



Spaces in motion

Embodied explorations of the in-between

My Hallgren Berg

Master's thesis 2025

Examiner: Marco Adelfio

Supervisor: Bri Gauger / Jessica Lundin

Chalmers School of Architecture +
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering

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Master's programme:

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SOCIETY, JUSTICE, SPACE

Chalmers School of Architecture +

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CHALMERS
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

This master's thesis explores how marginalized voices, specifically those of girls from northeast Gothenburg, can be centred in urban development through embodied and playful co-creation methods. The study investigates how urban spaces can be experienced, understood, and reimagined from the perspective of these girls.

The research is guided by two questions: *How can embodied methods contribute to an understanding of in-between spaces in motion?* and *How can co-design amplify underrepresented voices, needs and perspectives, particularly of young people who identify as girls, and contribute to more inclusive urban spaces?*

Through a series of workshops with five girls aged 16–20, the study centres around a specific passageway in Hammarkullen, an urban in-between space, or liminal space, that connects the centre of Hammarkullen with its surroundings. These “in-between spaces” are common and often invisible in the urban landscape, but for girls they have greater significance and even influence their behaviour, movement patterns, participation and sense of safety.

By moving, playing and pausing in the space, the girls were encouraged to reflect on and interpret the site through their physical bodily experiences, senses and emotions. This process fostered both individual and collective awareness of their relationship to the site, insights that often remain invisible in traditional planning processes. These experiences informed a design proposal that serves as a spatial interpretation of the girls' perspectives: a space that evokes memory through playful interaction, while also offering control, overview, and freedom of movement.

The thesis demonstrates how embodied and playful approaches can make visible the needs and desires that meet girls' experiences in urban space, but also strengthen their sense of ownership, belonging and right to take place.

Keywords: Co-design, embodied exploration, playful, ownership, gender equality, liminal space

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Acknowledgement

Doing this master's thesis has been both a challenging and unexpectedly joyful process thanks to all the wonderful people who, in different ways, have been a part of it.

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A heartfelt thank you also to my supervisors, Bri Gauger and Jessica Lundin, for your dedication, your patience, and your ability to see possibilities where I only saw doubt. Your support has been crucial! You helped me stay on track, reminded me what the project was really about (even when I forgot), and encouraged me to dare to take creative leaps.

Thank you also to Marco Adelfio, for your thoughtful advice, constructive feedback, and encouragement that carried me forward in my thinking.

To my friends, my family, mormis and to Emil and Sören – thank you for your presence, your support, the pauses, the conversations, and all your care.

You mean a lot to me <3

”Planning a city for everyone is not just about considering different perspectives – it is about letting more voices be heard.”
(Åkerman, Ågren, Rubin & Lindunger, 2015)

I have always worked with other people in various contexts – in school projects, in an organization supporting people with disabilities, or as a project manager and mentor in urban development initiatives that empower young people to engage in planning processes.

These experiences taught me that the most meaningful results come when everyone has the opportunity to express their thoughts and perspectives – and when they are truly listened to.

I believe collaboration is key to creating impact, but being heard isn’t always easy. Sometimes, we must create spaces where certain voices are given extra room to foster a more equal dialogue.

During the summer and fall of 2024, I worked with youth group in a project called Unga Stadsutvecklare (Young City Planners), which reinforced how vital inclusive processes are in giving more people a voice in urban development.

I really enjoyed working with them, so when I began formulating my master’s project - exploring public spaces with individuals who identify as girls, it felt natural to invite them to continue with me. I was really happy that they were eager to join!



Introduction to the project.
A film showcasing the on-site exploration
by me and the participating girls.

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All photos in the booklet are taken by me
unless otherwise stated.

Aim & purpose

The aim of this thesis is to use co-design methods to engage young girls in investigating, evaluating, and reimagining public spaces, with a particular focus on a passageway, an urban in-between space in Hammarkullen in Gothenburg. By actively involving the girls in playful site-specific and embodied explorations where they interpret and reflect on the urban environment through their physical and emotional experiences, the study aims to investigate how urban spaces can be experienced, understood and transformed from their perspective.

The goal is to develop a method that, through embodied exploration techniques, creates speculative and imaginative interpretations of spaces. The purpose of these interpretations is to open up new, alternative ideas and contribute to a more inclusive built environment.

Thesis questions

How can embodied methods contribute to an understanding of in-between spaces in motion?

In what ways can co-design amplify the voices, needs, and perspectives of underrepresented groups, particularly young people who identify as girls, and contribute to more inclusive urban spaces?



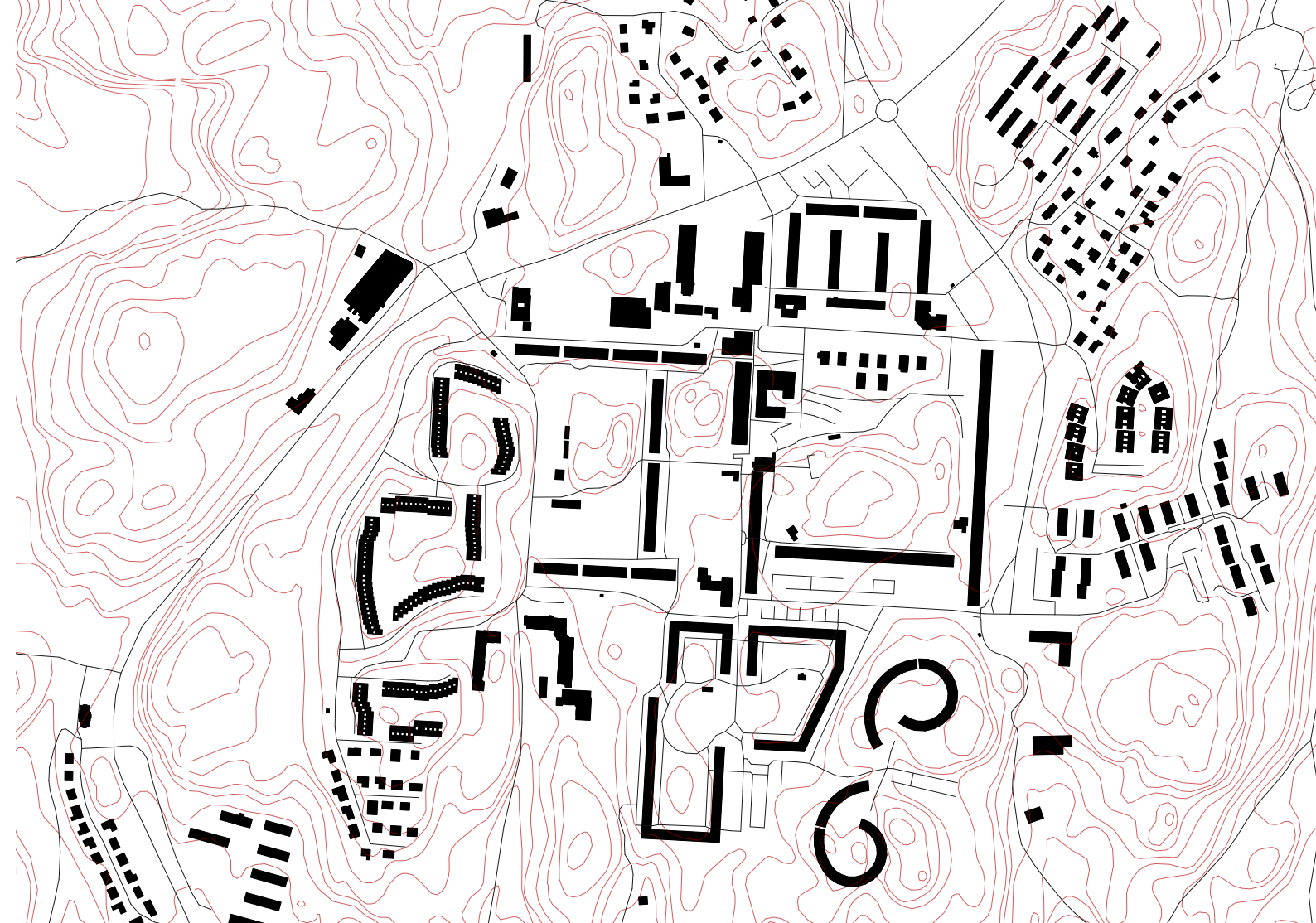
The background of the slide is a photograph of an outdoor setting. It features a grassy field with scattered dry leaves in the foreground. In the mid-ground, there is a concrete path or set of steps leading upwards, bordered by a metal railing on the right side. The background shows several trees with bare branches, suggesting an autumn or winter setting. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent reddish-orange filter.

Background



..... Hammarkullen

..... City centre of Gothenburg



Zooming in: Hammarkullen

Hammarkullen is located in the northeastern part of Gothenburg and has approximately 9000 inhabitants (Göteborgs Stad, 2025). The area is often recognized for its strong sense of community and vibrant local engagement. The residents are actively involved in shaping their environment, contributing to a dynamic and socially rich everyday life.

Hammarkullen is a multicultural area where people with origins from all over the world live (Göteborgs Stad, 2025). Approximately 50% are foreign-born and many are second-generation immigrants (Göteborgs Stad, Stadsledningskontoret, 2025). It is reflected by both the variety of food and local business but also in the activities, associations, language, art and music that take place.

An example of this cultural richness is the Hammarkullen Carnival that takes place every spring (Hammarkullekarnevalen, 2025). The carnival brings together dancers and visitors from all over the world, along with local dance groups and associations that together create a big celebration in collective effort.



Dancing people at the carnival

The design and evolution of Hammarkullen

As part of the Million Programme, much of Hammarkullen was built between 1968-72 and it was intended to function as a self-sufficient neighbourhood with workplaces, housing and a centre offering various services (Lindgren, Peter, & Reuter Metelius, 2014). Both single-family homes and apartment buildings were constructed, resulting in approximately 2700 dwellings. Characteristic features of Hammarkullen are the long high-rise buildings that surround the centre and several large courtyards with car-free streets and spacious areas between the buildings.

The landscape is characterized by a varied topography that follows the terrain up and down with a lot of preserved nature and greenery. In 1970, new directives were published regarding children's access to the outdoor environment, which was largely the basis for the design of the residential courtyards and green areas. There was a growing social responsibility for children and young people's everyday environments, which meant that the outdoor environment in the new residential areas would be adapted for support play and sports activities.

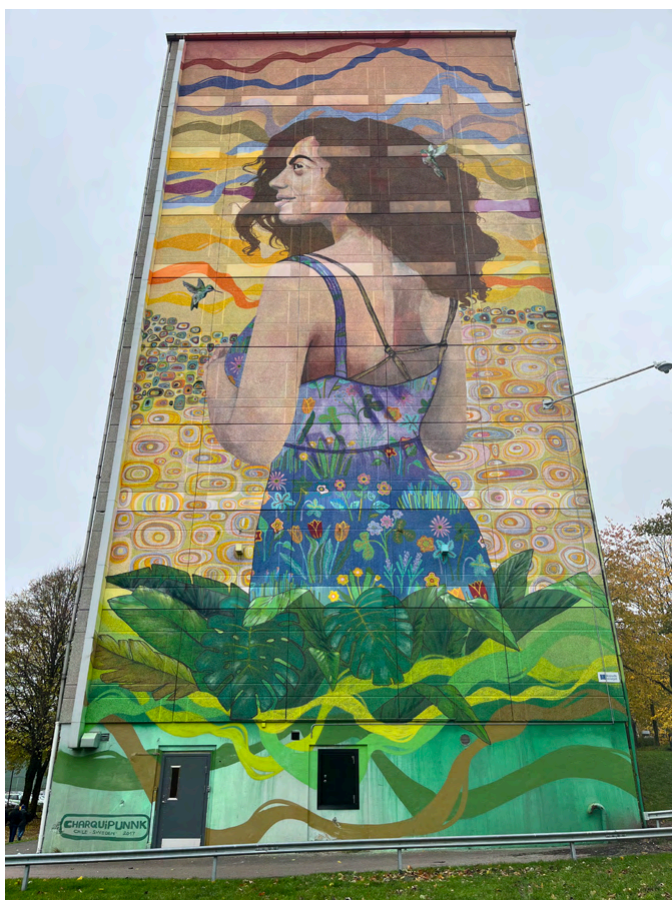


Hammarkullen tram stop



Hammarkullen playground





Natura, mural on Bredfjällsgatan 1 by Charquipunk

Public art and community engagement

There was an emphasis on artistic decoration in many of the Million Programme areas. Reliefs in concrete or stoneware in the entrances of the apartment buildings and metal façade decorations were common. Statens konstråd (The Swedish Public Art Agency) strived to integrate art with architecture, believing that it would have a positive impact on people's mood, attitudes and opportunities (Lindgren, Peter, & Reuter Metelius, 2014, p. 49).

Today, Hammarkullen has a wide range of public decorations and artworks. Among them are various works of art as sculptures, several murals painted by artists from all over the world, and as well as mosaics on various objects and on the ground throughout the area.

These mosaics are made by different artists often carried out in collaboration with local youth (Kulturvandring i Hammarkullen, 2024).

Labelled vulnerable: Hammarkullen's social and security issues

Like many other Million program areas, Hammarkullen is labelled as a particularly vulnerable area in the city according to the Police Authority. This defines a geographically defined area characterized by "low socioeconomic status where criminals have an impact on the local community. The impact is more tied to the social context in the area than the criminals' studied desire to seize power and control the local community." (Göteborgs Stad, 2025). As a result, many residents experiencing a sense of insecurity. "The people who commit crimes and are involved in criminal networks make up a very small portion of the population in the vulnerable areas. But even though they are few, they have a great impact on the areas." (Polismyndigheten, 2024).

