

HEMBYGDEN From Harbour to Home through Local Anchoring and Engagement

Author
Year of Publication
Examiner
Supervisor
Institution

Isabella Landtreter
2026
Kaj Granath
Susanne Clase
Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering





Title
Author
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Institution

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Examiner
Supervisor

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Isabella Landtreter
2026
Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Architecture and Urban Design
Healthcare and Housing Architecture
Kaj Granath
Susanne Clase

ABSTRACT

The master's thesis *Hembygden* explores how architectural methods can contribute to long-term sustainable rural development through local anchoring and participation. Rural municipalities face demographic changes, economic uncertainty, and challenges in attracting new residents. At the same time, social aspects, cultural heritage, and strong place identity constitute important, but often underutilized, resources in planning and design processes. Therefore, this study tests a methodological approach that combines analysis of place identity with participatory design to strengthen local influence, create meaningful residential environments, and enhance rural attractiveness.

The study employs a Research by Design methodology through a qualitative case study of the Bergkvara harbour area in Torsås Municipality, Sweden. The case study investigates how these methods can be translated into physical design by interpreting the character and involving local stakeholders. Concepts and strategies are generated and then concretized in a housing-focused design project based on the planning proposal for the harbour area from 2021. This results in a vision for continued dialogue among the municipality, residents, and developers, aiming to generate interest in the site's development potential.

Analysis of place identity combined with participatory design demonstrates how architectural decisions can be supported by well-founded arguments. In this way, the architecture that emerges is recognisable, credible, and locally anchored. By involving multiple target groups, a broader understanding of residents' thoughts and values is developed. The final design decisions, however, were not co-produced, but interpreted and developed by the architect. The process in itself therefore does not guarantee local anchoring, as it depends on the architect's selections, interpretations, and priorities. Participatory design should instead be understood as a continuous dialogue where perspectives are integrated into the reasoning behind the design, rather than a direct translation of ideas into form.

Finally, the thesis emphasises the importance of using architecture as a catalyst for community engagement and strengthened local society. By bridging local knowledge and professional architectural expertise, architectural practice can support locally anchored and resilient rural development. The role of architecture in rural contexts is therefore not only about physical form, it is about strengthening the relationship between people, place, and future.

KEYWORDS: RURAL DEVELOPMENT, PLACE IDENTITY, PARTICIPATORY DESIGN, HOUSING ARCHITECTURE, HARBOUR TRANSFORMATION, BERGKVARA,



AUTHOR
ISABELLA LANDTRETER

EDUCATION
Master of Science in Architecture
Chalmers University of Technology
Gothenburg
2023-2026

Bachelor of Science in Architecture
Chalmers University of Technology
Gothenburg
2020-2023

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
Architect, Part-time position
FOJAB
Gothenburg
2025-2026

Architectural Intern
FOJAB
Malmö/Gothenburg
2024-2025

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

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Purpose and Aim
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Delimitations

METHODS

Case Study
Place Identity
Participatory Design

THEORY

Rural Development and Attractiveness
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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Rural development faces several challenges, primarily related to population decline. As a result of urbanization and demographic changes, both the provision of services and social structures are affected. When elderly people remain in their homes and younger generations move to cities, the availability of attractive housing decreases, making it more difficult to create dynamic and sustainable local communities. Addressing these challenges requires a deliberate strategy that both complements existing needs and creates opportunities for all generations.

A central aspect of rural development is how to attract both residents and external stakeholders to invest in rural areas. Visions and future scenarios play a key role, however, to gain trust, development must be grounded in the existing conditions. Involving residents in the process is therefore crucial, not only to understand the context, but also to build upon its local identity. Participatory processes thus become a key tool for creating development that is anchored, sustainable in the long term, and meaningful for those who live and work in the area. This is particularly important in rural contexts, where social cohesion and a sense of belonging are often among the community's strongest assets.

Against this background, Torsås Municipality has long expressed a desire to develop the Bergkvara Harbour area and create an attractive residential environment with the Baltic Sea as its immediate neighbour. However, economic uncertainty has constrained the plans, making it challenging for the municipality to proceed with further development. The aim of this project is therefore to contribute to the development of the Bergkvara harbour area by bringing new life into the area, attracting external developers, and creating an attractive and sustainable residential environment. The challenge lies in anchoring development in what Bergkvara already represents, its history, culture, and people, while simultaneously shaping a future vision capable of inspiring both inhabitants and investors.

PURPOSE AND AIM

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how rural areas can be developed into attractive and locally anchored residential environments by combining place identity and participatory design. The study aims to develop a residential project that strengthens the local place identity, while also contributing to the discussion on how architecture and planning can support vibrant and resilient rural communities.

THESIS QUESTIONS

How can a former harbour area in a rural context be transformed into a residential environment that is locally anchored, using architectural methods based on place identity and participatory design?

PLACE IDENTITY

How can place identity be interpreted and translated into design to strengthen local meaning and character?

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

How can participatory design methods be used to create local involvement, influence, and anchoring in rural development?

DELIMITATIONS

The project is based on the previously developed planning proposal for Bergkvara Harbour (Torsås kommun, 2021) and focuses on translating the intentions of the plan into an architectural design, with particular attention to the northern residential area. The planning proposal serves as a starting point, with adjustments to propose improvements in housing quality and urban design.

The project adopts a more context-sensitive approach to building capacity than what is permitted in the planning proposal, prioritising housing quality and integration with the surrounding environment.

Economic feasibility, detailed technical design, and legal planning processes are not included, as the project operates on a strategic and visionary level. The aim is to formulate principles and directions that can guide future development, rather than to present a finalized proposal for implementation.

Bergkvara Harbour by the Baltic Sea, located between Kalmar and Karlskrona on the Swedish east coast.



METHODS

The thesis is based on a Research by Design methodology combined with a qualitative case study of the Bergkvara harbour area in Torsås Municipality.

The design process functions both as a method and as a result, using architecture to test and concretize the thesis questions within a real-world context.

CASE STUDY

The case study focuses on the former industrial harbour area in Bergkvara, which has long been identified as a potential site for development. The location is closely connected to the project's central themes, rural development, place identity, and participatory design, and provides a relevant context for the study. By examining Bergkvara's physical, social, and historical conditions, the research investigates how a new residential environment can emerge in relation to the existing environment and local community engagement, based on the previously developed planning proposal for Bergkvara Harbour (Torsås kommun, 2021).

PLACE IDENTITY

To identify the site's character, identity, and future potential, the analysis is based on the method described in the theoretical framework, a model proposed by Christou et al. (2019). The method deconstructs place identity into seven different aspects, categorized into physiological, social, and psycho-spiritual elements, in order to capture all relevant layers of the site's identity. In this thesis, the model is adapted and categorized into physical, social, and personal elements. The analysis is conducted through map analyses, site visits, and a briefing workshop. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive understanding of the site's context, forming the foundation for the thesis's overall vision and design strategies.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

The thesis applies a participatory design methodology to anchor the architectural proposal in local community perspectives. Through a user-centered approach, residents contribute experiences, needs, and ideas through two distinct workshop formats, based on *The Community Planning Handbook* (Wates, 2014). Briefing workshops addressing place and design workshops focused on the harbour area. By engaging diverse target groups of different generations, the process captures a broad range of perspectives and fosters a deeper understanding of the site. This methodology creates a locally anchored process while giving residents meaningful influence over the development of their living environment, strengthening both the project's relevance and its integration within the local context.



Garpen Lighthouse
situated on an island in
Kalmarsund, two kilometres
from Bergkvara, with the
landscape of Öland in the
background.



THEORY

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND ATTRACTIVENESS

RURAL AND URBAN

The relation between the rural and the urban is often described in terms of a dichotomy, in which the urban represents the “winner” and the rural the “loser” (Boverket, 2025). The city has become the societal norm, perceived as active, independent, cultural, innovative, and rich in opportunities. In contrast, the rural areas are often described as dependent, passive, and reliant on the city. For a long time, societal development has focused primarily on urban growth, resulting in widening political and demographic gaps between urban and rural areas. This persists despite the fact that the two are fundamentally interdependent.

When attention has been directed towards urban development, political perspectives have tended to frame the differences between the rural and the urban as a problem, one in which the countryside is seen as requiring special support measures to “catch up” with the cities. This perspective has been widely criticized by rural researchers (Sherry & Shortall, 2019; Tillväxtverket, 2021). Few people see the goal to fully reduce the differences between urban and rural areas. Expectations of what each context should offer naturally vary between individuals, over time, and across different parts of the country. However, the common foundation of rural policy worldwide lies in addressing issues related to population density and geographical distance.

The concept of rural areas has many definitions, and there is no universal definition suitable for all purposes. Rural areas are often perceived as regions outside urban areas (tätorter). According to Statistiska centralbyrån (2024b), urban areas are defined as contiguous settlements with at least 200 inhabitants. This means that rural areas consist of the spaces between urban areas. However, there are significant differences between the smallest urban areas with 200 inhabitants and the largest cities in Sweden, which are also classified as urban areas. The definition of an urban area must therefore be subdivided to illustrate the differences between various urban areas, and define when an urban area is situated within a rural context.

In this study, the municipal classification applied by Tillväxtverket (n.d.) and the Government of Sweden is employed. The classification, based on population size and distance, highlights that there are different types of rural areas with different development patterns. The municipal classification consists of six categories, half of which are classified as rural municipalities.

CITY/MIXED MUNICIPALITIES:

Large City Municipalities:

Over 80% of the population lives in urban areas; part of a region with at least 500,000 inhabitants.

Dense Mixed Municipalities:

Over 50% of the population lives in urban areas; less than 45 minutes to a town with at least 50,000 inhabitants.

Sparse Mixed Municipalities:

Over 50% of the population lives in urban areas; more than 45 minutes to a town with at least 50,000 inhabitants.

RURAL MUNICIPALITIES:

Urban-Proximate Rural Municipalities:

Over 50% of the population lives in rural areas; less than 45 minutes to a town with at least 50,000 inhabitants.

Sparse Rural Municipalities:

Over 50% of the population lives in rural areas; more than 45 minutes to a town with at least 50,000 inhabitants.

Very Sparse Rural Municipalities:

All residents live in rural areas; more than 90 minutes to a town with at least 50,000 inhabitants.

FUNCTIONAL ATTRACTIVENESS

Attractiveness concerns a subjective perception that varies depending on whom one asks. The ability to attract and retain talent, businesses, and capital is of great importance for economic development (Tillväxtverket, 2014). Designing attractive places can therefore be understood as a tool for economic development. However, economic growth should not be the goal in itself, but rather a means to achieve the welfare desired by society. Attractive places can also be considered a goal in their own right, representing spaces where people wish to live and settle.

Given its societal and economic significance, it is important to study attractiveness in a comprehensive way. Tillväxtverket (2014) distinguishes three types of functional attractiveness: residential, business, and visitor attractiveness. Each targets different groups but remains interconnected, for example, people tend to prefer working near their homes. Communities seeking to enhance residential attractiveness often aim to strengthen other forms as well. As Stenbacka and Heldt Cassel (2024) argue, housing alone cannot be the primary focus. To create socially sustainable and attractive rural development, attention must also be given to access to services, infrastructure, and communication.

Focusing on the residential attractiveness, relevant in this thesis, three fundamental factors can be identified. The foundation lies in access to work, which has traditionally shaped decisions about where to live. The increasing possibility of remote work, however, offers greater freedom in residential choice, potentially reshaping patterns of settlement. The second factor is the quality of housing, which also encompasses public and commercial services, the local environment, and perceived safety. Finally, there is the dimension of self-fulfilment through culture, leisure, and recreation.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:

1. Borrowing Size:

Through communication and infrastructure, connecting rural regions to nearby cities to access some of their advantages and leverage their scale

STRUGGLES AND STRATEGIES

Statistics indicate that population development is perhaps the most significant challenge facing rural areas (Boverket, 2025). In the mid-20th century, approximately 2.4 million Swedes (one-third of the population) lived in rural areas. Today, that number is just under 1.3 million (12% of the population). Throughout this period, the trend has been clear: young people primarily move to larger cities for education, employment, and services, while the proportion of elderly people in society increases and birth rates decline.

The consequences of this demographic imbalance and ongoing urbanization include reduced tax revenues and increasing difficulties for municipalities to finance welfare services, particularly health and elderly care, where demand rises as the population ages (Boverket, 2025). The social and spatial character of communities also changes significantly. Rural areas that were once lively and populated have, over decades, become sparsely inhabited regions with few residents and limited employment opportunities. Persistent outmigration also negatively affects those who remain, often contributing to a sense that the future lies elsewhere, especially in places with many empty houses and buildings.

However, Meijers and van der Wouw (2019) argue that rural regions should not be regarded as passive victims of urbanization. The key lies in identifying the advantages that cities offer and developing strategies to provide comparable benefits in rural contexts. The core advantages of cities are market size, innovation clusters, and collaboration. To replicate these advantages in rural areas, three strategies have been developed; borrowing size, urban concentration and city network integration.

2. Urban Concentration:

Concentrate development in a single urban centre within the rural region, to serve as a vibrant growth hub with services and activities to attract residents and businesses

3. City Network Integration:

Linking nearby small and medium-sized towns with complementary roles to achieve clustering benefits, complement cities within the region rather than competing with them

PLACE BRANDING IN RURAL AREAS

Attracting people to rural areas requires a clear identification of target groups and the specific needs that are not being met in urban environments. For instance, rural areas may become increasingly attractive as major cities experience rising crime rates and insecurity (Boverket, 2025). The strong social cohesion and low crime levels in rural areas provide a stable environment that appeals to those seeking safety. Moreover, where people grow up appears to play a central role in determining where one chooses to live later in life (Tillväxtverket, 2014). It is therefore crucial to understand what motivates return migrants, whether it is primarily social factors or other forms of incentives that encourage such relocation.

A key success factor in place branding is the support of local residents. It is essential that inhabitants recognise themselves in the local narrative and can stand behind the marketing of their community (OECD, 2025). If the local population perceives the profiling as inauthentic or disconnected from their lived experience, the place brand immediately loses credibility. For this reason, local engagement should be utilized to collectively define the place's brand and narrative, anchored in its cultural identity.

REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

Based on the theoretical framework, it becomes clear that the rural areas should not be viewed as a competitor to the city, but rather as a complement. The focus should be on identifying and strengthening the values that distinguish rural areas, while at the same time ensuring the basic conditions required to create residential attractiveness, primarily access to employment. For a place such as Bergkvara in Torsås Municipality, an urban-proximate rural municipality, there is a clear potential. Its proximity to both Kalmar and Karlskrona enables daily commuting, making it possible to combine the urban labour market with the rural living environment.

In addition to employment opportunities, housing standards, access to services, and the local environment are also emphasised as central components of attractiveness. Here, the rural areas hold a clear added value, the nature, peace and safety, as well as the possibility of a more independent lifestyle with larger living spaces at a lower cost. These qualities are difficult to offer in cities and therefore constitute important elements of a sustainable place branding strategy.

At the same time, the challenge of creating a vibrant rural area with a sense of future prospects remains. To counteract feelings of stagnation, an active visioning process is needed in which the municipality, together with local residents, formulates a shared narrative about the place's future. The vision should not only express ambitions but also be illustrated and communicated in ways that evoke engagement and pride. In this process, illustrations play a central role by concretizing ideas about development, creating shared reference points, and strengthening the sense of direction and possibility.

The industrial heritage is evident in the harbor environment, where the functionally designed setting shapes the character.



PLACE IDENTITY & HERITAGE

THE LOSS OF CHARACTER

Humanity is moving towards a universal civilization through globalization in technology, science, communication, and economics (Ricoeur, 1965). At the same time, human identity remains deeply anchored in local cultures, through language, traditions, art, and historical experience. Globalization therefore carries the risk of cultural homogenization, in which smaller cultures are weakened or extinguished.

There is a simultaneous desire to preserve and return to the roots while also adapting to modern development. Ricoeur (1965) argues that societies constantly balance between these two directions. The universal provides rationality, tools, and shared frames of reference, while the local provides life, identity, and meaning, the human anchoring. Local cultures depend on the technological and scientific progress of the universal civilization, yet the universal itself also depends on the diversity and creativity of individual cultures. Without this balance, the unique character of place is at risk of being lost.

MORE THAN JUST A GEOGRAPHICAL SITE

The distinction between a place and a geographical site lies in the influence of local conditions, which shape the specific identity of the place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Each situation is unique due to its local context, while the phenomenon itself remains general. Places are characterized not only by their geographical position but also by various relationships of economic, cultural, social, and emotional significance (Vecco, 2020).

The Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980) defines the concept of *Genius Loci*, or the “spirit of place,” as a qualitative tool for place analysis. The term is used across disciplines such as literature, history, and science to describe the unique energy and atmosphere of places (Vecco, 2020). *Genius Loci* is based on the idea that places consist of multiple layers, each contributing a new dimension. These layers include both the tangible and the intangible aspects, as well as the relations between them. They encompass biological, social, environmental, physical, and human dimensions.

The tangible layer describes space and refers to the three-dimensional organisation of the elements that constitute a place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). It includes concrete objects with physical substance, form, texture, and colour, such as people, animals, trees, stone, soil, and buildings. Spatial structure provides

humans with an existential foothold and enables orientation within the physical environment.

The intangible layer concerns the character and identity of a place and represents its most comprehensive quality. It includes the general atmosphere, the emotions it evokes, and what it offers to people, the qualities that make the environment meaningful. *Genius Loci* rests on the idea that those who inhabit a place actively contribute to its character: through their presence, actions, memories, and relationships, a unique identity and “spirit” emerge. The true essence of a place therefore lies not only in its structures or physical elements but also in the people who shape its atmosphere. At the same time, the character of a place is partly temporary and evolves over time, influenced by human activity, seasons, and weather (Vecco, 2020).

The task of architecture is to create meaningful places. This involves revealing and make use of the *Genius Loci* by integrating both tangible and intangible layers. The concept helps us understand the living character of a place and offers a richer, more dynamic understanding of how structures, people, and relations interact to form its unique identity, what actually makes it more than just a geographical site.

“There are not different “kinds” of architecture, but only different situations which require different solutions in order to satisfy man’s physical and psychic needs.”

Norberg-Schulz (1980)

“The existential purpose of building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place”

Norberg-Schulz (1980)



The stillness of winter with empty quays and an inactive harbor environment, reflects the silent character.

PHYSIOLOGICAL ELEMENTS:

- Physical static Environment
- Natural Environment
- Objects and Items within the static Environment
- Sensory Environment

SOCIAL ELEMENTS:

- Social Element

PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL ELEMENTS:

- Aura of the place
- Personal factor

ANALYTICAL METHOD

Genius Loci can be understood by analysing the different layers and dimensions of a place: the tangible (space), the intangible (character), and the relationship between them (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). The tangible dimension concerns the physical qualities, while the intangible is less measurable. Since the intangible encompasses atmosphere and emotions, it is essential to involve people in the process to gather insights that deepen the understanding of a place's character (Lokas et al., 2023). The essence of place identity lies in human memories, relationships and perceptions.

To identify the *Genius Loci*, a place can be deconstructed into its constituent elements. A model proposed by Christou et al. (2019) categorizes seven factors that cover all layers within *Genius Loci*. These factors are empirically derived and were found to contribute to the preservation of *Genius Loci* in the study "The 'genius loci' of places that experience intense tourism development." This method provides a structured approach to analysing a place's identity and its multiple dimensions.

PRESERVING & ENHANCING

Preserving and enhancing place identity involves ensuring that the unique character and cultural heritage survive and evolve in accordance with contemporary needs and changes. *Genius Loci* is not static but a dynamic quality shaped by both the environment and the people who inhabit it (Vecco, 2020; Lokas et al., 2023).

The preservation of place identity relies on a deep understanding of its historical and cultural context (Vecco, 2020). Places should not be reconstructed; rather, their unique character should be interpreted and expressed within a contemporary context. This creates a living tradition where changes are guided by local conditions, avoiding homogenization. Norberg-Schulz (1980) emphasises that humans' need for environments with distinct character is fundamental to well-being. Environments lacking clear identity may feel monotonous, create a sense of distance or disconnection, and reduce social sustainability. Preservation strategies therefore include not only restoration but also the design of place identity inspired by local materials, architectural styles, traditional elements, and social activities, while integrating the place's unique history and culture into the design (Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Vecco, 2020).

The design process plays a central role in strengthening place identity. According to Lokas et al. (2023), the process should be participatory and collaborative, with designers and the local community jointly identifying and shaping the place's intangible and tangible qualities. By preserving existing usage patterns and traditions, the spirit of the place is maintained. At the same time, new functions and activities can be integrated in ways that respect and reinforce the *Genius Loci*, enhancing both relevance and social sustainability.

In summary, the preservation and development of place identity require a balance between continuity and change, between tangible structures and intangible experiences, and between professional design and community participation. Strategies that emphasise participatory design, historical understanding, and local context contribute to creating places that are both meaningful and sustainable.

Maritime Museum in Bergkvara Harbour



REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

The work on place identity is grounded in the objective of preserving, enhancing, and developing the qualities that make a place unique. Therefore, the first step is to identify the character of the place in line with the theory of *Genius Loci*. This involves not only a spatial mapping, but an understanding of how people use, remember, and experience the place. In this thesis, the section on place identity will therefore be based on the model presented by Christou et al. (2019) in order to cover all layers of the place's identity, but the model is adapted and categorized into physical, social and personal elements.

