this to Skutskär we see that many of the centre functions are included, but some are also excluded.



Some of the spaces in the centre are quite large which can create a desolate feeling if it lacks activity. The sections shows how the space is divided. The large grass lawns could become more inviting if divided into different, smaller zones.

Examples of level of detail and distances

Large scale



Gävlevägen. Because of the visual separation from the centre and the lack of clear pedestrian presence, it is not obvious that you have now entered the centre to the left.



The center ends in the south with a large lawn which has a bigger potential of signalling that this is the end. Here the defined spaces blend out into open undefined spaces.

Medium scale



The main walking path leading to the centre from the station has quite open spaces and lacks clear signals that you are entering the centre.



The tree alley along Centralgatan helps to frame the street and makes it more intimate and smaller which can help to lower the speed.

Small scale



The enclosed small park outside of the library makes people feel protected and calm.



The library has the potential of also expressing it out onto the street. Without the sign, you would not be able to tell from a far that this was a central public function.

Summary of analysis

Streets

There is a lack of design-communication in transitions from mixed traffic areas to the separated traffic areas to the solely pedestrian areas. This creates confusion for the pedestrians and cyclists which in turn can lead to unsafe crossings. In the separated areas there are also gaps in the network which create non-continuous pathways and also a risk of confusion and unsafe traffic situations.

In general there are some main pathways which more or less encourage pedestrian walking, and as mentioned are more or less safe. Some of the main pathways connect in different crossings which make them more likely to have activity.

The different streets achieve different things depending on their design. The main shopping street is quite recently cut off from car traffic which creates a calmer and more safe area for pedestrians. The main car road, Gävlevägen, has a clear separation between the pedestrians path and car road. This makes it safer for the pedestrians and cyclists, but it can also increase the speed when passing through. Working with the streets and narrowing down the car roads can change the hierarchy from being car-focused to pedestrian-focused and in turn encourage more pedestrian activity.



The map marks the main pedestrian paths and its connections to other paths.

Public and private

In a small town it is difficult to rely on active edge zones to come from stores, especially when the centre also is quite large in size with spread out functions. Therefore it is equally as important to look at all the entrances and balconies.

In the analysis the main passages aren't the most active, and only some of the stores are natural to pass by when walking which makes them more of destinations and less of spontaneous drop ins. To make the pathways feel safer and more active, the façades - both public and residential, needs to be activated in other ways and more spaces for outdoor activities increased. This in turn is also hard since many of the residential entrances are facing towards the yard and there is a lack of balconies on the other side.

If a space is too closed off or sight lines are blocked, it signals more of a private feeling. This can be used to create a more safe feeling in a private courtyard, but it can also create worry if the spaces are too dark and it is supposed to be a public space. Some of the areas which are supposed to be experienced as public need some more eyes on the street to feel more public.



The map marks the façades in the most public areas and along the main pedestrian areas which lacks active façades and eyes on the street.

Microclimate

There are quite a lot of open spaces, which increases the wind flow and allows for less space with a comfortable microclimate. The wind makes it feel colder than it actually is.

The open spaces and quite low building height also create sunny spaces, but the sunny spaces might not be utilized in the best way since many of the entrances are turned towards north and becomes dark spaces.

The better areas are more enclosed, like the library square, and the worst ones are in general crossings or along the main pedestrian paths. The bad microclimate by entrances or along main pathways can hinder people wanting to spend time there which decrease activity.

Activity

Some of the meeting spaces that naturally exist, for example entrances to shops, or the bus stop have the potential of being improved. This can for example be to allow stores to spill out more of their business out onto the street outside - without intruding on the walking and biking paths, or to open up façades showcasing the activity on the inside.

There are more safe than unsafe spaces, especially connected to the area around the library square and the bus stop. The space considered safe are characterized by having a lot of greenery. The unsafe spaces could be characterized by spaces which lead to uncertainties, for example the narrow dark passages by the library square makes it hard to see who's coming, and the bus stops placement is a bit off to the side from the main centre road and makes it less supervised by eyes on the street.

Scale

The public spaces in the center are generally quite large compared to the amount of people using it. There is a risk that a space might feel more empty if the dimensions are bigger than the amount of people spending time there. The large scale in some places is also not adapted to the human scale. Some spaces to use as a reference of more of human scale is the library garden and square.

The long sight lines would benefit from being divided into parts to help with both orientation and activity. By making the façades more visually stimulating you can increase the chances of enjoyment in a space and of people walking from for example Coop to the primary care center instead of taking the car.



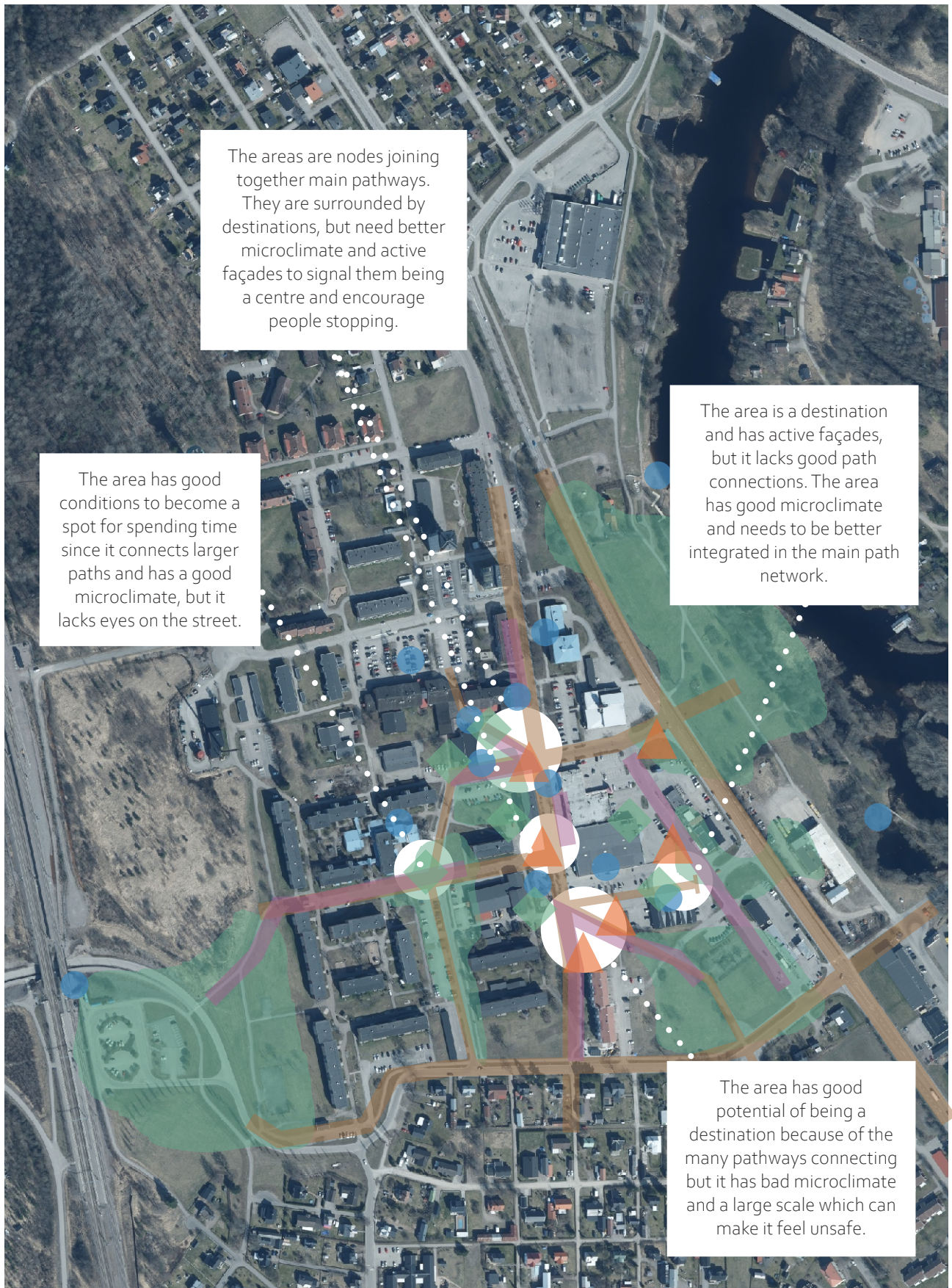
The map marks some of the areas with the best microclimate, good for sitting (green rhomb) and the worst areas, better for strolling (red triangle).