Girls in vulnerable areas

A public debate has been created around socially vulnerable areas where they are referred to as "dangerous" and that "everyone who lives there is a criminal" which is largely based on a media focus that often highlights issues around violence, shootings and gang crime (Vogel, Arnell, & Moberg Stephenson, 2024). The media image represents a structure that mainly involves boys and men which also affects how political reactions and society's resources, and attention are distributed. Interventions are therefore often used against crime prevention and male-dominated activities. While young girls, whose lives are already rarely visible therefore tend to receive even less priority in the society. It contributes to exclusion and a lack of inclusive places for young girls where they feel seen, heard and safe.

Glossary

Embodied

"Being an embodied subject means that we experience, perceive, and interpret the world in and through our corporeal bodies" (Fileborn, 2020)

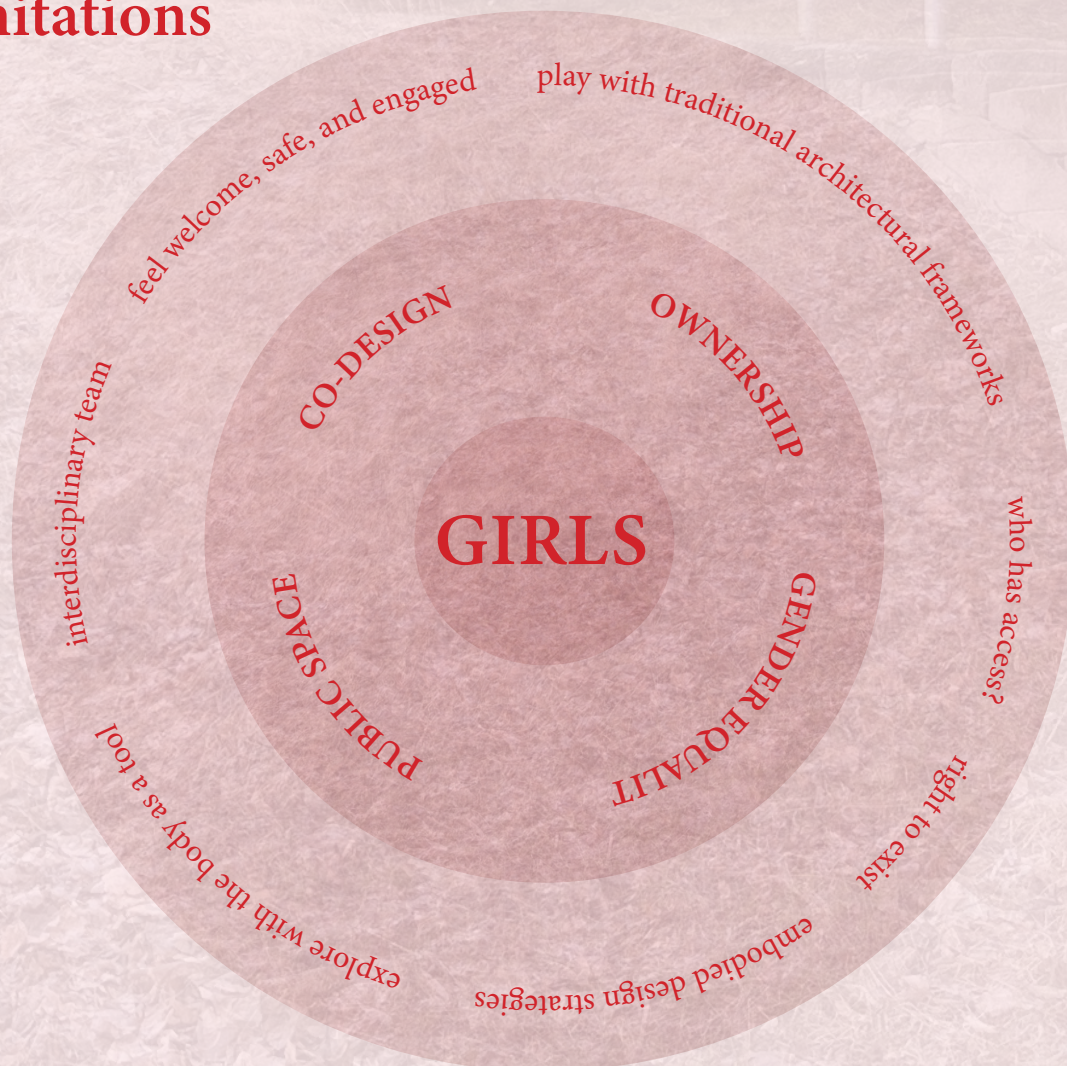
Empowerment

"Allowing others to 'take control' over their environment, being participative without being opportunistic; something that is pro-active instead of re-active." (Spatial agency, 2025)

Gender

Gender is a social construction, but in this thesis, the terms "girls" and "boys" are used to illustrate how girls are often excluded from public space and societal structures. This does not mean that all individuals identify with these categories—there are, of course, multiple genders and pronouns. The choice to use these terms reflects how gendered norms shape access to and participation in urban spaces, rather than an assumption of binary gender identities.

Delimitations



Target group

The thesis focus on the exclusion of girls in public space, which means that the needs of other underrepresented groups or gender identities will not be addressed.

Process before outcome

Architecture is more than the end result. In this project, the emphasis is rather on the process to truly highlight the collaborative and social aspect that takes part throughout the project.

Not a quantitative study

The thesis focus on both subjective and collective emotional aspects and embodied exploration and does not aim to collect statistics.

Phenomenology

My approach connects to theories of phenomenology and perception of space. Due to the limited scope and time of this thesis, I have chosen not to include phenomenology in the theory section. At the same time, it characterizes and is present throughout the project.



The background of the slide is a faded, light-colored photograph. It shows a grassy area in the foreground, with several trees in the middle ground. To the right, there is a metal railing, possibly part of a staircase or a walkway. The overall tone is soft and natural.

Theoretical framework

Why engage in Co-Design?

A central aspect of architecture and design is to understand and meet the needs of the user, which is often not obvious. Sometimes, even the users themselves do not know what is important to them. One way to approach this is through collaboration, where architects and users jointly explore and define what is essential in the design (Gielen, 2013).

Co-design, *co-creation*, and *participatory design* are all popular concepts in urban development today, almost to the point of becoming buzzwords. It is positive and important that co-creation and diverse perspectives are gaining more space in design processes, but at the same time it is essential to truly understand the meaning of these methods rather than simply following the trend and assuming that one is doing something beneficial. There is a tendency for these processes to become symbolic actions rather than leading to real influence (Bishop & Corkey, 2017). This is particularly evident when young people are involved in projects to share their opinions and experiences. Here one should think about how much power they actually have to influence? And is their participation genuine, or is it more about the fact that it looks good to include a youth perspective? One should also ask the question “What are the long-term consequences of this engagement?” (Avilla-Royo, 2023, p. 15)

The use of young people’s engagement and voices without granting them real influence has contributed to the term *youth washing* (The Climate Reality Project, 2023). This refers to politicians, organizations, and companies leveraging youth voices and activism for their own benefit, to appear inclusive rather than actually giving young people influence or decision-making power.

For co-design to truly fulfill its purpose, it must be integrated in a meaningful way. According to research from Henning Larsen and the Danish National Institute of Public Health (2022 - 2023) qualitative studies should always be conducted early in the process, before any ideas have been formed or design decisions made. This is to ensure that the information, insights, and experiences that the participants share are actually used and have significance and an impact on the project’s outcome.

Co-design can be implemented in many ways, but the fundamental principle is that it is an equal process where both the architect’s expertise and the user’s experience are given equal importance. “The architect brings to the table expert knowledge, while the user brings history and lived experience, each of which is given equal significance.” (Archio, 2023, p.6).

Creating spaces where more voices can be heard is an important part of co-design (Åkerman, Ågren, Rubin, & Lindunger, 2015). By amplifying and making room for underrepresented voices, more inclusive environments can be created. Architects have a responsibility to ensure that more people can have their say.

Statistics on the use of urban spaces

Studies show that boys tend to dominate public spaces for physical activities, accounting for up to 80% of usage, while girls make up only 20% (Blomdahl, Elofsson, & Åkesson, 2012).

There are fewer studies on the gendered use of green and recreational areas, and some argue that collecting data on these spaces is more challenging (Henning Larsen & the Danish National Institute of Public Health, 2022–2023). However, it is important to create an understanding of girls' activity and movement patterns in urban spaces. "Girls are a group that gets less attention in both the research and in the practical planning of urban spaces." (Hansson & Straume, 2021, p. 46)

Historically, society has been shaped by male norms, which have also influenced how spaces and areas are organized, often determining how and by whom they are used (Hansson & Straume, 2021).

The level of physical activity among young people is often linked to their perceived sense of safety in their surroundings. Areas with high crime rates often contribute to reduced activity levels, as they generate a sense of insecurity. This is particularly evident in socioeconomically disadvantaged and particularly vulnerable areas like Hammarkullen. Other factors, such as economic and cultural conditions, also play a role in shaping access to and use of urban spaces.

Young people's right to shape the city

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children and young people have just as much right as adults to be involved in and express their views on urban development and spatial planning. The city is their space just as much as anyone else's (Boverket, 2020).

Young people's needs in urban space

An important part of growing up is developing relationships and building friendships. Young people, therefore, need access to spaces where they can practice this. Feeling that one has access to and connection with public spaces in their surroundings often contributes to increased engagement with the place and strengthened social bonds. Patsy Eubanks Owens emphasizes the importance of engaging young people in the design process from the start to allow them to express their identities and foster social connections (2017).

Although some may view young people "hanging out" as negative, it is a crucial part of their social development (Bishop & Corkey, 2017). These spaces have been shown to boost self-esteem, develop and strengthen an identity, and support the transition from youth to adulthood (Höglhammer, 2018).

Owens highlights youths' preference for semi-private spaces where they can be alone or with close friends, underscoring the importance of these often-overlooked areas:

"We know that many adolescents seek out places where they can be alone, or alone with a close friend. These places are less visible, but no less important." (Owens, 2017)

The right to belong in public space

Leslie Kern discusses how certain groups, especially women and non-binary individuals, often feel excluded from public spaces. She highlights the need to create accessible, open, and welcoming places for people to inhabit, regardless of their gender identity, background, or socioeconomic status. (Kern, 2020)

Therefore, it is especially important to have spaces where girls feel safe and that primarily belong to them, as most public spaces and facilities are used predominantly by boys or are targeted at younger children.

How women interact with the city is often linked to its design. Kern describes how the city can be both a place for supportive community and a place that restricts women's freedom of movement and opportunities for connection due to fear or a lack of available, safe public spaces.

Integrate emotional dimensions into the analysis of urban space

Mei-Po Kwan argues that emotions and bodily experiences should be central to spatial analyses and advocates for the importance of capturing the emotional and bodily dimensions of how people experience space, as these are crucial for understanding movement and interaction in the urban environment (2008). By integrating emotional responses into mapping and spatial representations, it is possible to challenge dominant, often gendered, norms.

Urban space – what is that?

We spend a significant part of our time in urban spaces. This could be in parks, on a public square, or waiting for a tram at a stop. It could also be when walking along a pathway or down a staircase between two buildings.

Camilla Van Deurs, the city architect of Copenhagen, describes it as:

“Urban space is also the site of our ordinary movements in the city...walking to school, going to university, feeling safe at the metro station at night... these are all part of how we experience urban spaces.” (Henning Larsen & the Danish National Institute of Public Health, 2022–2023, p. 8).

Urban space is often linked to gender structures. This relates to how certain places are associated with a specific gender and how a space is perceived based on who uses it (Hansson & Straume, 2021).

Urban in-between spaces

In urban space, there are places that exist at the interface between defined and organized functions, often lacking a clear or fixed use.

These spaces can be described as “non-places” or “transitional spaces”, where people pass through or linger without the space having a specific designated function (Andrews & Roberts, 2012). Examples include passageways, areas beneath bridges, or leftover urban spaces where no explicit planning dictates their use, but where people still use or occupy them.

These places can also be referred to as “liminal spaces” or “loose spaces”, which can arise in different types of urban environments: both in planned public spaces and in unused, abandoned spaces. (Franck & Stevens, 2007, p.6).

Liminal spaces are characterized by flexibility and uncertainty in both their function and experience, creating opportunities for experimental and informal uses beyond the norms and regulations of urban planning. They can also serve as transitional zones between public and private spaces, making them attractive for spontaneous, alternative, or more hidden forms of activity.

These places can be perceived as uncertain and undefined, but also flexible, which can create opportunities for experimentation beyond the control of urban planning.





Methodology

The overarching approach is rooted in **Participatory Action Research (PAR)**, a methodology that emphasizes collaboration between researchers and participants to identify problems, create solutions, and implement changes together. In PAR, the researcher is not a passive observer but actively engages with participants and providing tools and methods to analyze their environments. The goal is to understand or explain a social situation but also to empower participants to influence their surroundings and address injustices or problems they identify themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Collective Discovery and Learning

A central principle of PAR is that knowledge is created collectively. Youth have unique expertise, shaped by their age and personal experiences from daily life. Knowledge that cannot be replaced by adult assumptions. Their perspectives reveal connections, identify potential, and create place-specific knowledge that would not be possible without their involvement (Mijanovic, Ivansson , Ricci Sac, & Hallgren , 2020). However, this does not mean that responsibility should rest solely on participants. Instead, a mutual exchange of knowledge should take place. As an architect, I contribute my expertise in understanding spatial relationships, bringing together diverse needs and ideas, and integrating these into design solutions. This collaboration fosters shared learning and exploration (Narbed, Creative Performance and Practice, 2021).