A participatory process is essential to ensure that this identity is not interpreted from the outside, but experienced from within. Through dialogues with residents, the project can capture the local perspective and allow it to inform design decisions.

The next step involves interpreting and expressing these qualities in a contemporary context. The design should not aim to recreate historical forms, but rather to generate new spaces and functions that engage in a dialogue with the existing environment. In this way, architecture becomes both anchored in the place and relevant for the future.

This means that every design intervention must be justified based on the character of the place. By establishing reasoned arguments for the design, it becomes not only locally anchored, but also meaningful for preserving, enhancing, and developing the place identity.

It is the people who build society and the sense of community becomes especially strong in rural areas.



PARTICIPATORY DESIGN & LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

For initiatives to be sustainable, equitable, and successful, participatory processes anchored in local engagement are essential, that is, the active involvement of residents in planning and decision-making (OECD, 2025). Such engagement fosters understanding of a place's cultural assets and strengthens acceptance when the community sees itself reflected in the place's evolving identity. Projects that exclude residents' participation tend to generate resistance. In "*Designdrivna dialoger för arkitektur och samhällsbyggnad*" (Fröst et al., 2017), several reasons are highlighted for involving users in the design process: the democratic right to influence one's environment, functional knowledge, creative idea exchange, efficiency through dialogue, visibility of quiet knowledge, mutual trust, learning, and meaningful participation.

Challenges arise in achieving broad representation and capturing diverse perspectives. A participatory, user-centered approach helps identify and understand the needs of different target groups but is more time- and resource intensive (Ontkóc

& Kotradyová, 2021). Differences between urban and rural contexts also affect the dynamics, as relationships in rural areas are often more intense and anonymity is low.

In municipal planning, consultations are conducted to gather residents' input, but these often occur too early or too late in the process, making the engagement less meaningful. Successful projects therefore integrate local engagement from the start, treating participation as a continuous component of planning rather than a one-time action (Fröst et al., 2017; OECD, 2025; Ontkóc & Kotradyová, 2021).

High levels of engagement also raise expectations, requiring clear feedback and transparency to maintain trust. Despite these challenges, research shows that local engagement has significant potential. When people are given genuine influence, not only are more relevant solutions created, but social sustainability and long-term legitimacy in decision-making processes are strengthened (Fröst et al., 2017; OECD, 2025; Ontkóc & Kotradyová, 2021).

ARCHITECT'S ROLE IN PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

Historically, architecture has prioritised authorship over participation (Yeung, 2025). Design has often followed a top-down approach, with users and communities primarily seen as receivers. The result can be projects praised as visionary yet experienced as disconnected from the people who actually inhabit and interact with the environments.

Architects are often commissioned to work in contexts where they lack personal attachment, making design for others a complex task (Yeung, 2025). While this distance can provide valuable objectivity, providing fresh insight and bringing new perspectives, it can also make it difficult to develop a deep understanding of the place's values. Through a participatory process, architecture can shift towards a more bottom-up approach, where users are actively involved in the design process and thereby deepen the understanding of the place.

By including a participatory process, architects must balance vision with humility and expertise with empathy (Yeung, 2025). The role expands from designing to also organising and leading processes: gathering people, translating complex issues into understandable terms, fostering a creative culture, and guiding collective analysis (Ontkóc & Kotradyová, 2021). Architects are then expected to translate this collaboration into a physical design proposal. This change opens opportunities for more voices, deeper engagement, and socially anchored outcomes (Yeung, 2025). The challenge for architects becomes designing *with* rather than *for* the community.

The workshop's tools give form to ideas and make it easier to see, share, and understand different perspectives.



THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

Participatory design is a broad concept that involves end-users in the design process. It is applied through various methods across multiple design fields, including interaction design, product design, industrial design, service design, and architecture, among others (Fröst et al., 2017). In architecture, practical tools such as workshops, mapping exercises, prototypes and sketches are often used as activities to create user-driven design solutions.

APPROACHES IN PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

In the study *"The Participatory Design Spectrum: Design for, with, and by"* (Leith et al., 2022), a spectrum of approaches within participatory design is described. The authors identify three primary approaches; user-centered design, co-design and user-generated design, differing in when and how the actors participate, and who holds the final decision-making authority over the design.

The authors emphasise that no single approach is always better than the others, and a single project may apply different approaches at different stages. The choice of approach is guided by the desired outcomes and who is best positioned to make final decisions relative to the specific task.

Design for – User-Centered Design

Designers consult with users to gather experiences and perspectives, which form the basis for design decisions. The final decision-making authority remains with the designer.

Design with – Co-Design

Designers and users collaborate as a design team. Decisions are made collectively, and perspectives are actively integrated into the process, creating a dialogue-based approach.

Design by – User-Generated Design

Users act as the designers, making their own decisions about design solutions. Designers provide resources and tools that enable users to identify problems and develop their own solutions, giving users full control over the outcome.

WORKSHOPS AS A PARTICIPATORY TOOL

In workshops, it is crucial to establish a clear structure and well-planned schedule, as well as to formulate explicit tasks (Ontkóc & Kotradyová, 2021). Activities should be limited to a maximum of two hours, while ensuring they conclude with concrete outcomes.

The Community Planning Handbook outlines several tools and examples of activities suitable for participatory design processes (Wates, 2014). Two complementary examples particularly relevant to this study are briefing workshops and design workshops, both recommending group sizes of 8–10 participants.

Briefing workshops are especially useful at the start of a process, as they aim to introduce the project, formulate key questions, and engage and motivate participants. This type of workshop can be conducted with different target groups and should be tailored to the specific context. The suggested process begins with a presentation of the activity's purpose, followed by individual brainstorming, where participants' ideas are collected on post-it notes. These notes are then thematically categorized by the group, and the results are presented and discussed collectively.

Design workshops are most effective when conducted after a briefing workshop. Their purpose is to enable creative collaboration, allowing participants to develop design ideas. The process begins with contextual information and a starting exercise, for example, to identify problems and opportunities. Participants then sketch and test design ideas on a shared medium, such as a plan, map, or model. Finally, the generated ideas are summarized.

A central aspect of these activities is participant representation. Open workshops may be limited by location and timing, restricting who can attend (Fröst et al., 2017). Focusing on invited participants allows for more controlled representation, strengthening the participatory approach. For example, inviting different focus groups with distinct themes can create a more diverse and representative participant base.

REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

This thesis employs participatory design with a user-centered approach. The process involves consulting with local residents to gather experiences, needs, and sources of inspiration, while the final responsibility for design decisions remains with the author.

Briefing workshops are highly relevant in relation to place identity and site analysis, as they capture local perspectives. The aim is to examine Bergkvara more broadly, identifying both appreciated elements and areas with potential for development. Through a design workshop, the focus is concentrated to the harbour area to generate design ideas and solutions addressing identified needs within the specific context. The purpose is to capture diverse perspectives and priorities through discussion.

Facilitating this process presents certain challenges, particularly in ensuring balanced participation across groups. Therefore, the workshops are divided into multiple sessions, allowing active engagement in discussions across all groups. Each session targets different demographic groups and is organised by generation in order to capture a wide range of community perspectives. This structure enables each workshop to focus on issues specific to the target group while also allowing results to be compared across groups.

A key challenge lies in balancing the design direction with insights emerging from the participatory process, and in integrating these inputs into the final design in a coherent manner.

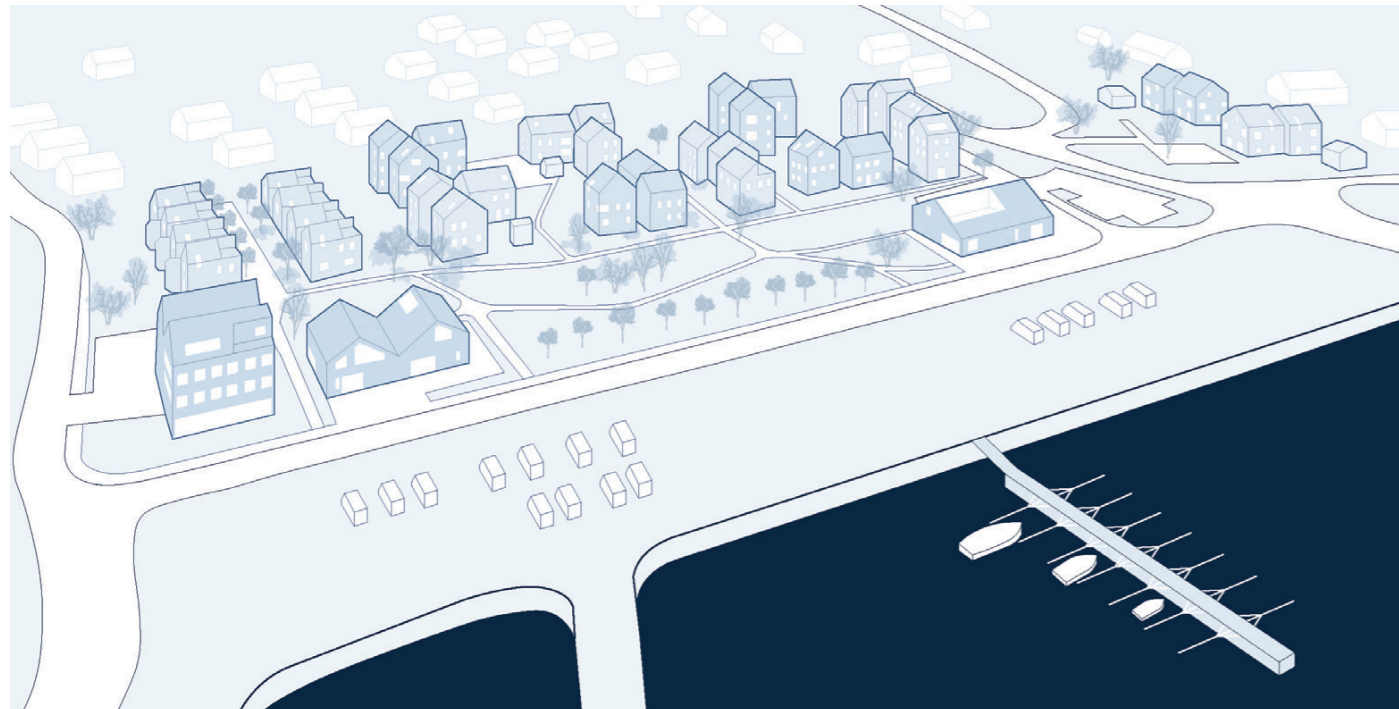
REFERENCES

This section presents three selected reference projects focusing on small-scale residential development in waterfront settings. The projects are used as a basis for studying spatial principles and design in the interface between sea and land.

Public Spaces for the Entire Community of Bua
The project incorporates public spaces in coastal locations to create meeting places for all residents of Bua.



Varied Structure
The varied and small-scale structure relates to the existing single-family houses in the surrounding area.



BUA HARBOUR

In the coastal landscape of Halland, twenty kilometers north of Varberg, lies the community of Bua, with approximately 2,000 inhabitants (Etikhus, n.d.). In addition to its marina, guest harbour, and sea rescue station, Bua offers preschools, a school, medical and dental services, grocery stores, restaurants, and public transport connections. What stands out most, however, is the strong sense of local community and the high level of engagement among its residents. In 2019, Etikhus, together with Radar Arkitektur, was awarded the municipality's land allocation competition for Bua Hamnplan, where new housing and commercial activities are now being planned.

The project's architectural approach has been rooted in the character of the area, where a clear identity and a distinct sustainability strategy form the basis for the core values of proximity to the sea, quality of life, and diversity (Radar Arkitektur, n.d.). The pedestrian pathway through the site is preserved and complemented by a park, meeting places, and areas for commercial spaces (Etikhus, n.d.). Bua Hamnplan can thus be seen as a distinct "growth ring" that builds upon and extends the local identity.

The project emphasises a high degree of variety in terms of tenure, program, and spatial experience (Radar Arkitektur, n.d.). By combining townhouses, condominiums, rental apartments, and commercial spaces, the development aims to foster social diversity and encourage interaction across generations (Etikhus, n.d.). The sustainability strategy focuses primarily on social sustainability, safety, participation, and identity, enabled by residents' strong engagement and sense of community. In addition to providing new housing, the project seeks to establish Bua Hamnplan as a destination that the entire community can take pride in (Radar Arkitektur, n.d.).

Architect:
Radar Arkitektur
Client:
Etikhus
Year:
Under construction
Location:
Bua, Varbergs kommun

Program:
78 residential units, commercial spaces and temporary housing
Commission:
Competition proposal, integrating residential units with commercial functions in the centre of Bua

REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

From the Bua Hamnplan project, several lessons can be identified, especially considering the similarities with Bergkvara in terms of rural context and project scale, as well as the project's core values of coastal proximity, quality of life, and diversity. The project highlights the critical importance of resident engagement and local community in fostering social sustainability, including aspects such as safety, participation, and identity. A valuable aspect is the ambition not only to develop a new residential area, but also to create a destination that the entire community can feel proud of. Furthermore, the approach of using varied typologies to foster a mix of people, functions, and experiences is interesting. Such diversity can contribute to a more vibrant neighbourhood and serve as a key factor in promoting social sustainability. Finally, the project highlights the importance of adding a new "growth ring" to the community, instead of replicating the existing identity, evolving it.

Terraced Transition

Through a terraced transition towards the water, a spatial differentiation is established, generating a natural separation between private and public zones within the environment.



Building Arrangement

The buildings are oriented with their gables facing the water, in order to maximize sightlines and visual corridors between the built environment.



KOLONIN, VÄXJÖ

In 2006, the project was developed in Biskopshagen, Växjö, as a small-scale residential block consisting of terraced houses (LBE Arkitekt, n.d.). The project comprises 26 owner-occupied dwellings, with floor areas of either 110 or 140 m². The architectural inspiration is drawn from classical architecture and historic towns such as Visby, Eksjö, Torekov, Trosa, and Vadstena. The aim was to employ modern construction techniques to create pleasant, small-scale, green, sustainable, and high-quality living environments for all.

The dwellings are located in immediate proximity to a pond that connects to Växjösjön. All houses maintain a relationship to the water and are oriented with their gable ends facing the pond, allowing visual corridors between the buildings. The facades are in varying colours, with some buildings constructed in brick.

The area is perceived as small-scale and human-oriented, partly due to the placement of car parking in a nearby location, which allows the remaining area to be car-free.

In 2008, the project was awarded the Växjö Building Prize (Bostadsrättsföreningen Biskopskolonin, n.d.). The jury described the projects as "A harmonious terraced housing area with curved pedestrian streets that create an evocative sense of a small-town environment. The interaction between water and the built form adds an extra dimension".

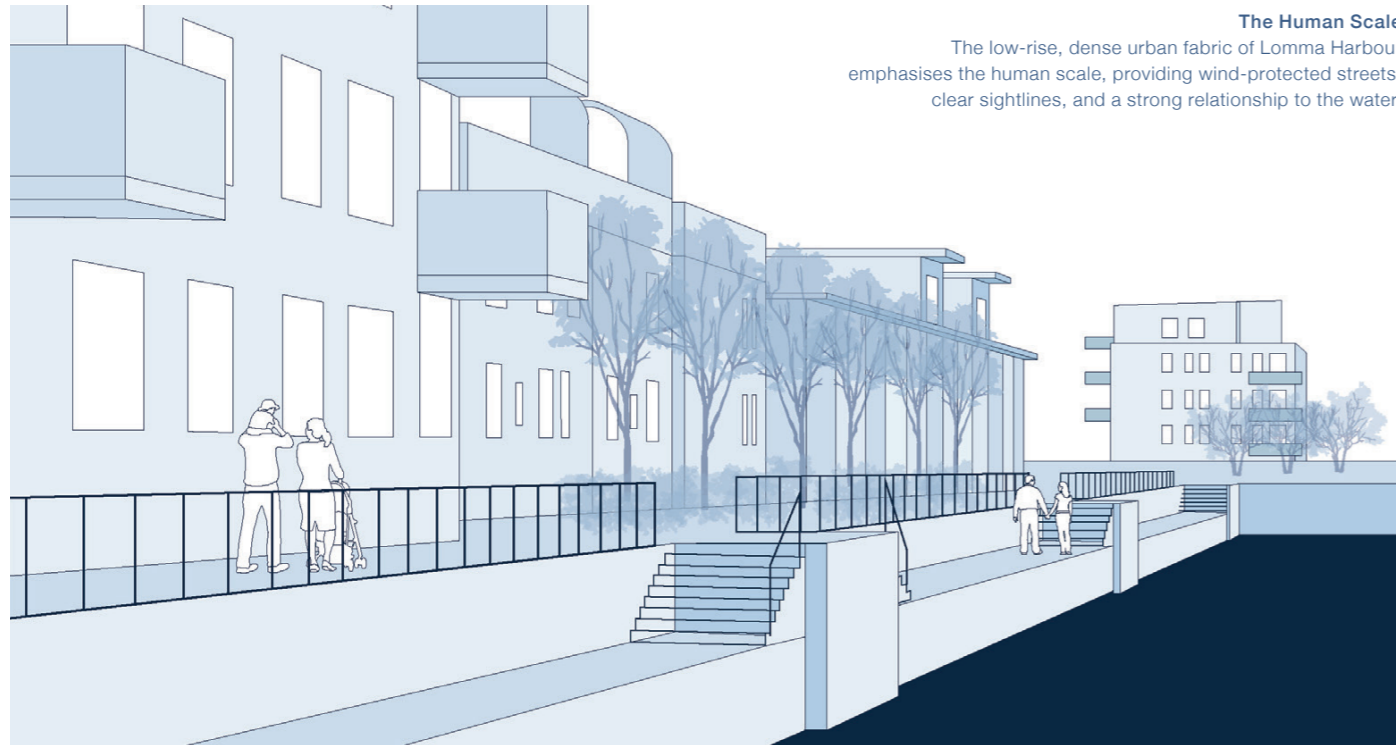
At the time of the land allocation, an explicit objective was that the area should include different types of housing in order to promote social diversity (Avenäs, 2012). The project has therefore faced some political criticism for consisting exclusively of owner-occupied dwellings.

Architect:
LBE Arkitekt
Mats Elgström
Client:
Kärnhem AB
Year:
2006

Location:
Biskopshagen,
Växjö kommun
Program:
26 residential units,
110 and 140 m²

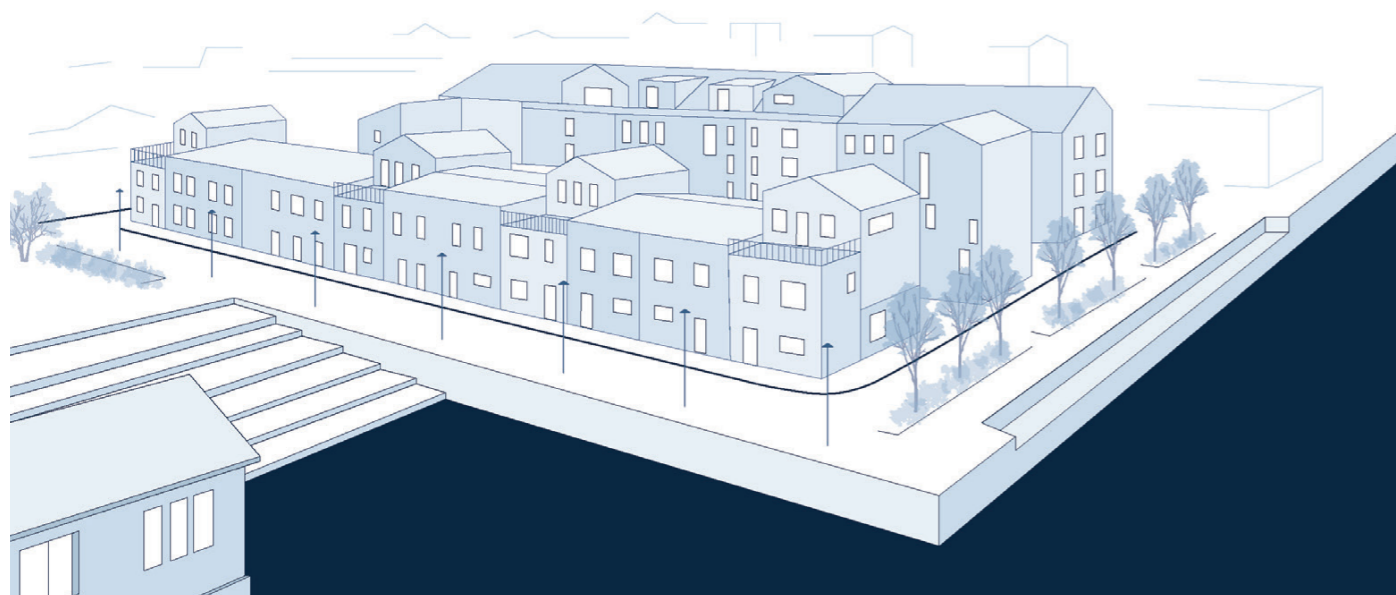
REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

The project is particularly interesting in how it relates to the water. This is expressed through the strategic placement of the buildings, which ensures visual contact with the water for all dwellings, as well as through their spatial relationship to the waterfront promenade. As a climate adaptation strategy, the terrain, from the pond up to the residential units, is terraced at different levels. This approach creates boundaries between private and public spaces. The gardens of the terraced houses are separated from the public promenade without the need for fences or hedges. The edge zone on the opposite side of the buildings, facing the car-free street, is also of interest. The low-rise typology, with terraced houses positioned close to the street, contributes to a human-scale environment. The buildings clearly define the street space while selectively opening towards the water through the orientation of the terraced houses, creating a varied and engaging spatial sequence along the pedestrian movement.