The map marks some of the main existing meeting spaces and destinations in the centre.



The map marks some of the areas which are mostly formed on a non-human scale. This could be that they are car dominated or have very long sight lines.



There are many areas where improvements could be made. In this image I have highlighted in white circles some of the areas of development which overlap all of the analyses.

S.W.O.T.

Analysis based on the site analysis, interviews and survey.

Strengths to build upon

- Close to beautiful nature such as the forests, the ocean, Dalälven and Bodaån.
- Existing ideas in the development of the centre, like the general plan, the new design programme, and the new detail plans show a good engagement in creating a good centre. Engaged entrepreneurs and the few property owner create short communications distances.
- Many services needed in your everyday life exists in the centre. It is a good foundation for further development with good infrastructure, services, shops, and restaurants.
- The centre has a close connection to both the railway and bus stops which can take you to many of the nearby larger cities, and the other towns. Good possibilities for public transport.
- The main biking paths from the schools to the centre and continuing to north are good. There are current development buildings better biking paths connecting the surrounding urban areas, like Tegelbruket and Älvkarleby, to Skutskär.
- There are "hidden" gems, like the library square and the new pocket park.

Opportunities to use

- Existing ideas of how to develop the centre is already in motion and therefore creates a good base. If the knowledge transfer is good, there is a smaller risk of needing to start from zero again and again. The current plans can create a momentum and a driving force which is needed to take these ideas into reality.
- An increase in jobs that allow a more hybrid work arrangement allows for the possibility to live further away from your office. Allowing good public transport and places for working from home can invite people that have these kinds of jobs.
- An increase in environmental awareness and people wanting to be closer to nature can help areas like Skutskär that offer both closeness to nature and convenient close-by services.
- Even though the municipality belongs to Uppsala region, there might be stronger connections to the northern urban areas like Gävle. Building a stronger connection to also the Gävle region can help Älvkarleby municipality to be strengthened from not only one, but two regions.

Weaknesses to improve

- There is a lack of seating spaces with both low wind speed and sun. The lack of edge zones for staying and standing lower the possibilities of extended activity in the centre. There is a lack of talkscapes and places for activity, for example. outdoor seating by a café or activity areas for children.
- The centre is far stretched and lacks central points which makes the centre undefined and tricky to decide where it starts and stops. The centre is divided into small islands which lacks connection.
- The centre lacks a clear identity and concept which can make planning difficult if the opinions differ.
- The sizes of streets and the public spaces are large, and the hierarchies of them are more focused on the motor traffic than the pedestrians and bicyclists. This car-dominated structure can also be seen in the detailing and volumes of the buildings.
- Road 76 is a barrier and unsafe for pedestrians. There lacks safe crossings and in turn also a strong connection to Bodaån. Roads like Hårstagatan also create barriers between functions in the centre.
- The entrances from all ways of transport (car, train, bike, bus, walking) to the centre are unclear and not very inviting.

Threats to overcome

- There needs to be a more long term political plan which has a clear direction independent of who is on the political power. There needs to be a development which the municipality has the energy to maintain and upkeep the drive.
- The tight economy and lack of resources are challenges. Building an attractive centre costs a lot of money and needs labour resources. This work is tricky to accommodate in a larger extent in the existing employments and hiring consultants for it is expensive.
- The increase of E-commerce makes shopping easier to do from home and the traditional centres struggle more to get people to come there.
- Increased climate changes lead can lead to increased large rainfalls, geotechnical issues, problems with storm water management, and potential pollutions from for example filling masses if needed.
- There is an increase in the aging population and without enough activity and working opportunities young people tend to move to cities.



How & what?

Tools, exploration, method, process

Interventions

The goal of finding out what is public life, how working with it would look like, and where it should be placed, is to finally figure out what kind of interventions should be implemented in your specific location.

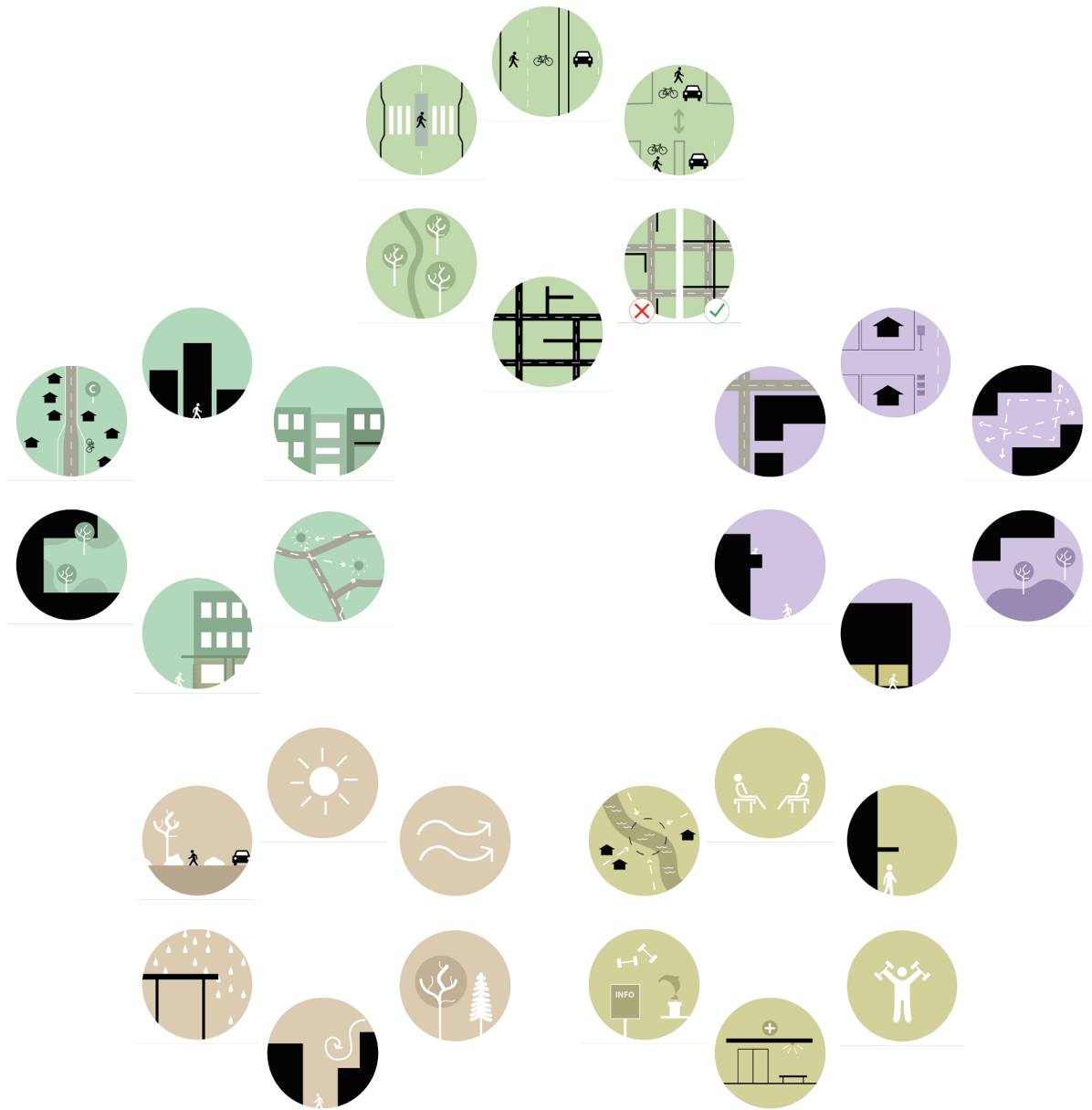
Based on the gathered information the interventions could be smaller or larger: a new detail plan with commercial services and housing, a couple of well placed benches creating a talkscape with a good microclimate, or a larger strategy on how to work with increasing public life in the location based on its specific conditions.