Include teenage girls in the design process

Teenage girls are a group that is often marginalized in urban planning. They are frequently generalized, with the assumption that all individuals in the group share the same needs, which is of course a very simplified view. “We shouldn’t paint a picture of girls as a homogeneous group that just has one huge need to sit and chitchat.” (Henning Larsen & the Danish National Institute of Public Health, 2022–2023, p. 14). For a more inclusive urban space, it is crucial to understand their needs by listening to their experiences and learning how they interact with the environment. Through discussions and workshops that provide qualitative information where different life experiences are shared, we can break down stereotypes and preconceived notions, gaining a deeper understanding of their needs.

There are several examples of projects where teenage girls have been involved in the design process of public spaces, giving them the opportunity to influence their surroundings. Some interesting initiatives include:

Frizon, Umeå

Dansbana!

Flickrum i det offentliga, Stockholm

Rosens röda matta, Rosengård Malmö

#UrbanGirlsMovement i Fittja, Botkyrka

These initiatives demonstrate how the inclusion of girls in urban development can contribute to more gender-equal societies, which is a key goal of Agenda 2030 (Globala målen för hållbar utveckling, 2025) Self-determination and co-determination should be pursued more because the examples mentioned above show that girl-conscious urban planning is possible if the user group is taken seriously (Hansson & Straume, 2021, p. 61).

Play and playful approach

The concept of play is defined differently depending on context, culture and social structures (Stevens, 2007). Play is often associated and reduced to children only, where it is encouraged and seen as part of natural development. But play is ongoing and happens all the time, throughout life. Play is about challenging, testing boundaries, creating new possibilities and encounters without any intention to achieve a direct goal. It can take place in discussions, in laughter, in dance but also in public space where unexpected interactions with places and people occur.

Play is the opposite of, for example, work and being deadly serious about something. Play means that there is room for curiosity but also mistakes. Play can contribute with flexibility and alternatives to the expected. In the project, I have used play as a method throughout the process to allow myself and the participants to use our imagination and not set any limits based on normative expectations and structures and to allow us to play with public space by exploring new and uncertain possibilities.

The body and mind as a research tool

My research focuses on the embodied, lived experience as a way to generate subjective and qualitative data. Instead of using abstract analysis, I explore how being in, moving through and experiencing a place can be a method for understanding urban spaces. By adding a critical perspective to these embodied experiences, I analyze how spaces shape and are shaped by human interaction (von Benzon, Mark Holton, & Wilkinson, 2021). The body itself becomes a research tool, offering insights into spatial perception, movement, and the emotional dimensions of place.

This approach connects to theories of phenomenology and perception of space.

“Our bodies and movements are in constant interaction with the environment; the world and the self inform and redefine each other constantly. The percept of the body and the image of the world turn into one single continuous existential experience; there is no body separate from its domicile in space, and there is no space unrelated to the unconscious image of the perceiving self.” (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 44)

Embodied exploration

Embodied exploration serves as a method for understanding spatial qualities by engaging the body and senses in an active process of exploration. Unlike just focusing on physical movement through space, embodied exploration emphasizes how sensory perception, bodily adaptation, and spatial awareness contribute to the experience of place. (Merriman, 2010).

Inspired by Anna and Lawrence Halprin’s methods for participatory processes, where they incorporated movement-based explorations. By “first becoming consciously aware of a space, we can then explore ways to control and shape it” (Merriman, 2012, p. 332). Lawrence argued that “urban areas demand ‘participation,’ and they must be experienced through movement to come alive” (Merriman, 2010, p. 434).

Embodied exploration involves becoming aware of the body in space, observing how it interacts with and is influenced by the physical space. Movement provides new perspectives on spatial experience. By taking time to explore, test and feel, participants may uncover new sensations and insights about their surroundings.

Engaging the body in this way can feel vulnerable, weird and even intimidating in public space. Therefore, it is crucial to first introduce these explorations in safe and controlled environments (Narbed & Exit Map, Moving On: dancing in the gap, 2024).

Emotional mapping

Emotional mapping is a participatory method for capturing and visualizing emotional responses: as participants' perceptions, feelings and thoughts of a specific place by being in and experiencing it (Pánek, 2018).

By mapping participants' emotional responses, it becomes possible to identify patterns in their experiences and understand how different places affect them emotionally. This can, for example, highlight which areas are perceived as safe, inspiring, or exclusionary, as well as the factors that contribute to these feelings (Pánek, 2018). Through thematic analysis, we can identify key insights and patterns, which in turn guide further exploration and development within the project (Reavey, 2020)

Sharing subjective information on the map can foster a sense of ownership and strengthen the sense of connection among participants (Cochrane & Corbett, 2018) by sharing stories with each other's (Luckett & Bagelman, 2023).

I divided the Emotional mapping into two steps: First, participants create a map of the place based on their own experience, choosing freely which physical elements they find significant (Reavey, 2020). They then reflect on the emotional impressions they experienced during the Embodied Exploration exercise and translate these into visual expressions using colored pencils on their map. This process captures the feelings and atmosphere evoked by specific areas, relating to aspects such as comfort, aesthetics, inclusion, and sense of safety (Jaskulska & Grzesikowska, 2024).

Documentation through text, photo and video

I have documented the process through this booklet, in a separate document where I have written down all my thoughts and reflections on almost everything, as well as through photo and video documentation, primarily of the workshop sessions. This is to remember spontaneous conversations and ideas that arose during the process. But also to use as a presentation and representation of the various exploratory exercises.

Thematic analysis

To identify key insights and patterns in the collected material, I conducted a thematic analysis. By first going through the material (quotes from the participants, photos, film and drawings) several times to understand it, I then summarized it using keywords, which I grouped into six themes: Control, Visibility, Safety, Exposed/Vulnerable, Aesthetic Comfort, Aesthetic Discomfort. Each theme was defined and named, providing a direction for further exploration and development within the project. (Tivenius, 2024)

Creative workshops

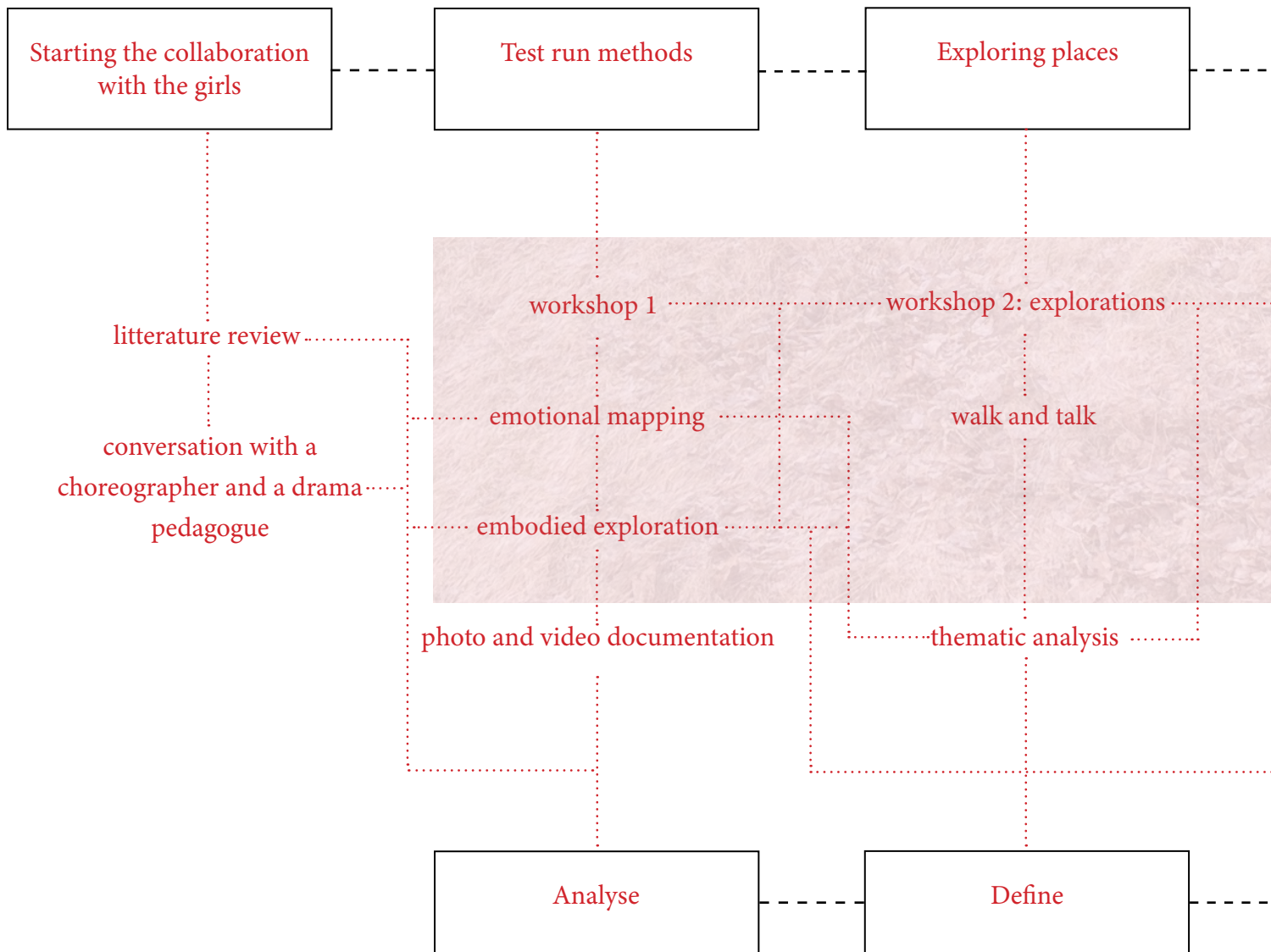
I have conducted four exploratory and creative workshops with the participants, where we primarily used our hands to communicate and think together by working with physical models made from various materials such as styrofoam, textiles, cardboard, and clay, in order to create imaginative expressions and interpretations.

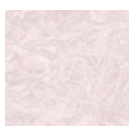


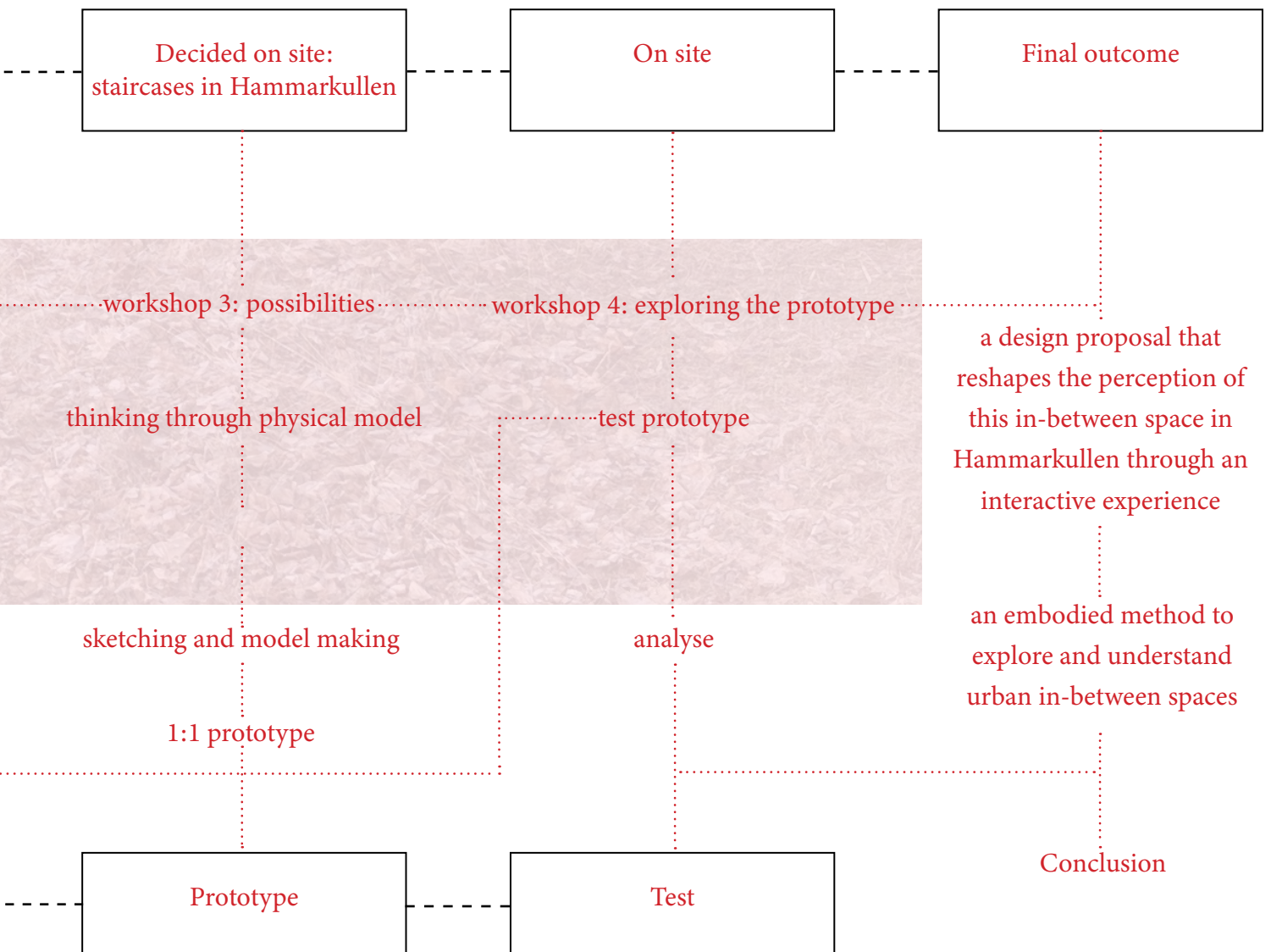
The background of the slide is a faded, light-colored photograph. It shows a grassy area with some trees in the distance and a metal railing in the foreground on the right side. The overall tone is soft and natural.