The Human Scale

The low-rise, dense urban fabric of Lomma Harbour emphasises the human scale, providing wind-protected streets, clear sightlines, and a strong relationship to the water.



Variation with Discipline

The design approach demonstrates how diversity in building form and facades can coexist within a disciplined framework, reinforcing local identity and urban cohesion.

LOMMA HARBOUR

Lomma, situated between Malmö and Lund, has functioned as a port and industrial town for several centuries (Ståhl, 2011). Since the early 2000s, the former industrial harbour has been transformed into an attractive urban district with commercial spaces, recreational areas, and approximately 1,300 residences (Brunnberg & Forshed Arkitektkontor, n.d.). The project was awarded the Planning Prize in 2004 for its clear presentation of Lomma's structure, history, and future development potential (Sveriges Arkitekter, 2004). The new district is characterized by a low-rise, dense urban structure that both leverages the appeal of the sea and addresses climate challenges. The plan creates a vibrant urban environment with squares, narrow streets, viewpoints, and sheltered spaces. Low-rise and dense is employed as a strategy for coastal development, where the spatial structure provides protection against wind (Forshed, 2018).

The Lomma Harbour quality program emphasises the local identity as the foundation for its design, highlighting characteristics for small towns in general and Lomma in particular (Lomma kommun, 2003). The program identifies two distinct urban structures: the garden city and the traditional small town. The garden city is located in the northern part and a denser small-town structure is found in the west and a more open structure in the east. Together, these structures contribute to the shared character of Lomma Harbour.

The small-town identity is further expressed through buildings of 1–3 stories, simple facades, clearly defined street spaces with facades aligned with the block perimeter, and ground-floor commercial activities. The quality program advocates "variation with discipline", a discipline that is manifested through concrete design principles for buildings and urban spaces. Examples of these principles include allowing buildings with public functions to have distinctive designs, visually prominent block boundaries, treating each building as an individual unit, low-pitched roofs, and carefully defined colour palettes.

Architect:

Brunnberg och Forshed
Arkitektkontor

Client:

Lomma Kommun

Year:

2003

Location:

Lomma, Lomma Kommun

Program:

approx. 1300 residential units
and commercial spaces

Commission:

Parallel commission, detailed
comprehensive plan

REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

The strategy of building low and dense appears particularly relevant when designing wind-protected structures by the water, as it contributes to a human scale and a cohesive urban space. At the same time, the combination of leveraging the sea's appeal and managing climate stresses is an important aspect. A central element in the planning of Lomma Harbour is the ability to articulate a clear vision of the town's structure, history, and future development potential, an ambition that should also be pursued in my own project. By starting from the identity of the place, in terms of scale, materiality, and design, the project can be grounded in its context while simultaneously contributing to its ongoing development. The concept of "variation with discipline" emerges as a particularly interesting principle, as it describes a way to achieve diversity and visual dynamism within a clear framework of shared design principles. Such a framework can ensure continuity and local anchoring while allowing freedom in architectural expression.

Chapter 2.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Bergkvara: an Overview
Planning Proposal for Bergkvara Harbour (2021)

PLACE IDENTITY

Physical Elements
Social Elements
Personal Elements
Reflections and Takeaways

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

Target Groups
Workshops
Participants' Evaluation
Reflections and Takeaways

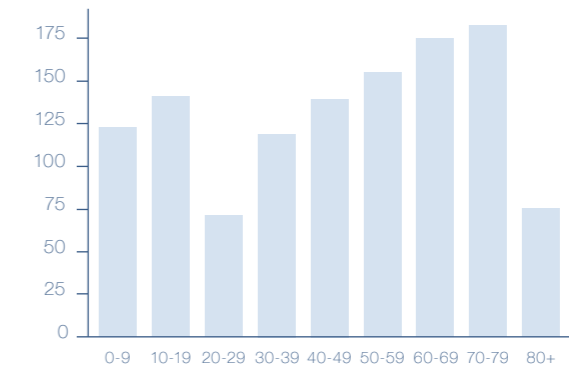


LOCAL CONTEXT

BERGKVARA: AN OVERVIEW

Bergkvara is a small community in the southeast of Sweden. It is located in Torsås Municipality, which is part of region Kalmar (Torsås kommun, 2025). Torsås Municipality is a rural municipality where 60 percent of the population lives in the communities and 40 percent outside them. The municipality is strategically located between two employment regions, Kalmar and Karlskrona, with reasonable commuting distances to both.

Today, Bergkvara is physically connected to the community of Gökalund and covers over 1,200 hectares, with approximately 1,200 inhabitants (Bergkvara Hembygdsförening, 2012; Statistiska centralbyrån, 2024).



Total population in Bergkvara by age group (Statistiska centralbyrån, 2024a)



Aerial view of Bergkvara from 1936, showing Storgatan as it extends through the settlement towards the harbor.



The former silo was a prominent landmark in Bergkvara, as seen here in 2008.

Photo by: Jan Olsson

HISTORY

Bergkvara is considered one of Sweden's oldest trading sites, with a long tradition of commerce and shipbuilding. The locality was founded in 1683 as a subordinate trading post to Kalmar and Karlskrona, but already during the 15th century Bergkvara had been granted trading rights (Bergkvara Hembygdsgille, 2012; Torsås kommun, 2019). During the middle ages, a marketplace emerged, and the harbour was primarily used for trade, with iron, timber, and agricultural products being shipped. In the 1760s, shipyard activity intensified, and shipbuilding required substantial labour. This contributed to Bergkvara's growth as workers moved into the community.

For most of the 20th century, Bergkvara was shaped by an industrial era, during which the railway was established in 1902, the more than 30-metre-high grain silo was constructed in the 1950s, and the remaining sheet-metal warehouse was built. Up until the First World War, Bergkvara was in fact regarded as Sweden's second-largest home port for sailing ships (Kalmarkusten, n.d.). The railway connection was then closed in the 1960s, while both the shipping company and shipyard operations were gradually phased out in Bergkvara. The silo remained standing for many years but was demolished in 2019.

Today, the harbour area reflects a long process of phasing out shipyard and maritime activities (Torsås kommun, 2019). During the late 20th century and into the 21st century, many buildings associated with the harbour industry have been demolished, which has undermined the site's original character as a harbour and industrial area.

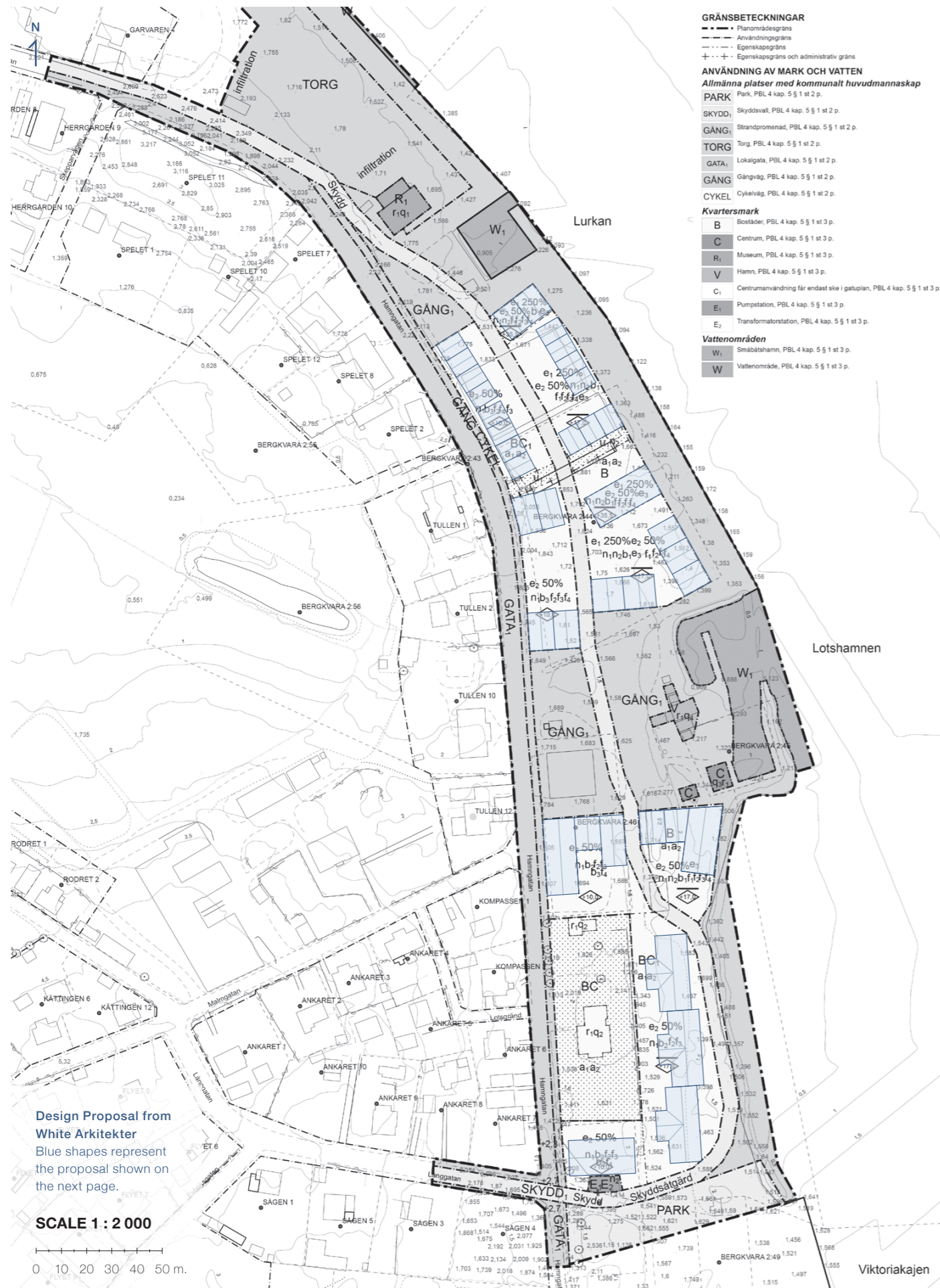
FUTURE

The municipality's vision states, "A good life in a vibrant municipality," and the new comprehensive plan from 2025 emphasises that the municipality shall promote new development along the coast and enable densification, while taking into account the valuable natural environments of the coastal zone (Torsås kommun, 2025).

A cultural heritage assessment by Ankdammen Konsult (2021) describes key aspects related to the area's development with consideration for the cultural environment. The assessment underscores the importance of preserving open spaces for marketplace and harbour square as essential elements in conveying the site's history. Too high land development risks enclosing surrounding buildings, highlighting the importance of maintaining open harbour areas. New buildings should also avoid long, continuous, unbroken rows, as this would conflict with the area's character and risk being perceived as a wall when viewed from the sea.

The former grain silo once made Bergkvara harbour visible from a great distance, before that, large ships in the harbour contributed to the site's imposing vertical character. By constructing a taller building, some of these visual character values could be reintroduced. The negative impact increases if several tall buildings are constructed, as they risk dominating the area and altering its character.

One of the greatest threats to cultural heritage is natural decay that occurs when areas are no longer in use. An investment in permanent housing in the Bergkvara harbour area could contribute to increased activity and thereby help revive and preserve the social and economic conditions required to keep the harbour area vibrant and evolving.



Design proposal from White Arkitekter illustrates one of several potential design solutions according to the planning proposal.



PLANNING PROPOSAL FOR BERGKVARA HARBOUR (2021)

In 2018, the municipality decided to prepare a new detailed development plan for Bergkvara Harbour, together with White Arkitekter (Torsås kommun, 2021). The current detailed plan from 1932 regulates land use for traffic purposes, which limits the possibilities for alternative uses. The new plan instead aims to create an attractive residential and visitor environment, recreate the spatial form of the former silo through a high development density, and address future sea level rise.

The proposal states that Norra Kajen, Lurkan, and Lotshamnen will continue to be preserved as open spaces, between which a block structure with residential development is proposed. A protective embankment runs through the entire area, both connecting the site and protect Bergkvara against future sea level rise. Ground levels in residential areas outside the embankment must be at least 2.8 metres above sea level. No specific requirements are set regarding the elevation of the waterfront promenade.

In the north- and southwestern residential areas, buildings are proposed with a maximum height of 10 metres above sea level and a maximum footprint of 50 percent, allowing for three storeys and ensuring adaptation to the older cultural environment west of Hamngatan. In the northeastern, central, and southeastern parts, a ridge height of 17 metres above sea level is permitted with the same footprint. An exception is made at the former location of the silo, where a ridge height of 35.5 metres above sea level is allowed, though with a maximum total gross floor area of 250 percent of the plot area. The development encompasses a gross floor area of about 14,500 m² in the north and 13,100 m² in the south.

The development of the area includes a clearer design strategy prioritising pedestrians and cyclists, incorporating elements such as seating, lighting, and planting. In addition, residential buildings are required to include balconies. The proposal does not provide exhaustive design regulations for the buildings, allowing flexibility for alternative solutions. Instead, a number of listed design principles serve as guidance.

The blocks within the area can function as green, semi-public, and semi-private spaces for residents, while the embankment through the residential quarters serves both as a pedestrian route and, when necessary, as a road. To prevent these elevated blocks from feeling unsafe during evenings and nights, it is important to allow entrances facing both the street and the quay, while ensuring that the blocks do not become too exposed.

The open spaces between the blocks secure public access to the waterfront and enable accessible, multifunctional meeting places. The walk path along the quay is proposed to be further developed with spaces for social interaction and activities that complement existing destinations, such as Kulturmagasinet and the Maritime Museum.

The planning proposal enables an expansion of the municipality's apartment supply while also providing greater housing diversity within Bergkvara. This may contribute to increased mobility in the housing market, release detached houses, and offer more people the opportunity to obtain housing that meets their needs.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES:

Spatial Orientation

Well-defined streets and public spaces, human scale in the design of ground floors, boundaries, furnishings, and details

Increase Opportunities for Human Interaction

Entrances facing public streets, the waterfront walk path, and open spaces

Variation within a Cohesive Whole

Preserve old buildings and historical traces, respect the character of the area, maintain consistent design features for a clear identity, reflect the present day with a distinct expression

Varied Building Heights

A tall building as a landmark, marking the location from a distance, higher density supports retail, services, and entertainment, carefully balanced height variations

An Attractive Public Environment

High standards for public spaces, encourage social interaction and spontaneous activities, promote biodiversity and stormwater management

Design Proposal from White Arkitekter
Blue shapes represent the proposal shown on the next page.

SCALE 1 : 2 000





PLACE IDENTITY

PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

This section analyses the physical elements of the environment based on municipal reports and map analyses. The analysis is based on the model by Christou et al. (2019), presented in the theoretical framework, but has been adapted to the specific context and the aspects of the physical environment considered relevant.

URBAN STRUCTURE

During the second half of the 19th century, joint shipping ventures (part-ownership shipping companies) came to dominate in Bergkvara, which was reflected in the built environment (Torsås kommun, 2019). Several captains' and shipowners' villas, dwellings, merchant houses, and craft farms were constructed in close proximity to the harbour and along Storgatan. One example is the larger building built by sea captain Håkan Pettersson in the late 19th century. The building functioned as a boathouse for more than a hundred years and has housed the Art Center Kulturmagasinet since 1995. Together with several other buildings along the street, it represents a clear example of the maritime-related development in the area.

Along Storgatan, a distinct commercial district also developed, with several older preserved merchant properties. Both shop premises with their long sides facing the street and gable-fronted sales buildings occur here, mainly positioned directly along the street line. These merchant properties often consist of combined shop and residential buildings, with associated outbuildings and storage structures located at the back of the properties.

A clear contrast in the building structure appears just west of the harbour, in the area known as Malmen. Here lived people whose livelihoods were closely connected to the sea, such as maritime pilots, seamen, customs officers, dockworkers, sailors, and fishermen. The built environment is characterized by its small scale, with modest dwellings and smaller plots that developed organically along the roads, forming a dense and fine-grained setting.

Within the harbour area, several characteristic buildings are still preserved today, such as the maritime pilot house, boathouses, warehouses, and the harbour office. The old railway environment has also been retained, including the station building, platform, warehouse, and outbuildings. The Maritime Museum, founded in the 1970s, relocated to the area in 1995 and today represent the site's industrial and cultural heritage.

STREET STRUCTURE

Along Storgatan, Hamngatan, and Malmgatan, the street cross-section varies, including buildings integrated with the street front, villas with front gardens, open harbour squares, or harbour squares containing various storage facilities. Sidewalks along Storgatan are distinctly elevated, whereas Hamngatan and Malmgatan only delineate the sidewalks with surface markings. Outside the old railway station, there are no road markings at all.

Storgatan / Hamngatan / Malmgatan

SECTION A - A

Storgatan: Narrower road due to bus stop, with a residential lot and hostel adjacent



SECTION B - B

Storgatan: Residential units and commercial premises, aligned with the street



SECTION C - C

Hamngatan: Harbour square with storage unit



SECTION D - D

Hamngatan: Harbour square and quay edge



SECTION E - E

Hamngatan: Old railway station to the water



SECTION F - F

Malmgatan: Residential lots facing the street



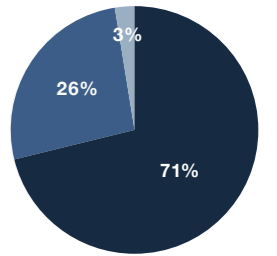
SCALE 1:1000



HOUSING STRUCTURE

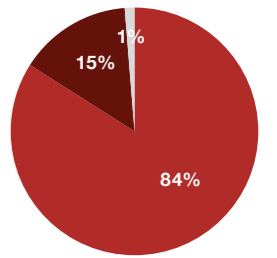
In Bergkvara, single-family houses dominate, as is evident both from the map data and the statistics on the most common tenure types and the number of residents per housing type. The residences that are not single-family houses often had a different original function and have later been renovated or converted into multi-family buildings. The majority of these

structures are older, built over 50 years ago, and are therefore perceived as less attractive today. A notable exception is Propsbacken near the harbour, where eight apartments were built in 2018, demonstrating a limited but existing modernization of the area's multi-family housing stock.



- Owner-occupation
- Tenant-owned cooperative housing
- Rental housing

HOUSING TENURE (2024)



- Single-family houses
- Apartment buildings
- Other

RESIDENTS BY BUILDING TYPE (2024)

HOUSING TYPES

- Single-family houses
- Apartment buildings
- Ground-level dwellings
- Accessory buildings
- Services and Community functions



The Torsås panel is a recurrent feature in several buildings in Bergkvara. It is characterized by its high degree of ornamental detailing, a pronounced wainscot, triangular window pediments, and a wave-shaped frieze. In this building, the paneling is further combined with the Södermöre corner joint.

ARCHITECTURE

Bergkvara is characterized by a number of well-preserved heritage buildings, some of which are presented on the following page. While several of these structures remain in active use, others are today unoccupied.

In general, buildings from the first half of the 19th century are characterized by red-painted wooden facades, whereas buildings from the second half of the century up to the 1920s were more often painted in light colours (Torsås kommun, 2019). Today, the buildings in the harbour area and Dalskär are predominantly red-painted with black or white corner detailing, while residential buildings in Bergkvara more frequently reflect the lighter colour palette.

The most common roof type in the area is the gable roof, and many buildings have traditionally been covered with red clay tiles (Torsås kommun, 2019). This tradition of red clay roofing has a long history in the municipality, with at least eight different brickworks operating from the 18th century into the 20th century, demonstrating a continuous local production and use of the material (Kalmar läns museum, 2024).

A distinctive building style in the region is the so-called Torsås panel (Kalmar läns museum, 2024). This type of panel has significant cultural-historical value and appears on both larger buildings and smaller residential houses, often constructed between year 1850 and 1900. Torsås panels may vary in appearance, but common features include a primarily vertical board-and-batten arrangement finished with an arched frieze, triangular window lintels, and a lower dado panel that can be oriented either vertically or horizontally. The Torsås panel is often painted in light oil-based colours, today frequently with one colour for the details and another for the wall surfaces. In some cases, the Torsås panel is combined with the Södermöre corner joint, another regionally typical wooden feature, in which the building's corner block is fitted with a rounded molding at the intersection of the corner boards.

Within the harbour area, the silo historically constituted a prominent architectural landmark. Although the concrete building was demolished in 2019, it had long served as a significant symbol of Bergkvara. The surrounding area is otherwise composed of several small red-painted storage buildings adjacent to Lurkan and Lotshamnen, as well as a limited number of larger garages and storage structures constructed in sheet metal.

Bergkvara Railway Station

Bergkvara railway station, here active in 1920, now stands empty after having served as a residence in recent years. With tracks running in both the north and south, the station became the railway station in Sweden located closest to the sea (Bergkvaras Hembygdsgille, 2012).