The “How?” in the chapter “How? Strategy, inclusion, in practice” explained and showed important general aspects on how to work with increasing public life. In this chapter, the how and where is combined into what type of interventions could be placed to increase public life.

This is first explained by showing different exemplified tools based on the key factors for public life. The tools are important aspects to take into consideration when designing the implementation, depending on which key factor you want to improve.

Secondly, the tools are then tested in a sketch exploration where some of the areas from the analysis are developed. The sketched interventions are based on references and input from interviews and the survey, and suggest smaller additions to improve public life in the centre.

Lastly, the whole process is combined into a design method development and how to work with the method is presented. These two parts summarize a way in which to more analytically work with finding interventions which can increase public life through an iterative process.



Tools

A lot of research has been done on creating life in a city-like context. This research can in some ways be applied to a small town, but not all of it. When going through the work I've found that the key factors for public life still apply, but what we mean and the examples we use can differ depending which location we are in. To be able to extend our interpretation of what pedestrian friendly and increased life can mean in a smaller town we might in some cases need to change the terms we use, or at least widen the perspective. This is to open up for a more free thinking and not get stuck in the more traditional ways of city planning. The more abstract terms and way of planning takes a step back and expands on the analysis of the actual need of the space disconnected from a

concrete implementation. For example before we dive in to the solution and decide if we need a new pedestrian bridge, tunnel, or a crossing of the road - what are the actual needs of the space?

The following pages describe my attempt on translating some of the key factors for public life into the more abstract tools more suitable for the rural context. This does not mean that the original key factor don't exist in the small town or vice versa in the city, but instead it opens up for a wider perspective of what can be seen as public life.

The tools are presented as general themes, and in the bubbles how these could look like as design tools.

Streets

In a city, a street should fulfil a list of parameters to be classified as pedestrian friendly. The demands are often grounded in the will to create safe environments. Similar demands such as safety and adequate space should of course be placed in smaller towns as well, but it might look visually different than in the city.

Pathways

In the countryside, a walking path going through a grove might have the same importance as the city boulevard - and should be treated as such. It therefore makes more sense in some areas to talk about pathways as a way of transportation rather than streets.

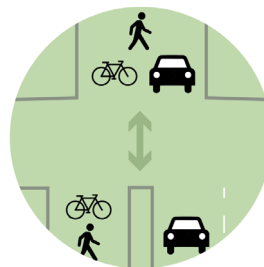
Connections

The main transport in a smaller town is often by car since the distribution of housing can be quite sparse. Even though that is the case, everyone is at some point a pedestrian. This means working to increase safety, easy to understand orientation with continuous pathways, adequate space for the pedestrian road, and thinking about how different functions are connected to each other.

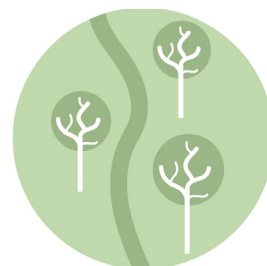
In the public space car roads, or even buildings, might be hinders to be able to move around as a pedestrian or cyclist in a safe way. To allow better orientation, and more free movement a new pedestrian crossing might be needed, or a pedestrians sidewalk extended.

Prioritizing

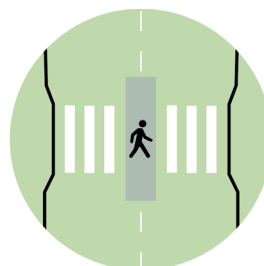
Allow a variety of places to walk is a positive aspect for walkability, but it can also be contra-productive if the amount of people is too spread out - leading to all of the pathways feeling quite empty. By focusing and emphasizing some pathway network we can more clearly define a pathway hierarchy which in turn clarify entrances to the spaces, and also increase orientation and navigation.



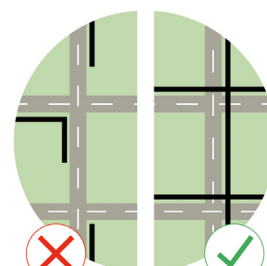
*Beware of the transitions
between different traffic
separations*



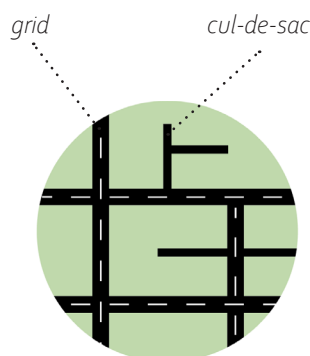
*Handle the important
pathways with the same
care*



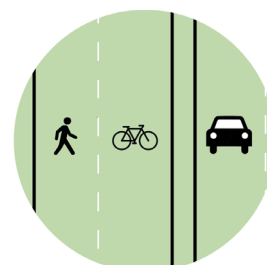
Safe crossings



*Continuous biking and
pedestrian paths*



*A mixed and connected
street layout encourage
walking*



*Pedestrian and biking-
focused*

Public and private

A gradient from public to private is important in both a city and a small town. Depending on the specific locations what might be seen as private or public can differ. In a city, a road with residential housing street compared to the central shopping road is seen as a quite a private area. If you instead move to a countryside village - what is seen as public might be the gathered mail boxes along the main road.

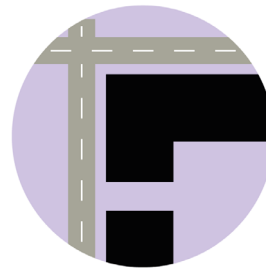
By feeling that a public space is more private, you can be more inclined to spend time there. At the same time you don't want a path that is too private since that might make people feel unwelcome. Therefore along the public central pathway you might want more semi-private zones along the walls for seating, or very public zones for window shopping. Public and private is about which zones, and edge zones, we create and perceive, and depending on the surrounding context that perception can differ.

Openings

To improve orientation or activate the edge zone you might have to open up a passage to get a more clear sight line, or glass a façade to create a larger transparency between the inside and outside activity. A space with bad views and hidden corners can make you feel unsafe since you don't know what might be hiding behind a corner.

Boundaries

People like to gather by walls to feel safe and have a good view of their surroundings. Too open spaces without protection might feel intimidating to be in. They also often have a worse microclimate since there is nothing that blocks the cold wind or the too warm sun. By using different kinds of barriers, whether permanent like a small built structure, or more temporal, like a field of high grass, the open spaces get more defined. Some public spaces where the flow of people is less, it might be beneficial so make it feel smaller and concentrate the amount of people to increase the feeling of public life.



Framed spaces to create more private spaces



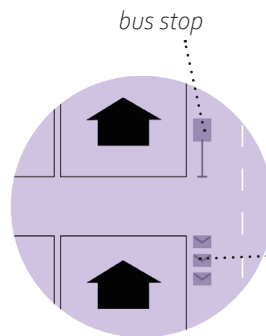
Eyes on the street to improve safety



Active bottom floor to increase interaction



Sight lines and avoiding hidden corners



Expand the zones of what can be seen as private and public



Defining open spaces to divide zones

Microclimate

What we want to achieve regarding good microclimate is the same as in cities - comfortable temperatures with moderate wind and sun exposure. Harsh Urban Heat Island effects are not that common in smaller towns, but what we can experience can be the opposite, meaning too large and open spaces which create uncomfortable environments regarding wind. The large scale, like many cities as well, often come from the car perspective planning.