Process: From exploration to proposal

Process diagram



 = co-design



Introduction to process

The project was carried out in collaboration with five girls aged 16–20, who all live in northeastern Gothenburg, primarily in Hjällbo, Hammarkullen and Angered.

In order to value their time, commitment and perspective, they have received financial compensation, financed through Irisstipendiet. This is because their participation has been invaluable to this project and because I believe that young people's involvement and perspective is something that should be taken very seriously and not something that is just exploited because it is easily accessible and free.

I feel very grateful that I had the opportunity to get to know these young people during the fall of 2024 in the Unga Stadsutvecklare project. Partly because it has of course been an advantage that they have already received an introduction to what urban development is and are genuinely interested, but also because we have had a lot of fun together.

All participants have been informed and have approved through a consent form how their personal information (first name, age, gender, audio or video recordings, pictures, and other information connected to the individual, such as personal reflections (e.g., thoughts, perceptions, and opinions)) will be used in this thesis.

The collaboration began with an information meeting in January when I presented my project idea to the participants. The starting point of the project was that we would explore Angereds Resecentrum to initiate a dialogue about public spaces and who feels welcome and who has access to it.

My choice of Angereds Resecentrum as a starting point was based on the fact that it was created through a process where young people's influence played a significant role in the design. Through my experiences as a supervisor in the Unga Stadsvecklare project, I realized that this did not necessarily mean that the place was perceived as inclusive for everyone and especially not for girls.

During the information meeting, I made it clear that if the girls did not feel a connection to this place or preferred to suggest other places to explore, I was fully open to adapting to their preferences. It was important for me that we worked with places that they have a relationship with, whether it is places they often visit or consciously avoid. This was to ensure that the process was both genuine and honest. Therefore, I asked everyone to reflect on this.

After the information session, we met at four workshop sessions during the spring to explore urban spaces and create ideas together. Each workshop has been shaped along the way, based on what I felt was important for me and the participants to explore in order to move the project forward.

The first workshop had two purposes, to test the methods and at the same time collect data in a safe environment together with the participants. The second workshop instead served as a method for data collection in a more realistic context. The third workshop took place after the collected data had been analysed and aimed to encourage both me and the participants to start thinking about possible improvement opportunities for the now defined focus area of the project. The fourth and final workshop served as an opportunity for me to present my design proposal to the participants, based on the reflections and ideas generated in the previous workshop, and to test and evaluate it through a 1:1 scale prototype on site.

In the following section, I will explain how the process unfolded.

Put into practice

Workshop 1: Test

The first workshop served as a test run to assess feasibility, evaluate whether participants found it valuable, and provide the opportunity to conduct the session indoors in a safe environment.

At this session five participants were present, and it took place on an evening in January. We were in Chalmers' facilities in Hammarkullen, which we also used when working together in Unga Stadsutvecklare so all the participants had been there before. Everything was documented through video.

Before we started, I arranged the room with furniture and objects placed in a disorderly manner. The space was left partially open to allow for larger movements and to give the opportunity to interact with the surroundings in different ways.



Exercise 1: Embodied Exploration

Conscious positioning in space

We began with warm-up exercises to become comfortable with each other and to begin fostering an awareness of the body. I guided the participants but also participated in the exercises myself.

We then proceeded with Embodied Exploration, where we moved around the room and, after a while, were invited to position ourselves in a place we perceived as positive. Everyone was free to stand, sit, or lean against an object. A brief moment was then spent reflecting individually on why each person chose that particular spot.

The exercise was repeated, but this time, everyone was encouraged to position themselves in a place they perceived as negative.

Then we discussed the experience, how it felt to be there and what feelings or thoughts were evoked.

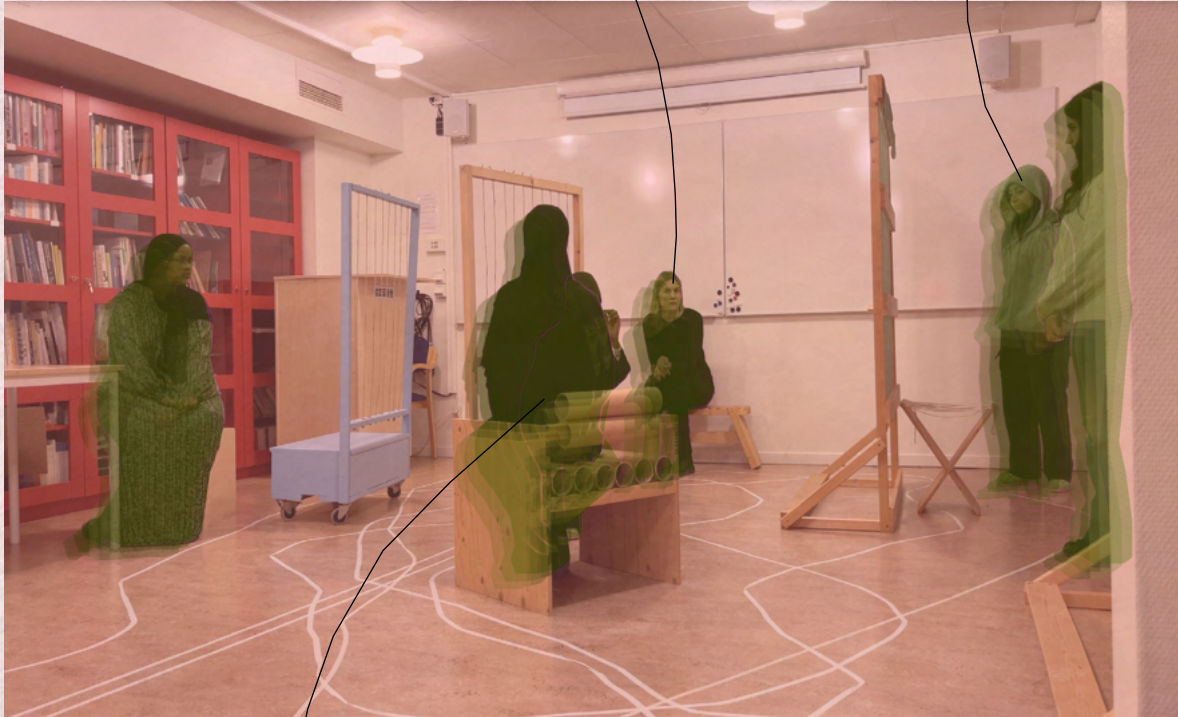
The discussion continued with reflections on why everyone chose to position themselves in a particular spot, considering whether it felt positive or negative.



"I sat over there because I felt safe and comfortable."

"I chose to stand behind this so that I had nothing behind me. I could still see you, but you couldn't see me as clearly."

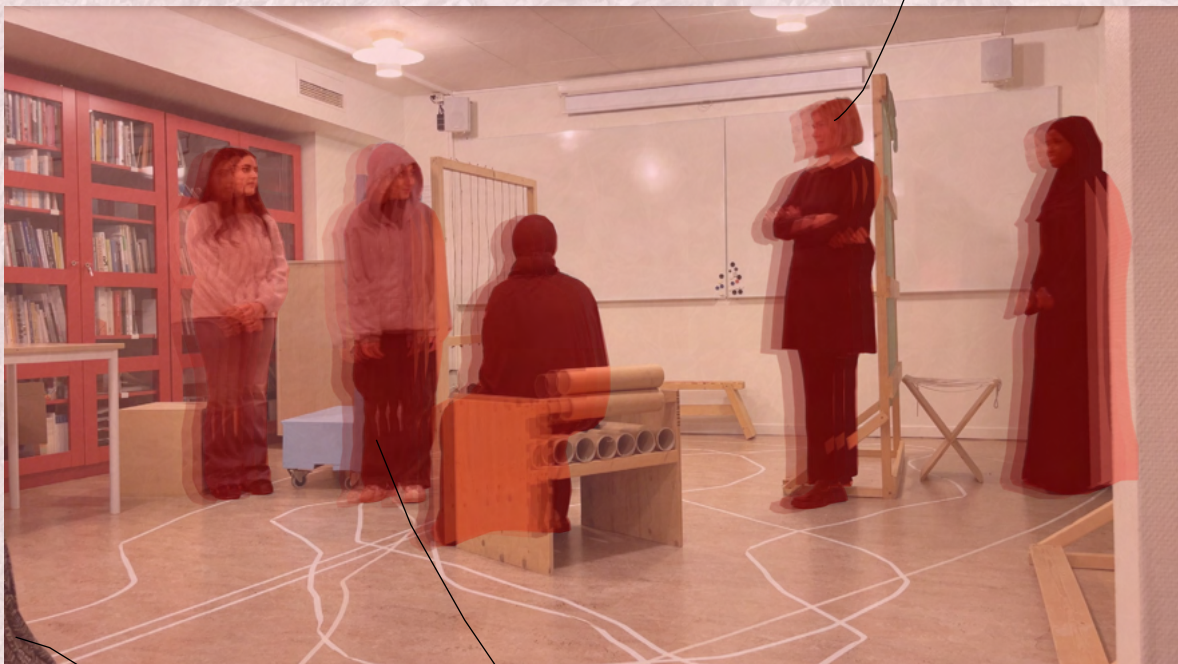
Reflections on choosing a positive spot:



"I felt that I had control, that I could see what was happening around me. I felt safe."

"Someone was standing behind the textile while my back was turned to the person, it felt like she saw me more clearly than I could perceive her."

Reflections on choosing a negative spot:



"I stood in the middle of the room next to the camera, because it felt like I was giving a presentation, everyone was looking at me."

"I couldn't sit or lean on anything, and I was trapped between the benches."

Exercise 2: Reflection on everyday places

In advance, I had asked the participants to think about places they wanted to explore. These could be places they frequently use or pass by, but other types of places were also welcome.

One participant took us to a location she has to pass on her way to her taekwondo training in Hammarkullen. She lives in Hjällbo and takes the tram to Hammarkullen, walking through the center and turning off just before the Hammarbadet swimming hall. Between Hammarbadet and the training facility, Hammarkullehallen, there is a steep slope with two staircases running parallel but in different directions. Additionally, there is a very steep asphalt ramp.

The participant explained that she always feels scared and uncomfortable when passing through this area, but she still does it because it is the fastest route. She described the staircases as strange and poorly designed. She also found the lighting unsettling, giving a ghostly glow.

Another participant agreed and said that she has a similar staircase on her way home, but she doesn't even have the option to choose a different route.



Exercise 3: Emotional mapping of Angered Resecentrum

On-site, we began by walking around together, discussing the space, and sharing our impressions and reflections. We then proceeded with Emotional Mapping. Participants were first asked to create a map of the area based on their personal perceptions. One was free to illustrate the physical elements they observed and add details that felt significant to their experience.

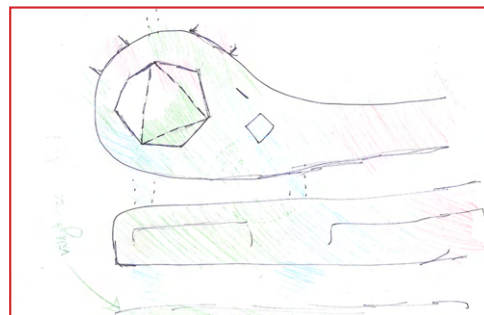
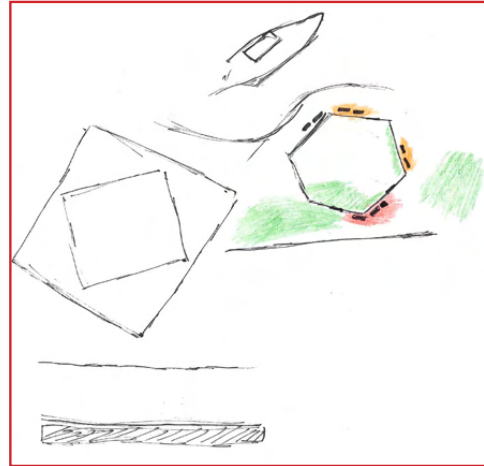
Afterward, we shifted focus on the emotional aspects we associated with the place and expressed these through colored pencils. In this way, each participant could illustrate how different parts of the place evoke different emotions and perceptions.

We collaboratively established the color interpretation before starting the exercise to ensure that everyone's maps could be read consistently. But what one wanted to bring and focus on was up to each individual.

Green: Positive, I want to be here – it feels nice, safe, or inviting

Red: Negative, I don't want to be here – it feels uncomfortable, unsafe or uninviting

Blue: Neutral – neither good nor bad, I don't really care



Insights from workshop 1

“unestablished” places

The staircases in Hammarkullen made me curious to explore more “unestablished” places - spaces that people might only pass through because they have to, like in the participant’s case on her way to taekwondo training.

The other participants also referenced similar places. Perhaps locations become more intriguing and significant when they have a personal connection to them.

These places might create more engagement.

I noticed that some participants seemed slightly uncomfortable when we were at Angereds Resecentrum. There were many groups of men and boys just hanging around.