Lindbergsgården

A farmhand settled on this plot as early as 1719, and since then the site has served as a centre of commercial activity, with the sale of iron and building materials as well as equipment for fishing, boats, and agriculture (Torsås kommun, 2019). The building functions as a landmark in the area, strategically located at the road crossing towards Dalskär. The old residential house remains, as does the historic smokehouse with its two tall brick chimneys. Lindbergsgården provides a clear insight into the history of the site.



Brantingska Husen

The properties along Storgatan are named after the ship's blacksmith Edvin Branting (1883–1982) (Torsås kommun, 2019). The buildings comprise a cluster of houses closely connected to the local community, with two of the structures aligned directly along the street.



Alm och Berg, Blå Hallen

Former commercial buildings in Bergkvara along Storgatan, featuring many preserved details such as doors and wooden paneling. Alm and Berg operated as a hardware store until the 1960s but later shifted focus towards arts and crafts, household goods, and similar products (Bergkvara Hembygdsgille, 2012). The store was not only a place of purchase but also an important gathering point for the residents of Bergkvara.



Ängen

Bergkvara Pensionat Ängen, in 1939 and 2026. The building has served as a private residence, guesthouse, and preschool, and today houses four apartments. The tower was demolished in the 1970s, but otherwise the building is well preserved, retaining its yellow wooden facade and wooden details (Torsås kommun, 2019).



Bergkvara School

Bergkvara School, originally named Solhems School, opened in 1913 and has over the years been extended towards the inner courtyard (Bergkvaras Hembygdsgille, 2012). The school was situated midway between Bergkvara and Gökälund to serve the needs of both communities. Its architectural expression is well preserved, and the building constitutes a prominent landmark within the area.





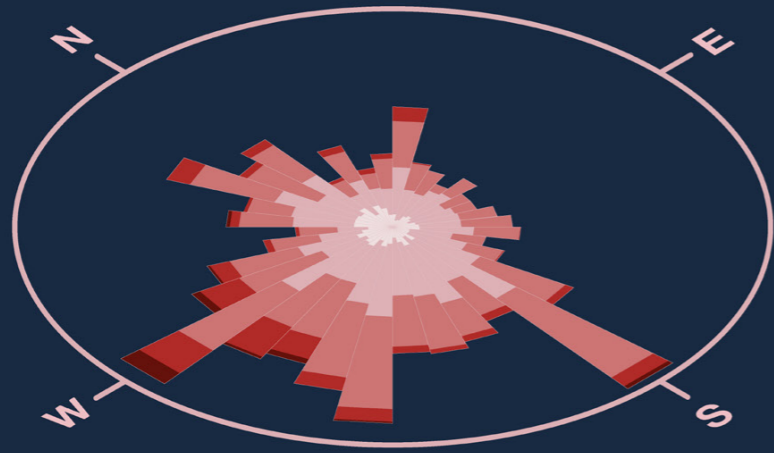
A mapping of Bergkvara's architecture along the central street, showing historical layers and later additions that together shape the character of the built environment today.

SITE CONDITIONS

The following section presents the site conditions in relation to solar exposure, wind, smell, noise, and topography.

Smell

Bergkvara Wastewater Treatment Plant is located nearby, which could potentially affect odor conditions in the harbor area. However, previous reports from nearby residents indicate that they have not experienced disturbances from either odor or noise from the facility (Torsås kommun, 2015).

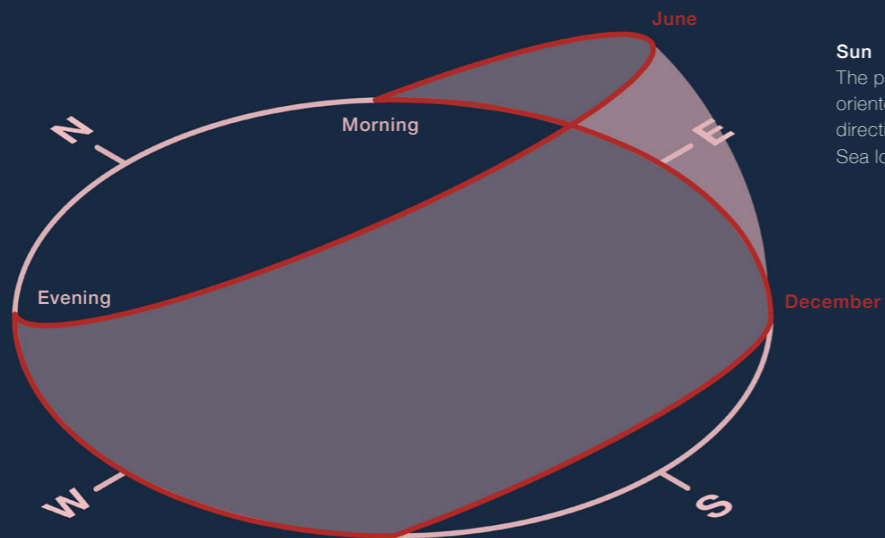


Wind

The site is highly exposed to wind due to its location in the open coastal landscape. The predominant wind directions in the area are from the south and east.

Noise

The area is currently not exposed to noise. However, traffic volumes along Hamngatan are expected to increase as the housing supply expands and activity in the harbor intensifies.

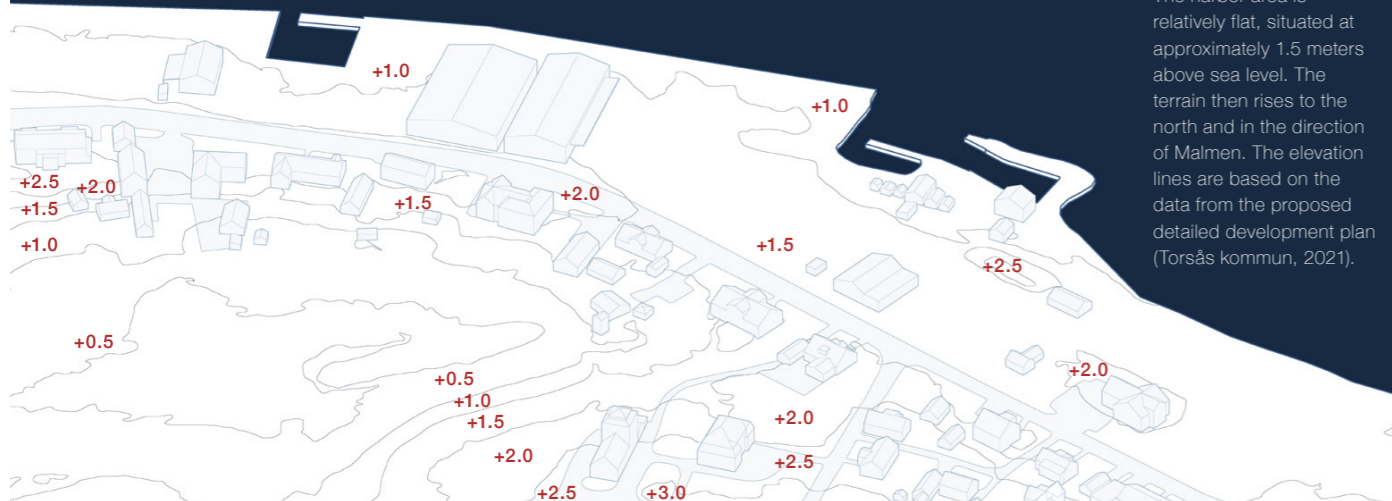


Sun

The plot is primarily oriented in a north-south direction, with the Baltic Sea located to the east.

Topography

The harbor area is relatively flat, situated at approximately 1.5 meters above sea level. The terrain then rises to the north and in the direction of Malmen. The elevation lines are based on the data from the proposed detailed development plan (Torsås kommun, 2021).



N

STREET FURNITURE

The single-family houses are often separated by hedges or fences to separate private and public spaces, creating clear boundaries within the environment. The public areas encourage movement along Dalskärsvägen towards the harbor. The pedestrian street is furnished with elements such as flowers, benches, and lighting, and leads to destinations like Fias backe, Dalskär, and the gazebo at Parlamentet. In the marina, several piers provide access to the water. However, the main bathing areas are concentrated to the north part of Dalskär, as well as at Badudden, south of the harbor.

Public transport to Gökalund and Torsås, continuing to Kalmar, has two stops along Storgatan and ends at Bergkvara harbor. From there, the bus journey takes approximately 15 minutes to Torsås square and about one hour to Kalmar.



FURNITURE

- Flagpole
- Lightning
- Bus Stop
- Flowerbed
- Piers and Bridges
- Gathering pavilion
- Pool
- Roof
- Deck
- Bench
- Hedge
- Fence
- Stone wall

SCALE 1 : 4 000



"My favorite spot is here, at my grandfather's house"

Verner Anderssons Store
The Old Sausage Kiosk
The terminal in Bergkvara

"Lionsleden was the best moped route to Torsås"

"When I was 12, me and my friends biked to the pizzeria and stayed there all night"

The Fashion Store with Britta

"All of my friends live here!"

"Autograph signing at the old tourist office with the artists at the Water Festival"

Olssons Bakery

The Old Furniture Store

"The padel center is an amazing meeting place"

"The mocha cake and bread rolls from Pludde"

A mapping of memories

by the participants. The memories reflect life in Bergkvara, past and present, and highlight its significance.

SOCIAL ELEMENTS

The social elements were explored as part of the workshop, the briefing part, aimed at mapping the current living situation in Bergkvara, as well as through background research on local activities and initiatives.

ACTIVITIES

Bergkvara is characterized by a rich associational life. The association Bergkvara AIF, founded in 1930, has historically included gymnastics, swimming, bandy, table tennis, and weightlifting (Bergkvara Hembygdsigille, 2012). Today, the association offers only its football section, the locality also hosts a successful table tennis club, an extensive scouting organisation and a padel hall. In addition, there is a boat club that has organised numerous competitions and annually arrange a sailing school.

"We usually have coffee in the forest with the kids and the dog"

"When I turned four, I had my birthday party here!"

"When we were little, we used to look for tadpoles here"

"According to the kids, we live in the best house, here there's everything: a hill, a football field, a pool, the bus, the school, a sports hall, and more."

"The old preschool in Ången"

"All the children's parties in the sports hall"

"As kids, we always played in the thicket behind the school."

"The school music show"

"The egg rolling down the hill every Easter"

"Annual football match, 6th grade against the teachers"

"I love sledding down the big hill"

"Scouts every weekend"

"I have lots of great memories with good friends through the scouts"

"Family fun at the Chapel"

"All the musicals and performances at the Chapel."

"A memorable moment was in 2010 when Bergkvara AIF played Djurgården at Hagaborg"

INITIATIVES

Places in the Making is a development project at Kalmar läns museum in which cultural environments are used as a resource for sustainable development. The aim is to develop a model for co-creative development, promote participatory processes, strengthen collaboration between different sectors, and contribute to socially sustainable development in rural areas. Bergkvara serves as a testbed through the initiative *Bergkvara vågar!* (2023–2026). In collaboration with residents, associations, businesses, children and young people, the project explores how the coastal area can be developed with the goal of connecting Dalskär and Badudden. In spring 2025, five small cabins were built and can be rented for various activities, following local requests for a meeting space in the harbor.

"Ski trails!"

"Ragnaborundan is a great running route"

"Breakfast and evening swims at Ekkläppen when the kids were little"

"Värnholmen Camp"

"I love the running routes around Ragnaborundan and along the coast"

"Ekkläppen is Bergkvara's calmest and warmest swimming spot!"

"I loved Dalskär's playground with the big trampoline."

"Last summer, a friend and I slept in our car here"

"Canoeing with the scouts!"

"Seal Safari"

"As kids, we always played Wildkids on the islands"

"Winter Swimming Spot"

"Every summer, a big cycling party is held with all the amazing people!"

"Children's shows on the stage"

"I had my 30th birthday party here"

"Delicious food at the seaside restaurant"

Bergkvara Water Festival

"The trampoline that used to be out in the water"

"Torchlight procession with the scouts at Vålberg"

"Last summer, the kids dared to jump from the diving tower for the first time"

"Every year, Midsummer is celebrated at Skytteholmen."

"Fireworks on New Year's Eve"

"Lionsgrillen, where we've grilled many times with friends"

"Coffee at Garpen"

"The pier dances in the harbor back in the day, when people arrived by boat, it was a celebration throughout the whole village"

"Ice skating at Ångaskär."

"Outdoor exercise every summer"

Blå hallen Shopping Center

Jockes Store

Lindbergs Grocery Store

Sandqvists Bakery

"Bergkvara Day is celebrated in the harbor every year!"

"Swimming and playing at Kårö"

"Summer hangouts at Kårö, with water skiing!"

"When the railway existed, we used to hop on the carts in Bergkvara and ride down to the harbor!"

"Art school at Kulturmagasinet every summer break"

"Live music nights at Strandbygget"

"After the school year ended, everyone went here for coffee and cakes!"

"The Vanilla Buns"

"My grandparents worked as pilots, so I spent a lot of time here as a child"

"A spring morning with coffee by the boathouses"

"The old silo was the best playground; you could ride the elevator, maybe Bergkvara's first elevator"

"A ferry used to run from here to both Mörbylånga and Bornholm"

"Horseback riding with my old horse"

"My grandmother lives here, we usually bake together!"

"When I was little, we used to jump in the wood shavings here with my grandmother"

"Badudden is Bergkvara's best swimming spot"

"This is 'our' swimming spot, not the tourists!"

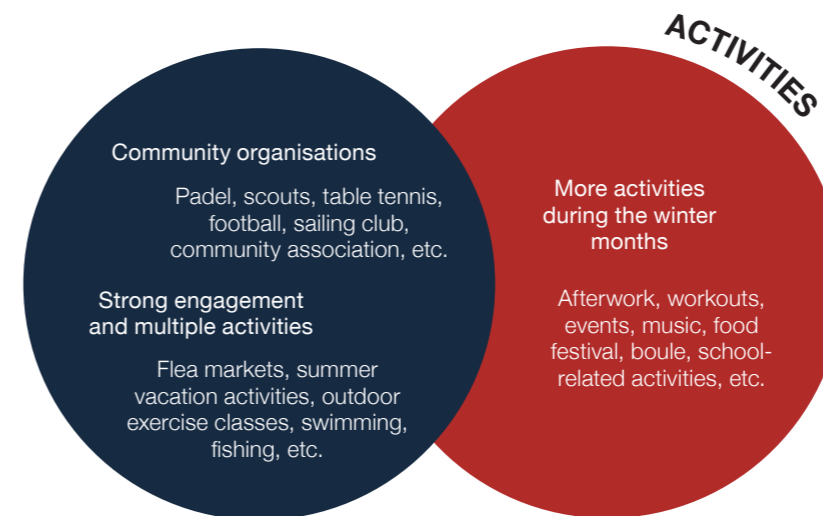
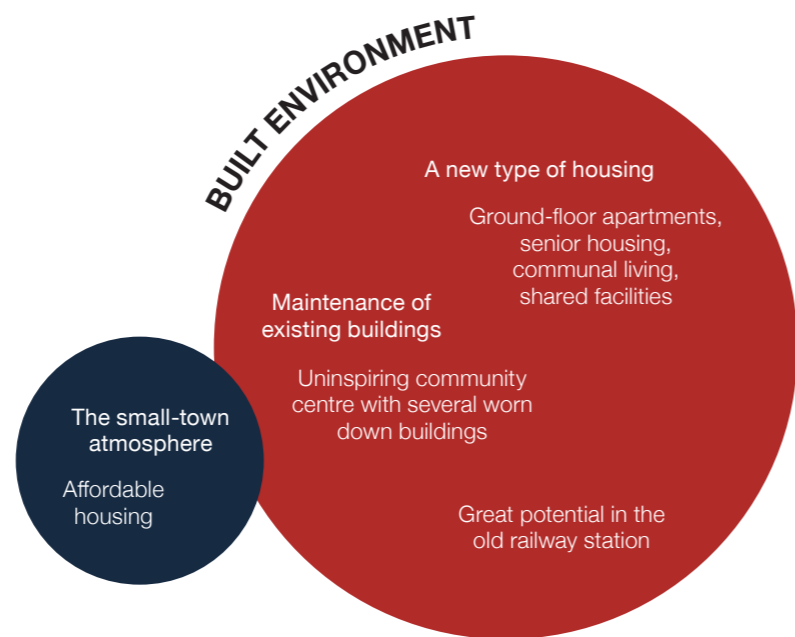
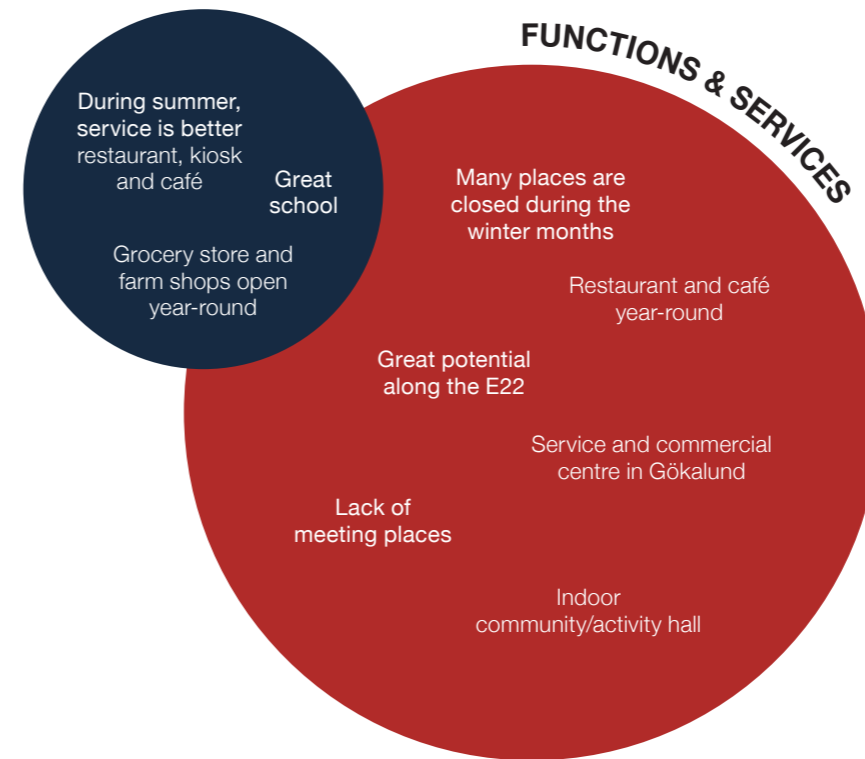
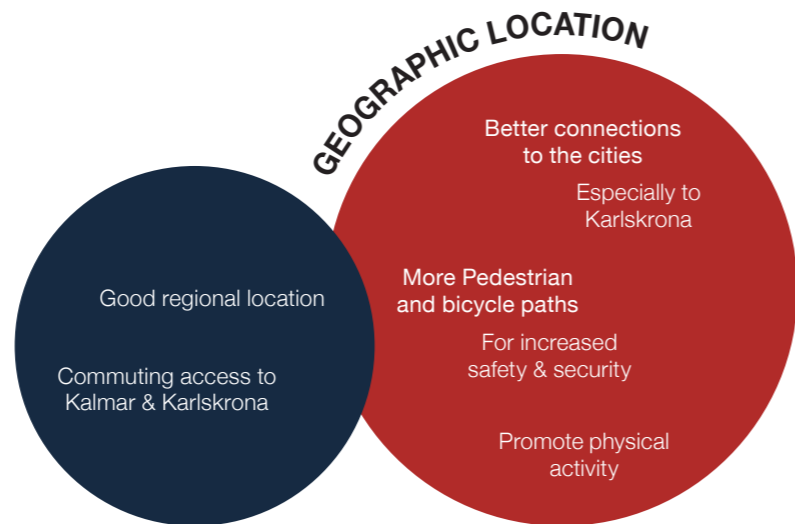
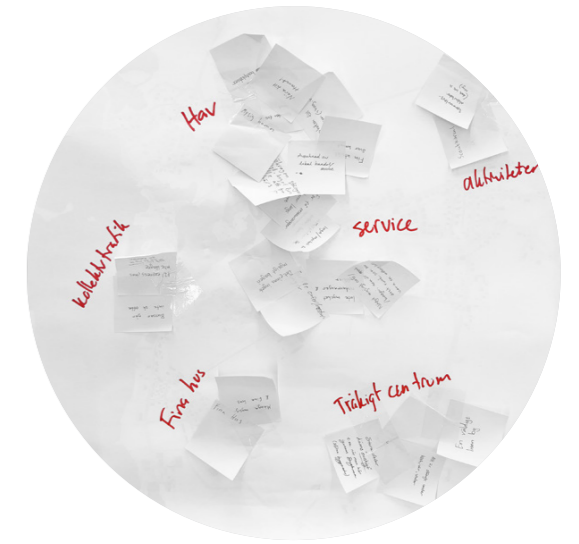
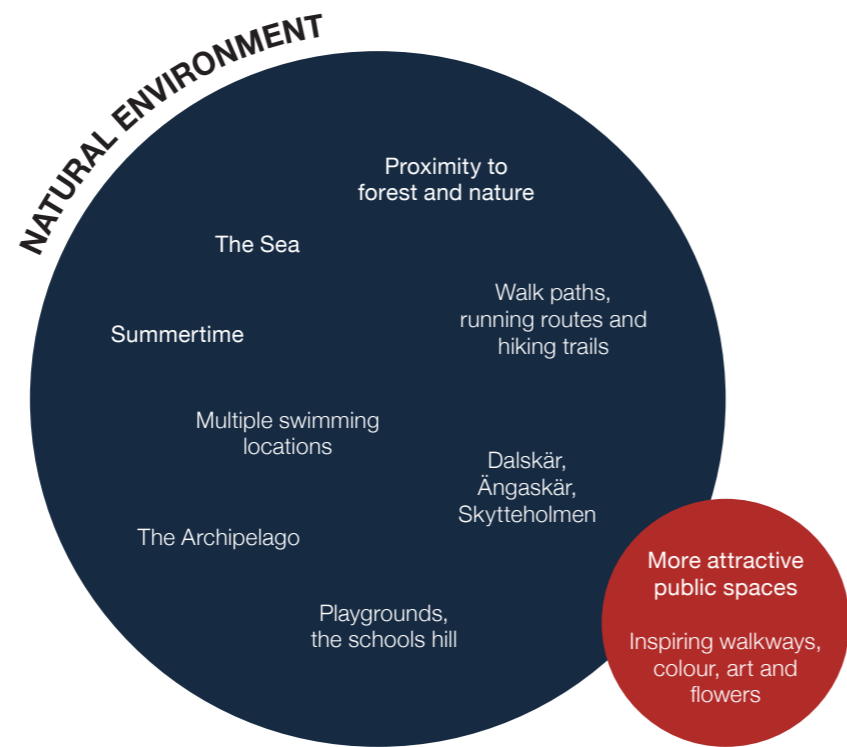
"All the treasures found at the second-hand store Vågen"

"I practiced driving my moped here"



LOCAL COMMUNITY-BASED SITE ANALYSIS

During a briefing workshop, the residents of Bergkvara identified existing qualities as well as weaknesses and development potential in the community. The results have been categorized into six areas and are visualized in the diagram: light blue circles represent existing qualities, while dark blue circles represent weaknesses and development potential. The size of the circles schematically illustrates the proportion of strengths relative to weaknesses.