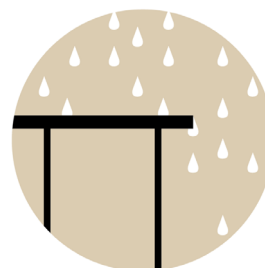
Protection

To prolong the time spent outside, spaces for spending a longer time need to be protected from wind and in a sunny place to achieve the most outdoor thermal comfort. There also needs to be places where you can hide from a sudden burst of rain. This can be free standing structures or implementation of big enough entrance roofs to be able to observe your surroundings before leaving the building.

Changing with the seasons

To create alive spaces around the whole year, the spaces should change with the seasons. Pick a variety of greenery which define and decorates all year around. A deciduous tree can give shade in the summer and let in summer in the winter, meanwhile an evergreen tree blocks strong winds all year around.

By placing the ploughed snow in specific places it can complement a park as a playground, or a pond can be a small ice skating area when it freezes. The pedestrian and bike area need to be wide enough to not be blocked when the street is ploughed.



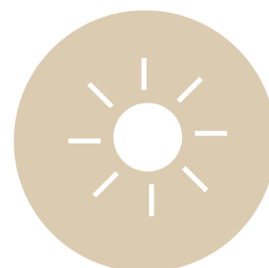
Shelters extend outdoor stays



Block strong winds



Greenery to cool, shade, and block



Sun exposure in the winter and shading in the summer



Building form can regulate temperature



Make use of the winter barriers

Activity

The same kind of activity that happens in a city happens in the small town as well, but the places for meeting might be fewer. In the smaller towns the meeting places that might be overlooked, like the entrance to the main food store, the queue to the ATM, the centre bus stop or the parking outside of the preschool, are instead the most important ones because here are where people naturally meet.

When looking at what makes public life we often get caught up in the flow of people and the sense of activity, when in a small town what is maybe more important to look at is the type of activity and in turn the type of interactions. If the center is adapted to activity that focuses on people transporting themselves from point A to point B, it is hard to create public life in a small town since the amount of people are fewer. Instead map out the type of interactions that are possible and the potential of where they could happen.

Alone together

Sometime you don't want to interact with people, but you still want to exist in a proximity to feel a kind of belonging. This can be carefully placed benches along protected, semi-hidden, or sanctuary-like places, like a pavilion, for contemplation and recovery.

Intentional interactions

A good effect on perceived public life is to increase the amount of intentional interactions, and by that I mean longer visits where you decide on meeting and spending time in a place. This can be sitting and chatting with a friend in a café, bringing your kid to play in a playground, or gather some friends to play boules in a park..

Spontaneous bumps

Entrances, crossings of paths, or other attractions like the mailbox, bus stop, or the ATM, are good places to give some extra care, for example a roof or a little extra space. In this way we can increase the chance of having a spontaneous bump with another person and an exchange of a few words. Since a small town has fewer people it is not unusual to meet your neighbour or your kids teacher in these places.



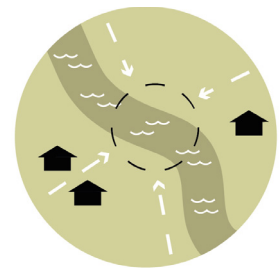
*Playful environments
where people can interact
with the environment*



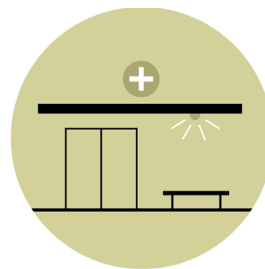
Developed edge zones



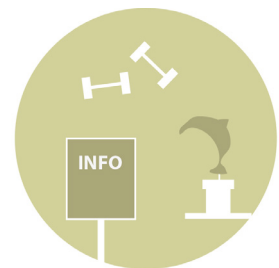
*Allow for a variety of
talking spaces*



*Connect the activity
spaces to the local context*



*Develop existing meeting
places*



*Implement places for
stopping which doesn't
rely on commercial activity*

Scale

The small towns often found in the rural void are planned from a car perspective. Since the public transport isn't that frequent, many are dependent on their car. The public spaces therefore often have a large scale, and the visual stimuli is mostly experienced by motor traffic. Even though this is the context every driver is at some point a pedestrian and so to increase the pedestrian movement (public life), the details need to increase on the smaller scales to adapt to the pedestrian scale.

Small

The small scales effect on public life is based on the level of detail in spaces. A façade that has pillars to lean on when waiting, or a window sill made into a bench are different kinds of design that can encourage people to stop and spend more time in that place. A rose bush placed strategically along a walking path can make you stop, take a moment and smell the flowers.

Medium

The medium scale entails both the division of framing volumes or areas, but also the relationship between them. A path with good visual stimulation, like varying façades or greenery mixed with buildings, can make a pathway feel shorter than the same path with a too large scale with little stimuli. By creating environments on a pedestrian and/or biking scale, the detail level increases and thus encourage more people to walk the 15 minutes instead of taking your car the same route.

Large

The first impression on a distance is based a lot on communication, signal, navigation and orientation. The human eye can register movement on a distance of circa 100 meters away, and 300-500 meters we can see if something is happening on a square. The way we work with sight lines, skylines and relational design language (what we associate with different environments) we can easier tell the visitor that this is the centre and, for example, here is where you can stop to go the store.



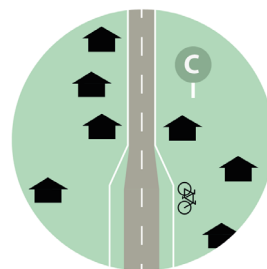
Always keep the human scale and perspective in mind



A variation in spaces to increase visual and spatial stimulation



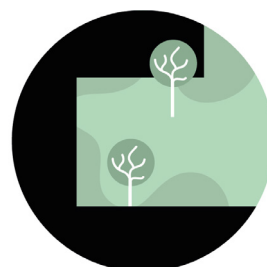
Increase material detail where people come in contact with the façade or object



Make use of common associations to signal differences in the environment



Targets points at the end of sight lines can guide people through a space



Work with achieving feelings in spaces - for example a small space can feel cosy or cramped depending on the design

Exploration

A part of developing the design method has been to test the different references in the context of Skutskär. The tests include smaller to medium sized interventions which can increase people spending more time in the centre, and in turn the sense of public life. The interventions are anchored to the local context by looking at existing meeting places and the history of the municipality. By working close with the local context in the interventions they can also be seen as ways of strengthening the identity of the centre. The interventions also take the economic conditions of the urban context in consideration and therefore the interventions are focused on ideas that would be manageable for a municipality of this size to implement and maintain.

The interventions and sketches are to be seen as suggestions and not finished solutions to directly implement.

1. The playground

The centre is experienced as protracted and many of the surrounding areas of the centre have a large scale - this place included. By working with this space, it could act as an "ending" to the centre which helps to frame and activate it

2. The walking path

The main walking path is in the middle of the centre. This space needs more work to be feel more cosy and turned into a pedestrian street feeling. By narrowing the street with functions you could gather the people making it feel more alive. To achieve this it also needs an improved microclimate.

3. The culture square

The library square has great potential of becoming a gathering and meeting space in the centre. The library attracts spontaneous visitors, but other than that it lacks commercial destination and has the risk of feeling hidden and unsafe with narrow passages. By working with the space we can increase the amount of people visiting and eyes on the street.



Chosen areas for sketching interventions. The three areas are existing nodes with potential for further development.