One participant commented that working with the staircases in Hammarkullen, for example, could lead to a more embodied exploration since it’s a place where they feel more comfortable experimenting, as there aren’t as many people around.

Safety

I noticed that the aspect of safety received significant focus during our explorations of the sites, especially in the results, despite the fact that I did not explicitly ask participants to reflect on it. This makes me think about the balance between guiding the conversation and keeping it open. Perhaps the process could have been more structured, with a clearer focus on specific aspects. At the same time, my intention was to capture their genuine perceptions, thoughts, and words without directing them too much—so that the themes that truly matter to them would emerge.

Comfort – what does it really mean?

The concept of comfort can have different meanings depending on the context. It can refer to physical comfort, such as a pleasant place to sit, but also to a specific feeling of being in a space that, for example, feels welcoming.

Workshop 2: Explorations

This session took place on a morning in February and due to illness only two participants were present.

In advance, as in the previous workshop, I had asked the participants to think about places they wanted to explore. On-site, we conducted both Embodied Exploration and Emotional Mapping and was documented through photo and video.

Location 1: Hammarkullen

We returned to the staircases that one participant has to pass on the way to her Taekwondo training



Positive:

"I think the rock wall has something special, it feels hard but soft at the same time. I feel like leaning against it."

"Standing up here (at the highest point, just before the stairs) feels good because even though I can't see what's in the bushes or around the corners of the building ahead, it feels like the stairs—or maybe just being above—act as a barrier in between."

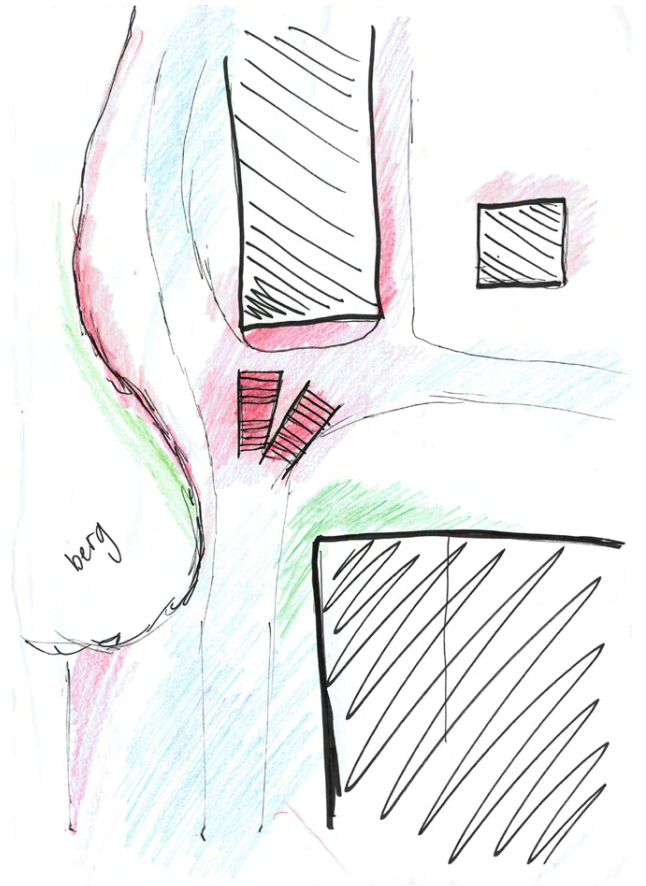
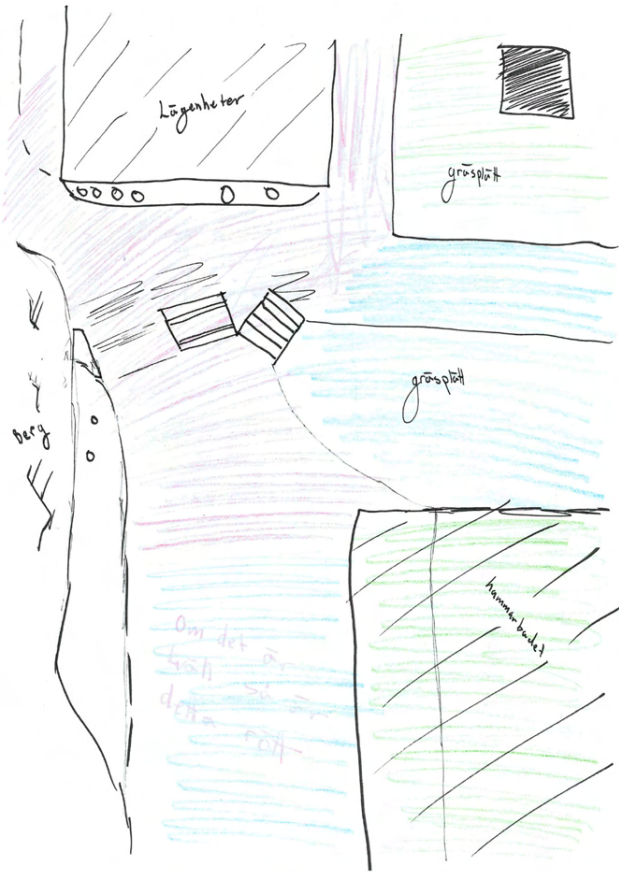
"From here, I have the best overview. And if someone suspicious were to come, I could escape or step aside."

Negative:

"The stairs going in different directions feel very strange. The awkward gap between them makes me uncomfortable. The whole place feels temporary, or unfinished."

"I feel trapped in the stairs. Something could come from both behind and in front of me."

"I really don't like walking down this staircase (the one on the left) because it feels like someone is standing in the bushes below."





Location 2: Rannebergen

the pathway to the bus for one of the participants

It was challenging to capture everyone's bodies and reflections in a single image due to the large size of the area. Instead, photographs of specific locations represent the participants' bodily positions and physical analyses, highlighting their interactions with the space.

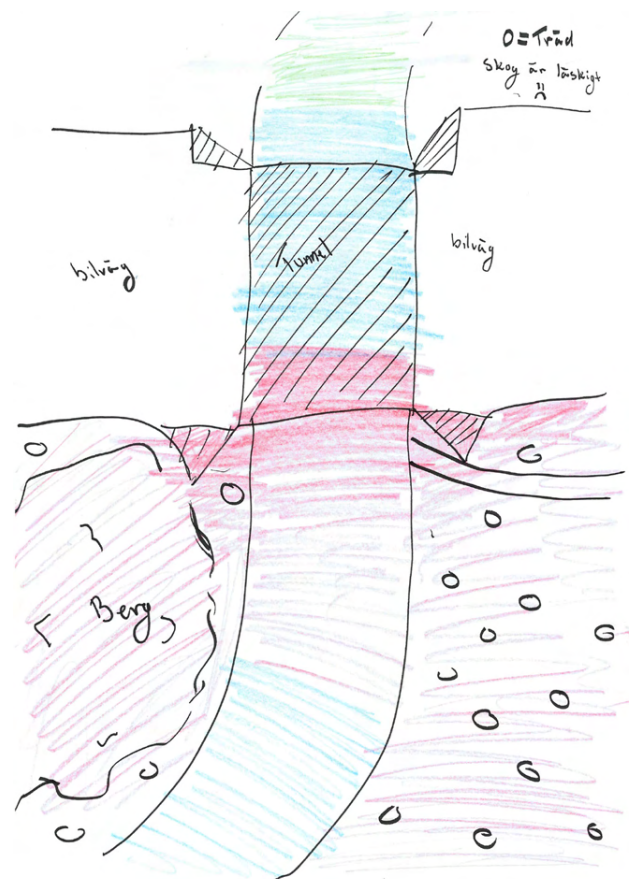
"When you walk up here towards the houses and the bus stop, it doesn't feel as lonely as on the side towards the water and the forest."



"Nice view, lovely to walk past. At least during the day."



"Here, I have a good overview, both of what's in front of me and behind me."

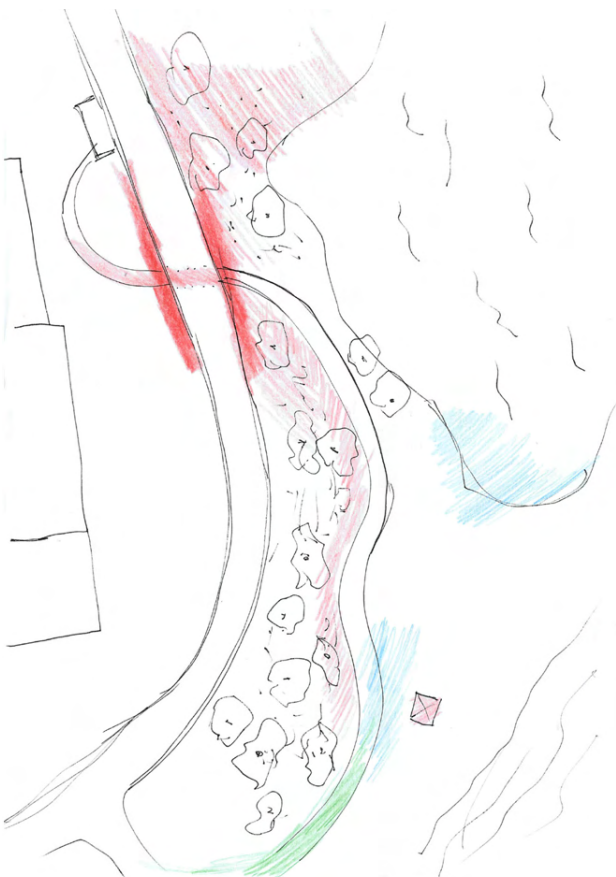




"I don't know what's outside, which makes me feel insecure."



"Here, it always feels like someone is going to come out when I walk past alone."



"Right here, when you come out of the tunnel and are met by a lot of trees on both sides, and you can't really see anything because of the high edges on the bridge that block the view."

Insights from workshop 2

Group feeling

During this workshop only three of us participated due to illness. This had a noticeable impact on our sense of group feeling - it was clear that we didn't feel as strong or confident as before.

Indoor vs. outdoor

There was a significant difference between conducting Embodied exploration indoors versus outdoors. When we tested it indoors during the first workshop, it was more playful. When we did it outdoors, it was clear that we weren't as comfortable, which likely made some participants hesitant to move as freely and exploratively.

Safety

Even during this workshop, much of the group discussion centered around safety, which is not surprising. It is a topic that is almost unavoidable when talking about public spaces.

Positioning

At the stairs in Hammarkullen there was a clear difference in the perception of the space depending on whether one was standing above or in the middle of the staircase. All participants experienced a sense of being trapped when standing within the staircase. The area everyone chose as "positive" was just above the stairs, where the same feeling of trapped did not arise. One participant commented that this spot provided an opportunity to "escape" or step aside if an unpleasant person should appear. The participant who led us there mentioned that she often walked on the grass along the steep slope instead of using the stairs for this very reason. A similar experience occurred in Rannebergen when we passed through the tunnel beneath the road. One participant felt noticeably more uncomfortable moving in one direction compared to the other.

It is interesting how a place can feel so different despite being only a few steps apart.

Thematic analysis

After conducting workshop 1 and 2, I identified key insights and patterns of the collected material through thematic analysis, which in turn guide further exploration and development within the project (Reavey, 2020).