In summary, the analysis shows that Bergkvara's greatest qualities today are its natural environment, with proximity to the sea, forests, and nature being most important to the residents. The social environment also stands out, with safety and strong community engagement as key assets. Additionally, the many activities driven by this engagement, as well as the local voluntary associations, are highly valued.

Regarding Bergkvara's weaknesses and development potential, there is a strong need for more facilities, services, and activities during the winter months. Residents see significant potential in Bergkvara's regional location, but this requires upgrading the built environment to increase interest and attractiveness. With better connections to nearby cities, more year-round meeting places, and complementary housing developments, residents see Bergkvara as highly promising for future development.

GÖKALUND

A mapping of the personal analysis based on the relationship to the site, with reflections drawn from personal memories and experiences of growing up in Bergkvara.

PADEL

SCHOOL

PERSONAL ELEMENTS

This section is based on personal experiences, perceptions, and reflections.

AURA OF THE PLACE

Activity in Bergkvara is primarily concentrated in natural areas and Dalskär, where the environment is perceived as inviting and vibrant. During the summer, Dalskär functions as a strong social and functional node, with the campsite, restaurant, and beach area at its center. A comparable meeting space, serving both Bergkvara's residents and visitors from surrounding communities, is lacking during the winter months. The harbor area has the potential to develop into such a hub, offering new functions and meeting spaces that could enrich life in the rural community.

PERSONAL SITE ANALYSIS

Bergkvara is perceived as a calm community where everyone knows each other. The locality offers different walking routes in varied environments, extending through forests and agricultural landscapes, through housing areas, and along the coast.

In contrast, the harbor area appears more abandoned. There are fragments of former activities, but the overall impression is that functions have gradually disappeared while the place itself remains.

FOOTBALL

SCOUTS

CHAPEL

SKYTTE-HOLMEN

DALSKÄR

THE HARBOUR

Within the project *Bergkvara vågar!* five rental cabins were constructed adjacent to the harbor area during the summer of 2025.



REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

The primary focus of the new development should be to build upon Bergkvara's heritage and traditions. This section emphasises the importance of reflecting the site's historical character in the new structure, similar to other parts of Bergkvara, where fragments of history are visible in the built environment. The sections also illustrate a permissive structure, where the current situation is characterized by diverse interactions with the street. A particular challenge in the area, however, is its exposure to wind, which requires careful design of the public spaces.

Architecture in Bergkvara is primarily characterized by a high degree of wooden detailing, reflecting the region's tradition of craftsmanship. This is particularly evident in the regional Torsås panel, with high cultural-historical value. The built environment often consists of wooden houses, painted in lighter colours or red with black or white corners. In the harbor area, architecture is mainly functionally adapted, as seen in the former concrete silo, the sheet metal storages and the red-painted boathouses.

The housing stock is currently very homogeneous, consisting mainly of single-family homes. This creates an opportunity to introduce housing types in the harbor area that are currently missing in Bergkvara.

The development should also focus on enhancing movement along the waterfront, to contribute to the development of the "bath to bath" path. Along that path, the harbor can serve as a new destination, functioning as a social node while offering activities and functions year-round for all residents of Bergkvara.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS:

Reflect the harbour's history in its architecture
both structurally, but also material-wise with the metal sheet, concrete and wooden houses

Regain the landmark
with a tall building that references the former silo

Maintain the small-scale character
with residential buildings both aligned with the street and with front gardens, similar to other houses along Storgatan/Hamngatan

Express the region's craftsmanship traditions
in a contemporary way

Wooden residential buildings
as in the rest of Bergkvara, with red brick gable roofs and light colours

Strengthen movement along the waterfront
and serve as a stage in the development of connecting bath to bath

Develop a vibrant node
with meeting spaces and functions throughout the year



Participants share experiences and stories from different stages of life in Bergkvara.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

TARGET GROUPS

In the participatory design process, four separate target groups were invited to discuss Bergkvara in general and the future of the harbour. The groups represented children, young adults, parents, and seniors, with the aim of reflecting a range of perspectives within the community.

WORKSHOPS

Participants were personally invited to a workshop conducted at an early stage of the project, before the design process. The purpose was to establish a knowledge base for the sketching phase. The selection was made strategically to reflect a range of experiences within the target group, including both individuals who moved to Bergkvara as adults and those who grew up there.

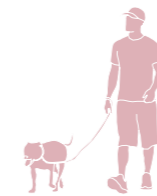
In the first part, the briefing workshop, participants identified Bergkvara's qualities, weaknesses, and development potential. In the second part, the design workshop, the focus shifted to the harbour area to examine which aspects of the development potential could be realised within this geographically defined area.

The groups were provided with a map of the harbour area, including three-dimensional volumes representing existing buildings. As support tools, the groups used scale models illustrating different building typologies, along with pens, Post-it notes, and inspirational images to visualise the area and discuss its potential.

The results varied between the groups, but showed a clear shared focus on public spaces, pedestrian paths, and a diversity of meeting places. A more detailed result of each target group's discussion is presented on the following pages.



CHILDREN
Number of participants: 8
Ages: 11 years old



YOUNG ADULTS
Number of participants: 7
Ages: 20-25 years old



PARENTS
Number of participants: 7
Ages: 35-55 years old



SENIORS
Number of participants: 5
Ages: 60-80 years old

CHILDREN

In this target group, eight children from grade 5 (eleven years old) at Bergkvara School participated.



CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION:

All the children currently live in Bergkvara, one child lives in a townhouse and the rest in small family houses. They appreciate being close to the sea and having the opportunity to swim in several different places. Proximity to family, relatives, grandparents, and friends is also highly valued.

FUTURE HOUSING SITUATION:

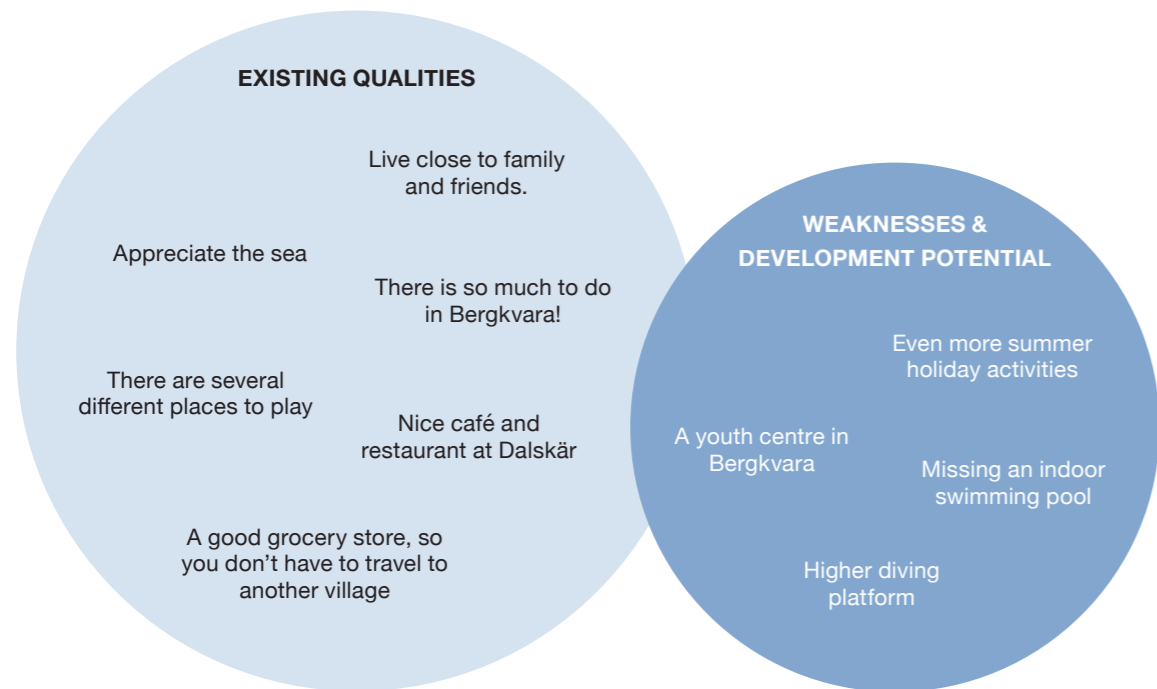
The children have different plans for the future. One wants to live in an apartment in Kalmar, another dreams of a summer cottage, and one would like a farm by the sea. However, the majority would prefer to live in a villa by the sea.

BERGKVARA SITUATION ANALYSIS:

In general, the children feel that there is plenty to do in Bergkvara, such as swimming, fishing, playing padel, cycling, and playing football. They appreciate the many playgrounds, with their favorites being Dalskär and the large hill by the school. Activities during the summer are especially valued, particularly

those at Dalskär, including sea and pool swimming, café, the ice cream kiosk, and the seaside restaurant. At the same time, the children wish for additional facilities that are available in nearby communities, such as an indoor pool and a youth center.

"Dalskär is our favorite place!"



YOUNG ADULTS

This target group consisted of seven young adults aged 20–25, all of whom grew up in Bergkvara.



CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION:

All participants currently live in apartments in Gothenburg. They moved from Bergkvara between 2020 and 2025 to begin their studies. All report satisfaction with their current housing situation and consider it well suited to their present stage of life.

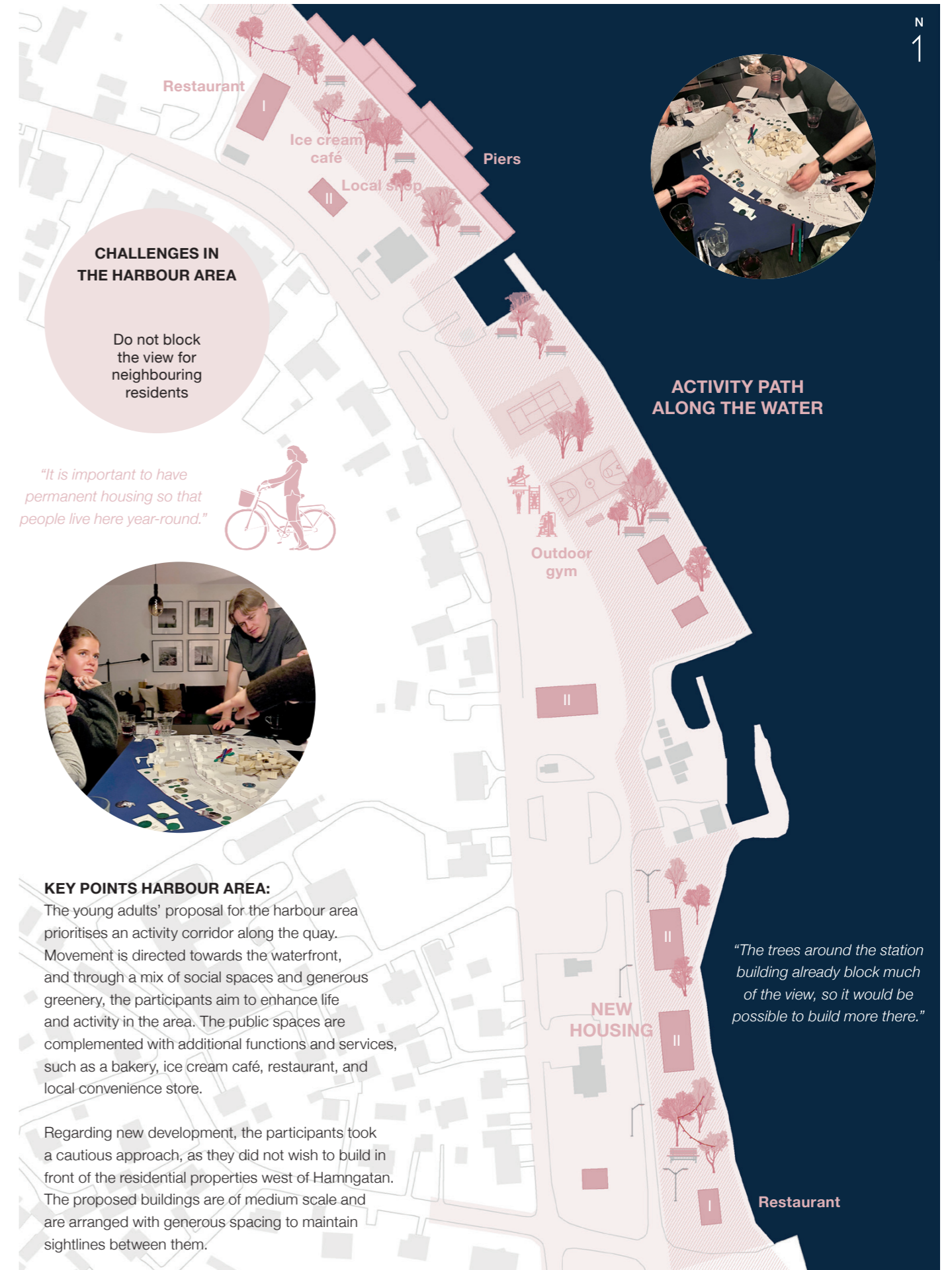
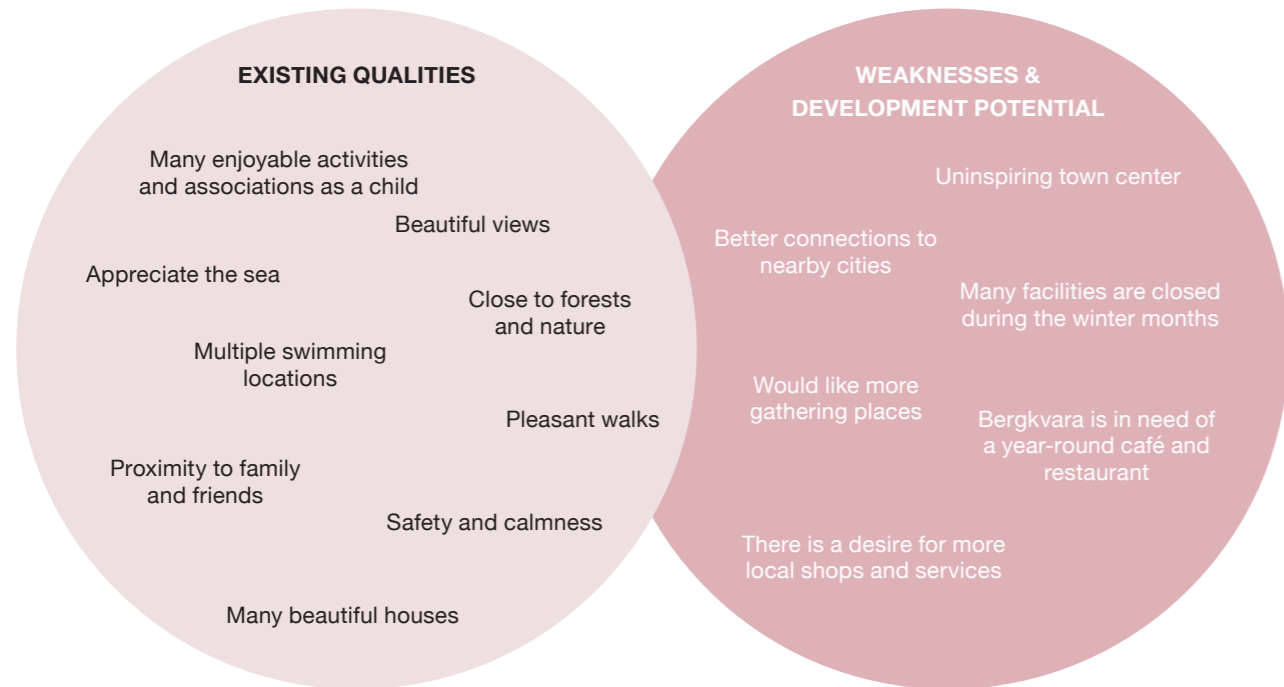
FUTURE HOUSING SITUATION:

In a future family situation, the participants wish to live in a single family home. Some prefer to live near a larger city, with access to urban life, while others seek a quieter and more secluded environment. Proximity to nature, the sea, family, and friends is highlighted as important, as well as a pleasant, safe, and calm living environment. Access to services and activities is also highly valued, with participants wanting to live in a setting that is lively and offers natural meeting places.

BERGKVARA SITUATION ANALYSIS:

The participants are very positive about Bergkvara's natural environment and social context. They appreciate the proximity to nature and the sea, as well as the activities that this enables. The social aspect is characterized by a sense of safety and the value of living close to family and friends.

At the same time, participants note that while there are many attractive buildings in Bergkvara, the overall impression is worn-down and the town centre lacks appeal. There is a desire for more functions and better services, as well as improved connections to nearby cities.



KEY POINTS HARBOUR AREA:

The young adults' proposal for the harbour area prioritises an activity corridor along the quay. Movement is directed towards the waterfront, and through a mix of social spaces and generous greenery, the participants aim to enhance life and activity in the area. The public spaces are complemented with additional functions and services, such as a bakery, ice cream café, restaurant, and local convenience store.

Regarding new development, the participants took a cautious approach, as they did not wish to build in front of the residential properties west of Hamngatan. The proposed buildings are of medium scale and are arranged with generous spacing to maintain sightlines between them.



"We moved to Bergkvara mainly for the kids, for the safety and the great school."

"People in Bergkvara are proud of their community and local identity."



PARENTS

The target group consisted of seven parents aged 35–55, all living in Bergkvara, some grew up there, while others moved there later in life.

CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION:

All participants currently live in houses in Bergkvara, some with young children at home and others without children who have moved out. All are employed in nearby communities or commute to the cities. The participants describe Bergkvara as their safe haven and appreciate the proximity to nature and the sea. What many value most, however, is the suitability of the area for raising children. There is a well-regarded school, and participants perceive the environment as providing an appropriate and safe context for child development. A challenge of rural living, however, is that it requires careful planning. Opportunities for spontaneity are limited due to limited availability of services and facilities.