The playground

1. Historical playground

On the site is an existing playground. The playground has a lot of different playing equipment, but it is a bit hidden. The playground isn't framed which makes the space quite exposed.

By developing the existing playground and expanding it, we can create an activity that doesn't rely on commercial activity and it can create synergies with people going to the store. A reference here is a playground in Enköping which has built a playground with small houses of historical buildings. By incorporating the history, the playground has the potential of becoming more of a destination since it adds something more than solely a "regular" playground. In the sketch I've chosen the old demolished railway station. The historical buildings can help the inhabitants feel more connected to the space.

2. Ground painting

Since the centre is quite protracted it can be tricky to know where it ends and where it starts. By working with a ground painting which runs through the main pedestrian street the area is framed without using built structures.

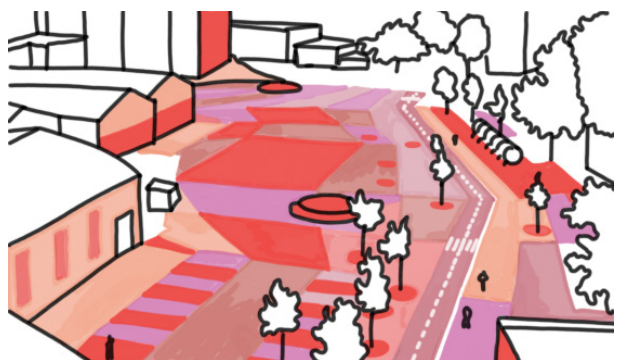
Similar to the playground, I suggest the ground painting should have a connection to the local context and therefore a flowing river runs through the street. The ground painting could be more or less abstract. A more "realistic" version is to connect the shapes to the real form of Dalälven through the municipality, and then use the different nodes along the painting to symbolize various small towns like Älvkarleby, Skutskär, and Marma.



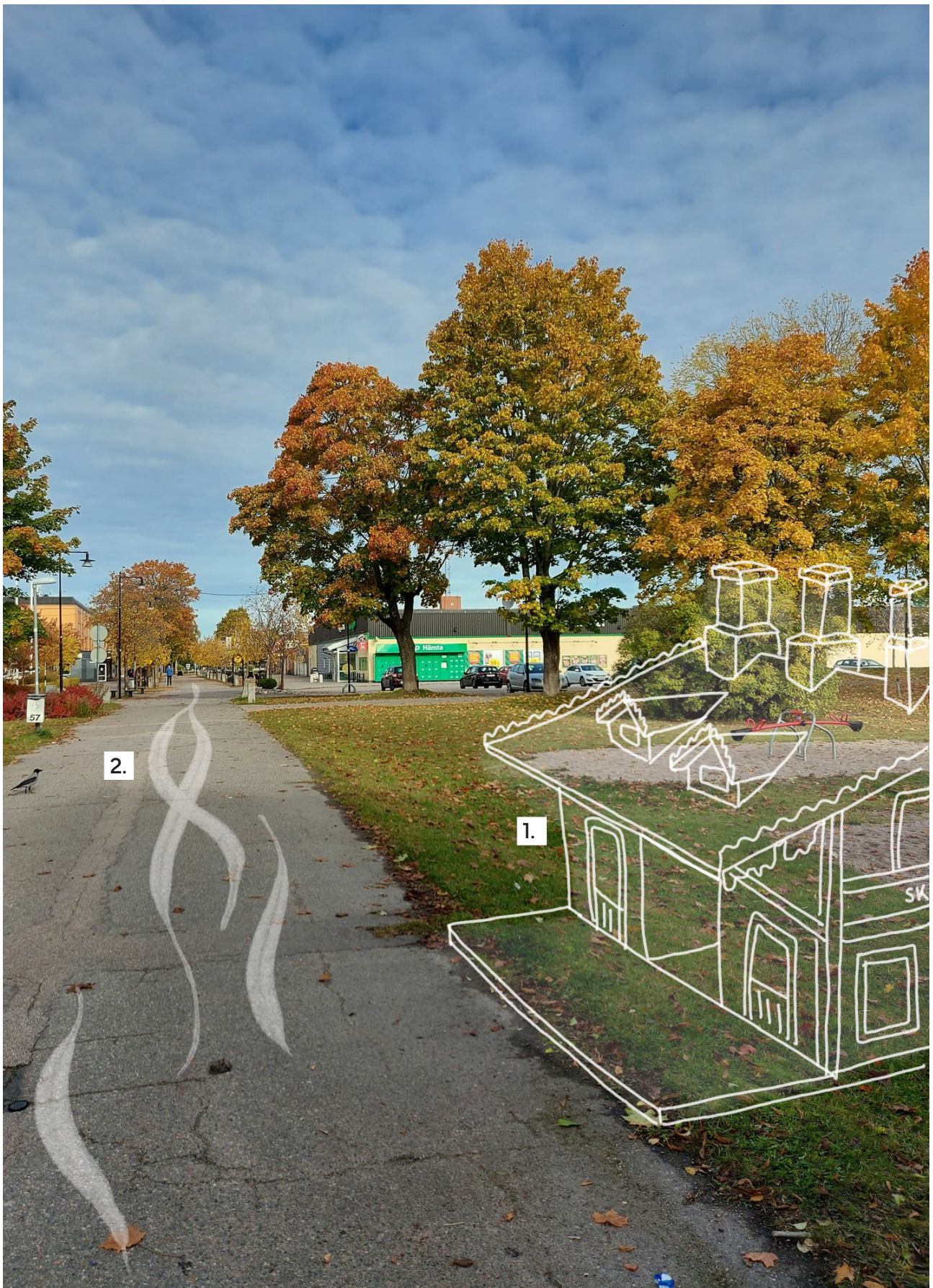
Existing playground by the coop-parking lot. The area has the potential of becoming a destination playground and also to signal the beginning and end of the centre.



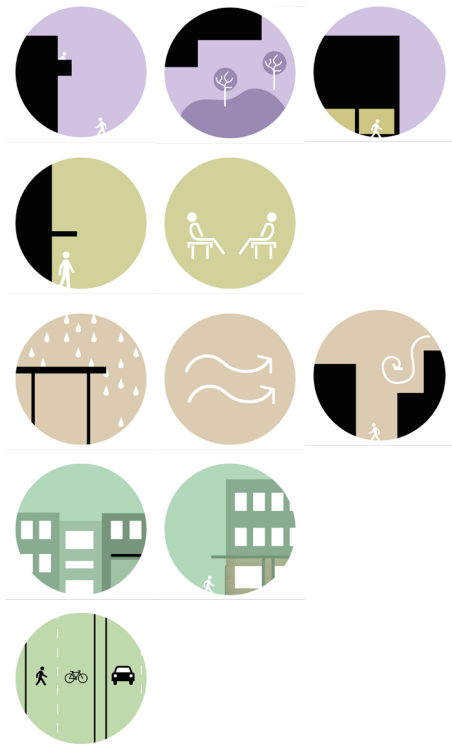
Photo 3: Thordnadtsson, 2025. The old railway station house in Skutskär. Reference: In Enköping, Sweden, they've built a playground with miniature historical buildings.



Reference: Superkilen, Copenhagen, Denmark. The ground painting makes the area stand out and connects it without using built structures.



Sketch of different interventions.



The walking path

1. Illumination

There are many different ways of illuminating a walking path. Light can be used solely for function or be used to divide a space into different zones. The central shopping street is quite wide and open and string lights could be used to lower the scale of the space and make it feel more inviting such as in the reference in Gränbyparken, Uppsala.