Control

Feeling of control

I can see you, but you can not see me

To open behind my back

Nothing behind me

Visibility

Overview

See what is happening around me

Feels like someone is standing in the bushes

Safety

Sense of safety

Protection

I can escape / step aside

Darkness

Exposed/Vulnerable

Excluded

No control

Hinder

Trapped

Everyone is looking at me

Stand in the middle

You can see me better than I can see you

Feel like I was alone

Aesthetic Comfort

I feel like leaning against it

Attraction

Something special – makes me curious

Hard and soft at the same time

Aesthetic Discomfort

Feels temporary / unfinished

Feels strange

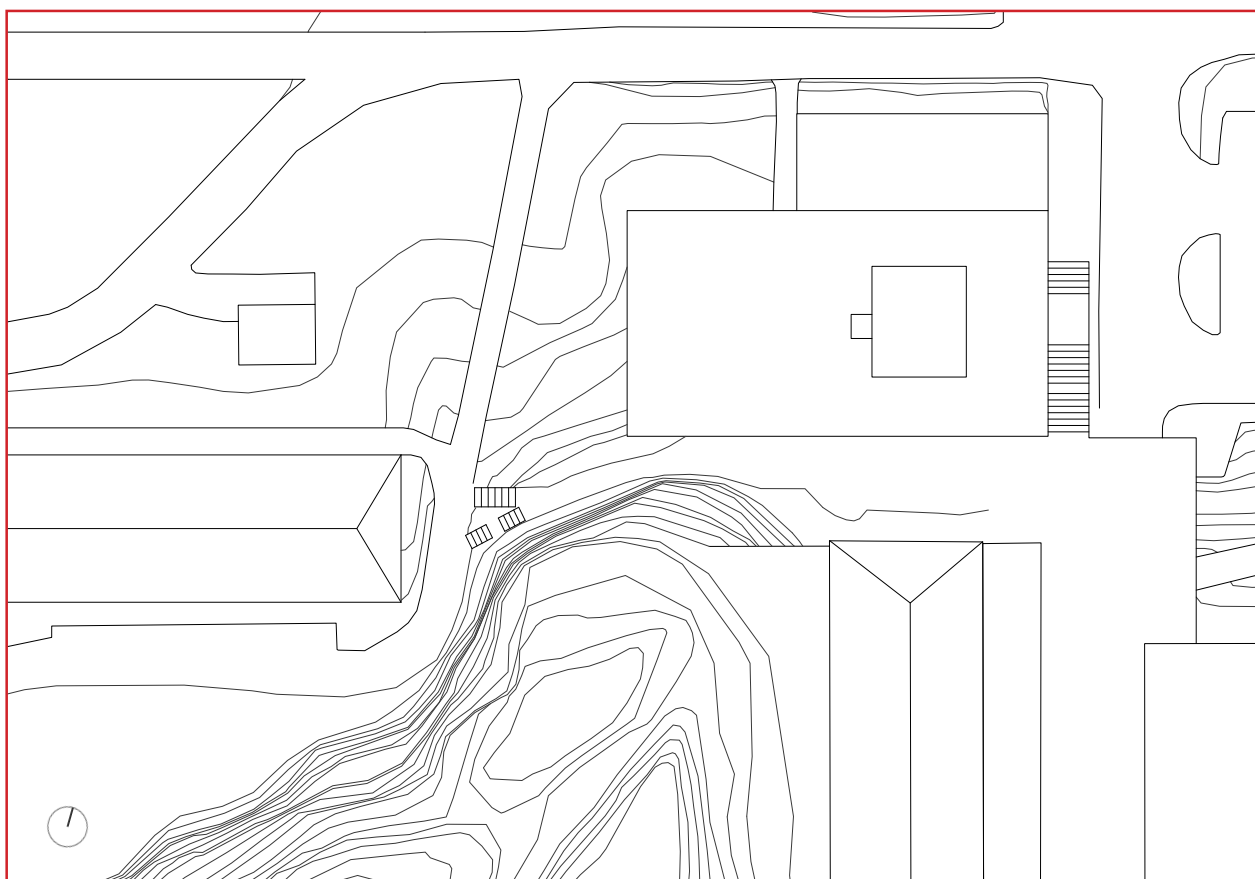
Darkness



Definition - direction

Based on the exploration of various locations and the subsequent analysis, I decided that the focus of further exploration would be the passage in Hammarkullen. A liminal space, an urban in-between, connecting Hammarkullen's center with its surroundings. For many, it is likely perceived as an insignificant non-place and almost invisible. But based on the participants' experiences, it is a place that evokes many different feelings and perceptions.

How can one work with a seemingly dull or uninspiring place to make it more exciting, memorable and inclusive? The participants agreed that the site is 'ugly', but I think it is a place with many interesting qualities, for example, the cliff that runs along one side.



Workshop 3: Possibilities

This session took place on a Sunday in March and three participants were present.

At this session, we began by reviewing the summary of the analysis and the defined themes to see if there was anything the participants felt was missing.

Then we created an abstract working model of the site using different volumes of styrofoam.

We explored the site focusing on the urban in-between space based on the different themes.

We had an open dialogue where participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences and discuss and try possible changes through different materials such as clay, textiles and cardboard.





The discussion touched on the following topics:



Visibility: Rounded corners on EVERYTHING = no blind corners!

Greenery: The bushes on the short side of the building opposite the stairs: Several participants felt that it gives the impression that someone might be standing inside.



Lighting: Both to illuminate the entire space and to create more interesting spatial qualities.
No spotlights!

The stairs: Reducing the feeling of being enclosed by introducing new railings that do not block the space in the same way. Maybe a railing in the middle?

There was also a suggestion for a staircase extending along the entire slope—good sun exposure and could be used by the school.



No "hangout spots": The participants expressed concern that it would only lead to groups of boys gathering there in the evenings, making it feel unsafe.

The empty space between the swimming hall and the stone wall:

Interactive objects – creating reflections – something intriguing that captures attention so that it does not remain just an anonymous passage. It does not necessarily have to be seating but something that prompts a reaction and makes the place memorable.

"Eyes on the street": No see through windows facing the passage. Redesign and incorporate more safety and interaction.



Insights from workshop 3

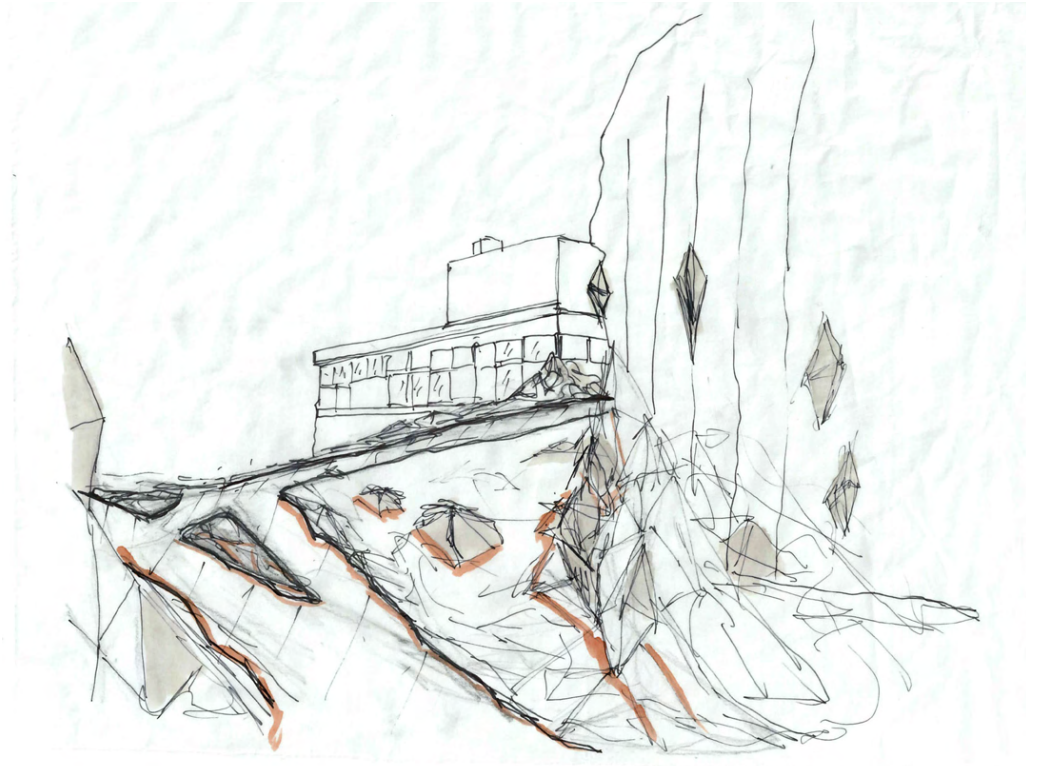
I thought all the different possibilities for the space were important, but the concern about “no hangout spots” because boys might take over the space was particularly interesting, but also quite sad.

I wanted to explore this in combination with the idea of interactive objects, something that created reflections, something intriguing that captured attention so the space didn't remain just an anonymous passage. The goal is to prompt a reaction and make the place memorable. Reshaping the perception of this in-between space through an interactive experience. I wanted to explore this in model and connect it to the words from the thematic analysis.

After this workshop, I felt a strong interest in exploring how to engage with a place that isn't designed for lingering, but rather for movement. In many ways, this challenged the conventional understanding of “public space”, which is often shaped to attract and hold people, rather than to guide them forward through it.

Generate ideas

I started exploring different ideas in sketches and models. I wanted it to become an identity of the space based on the girls reflections.

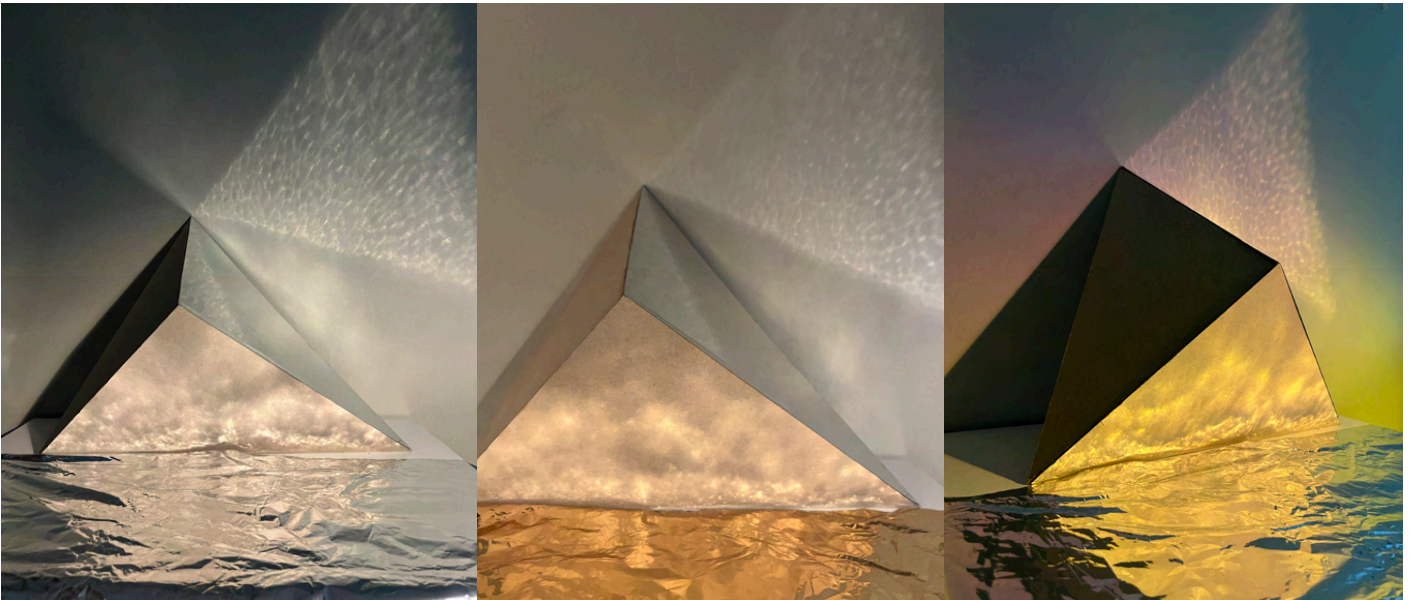
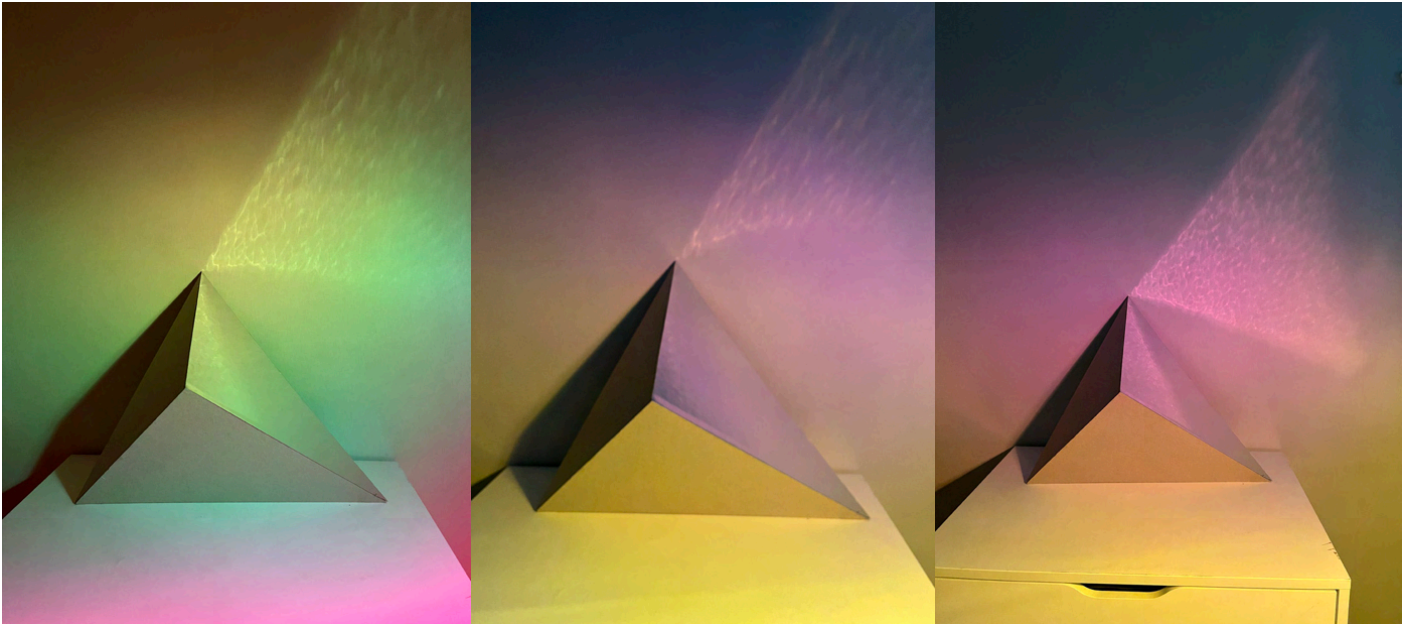


Light and reflection study

The idea of reflective surfaces was something I wanted to explore, with the aim of not only creating interesting plays of light but also functioning as mirrors, similar to those sometimes found on narrow roads to help see around sharp corners, providing an overview and allowing one to see what lies ahead or behind.

I constructed a model using cardboard and mounted mirror plastic on one of its sides. Colored light was cast through tinted plastic sheets, and I experimented by placing various reflective surfaces in front of it.





Prototype 1:1

The light study made me curious to try it on site in full scale so I built a 1:1 prototype in plywood and cardboard and during an evening in April me and a friend tested it on site.

The aim was to explore how the design could be experienced in the actual context, focusing on reflections, atmosphere, movement, and interaction in the dark.

We used reflective plastic filter and a flashlight for the light experiment.