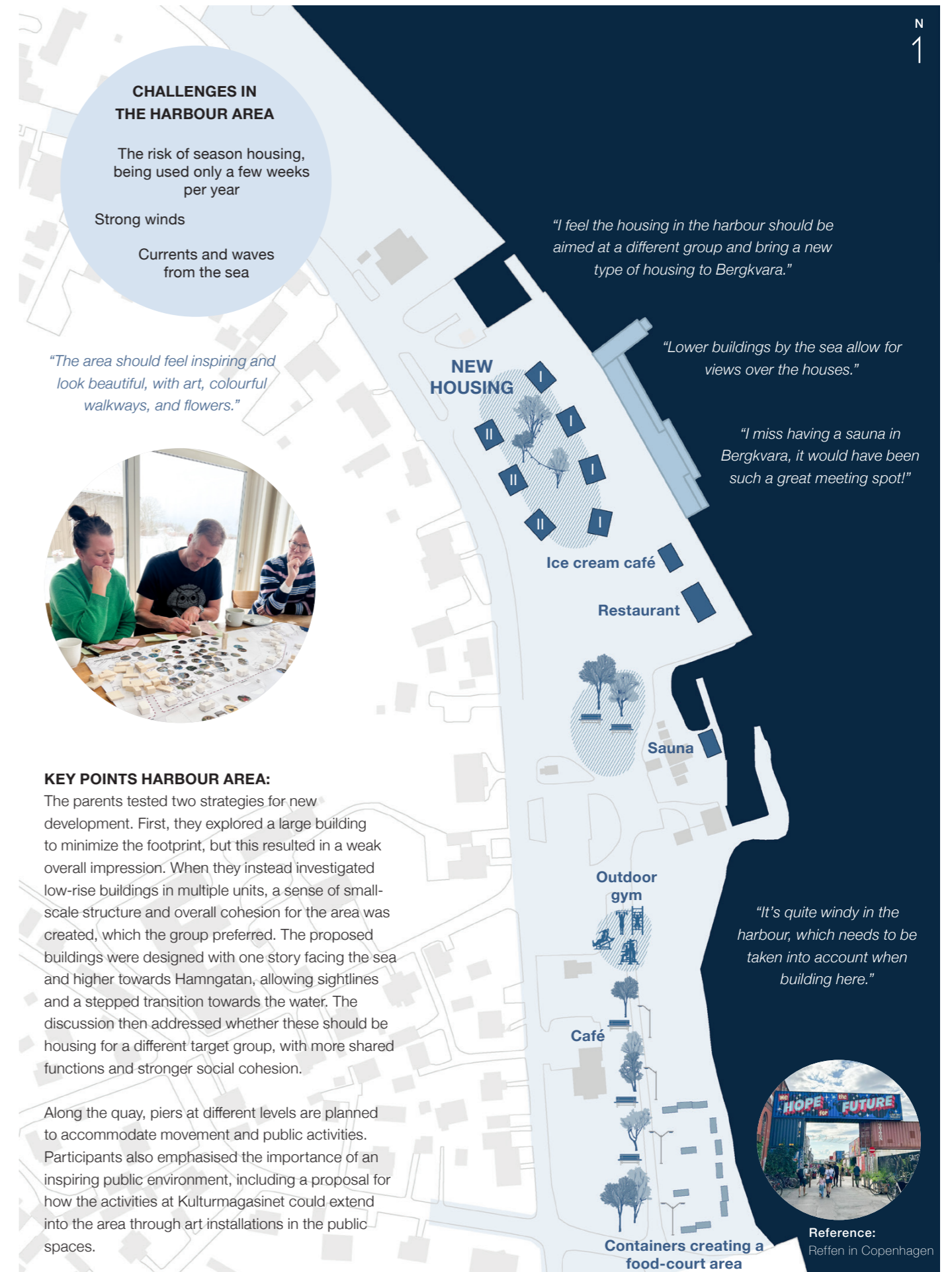
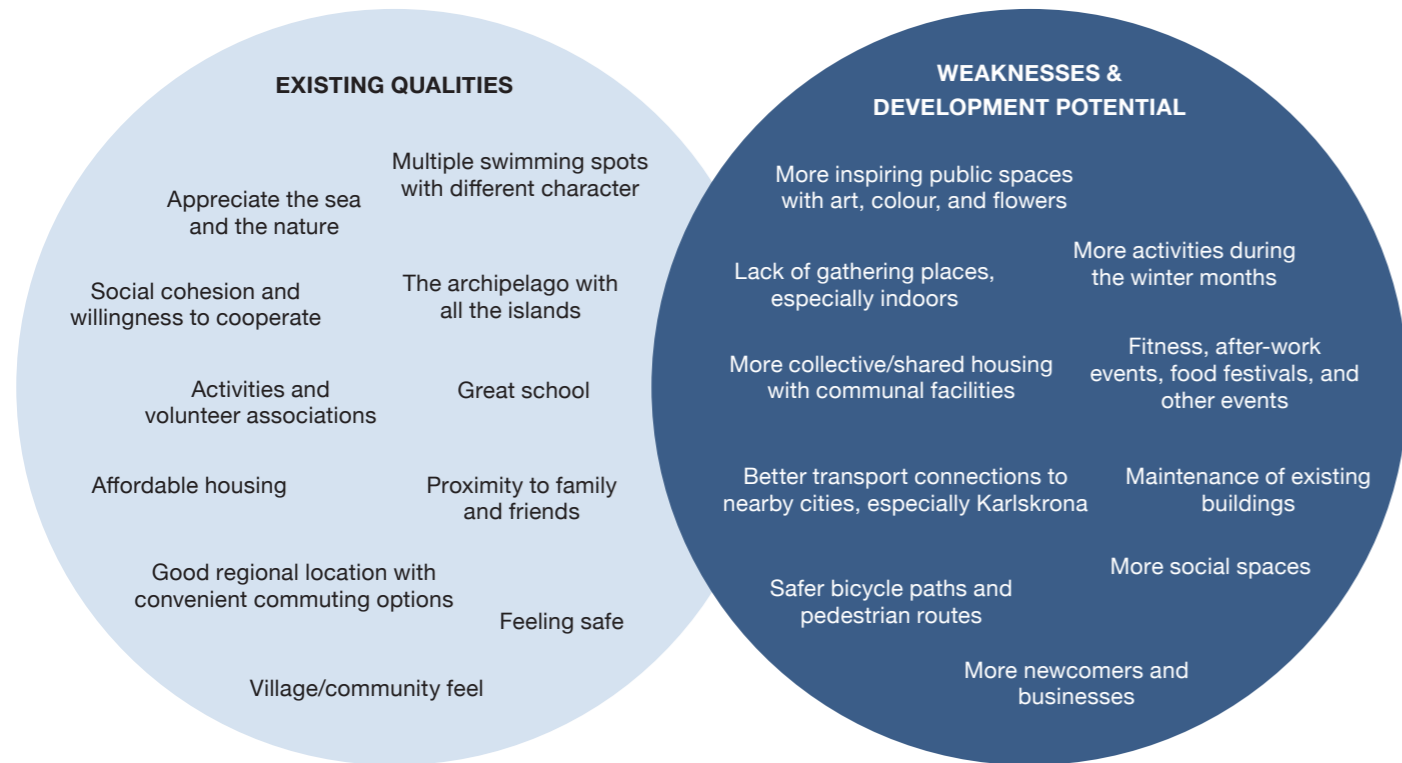
FUTURE HOUSING SITUATION:

Perspectives on the future housing situation vary among participants. Some are uncertain, as they perceive Bergkvara to be worn down and at risk of decline. Others view Bergkvara as their place for the rest of their lives. A few have previously considered leaving, but the summers convince them to stay. Many participants lack the city's vibrancy and gathering places, which is why they value working in nearby cities. There is also a desire for improved access to services and the opportunity to live more spontaneously. Some participants note that they currently prefer more secluded living, but they think that in the future they would prefer to live closer to others, with more neighbours and a stronger sense of social community.

BERGKVARA SITUATION ANALYSIS:

Bergkvara provides a suitability of the area for raising children, with a highly regarded school. The natural surroundings and the sea are highly valued, and the activities that take place there. The social environment is also significant, characterized by strong local engagement, community cohesion, and a willingness to cooperate. Participants who moved to Bergkvara later in life highlight the strong local identity and community as unique features.

Participants also emphasise Bergkvara's regionally strategic location and its potential to attract new residents and businesses due to its proximity to two cities. To realize this potential, the town's attractiveness needs to be enhanced, including through the maintenance of existing buildings, improved transport connections, and a broader range of functions, services, and public gathering spaces year-round.



KEY POINTS HARBOUR AREA:

The parents tested two strategies for new development. First, they explored a large building to minimize the footprint, but this resulted in a weak overall impression. When they instead investigated low-rise buildings in multiple units, a sense of small-scale structure and overall cohesion for the area was created, which the group preferred. The proposed buildings were designed with one story facing the sea and higher towards Hamngatan, allowing sightlines and a stepped transition towards the water. The discussion then addressed whether these should be housing for a different target group, with more shared functions and stronger social cohesion.

Along the quay, piers at different levels are planned to accommodate movement and public activities. Participants also emphasised the importance of an inspiring public environment, including a proposal for how the activities at Kulturmagasinet could extend into the area through art installations in the public spaces.

SENIORS

The target group consisted of five individuals aged 60-80 who have lived in Bergkvara for at least forty years.

CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION:

One of the participants has lived in Bergkvara their whole life, while the others moved there in their twenties or thirties and have stayed since. Several have commuted to work in Kalmar or nearby towns, and some have also worked locally, for example in shops or at the school. All participants are happy with their current housing situation and especially value being close to the sea, nature, and their friends and social network.

FUTURE HOUSING SITUATION:

At present, there are no plans to leave Bergkvara or the current housing situation; the intention is to remain as long as possible. At the same time, one participant feels that their current home is larger than needed. Another has considered living closer to local services and could, in the future, imagine moving to a more accessible ground-floor apartment.

"In Torsås, they've built new ground-floor apartments that seem really good, accessible, with glazed patios and close to nature."

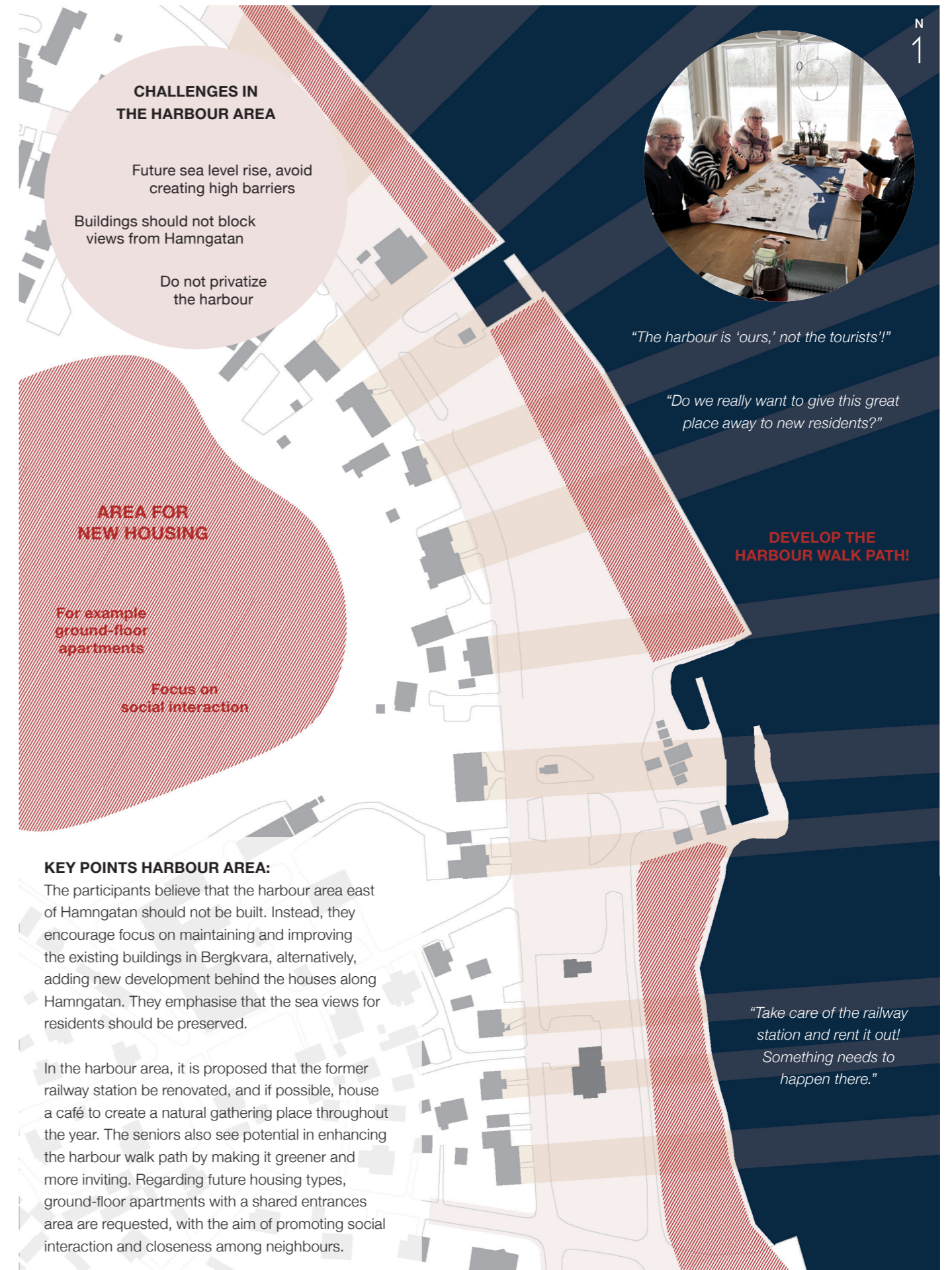
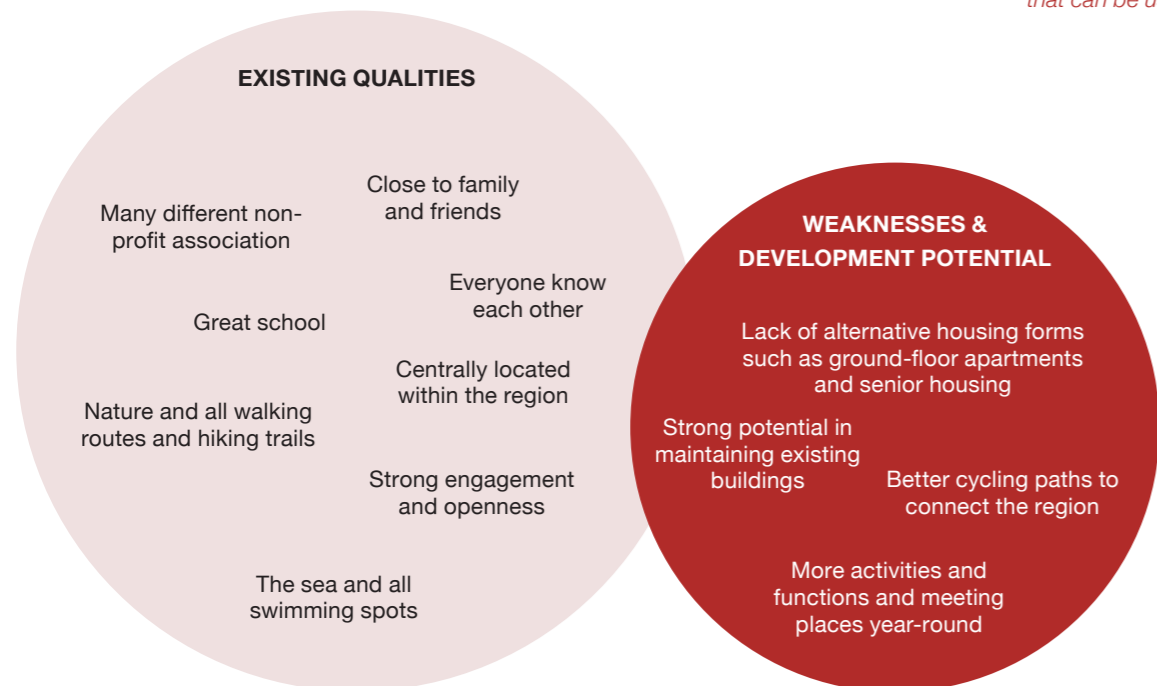


BERGKVARA SITUATION ANALYSIS:

The target group primarily values the social qualities and the people of Bergkvara. The perceived openness and strong local engagement create beneficial conditions for an active community life and well-appreciated activities. The notion that "everyone knows everyone" is described as a strength, contributing to everyday interaction, a sense of safety, and strong social cohesion. Natural and environmental qualities are also emphasised, particularly access to swimming areas, walking routes, and hiking trails.

At the same time, the group identifies a need to maintain and further develop the existing built environment, as well as to complement the area with alternative housing types. Improved cycling infrastructure that strengthens connections to surrounding areas is requested, along with a broader range of activities.

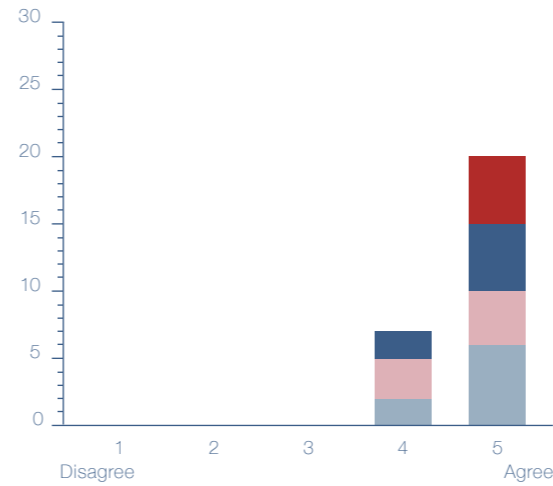
"We need indoor meeting spaces that can be used all year round."



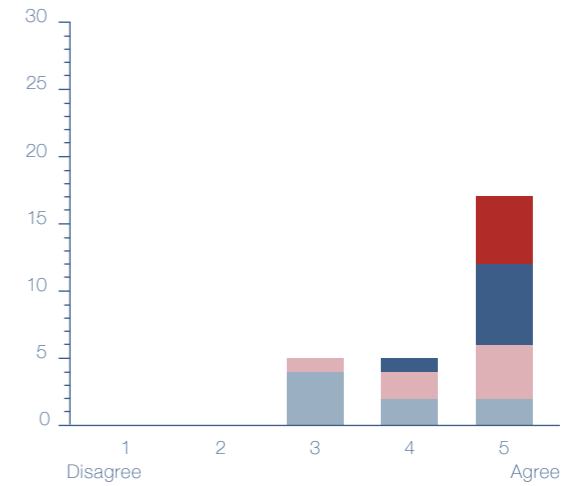
Using tools and maps, participants come together in a playful session to test ideas.



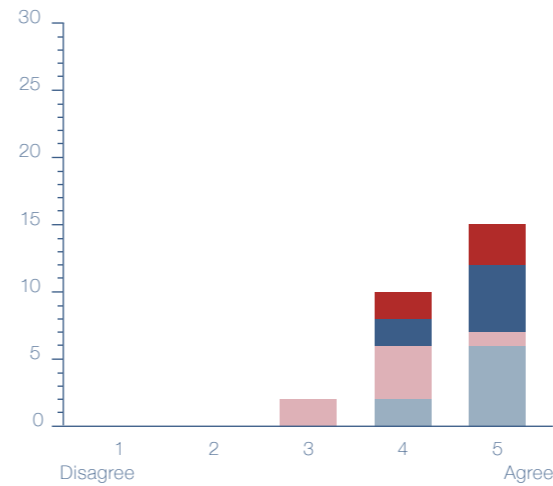
I really appreciate living in Bergkvara.



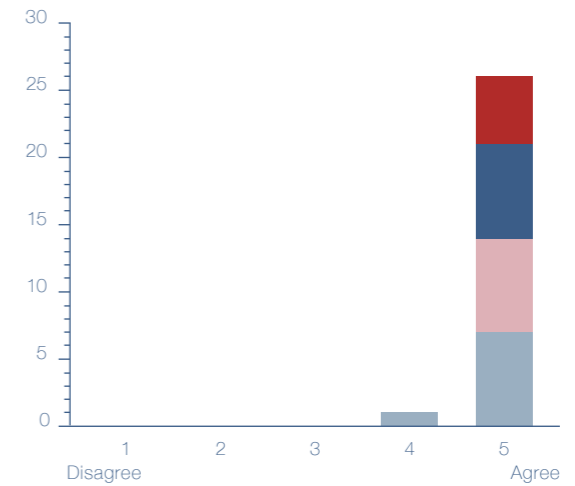
I believe that this type of workshops makes a difference in the planning of our living environments.



I would recommend others to live in Bergkvara.



I enjoyed participating in this workshop.



TARGET GROUPS

- Seniors
- Parents
- Young Adults
- Children

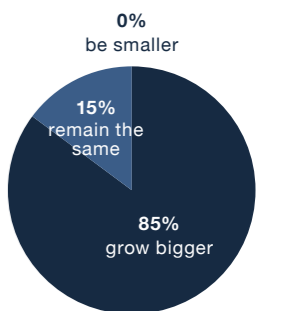
PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION

All workshops concluded with a brief evaluation in which participants were asked questions about the development of Bergkvara and the participatory design process.

The results indicate that the participants appreciate Bergkvara and would recommend it as a place to live, reflecting a strong sense of pride in their community and living environment. There is also a clear desire for growth and for Bergkvara to continue developing and expanding in the future.

Regarding the participatory design process, the evaluation highlights the importance of participation, as the vast majority of participants feel that their involvement influences the planning of the living environment. Furthermore, participants reported that they valued taking part in the exercises, as they provided an opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions and to feel heard in the planning process.

In the future, I would like Bergkvara to...





Workshops create opportunities to learn about others' thoughts and ideas about the common living environment.

REFLECTIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

Overall, all target groups identify Bergkvara's main qualities in its natural environment, the proximity to the sea, and the social context. The development potential is primarily associated with the built environment, as well as the availability of functions and services throughout the year. Residents want Bergkvara to grow, but to attract new residents, there is an emphasised need to increase the town's appeal and highlight its potential.

The ideas for the harbor area vary between target groups, but the core values are often the same. Children feel that there are already plenty of activities and are therefore not seen as the main target group. Other groups express a clear need for more meeting places and year-round functions, along with opportunities for a more spontaneous everyday life.