2. Weather shelter

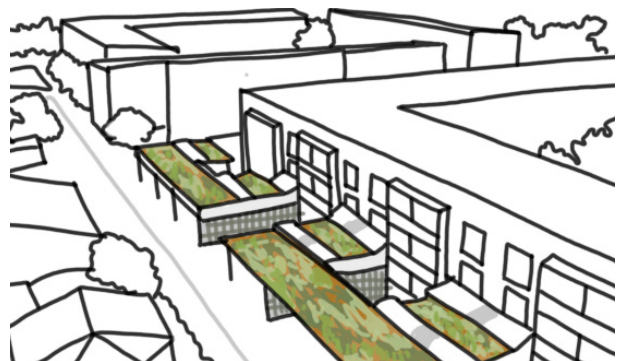
People like to gather by walls to feel safe and have a good view of their surroundings. Too open spaces might feel intimidating and unsafe to be in. They also often have a worse microclimate since there is nothing that blocks the cold wind or the too warm sun. By using different kinds of barriers the open spaces get more defined. Where the flow of people is less, it might be beneficial so make it feel smaller to increase the feeling of public life, but also to bring in more activity such as the reference of bokaler in Malmö. The built structure in the sketch could be used as a market stall or more intimate seating more sheltered from strong winds.

3. Ground painting

To tie the centre together, the ground painting continue through the walking path. This makes the whole centre feel more connected and also builds up a curiosity of where it takes you.



Existing walking path. Many different interventions for activating the street are already implemented: trees, seating areas, roof over entrances and signage for the store.



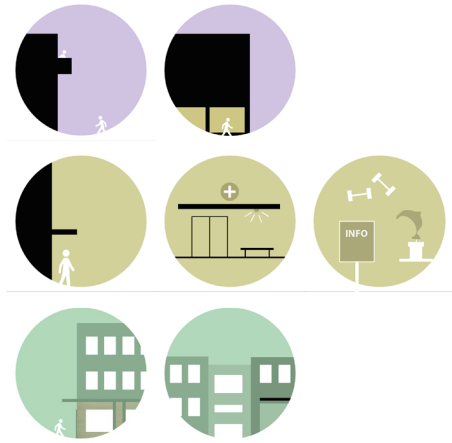
Reference: Bokaler, Malmö. The wide street is narrowed and the entrance floor expanded by building small commercial buildings.



Reference: Gränbyparken, Uppsala. The otherwise open park environment has been complemented by lights and seating which defines a social and more intimate zone.



Sketch of different interventions.



The culture square

A common type of active façade which encourages you to stop and stay for a bit is a shopping window. Since this square lacks these types of functions there is also a lower amount of people stopping and spending time in this area. The idea of a shopping window can be implemented in other functions by working with the façades.

1. Exhibition

A way of creating an identity of a space is also to learn more about it and the people using it. Permanent outdoor exhibitions telling about the history of the area and the municipality, or temporary exhibitions like the summer photo exhibitions at Laxön can act as a destination for people visiting the centre.

2. Illumination

A way of activating a façade is to illuminate it using different spotlights. This increases the feeling of safety when during the dark hours and months of the year, and also highlights different architectural elements or exhibitions.

3. Exposure

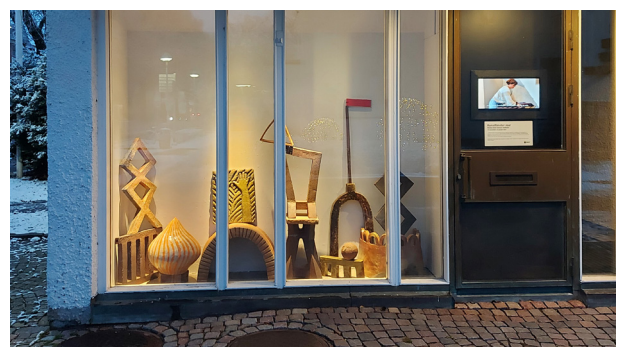
The library is a popular destination, but the expression of the building makes both the location and entrance of the library hidden. By working with the façade, the existing windows can be changed into larger display windows which can be used by the library to showcase their function even outside of opening hours.



Existing façades by the entrance to the library square from the centre. The library façade is shown on the right.



Reference: Fotoexpo, Älvkarleby, Sweden. A temporal outdoor photo exhibition during the summer months.



Reference: Art-window, Joar Blå, Enköping, Sweden. A window box for displaying art exhibitions all around the clock.



Sketch of different interventions.

Method development

The thesis work led to a design methodology which acts as a framework when working with the development of a small town center. The methodology helps the user build up an argumentation for the interventions, similarly to how the work in the thesis is presented. The argumentation gives better chances of the projects being successful since it is based in both research, references and the local context.

Every part of the methodology includes more complexity and the method is a simplification of the actual process which is described in the following pages.

General guides

What?

What is public life?

Key factors

Summarize key factors in the physical space which is needed to create public life. Differentiate different kinds of public life and their functions.

For example, developed edge zones creating a gradient of private to public, places for sitting and spending time which feels welcoming and is protected from wind/rain but still in the sun, a centrally located infrastructure network which makes it easy so "stop by" on your way somewhere else, clear orientation with eyes on the street so you can move around more freely while still feeling safe.

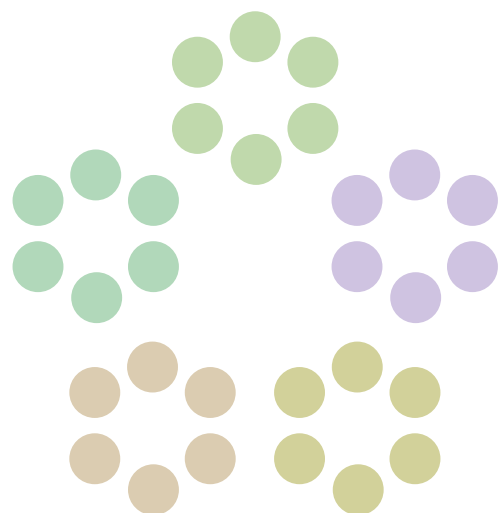
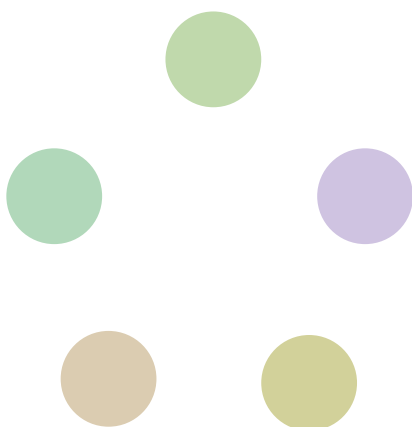
How?

How to increase public life?

References and tools

Gather references and learnings on ways of working, both on how to work and already implemented interventions. The research and references is translated into design tools which are also adapted into a rural context, widening the perspective of how you can work with increasing public life and what you need in the process.

This can for example be to focus on developing existing meeting spaces, to be aware of the sizes of the spaces to gather people, and to create collaborations between town to make use of each others strengths.



Site specific

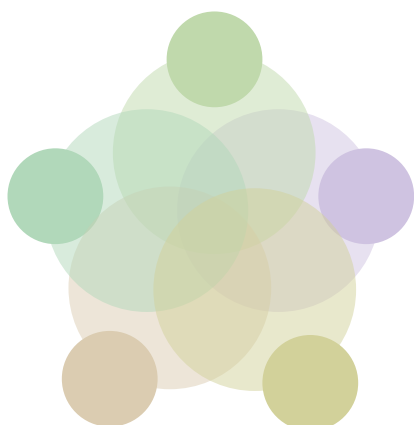
Where?

Where to create public life?
Analysis and local context

What are the current conditions for the key factors of public life in the decided location? By working with different types of analyses based on the key factors we can start to locate where interventions could be implemented to increase public life.

What we want to achieve is to encourage more people to spend time and therefore it is crucial to involve the local people and ask what their experience of the location is and what their ideas are. This can be done in different ways - interviews, surveys and co-design workshops.