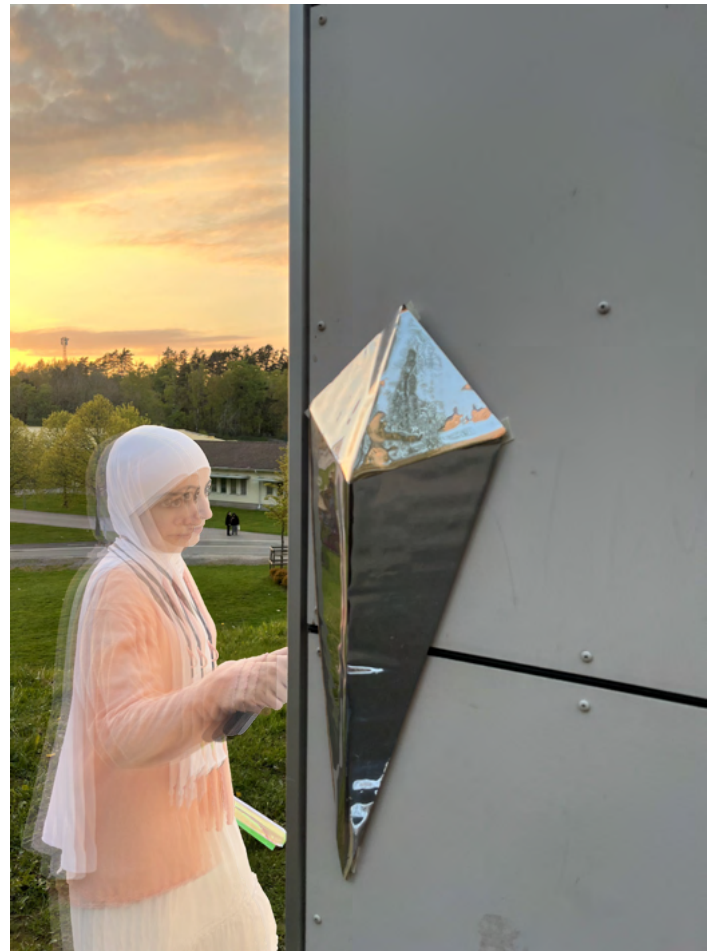
Workshop 4: Embody the prototype

The fourth and final workshop took place on a Thursday evening in April in Hammarkullen with three participants present. On this occasion we started by having dinner together and it was very nice and it became clear that our relationship during this project has become so strong. It felt a bit melancholic that this was our last session together.

This session served as an opportunity for me to present my design proposal to the girls, based on the reflections and ideas generated in the previous workshop, and to test and evaluate it through the 1:1 scale prototype on site through embodied exploration.

We positioned the prototypes in different locations and played with light and reflections. It was very fun and inspiring, and we ended up staying much longer than planned. I felt that everyone was almost spellbound by the light effects we created on the walls and the ground.

Before the workshop, I was a bit concerned that the reflections wouldn't be as striking or dynamic during the day compared to the light effects I had observed during my earlier evening experiments. However, it turned out to be quite the opposite. The reflections blended beautifully with the sunlight, creating a softer and more pleasant expression than the sharper, more dramatic contrasts that appeared in the dark. I also discovered that the sunlight itself could be used as a source of interaction, showing that different reflective surfaces can have an effect even during the day without the need for artificial lighting.



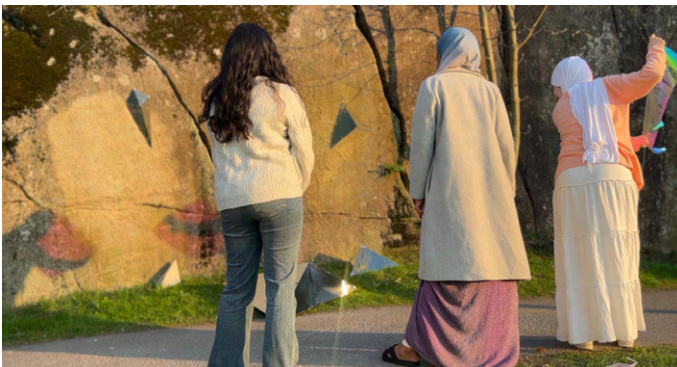




Everyone moved over and through the prototypes in different ways, for example by jumping from the largest shape to more explorative movements in between, focusing on the mirror image that appeared in the reflective surfaces.



Together the girls walked arm in arm and took over the place even though other people were passing by at the same time. I think that was my best moment when I stood for a moment just observing them and felt their genuine joy and sense of connection, both for each other and with the place, which in that moment really felt like ours.



During the workshop we discussed the design proposal and everyone agreed that, above all, the reflective parts and the light effects contributed something interesting to the place. But it became clear while we were on site that that was not the most important. What really mattered was why we were there and that we were there together.



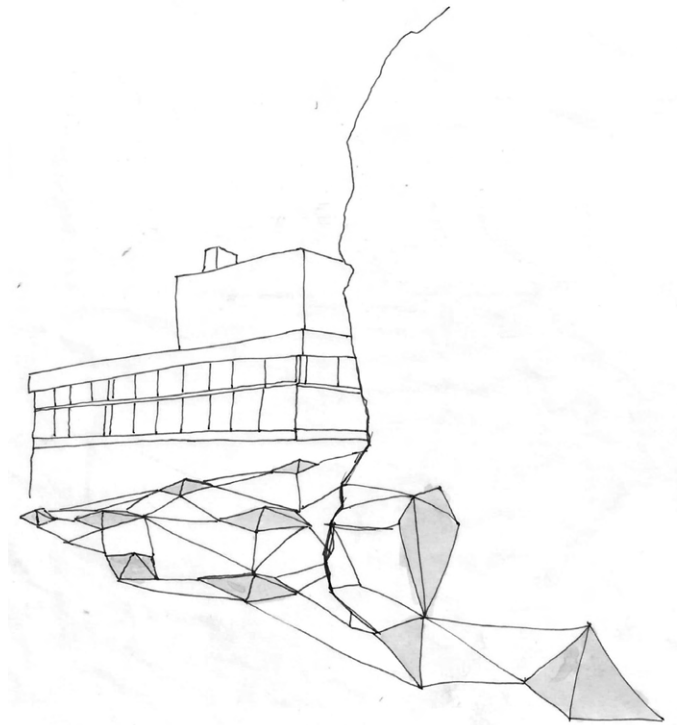




The background of the slide is a photograph of an outdoor setting. It shows a grassy area with some trees in the distance and a metal railing in the foreground on the right side. The text "Design proposal" is overlaid on this image in a red, serif font.

Design proposal

The design is based on the reflections and discussions that arose during our exploration, and has thereby resulted in a design proposal reshapes the perception of this in-between space in Hammarkullen through an interactive experience. A place that does not invite you to stop or sit down, but rather encourages movement and flow, but which still evokes a reaction, leaves an impression, and stays in your memory.



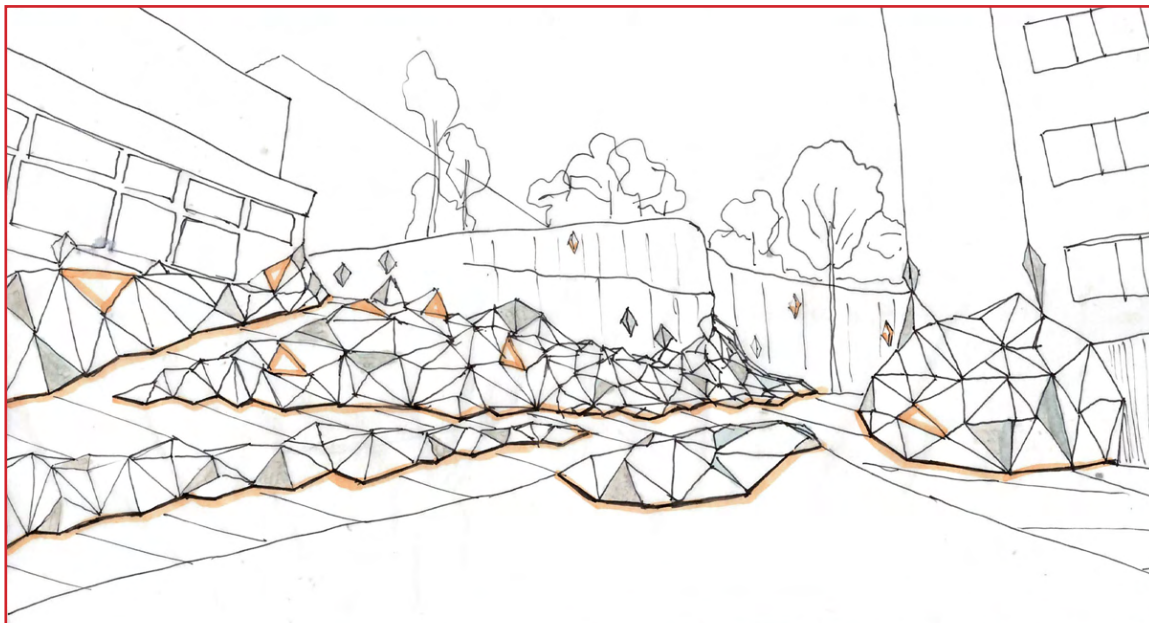
The landscape's varied topography

By integrating ramps seamlessly into the landscape, they can become playful, sculptural elements that invite movement and play.

I moved away from traditional stairs and ramps, and instead work with a surface made up of angles with varying degrees of inclination, as an extension of the cliff that continues out across the grassy slope. This is to avoid creating natural spots for lingering or social interaction, the focus is on movement through the space.

It is possible to walk straight up across the different geometric shapes, but they also form a continuous ramp, ensuring that everyone can pass through the area.

The material will be concrete to offer good grip.