In public spaces, there is a preference for inspiring environments with art, colour, and greenery, especially those that emphasise the closeness to the sea. At the same time, the need for safety is emphasised, with bicycle paths and sidewalks considered central.

New buildings should be designed with respect for existing buildings, sightlines, and scale. Residents support small-scale development with permanent housing, ideally aimed at new groups. Significant potential is also seen in activating the old railway station with new functions and meeting places.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS:

Respect for the existing
buildings, sightlines, and scale

Small-scale development
to attract new residents

Social living environment for seniors
offer a new type of housing, in a more social setting

Inspiring public spaces
with green areas, and accessible waterfront

Bicycle paths and pedestrian streets
to increase safety, especially among families with children

A café and a restaurant
open year-round to promote a more spontaneous everyday life

Smaller public functions
sauna and community pavilion

Chapter 3.

BERGKVARA HARBOUR

- Vision and Goals
- Urban Strategy
- Phasing and Development
- Built Environment
- Public Spaces
- Phase 1: Kajgården
- Participant Reflections on Design

BERGKVARA HARBOUR

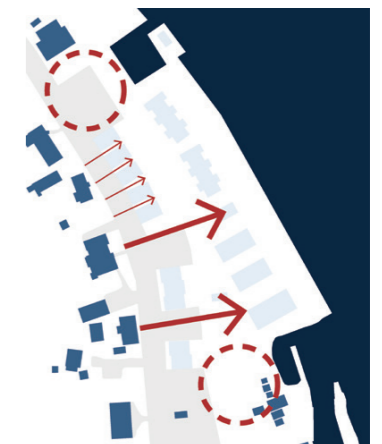
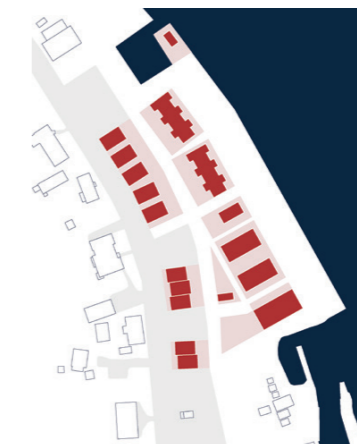
VISION AND GOALS

The aim is to bring new life into Bergkvara's harbour area and establish it as a vibrant and integrated part of the community. New and existing residents are accommodated through a diverse range of housing typologies and public meeting spaces, generating added value for the wider community. By building on the maritime identity and allowing it to evolve within a contemporary and sustainable

framework, the proposal articulates a place that connects past, present, and future. The project constitutes the first phase of a broader development of the area, where the northern harbour area serves as a starting point for continued expansion southwards towards the former railway station and Viktoriakajen.

URBAN STRATEGY

The design project is based on three key concepts developed from the research and reflections presented in Chapter 2. These concepts are then translated into design strategies for the development of the harbor area.



KEY CONCEPTS

ACTIVATE

Develop the harbour into a social environment fostering everyday activity, public spaces, and an inspiring living environment. Establish its role as a social node for the entire Bergkvara.

ADD

Introduce new housing types and functions to diversify Bergkvara's residential and service offerings, and at the same time enhancing the locality's long-term attractiveness.

ANCHOR

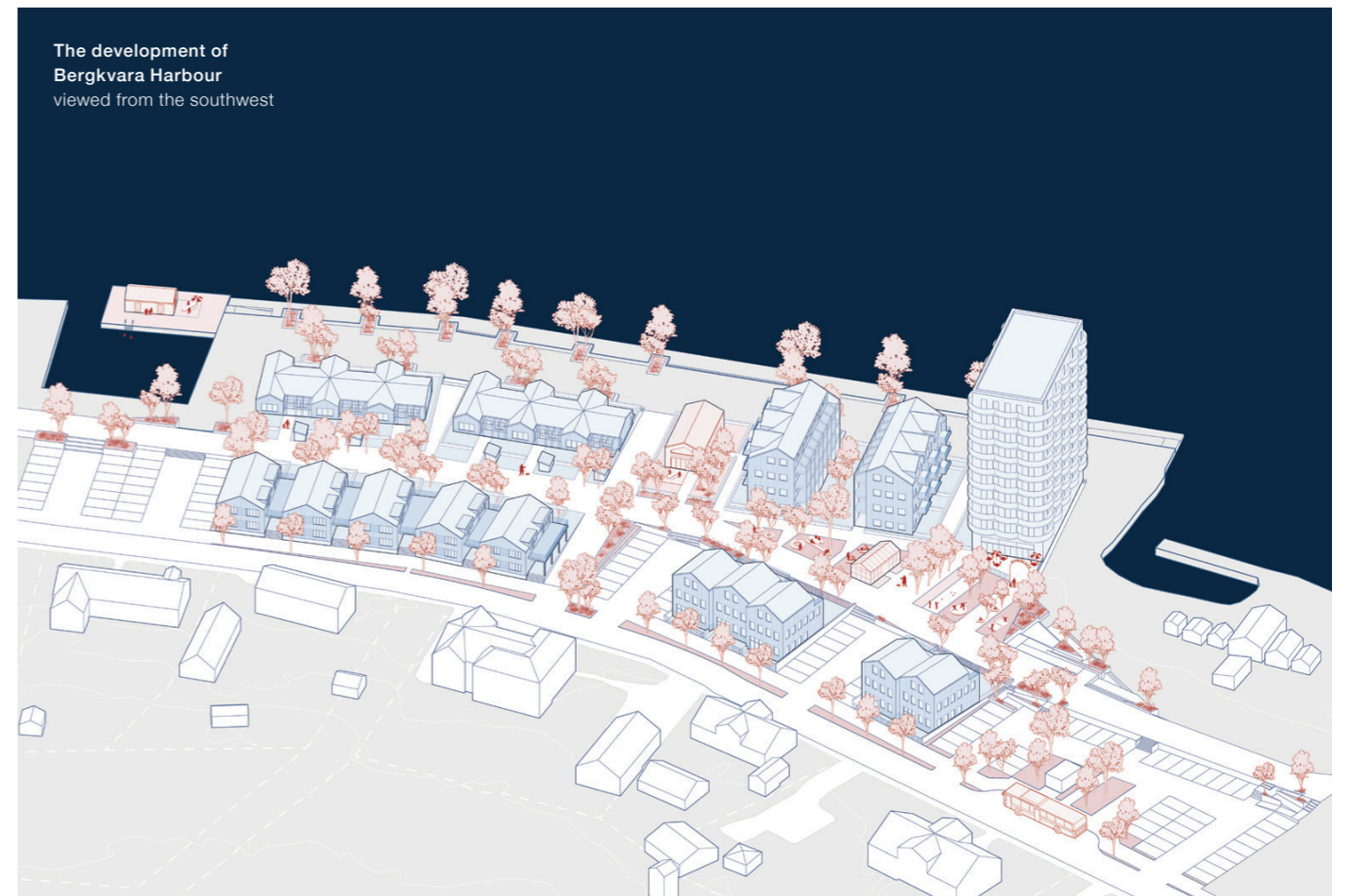
Anchor the development in Bergkvara's maritime identity, scale, and spatial structure. The addition is perceived as a natural part of the community, where the identity is preserved and developed.

DESIGN STRATEGIES

- Establish a cohesive harbour walkway, a public backbone that connects the area
- Integrate the elevated protective embankment into the urban spaces by leveraging it as an asset and activating the areas on and around it
- Activate ground floors and smaller inventions with commercial spaces and shared functions

- Complement the community with new functions, services and meeting spaces that are currently missing
- Integrate new housing typologies to broaden Bergkvara's housing supply
- Enable senior and community-oriented housing, supporting ageing in place while simultaneously increasing mobility within the housing market

- Integrate a low and dense building structure that respects the site's scale and architecture
- Preserve open spaces and sightlines towards the water
- Use robust, locally anchored material and building traditions



PHASING AND DEVELOPMENT

Development is to be implemented in a phased approach in order to respond to future interest and needs. The vision presents a flexible framework that can be scaled and adapted over time, depending on future demand, interest, and investment conditions.

To activate the site's potential at an early stage, phase one introduces a simple and small-scale structure (Kajgården). The new structure is carefully integrated into the existing environment and located on the site of the two current run-down storage buildings and does not impact the surrounding built context. The development enable a gradual enhancement of the public spaces and initiate both the protective embankment and the harbour walk path. The community pavilion and sauna introduce public functions that invite people to engage with the new area, generating immediate activity in the harbour.

In phase two, interest in the harbour area has grown, enabling a more urban form of development at the outer edge of the quay. Bergkvara regains its landmark in the form of a taller residential building, referencing the former silo that once defined the site. The ground floor provides opportunities for activities such as a restaurant or café, thereby reinforcing activity and establishing a clear destination. At the same time, the public spaces continues to evolve into a vibrant harbour square and a continuous harbour walk path with a pier along the quay.

Phase three connects the existing residential buildings along Hamngatan with the urban structure of phase two. The buildings are carefully sited to preserve sightlines towards the water. Once this phase is completed, the northern harbour area is established.

NUMBERS:

GFA:
Total: 7370 m²
Public: 300 m²
Residential: 7070 m²

Phases:

1: 1710 m²
2: 4510 m²
3: 1150 m²

RESIDENTIAL UNITS:

Total: 67 units
Senior housing: 6 units
Terraced housing: 10 units
Apartments: 51 units

PARKING:

Total: 115 parking spaces
Private (on site): 11 (16)
Residential: 59
Public (guests): 45

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment expands Bergkvara's housing supply and creates new opportunities for both current and future residents. Housing is developed to accommodate different life situations, and through new functions the attractiveness of the area is strengthened. The architecture is designed with a strong local anchoring in scale and expression.

SENIOR HOUSING

Ground-floor apartments adapted for elderly, with potential for ageing-in-place in the event of a care situation.

OWNER-OCCUPIED TERRACE HOUSING

A three-storey dwelling adapted for families. It includes a small private garden and a front garden, with the possibility for commercial use towards the street.

APARTMENT TOWER

A ten-storey apartment building with an active ground floor including space for a café or a restaurant, with an associated outdoor seating area.

RENTAL TERRACE HOUSING

A two-storey dwelling adapted for families. The dwelling includes a small private garden as well as a carport with a roof terrace.

GALLERY ACCESS HOUSING

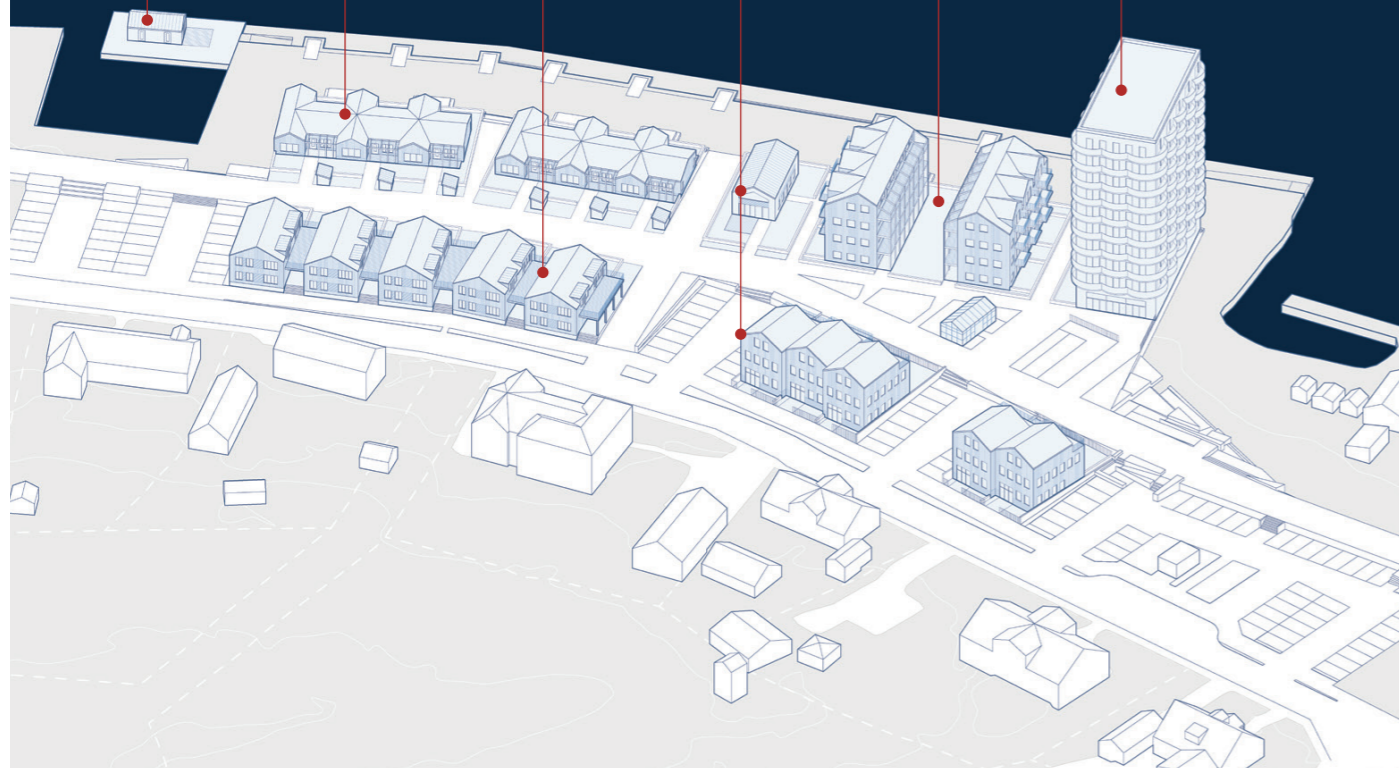
A four-storey gallery-access residential building offering two-sided apartments in a cost-efficient building typology.

PUBLIC SAUNA

A single-storey building with views over the sea and towards Dalskär. The building contains a sauna, changing rooms, and a communal room.

COMMUNITY PAVILLION

A one-and-a-half-storey building including a community room with a kitchen and bathroom, as well as a smaller guest apartment.



RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

The residential buildings in the harbour area are inspired by the surrounding built fabric of Bergkvara, where wooden architecture in light colours constitutes a dominant characteristic. At the same time, there is a historical variation between light facade colours and traditional red-painted wooden panels. Within the preserved harbour landscape, however, the red colour is almost entirely dominant, meaning that the proposed development, with its light colour palette, establishes a deliberate contrast to the existing older structure.

The design also aims to continue the local tradition of wooden craftsmanship, for example through the use of vertical and horizontal wooden cladding, interpreted in a contemporary manner. This is expressed through a formal language characterised by simplicity, clear volumes and restrained lines, which can also be found in parts of the newer residential buildings in Bergkvara.



PUBLIC BUILDINGS / SMALL INVENTIONS

The smaller-scale buildings, including the community pavilion, sauna and other smaller inventions, are anchored in the maritime identity. The aim is to strengthen the connection to the harbour's open and functionally structured landscape.

The material palette is primarily based on sheet metal, often combined with wood. These materials have a long-standing presence on site and are well suited to the exposed coastal climate. Together, they also carry a clear reference to the site's historical use and its tradition of temporary and flexible structures, which further justifies their application smaller inventions that can function as temporary elements within the area.



LANDMARK BUILDING

Bergkvara regains a distinct landmark in the harbour area through a taller residential building referencing the former silo that once characterized the site. The building re-establishes the visual identity and silhouette of Bergkvara from both land and sea.

The design draws on the silo's robust expression through a concrete facade, while externally mounted balconies in arched forms reinterpret its historical formal language. The ground floor is elevated in height to accommodate commercial uses, with a proposed restaurant or café opening onto the harbour square with outdoor seating. This provides visual connections towards Lotshamnen and the sea, while also enabling access to evening sunlight.



PUBLIC SPACES

Within the vision for Bergkvara Harbor, an attractive and inspiring living environment is developed, providing space for both spontaneous interactions and planned activities. The area is expected to develop into a central social node for the entire community, as well as a significant driver of Bergkvara's future development.

PUBLIC SAUNA

A bookable meeting space that can be used by the entire community of Bergkvara. The site offers a sheltered swimming area along the quay, as well as an outdoor space for activities associated with sauna use.

HARBOUR WALK PATH

An inviting harbour promenade with several resting spaces integrated into the greenery. The walk path aims to connect to Dalskärsvägen in the north and continue its development towards the south.

SAFER STREET HAMNGATAN

A clearer cross-sectional structure along Hamngatan contributes to a safer environment. The integration of greenery also enhances the street's qualities for staying and lingering.

COMMUNITY PAVILLION

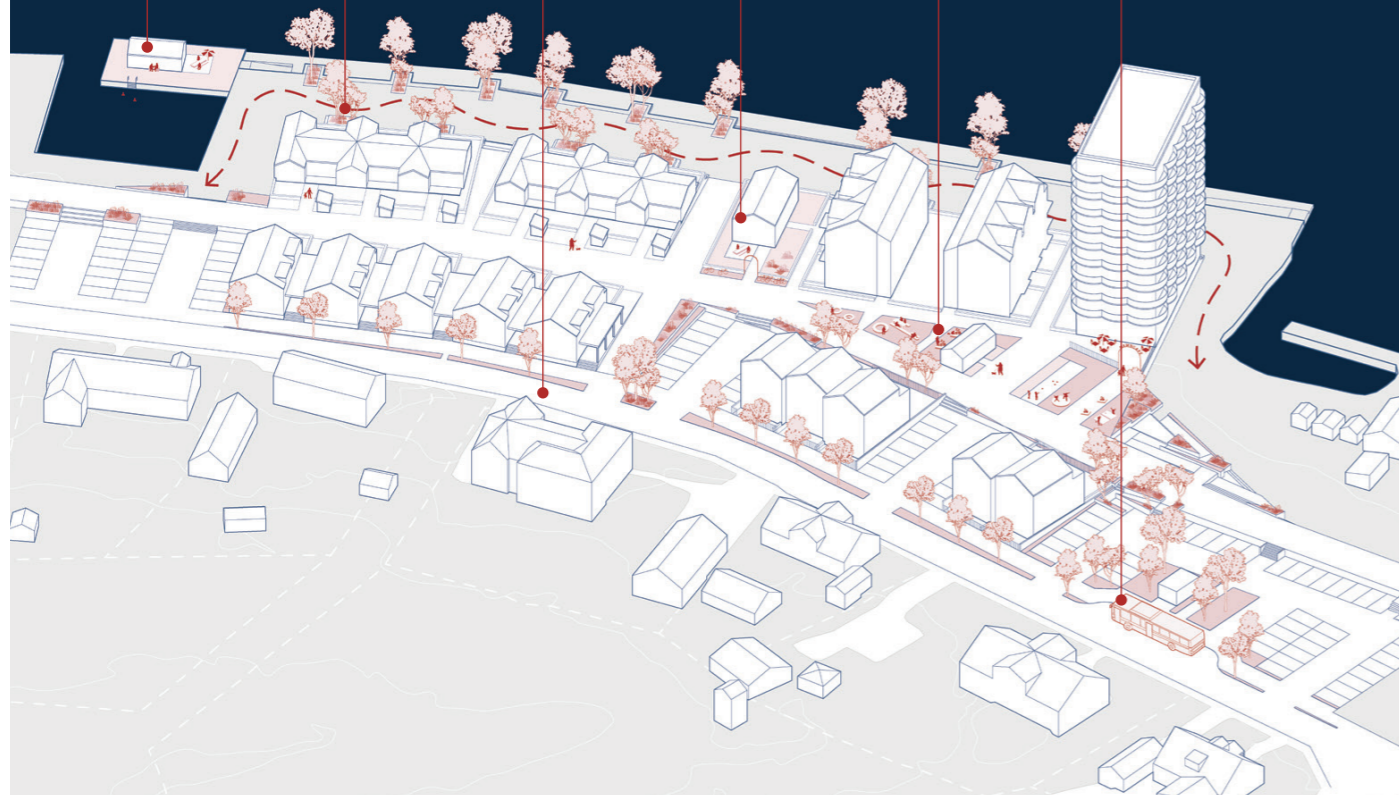
A bookable hall that responds to the demand for year-round activities in Bergkvara. By combining indoor and outdoor spaces, a flexible meeting space is created for a wide range of activities.

BUS STOP

The existing bus stop is developed with parking for commuter traffic. The location creates favourable conditions for further development to the south.

HAMNTORGET

Between the buildings, a more sheltered square is formed, offering activities for all ages. It includes, among other things, a winter garden, cultivation areas, a pétanque court, greenery, and outdoor seating for a café or a restaurant.

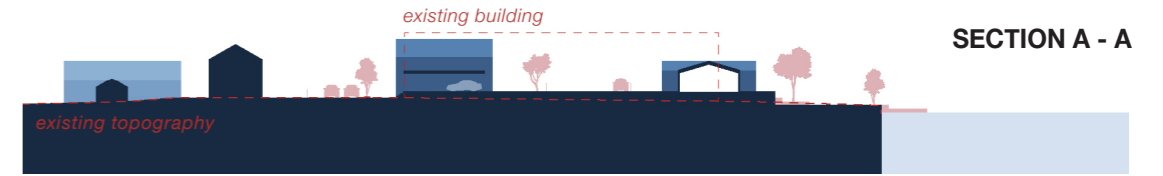


ELEVATED PROTECTIVE EMBANKMENT

In the development, an embankment is integrated to protect existing buildings from future rising water levels. The embankment is designed to be used as a qualitative design element, including the separation of private and public zones. Along Hamngatan, buildings can be positioned directly at street level with limited visual exposure. At the same time, the quay is shaped as a terracing towards the sea, creating a series of public spaces at different levels.