The overlapping of analysis maps can then point out different key areas for interventions.

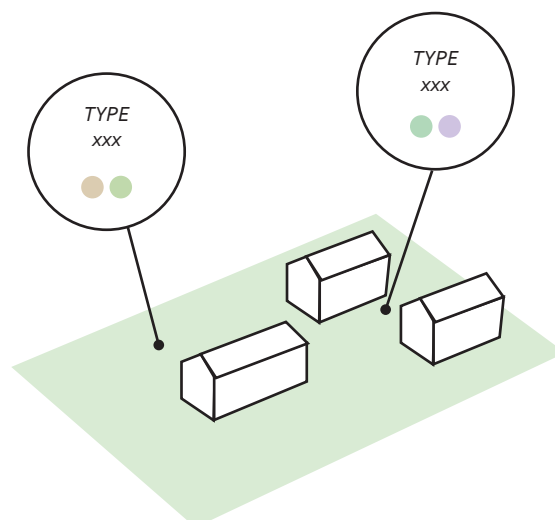


What?

What type of public life and where is it needed?
Interventions and combine

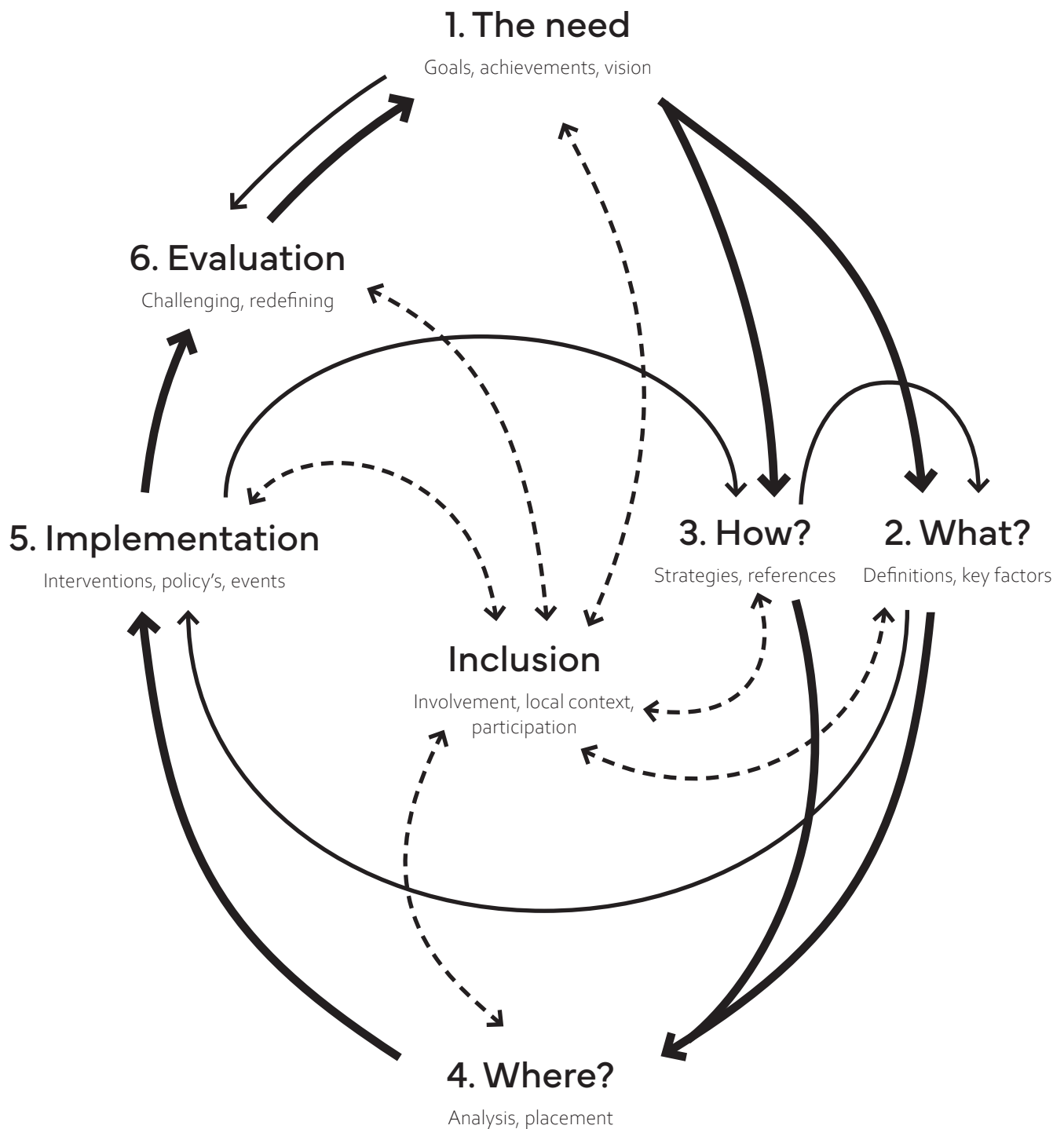
When combining all of the key factors, tools, references, analysis and local context we can suggest different interventions which can be tested on a working group based in the location.

The suggestions can for example be in the form of sketches, models, or mapping and be a foundation for further discussions.



Process

How to work with increasing public life, or any other type of similar goal, demands an iterative process. How this works is describes in this spread.



1. The need

A process of developing something always starts with a need and/or goal. This sets the foundation of the process.

In this case the defined goal is increasing public life by working with, and enhancing and changing the architecture in a small town centre.

The defined need can for example be found by interviewing people or looking at statistics - the best might be a combination of the two since data and an experience of something gives two different types of dimensions in defining the need.

The need can also be described as more of a vision so that the process doesn't lock itself too fast into solutions. By allowing exploration we encourage more unexpected ideas.

2. What?

After defining the need we can, based on the gathered information from the need, try to brainstorm and research what this need could crystallize in.

In this case it is research of what public life is and what key factors can define it.

3. How?

Parallel to the defining of what we mean when talking about our need, public life, we can look at different examples of how other people have worked with the same need in both theory and practice.

This can both be finding examples of actual projects and be inspired by the implementation, but it is also finding strategies and ways of working which can be adapted to this current process' local context. This is because solely taking an idea which in one place has increased public life, and implementing it in the local context does not necessarily mean that it will have the same effect.

4. Where?

When explained what we mean and how we could work is defined we can bring this process even more to the local context and physical spaces.

We have found in the "what" what factors contribute to the public life and now which of these qualities do we see in the chosen place? In the spaces where the analyses show that the key factors are lacking or that there is potential of working with the key factors we find where the interventions could be placed.

5. Implementation

When we have some potential placements we can start brainstorming different ideas. How to do this is by going back to the "how" and "what", looking at references with similar circumstances, and in that way defining what the implementation should and could be. When sketching and designing different interventions we can also motivate what type of public life and key factor it tries to improve in this particular location.

6. Evaluation

After finding an intervention we need to evaluate it. Did the implementation fulfil the need that was specified in the beginning of the process? Or have we now discovered that the need is actually something else than what we thought?

The evaluation should not only be made after the intervention is already built or implemented, but instead after every milestone in the project. This is to help challenge our ideas and as much as we can ensure that the end goal is as close as possible.

Iteration

If during the evaluation we find that what the implementation is might not meet the real need we have to redefine and continue the process.

Going back and forth, and testing new ideas creates more of an iterative process which encourages new ways of thinking and working.

An iterative process needs a bit longer time compared to a linear one since it needs continuous evaluation and clarification, but it saves a lot of time in the end product since it is more adapted to the local context.