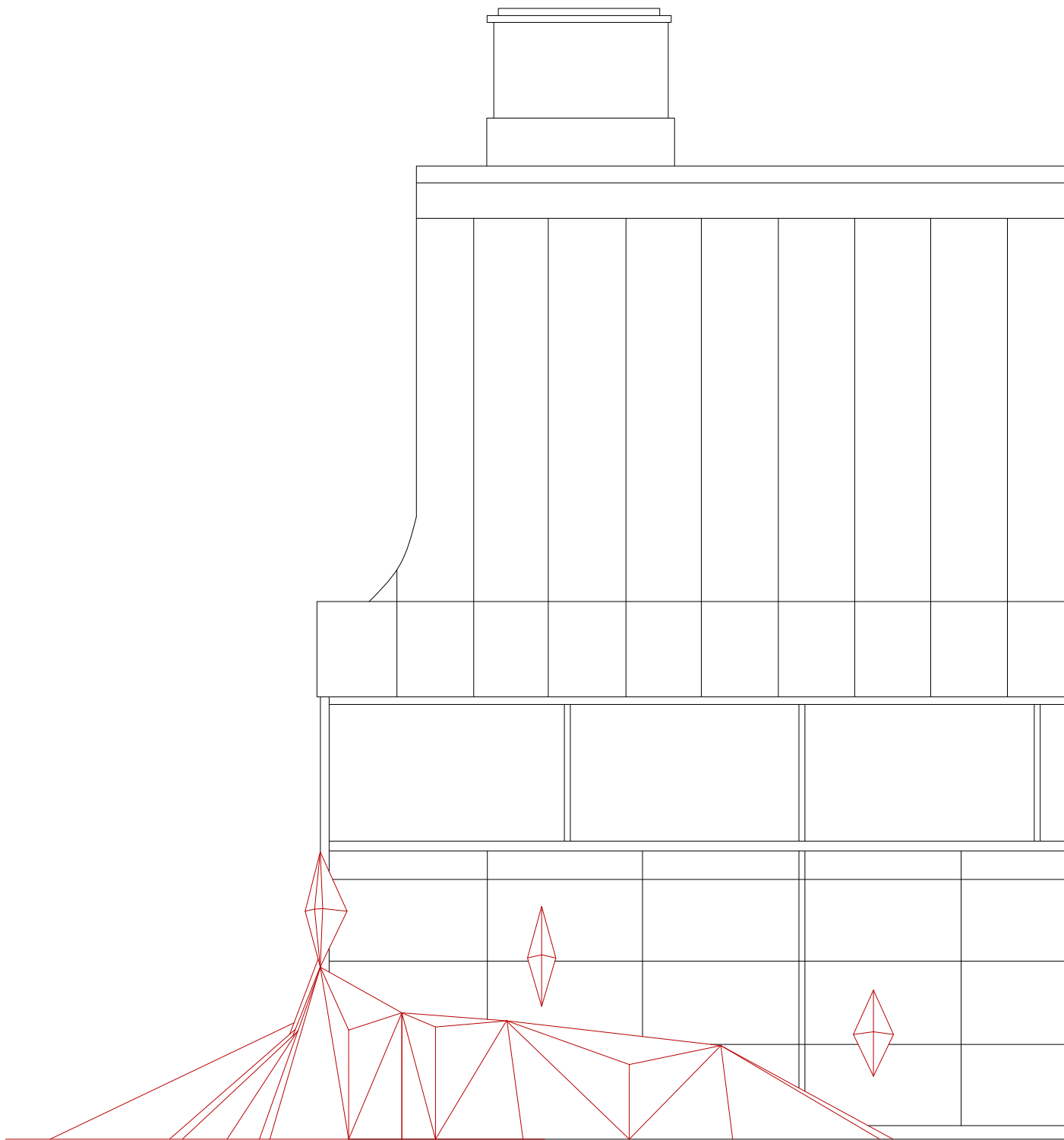
Reflective surfaces and mirrors

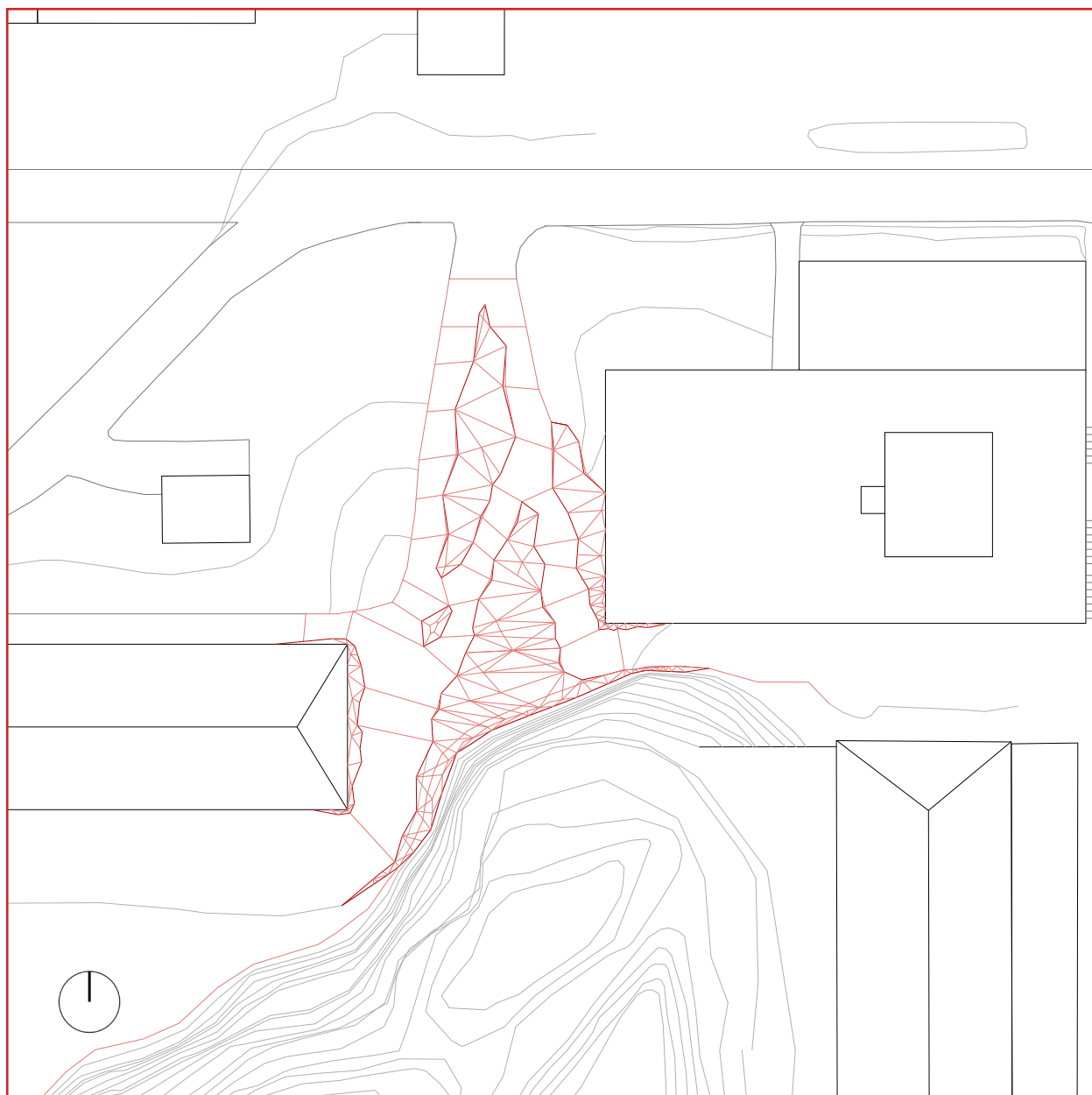
While offering a sense of control and overview, they also create intriguing visual effects that creates playful effects and distortions that contribute to memory-making and spark the imagination.

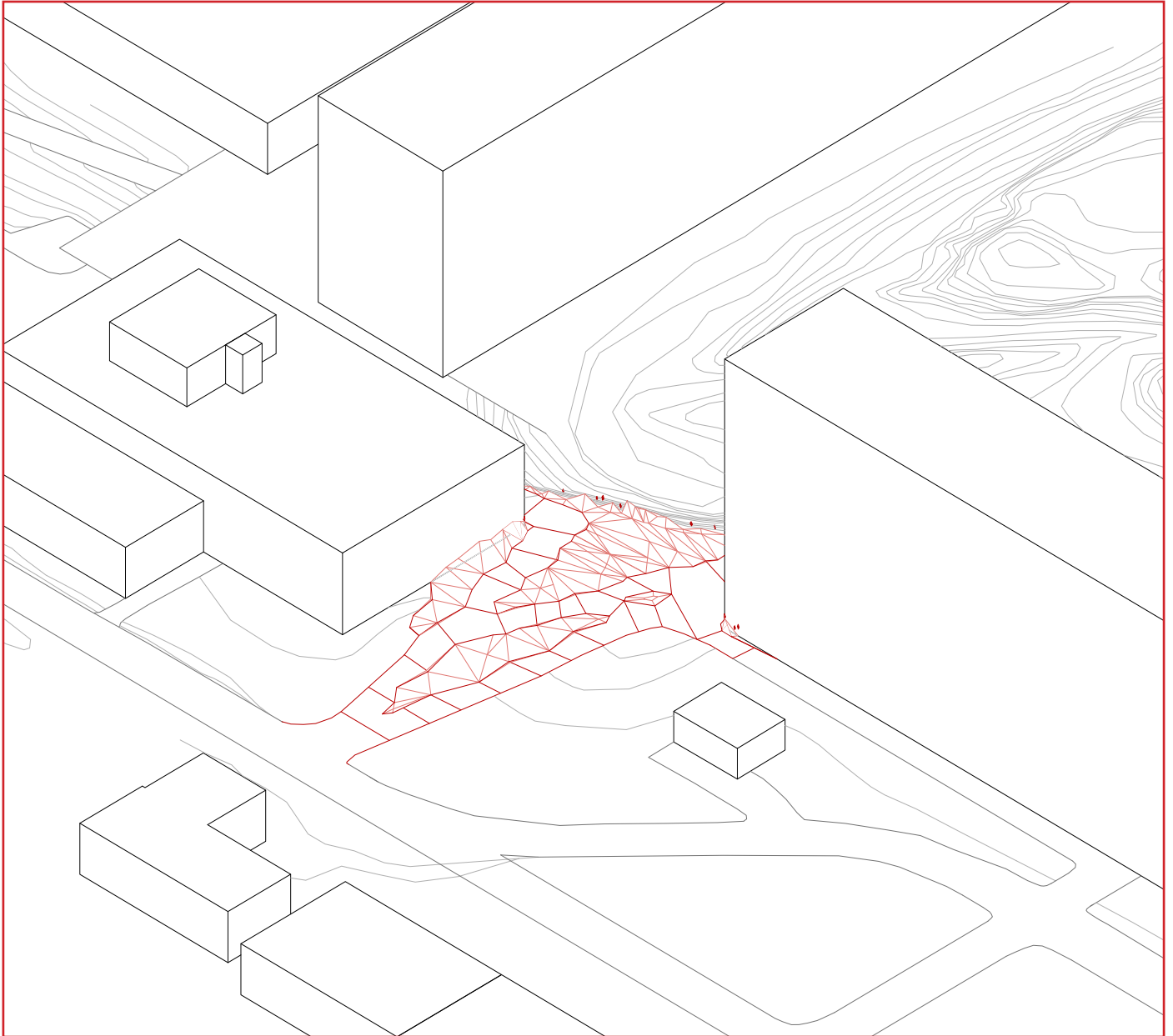
The site gains an identity based on the girls' experiences and reflections.

This elevation illustrate how different light effects emerge and, in interaction with people on site, become an extension of their movements along the different surfaces in varied levels. There is a sense of playfulness and changeability.









The site remains a passage, but transforms into an in-between space for movement. It breaks down a barrier and creates a connection between the center and its surroundings.



The background of the page is a faded, light-colored photograph of an outdoor park setting. It shows a grassy area with scattered dry leaves in the foreground, a set of concrete stairs with a metal railing on the right side, and several trees in the background. The overall tone is soft and natural.

Discussion

How can embodied methods contribute to an understanding of in-between spaces in motion?

In what ways can co-design amplify the voices, needs, and perspectives of underrepresented groups, particularly young people who identify as girls, and contribute to more inclusive urban spaces?

The following discussion reflects on the insights gained through the embodied and playful co-design process with the girls in Hammarkullen. It delves into how this approach shaped both their and my own understanding of place, identity, and participation in urban space. Drawing on personal observations and reflections, I highlight the value of emotional, embodied, and subjective experiences, elements often overlooked in traditional urban planning and participatory design methods. By using and exploring embodied methods, the project offered a more nuanced understanding of how places are felt, used, and experienced. Focusing on the body, both in stillness and in motion, alone and in relation to others, heightened self-awareness and deepened our collective reflection. We began to value not only what could be observed or measured, but what was felt.

Unlike conventional participatory approaches, which often prioritize measurable outcomes this method created space for emotions, atmospheres, and the unspoken. When words were not enough, bodily or visual expression took over, offering alternative and often more intuitive ways of communicating and understanding. This shift allowed for a more holistic engagement with place, rooted in sensation, memory, and imagination. An important part was using play and movement as a method to give the girls space to freely approach the place and the exercises on their own terms. There was no wrong or right way to express oneself, to move or to experience. I found that this resulted in all of us daring to challenge ourselves and experiment, both emotionally and physically. Reflections on what it feels to be in a specific place became our main focus rather than what the place is for or what one is supposed to do there. It contributed to an awareness of ourselves and our own sense of place and belonging in the urban space.

In projects and methods, I have studied, and when I have worked with participatory co-design in the past, the focus has never been on the body and emotions. The emphasis has always been on understanding the site and its use by collecting data through observation, interviews, surveys and then coming up with a solution through tools such

as co-creating collages, maps and filling in post-it notes with ideas. These are very helpful tools, but I would argue that you miss out on valuable information related to a more emotional experience and the subconscious. These kinds of experiences can be difficult to put into words and therefore often require more time and reflection to be verbalized. Sometimes, even that is not possible and then visual expression can be a powerful way to communicate a mood or experience.

Therefore, a method that encourages participants to not just express their opinions but also add what they feel is something I have missed. Here, play also becomes a powerful tool as, in combination with the focus on feelings and emotional aspects, creates a process that is about curiosity and imagination that drives a desire to experiment. This in turn, opens up more nuanced ways of engaging with and perceiving a place.

There is no ultimate answer in this project. The design proposal is based on the reflections and discussions that arose during our exploration and has thereby resulted in a design that reshapes the perception of this in-between space in Hammarkullen through an interactive experience. A place that does not invite you to stop or sit down, but rather encourages movement and flow, but which still evokes a reaction, leaves an impression, and stays in your memory. The design proposal is an alternative that meets some of the reflections that emerged during the process. It is a design and a physical reflection of what we discussed and experienced. Certainly, the result would have looked quite different in a different context with other participants and experiences.

I don't want the design to be seen as the only final product, rather an opening for other reflections and new possibilities for similar spaces and processes.

The process and our exploration together have been the most interesting and valuable aspects for me. It has truly strengthened my belief in the importance of creating processes that prioritize voices that are often unheard.

When co-design is approached with sincerity and combined with embodied exploration and play, I have seen in this project that it can create a space for voices and perspectives that are otherwise not given

space or rarely heard.

In the project, the girls have been allowed to express, explore, imagine and shape the possibilities of the site from their own perspectives. It is a process where they become co-creators and where they are given the space to test thoughts, ideas and emotions, and express them visually but also in words. I experienced that this fostered a sense of ownership, both over the site that became “ours” during the project but also over our emotions and experiences. What each individual experienced or experienced, positive or difficult or bad, both linked to the place in Hammarkullen and other places, was taken seriously and acknowledged.

In relation to Hammarkullen, which is often referred to as a vulnerable area with social and security problems, one consequence can be that young girls are even more invisible than they might in places without such issues. In “vulnerable areas”, much of the attention and resources are directed towards dealing with crime and conflicts that are dominated by boys and men, resulting in the needs and perspectives of young girls being further marginalized.

With this project, I want to emphasize the importance of creating places where underrepresented voices are given extra space to express themselves and where those expressions are acknowledged. Because why should you take the time to reflect on what you think and feel, and express it if no one listening or cares?

In this project, I have focused specifically on the perspectives and voices of girls in a vulnerable area, but of course this applies to all underrepresented groups in society. Everyone has the right to think, feel, take up space and act. Everyone has the right to influence and shape the city. To make this possible, processes must be created where representation is a fundamental component throughout. We do this through unconventional processes that challenge dominant norms about how urban development often takes place, and we ask critical questions about which voices are heard and counted and have a questioning approach to who has knowledge. An often adult and male-dominated structure need be challenged. This can be done by having an interdisciplinary and creative approach, for example through embodied methods and play.

Co-creation and embodied exploration with a focus on emotions and imagination is something I want to continue working with. To give less space to the rational and more to the playful and emotional.



The background of the page is a faded, sepia-toned photograph. It depicts an outdoor scene with a grassy field in the foreground, a line of trees in the middle ground, and a metal railing or fence on the right side. The overall tone is warm and slightly hazy.

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