Inclusion

A crucial part of every step of the process is to work with inclusion. Who is going to use it? Who is going to maintain it? By including the users in the process, for example in defining what it is that we want and where it is placed, the implementation will more seamlessly be incorporated into people's life's instead of having to adapt to something completely different. Depending on the project different types of inclusion might be more beneficiary than others.

Including the users might also give a higher chance of satisfaction since people feel like they are taking part of their surrounding environment and therefore feel a larger sense of ownership of the space. This in turn can help the space be better taken care of by its users.



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Discussion

Design methodology, public life, inclusion

Point of departure

Increasing public life in a centre can lead to many positive consequences such as an increased feeling of safety, a larger basis for business life, a sense of community and a possibility of social interaction which in turn can decrease loneliness. To create this, people have always created nodes with various functions that gather people, and these have differed depending on the locations and time in history. Different ways of living have adapted these nodes. Maybe it started as a way of giving workers in an industry access to a school, a store and a post office, like the former centre in Skutskär, or it is a carefully city planned town which has positioned the centre according to different calculated factors. Either way, what it comes down to is gathering people in a meeting place.

A lot of research has been done on public life and how to work with streets and public spaces. One of the more prominent ones is the work of Jan Gehl which highlights the importance of the human perspective and scale. His work and his office's work has inspired a lot of this thesis work and how to get a better understanding of what public life is and how you can work with it. What I noticed

early on in my research is that a lot of the research was focused on larger cities. There was a lack of analysis on both the countryside, and the smaller towns - also called the rural areas. I started to wonder, based on my own experience growing up in a smaller town, which role the smaller centre has in relation to the cities and the differences between the two. It became an exploration of my own of what do we really mean when we talk about public life and how does that relate to the rural preconditions.

The demands for the small town are often similar to the city - a square or central street full of life, a blooming business life and an increasing population, but are the demands reasonable? Are the conditions and goals for this the same and are we seeing the small town public life through the lens of a city narrative? Since the means in a smaller town is smaller, both economically and socially because of the smaller population, maybe a broader perspective of what public life is and what it could be is needed. These kinds of questions have been the foundation for my thesis and what I have found is what I will discuss in this chapter.

Design methodology

The main question of the thesis is "How can public life be increased in the rural context of Skutskär centre?". To answer the question I've developed a methodology to expand the perspective of what can be seen as public life, and how to build up an argumentation and structure of how to work with reaching the set goal of increasing public life. The methodology is based on the questions of "How?", "What?", and "Where?" and present different toolboxes where research has been translated into different ways of working to help municipalities in their strategies. The area of exploration for the method has been Skutskär, but the idea has been to create a general methodology which can be used on whichever other location. Why I chose to develop a methodology was to not simplify the process of centre development and public life by saying "if you built this specific thing the public life will increase". Instead I wanted to show that it is an iterative process which demands even more inclusion with the people living in the centre than what was manageable to achieve in this thesis and so instead I opted to give other people tools of how they could work with this themselves.

A common trend of small town centres is that cafés or clothing stores open, and then two years later they have to close because it is not financially sustainable. The café can be placed in the middle of the centre, but it still doesn't work - and so the question is why? Based on the research in this thesis there are five main key factors of creating good conditions for public life: working with the streets, the experience of public and private, the microclimate, the activity, and the scale of the spaces. Maybe the outdoor seating by the café was too windy? Maybe the store-front was hidden or too closed off from the street? To figure this out we need to analyse the locations, find references and support from other municipalities with similar goals and struggles, and try to pinpoint which of these key factors are lacking to create a good space for stopping or spending a longer period of time. When places which lack different aspects are identified we can work with different design tools within the key factors to improve the spaces. Maybe

the outdoor seating needs some greenery that stops the main wind flows, and the clothing store needs a more developed edge zone which invites the store to spill out onto the street? We can never guarantee that a space will be used, but by working with these factors we can improve its preconditions. The key factors doesn't necessarily differ between a city or a small town, instead what might differ is the desired outcome and where public life takes place. The translation to the rural context is therefore to broaden the perspective and challenge the preconceived notions of what public life might look like and what it could be, instead of being something completely different from a city planning perspective.

Public life

Public life can be a lot of things. It can be walking along a busy shopping lane in a city, saying hello to your neighbour by the mail boxes, or meeting up with a friend in a park. Whether intentional, spontaneous, or non-interactive, public life is the experience of people. It doesn't have to be many people, and that is the first recognition when looking at a city centre compared to a rural centre. To put the demands on the rural centre to be as alive as a city shopping street is a mission bound to fail. Instead, as we found in the research by Gehl, it is equally about the amount of time people who spend time in a place as how many. The more people in a place who are stopping and sitting, the more eyes on the street, which in turn can make the space feel safer. It also increase the experience of a place feeling alive and the possibility of social interactions.

Hajer and Reijndrop pinpoint in their book the need of a shift of perspective within the discourse of the public, and to broaden our language in how we see our shared spaces (Hajer, Reijndrop, 2001). Places such as a tunnel underneath a road, or a cross section in a sub-urban area, often seen as "non-places", are still places for existing social exchanges even though they in the urban planning discourse do not fulfil the criteria of a public space. Where this public life can happen might be in the queue

to the ATM, waiting by the bus stop, or by the entrance to your kids preschool. It is the existing, but often overlooked, meeting spaces which in the small town are some of the most important.

The small town centres are often areas for everyday errands. Errands draw people to the centre, but many of them are indoor, creating what Gehl architects call "invisible life". There might be a bunch of people in a library, but the street outside is desolate. What instead creates public life is the time moving between errands, by the entrance to the place where you do your errand, or by a place where you happen to stop by while doing your errand. These places have to be viewed with equal importance as the busy shopping street of a larger city, to be able to understand how to increase the public life in a small town.

Inclusion

There are many different actors in the implementation and creation of public life. The main group is of course the inhabitants, but they can furthermore be divided into different actors such as visitors, consumers, business owners, the municipality, workers, associations, and the general civil society. Depending on who owns the land and the estates, different actors have different legal responsibilities and economical possibilities of improving a space. This demands cooperations between actors from all aspects - the ones who are going to use it, the ones who owns it, and the ones who are going to manage it. All of the actors need to feel included and strive towards the same goal to achieve the best outcome. As written in the chapter "Inclusion" this can be done in different ways. Depending on the type of project and desired outcome, there are different types of inclusion which more or less include the user in the process.

One of the strengths in a smaller town and smaller community is the closeness to other people. There's often a large local engagement in building up the surrounding association life, and the municipality depend a lot on this when developing both events and meeting spaces for the inhabitants. When discussing this with the

business life developer at Älvkarleby municipality, she describes how there are many voluntary associations, such as Bandyklubben that runs the second hand shop and the mini golf and a stage at Holmarna, and the civil defence association arrange events. There's a rich association life in the municipality, but not a lot of them are involved in the development of the centre. Does the centre feel like an unwelcoming platform? Is it a question of who is responsible for the space or who feels an ownership of the space? The end goal of increasing public life is first and foremost to bring the inhabitants to want to spend time in the centre. Therefore inclusion is one of the centre aspects in this field, such as shown in the diagram for the process on page 74. Testing different ways, like the reference of "Odlå torg", would be a good way of continuing developing the design method and together with the community develop the different sketched interventions that could increase public life in centre.

Conclusion

In conclusion to the research question "how can public life be increased in the rural context of Skutskär centre?" there are many ways in which this can be done. Since this isn't a straight forward question, the answer has many layers. This thesis present different ways on various levels of how you can work with increasing life:

- Key factors based on public life research
- References on strategic documents
- References on implemented design projects
- Design tools
- A suggested broadened perspective
- Inclusion in the design process

All of these aspects are then summarized into the design methodology which also is a reflection of the process of this thesis. This thesis does not present a finalized answer, but instead it offers ways of building an argumentation and presents another way of thinking when planning in the rural context which is where we need to begin.

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