SCALE 1 : 1000

0 5 10 15 20 25 m.



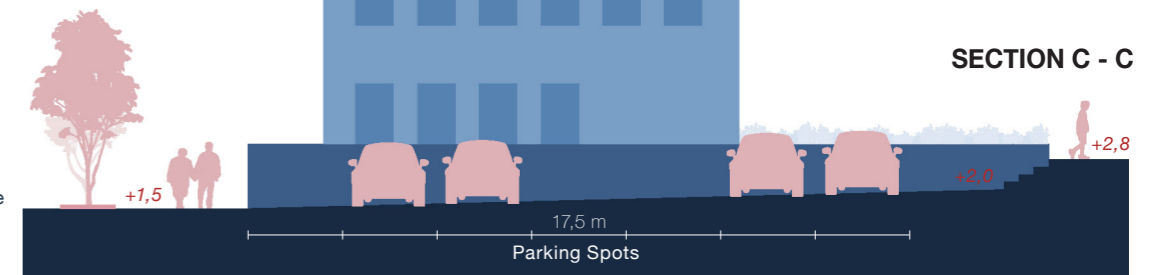
SECTION A - A



SECTION B - B

SCALE 1 : 200

0 1 2 3 4 5 m.



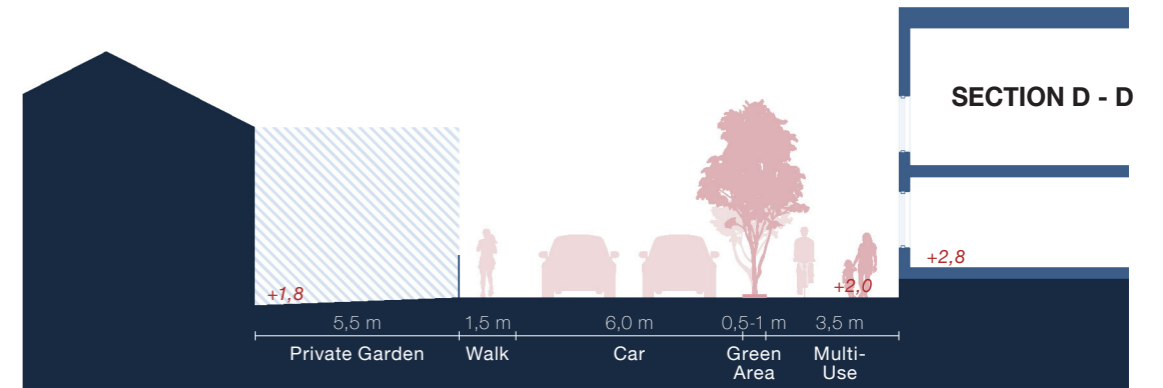
SECTION C - C

PARKING

The rural context requires adequate parking, therefore, at least one parking space per dwelling is planned. The parking areas are concentrated along Hamngatan to reduce internal traffic. The protective embankment separates the parking areas from public recreational spaces.

HAMNGATAN

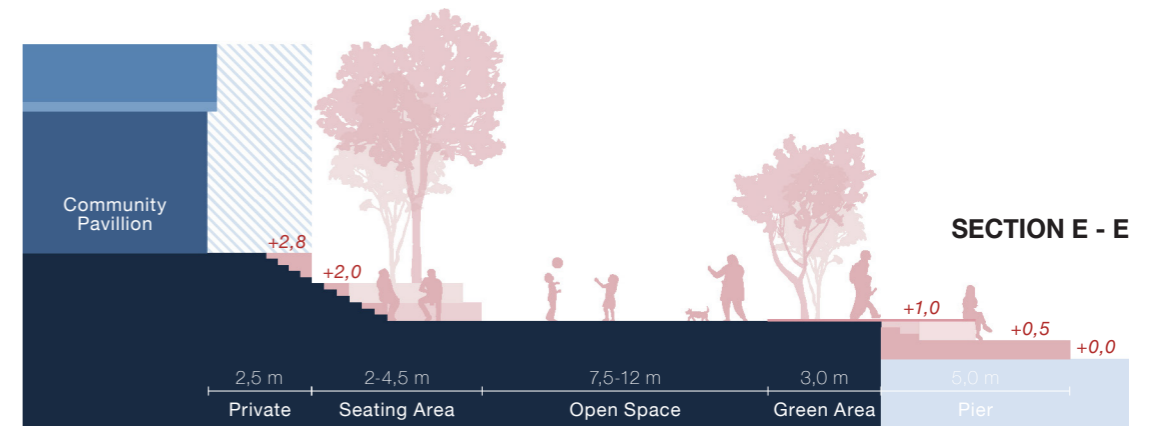
As a response to the demand for a safer pedestrian and cycling environment, a clearer cross-sectional structure along Hamngatan improves overall safety conditions. By integrating a green zone, a protected multi-use space is established, allowing pedestrians and cyclists to move safely.



SECTION D - D

HARBOUR WALK PATH

The area steps down towards the sea, creating a distinction between private and public. An open space allows for exhibitions and temporary programmes. A pier extends the site into the water, strengthening the connection to the sea. Vegetation is integrated to create a more pleasant, inviting environment that encourages people to stay.



SECTION E - E



SITE PLAN
SCALE 1 : 400

PHASE 1: KAJGÅRDEN

Kajgården constitutes the first phase in the development of Bergkvara Harbour. The aim is to quickly activate the site and reveal its potential for continued development. With modest means and a lightweight, easily constructible structure, the phase can be realised rapidly and serve as a clear demonstration of the area's attractiveness.

The housing also enables an initial extension of the elevated protective embankment and the harbour walk path along the quay. Through smaller, programmed elements such as meeting spaces, a sauna, and a community pavilion, conditions are created for activity and everyday life, where both new and existing residents are engaged in the development of the site.

The dwellings are characterised by general and flexible floor plans. The kitchen, dining area and living room are arranged in an open situation, allowing the spaces to be used in a variety of ways over time. The connection to the outdoors is consistently strong, with long sightlines and wide, operable glazed openings that create a seamless transition between interior and exterior. Entrances are marked by pergola structures, which also allow for potential future glazing of the outdoor spaces.

The housing aims to complement Bergkvara and broaden the local housing supply by introducing dwelling types that are currently missing. The first phase therefore comprises two housing typologies, larger terraced houses as rental units and ground-floor dwellings adapted for elderly residents.

TERRACED HOUSES

The terraced houses are designed as rental units with the ambition of lowering the threshold for moving from the city to the rural context, for example in connection with testing a more commuter-based everyday life. The rental form provides an opportunity to try a new way of living before making a potential decision to settle more permanently in the area.

SENIOR HOUSING

The ground-floor dwelling is adapted for elderly residents and designed to support long-term ageing in place, even in the event of changing care needs. This is expressed through a high level of accessibility and a clear connection between the entrance, storage facilities, bathroom and bedroom. The dwelling's primary quality lies in its location, with views of the Baltic Sea from all main living spaces.

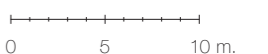
TERRACE HOUSING:

Area: 170 m²
Size: 7 rooms and kitchen
Number of residences: 5

SENIOR HOUSING:

Area: 83 m²
Size: 2 rooms and kitchen
Number of residences: 6

SCALE 1 : 400



SECTION A - A

TERRACED HOUSING

SENIOR HOUSING



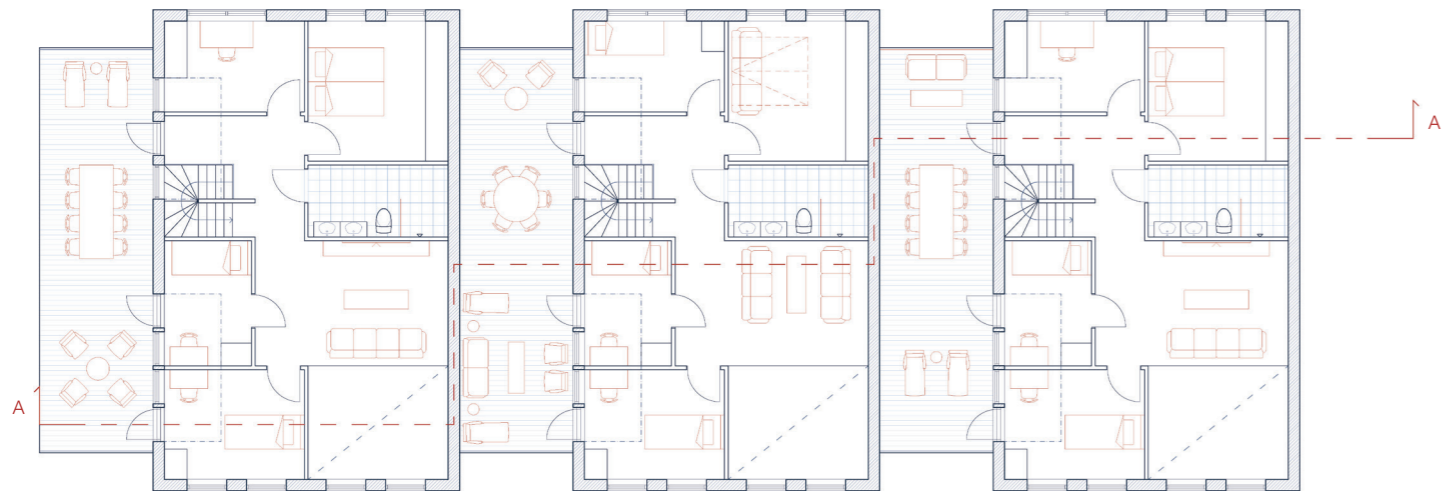
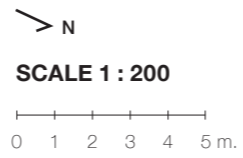
A HOME FOR DIFFERENT STAGES OF LIFE

The terraced houses are designed with general and flexible rooms that can be adapted to different stages of life. This allows families to provide children with private bedrooms, while also accommodating guest rooms and spaces that can change function over time. The generous floor area creates a clear contrast to the more compact urban apartments and enables a more spacious and flexible everyday life.

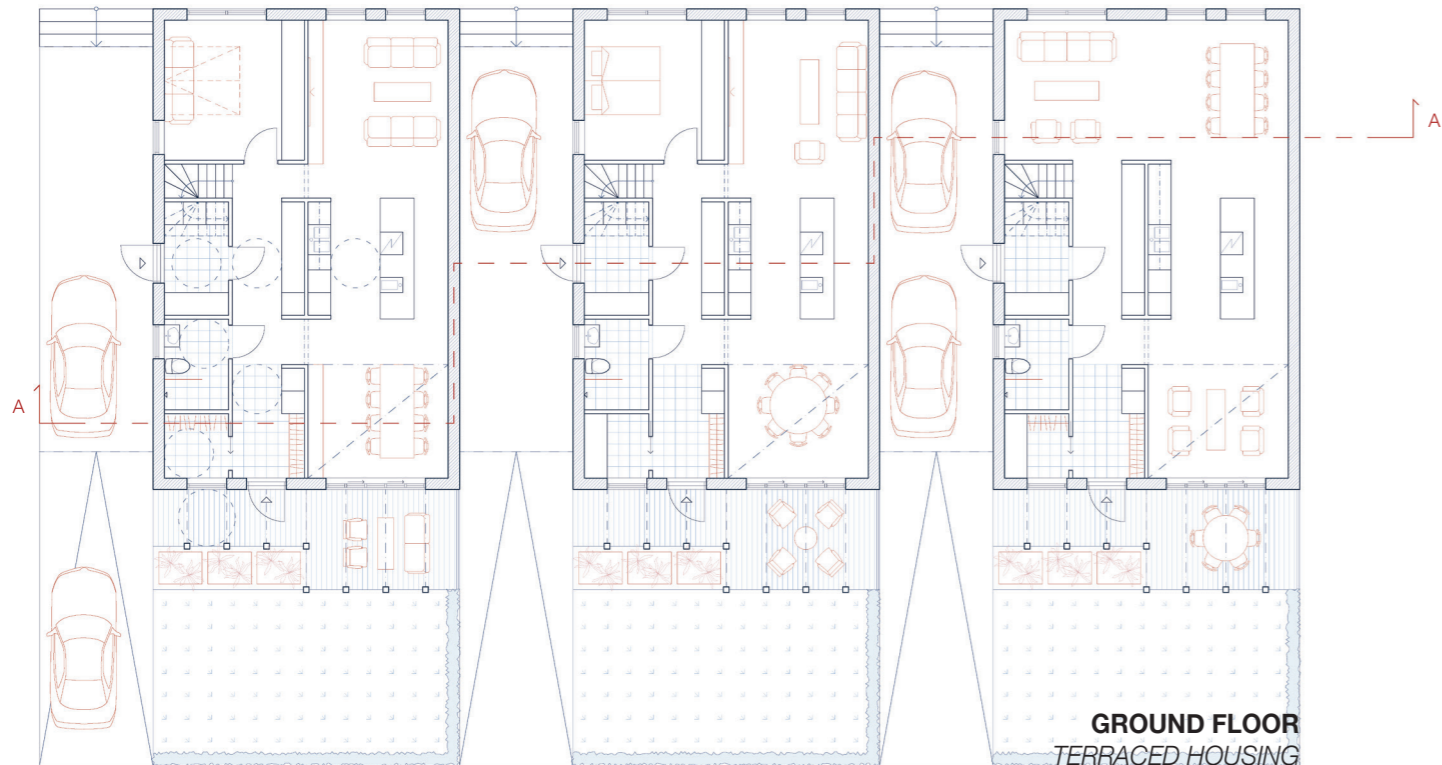
Each dwelling includes a continuous carport, which helps break up the rhythm along Hamngatan and creates sightlines between the houses. This establishes a possibility for entrances to be accessed

from both the street and the inner courtyard, with a dedicated utility entrance connected to the laundry room. The driveway accommodates up to three cars per dwelling, with additional guest parking close by. The carport also enables a continuous roof terrace, with morning sun over the sea to the east and evening sun to the west.

Each terraced house has its own private garden facing a pedestrian street. The boundary between private and public is softened, allowing everyday life to extend beyond the plot, where play, movement and spontaneous meetings can emerge naturally.



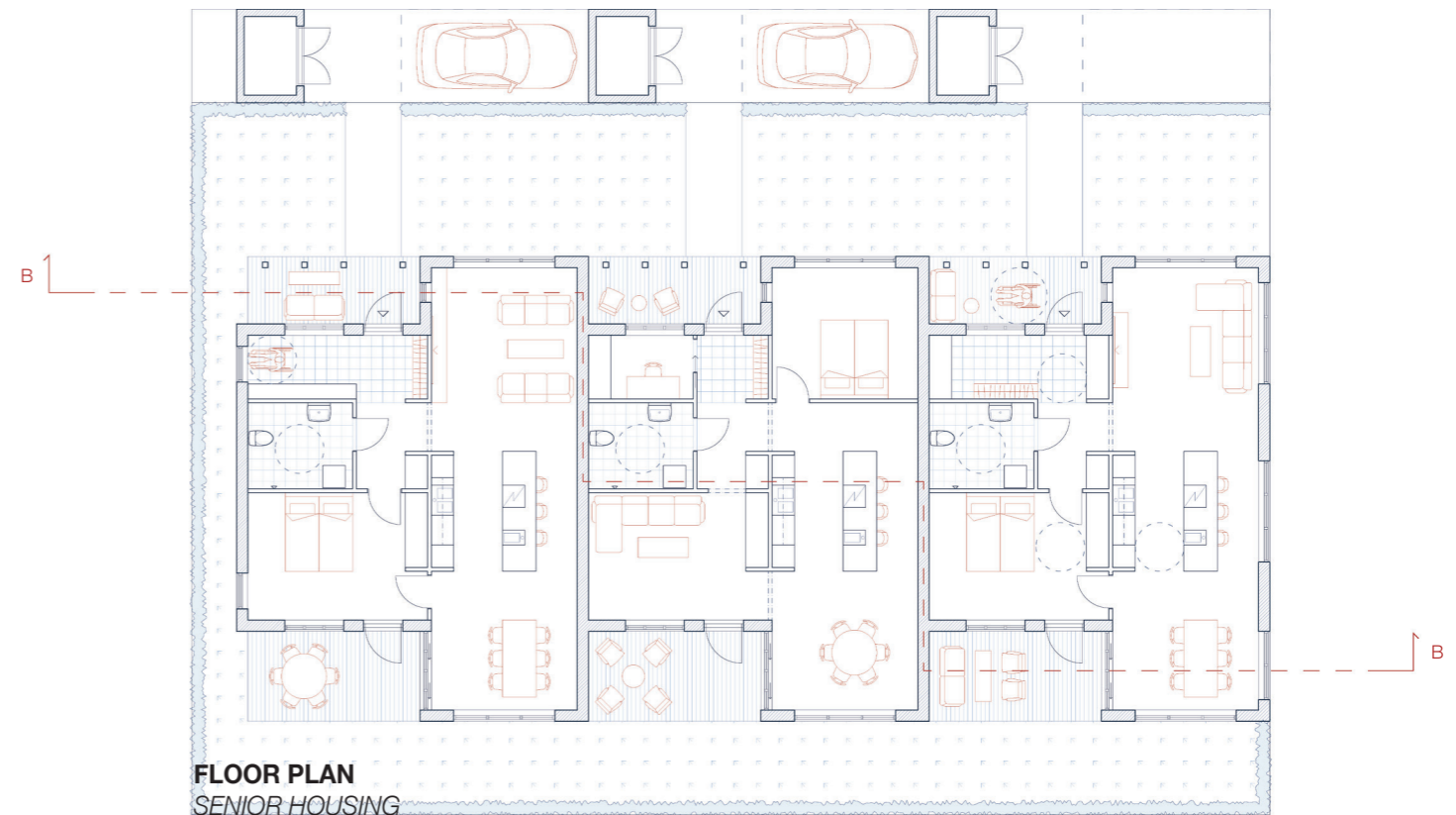
FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR
TERRACED HOUSING

The senior dwellings also feature general rooms that allow for a flexibility in how living rooms and bedrooms can be arranged over time. In the entrance area, there is also a flexible storage space with natural light, which can be used as a storage room, open hallway storage, or as a small home office.

The architectural expression contributes not only to a strong sense of small-scale living, the niches and recesses also create more private and weather-protected outdoor spaces within an otherwise shared garden situation. With through-access entrances, the dwellings offer outdoor spaces with both morning and evening sun.



FLOOR PLAN
SENIOR HOUSING

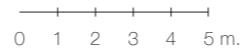
A CONTEMPORARY FACADE INTERPRETATION

The architecture takes its inspiration in the surrounding built environment of Bergkvara, with its wooden architecture in light colours and red tiled roofs. The facade design relates to Bergkvara's carpentry tradition, translated into a contemporary expression. It is simple and consistent, with clear references to the culturally and historically valuable Torsås panel, expressed through a light-painted facade with both vertical and horizontal wooden paneling and a pronounced dado level.

The simplicity, clear volumetric articulation and restrained lines connect to a contemporary architectural expression, also present in parts of Bergkvara's more recent residential development, thereby establishing a continuity between past and present.

The architectural expression of the senior housing contributes to an increased perception of small-scale character through the articulated gables. The ambition is for the dwellings to be perceived as independent units within a coherent whole. The overall impression is intended to be small-scale and picturesque, recalling the smaller cottages throughout Bergkvara.

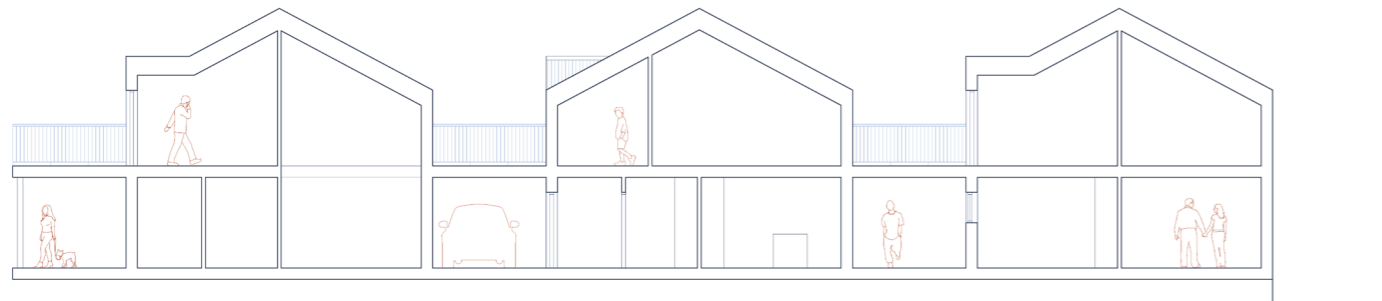
SCALE 1 : 200



FACADE TO THE WEST
TOWARDS HAMNGATAN

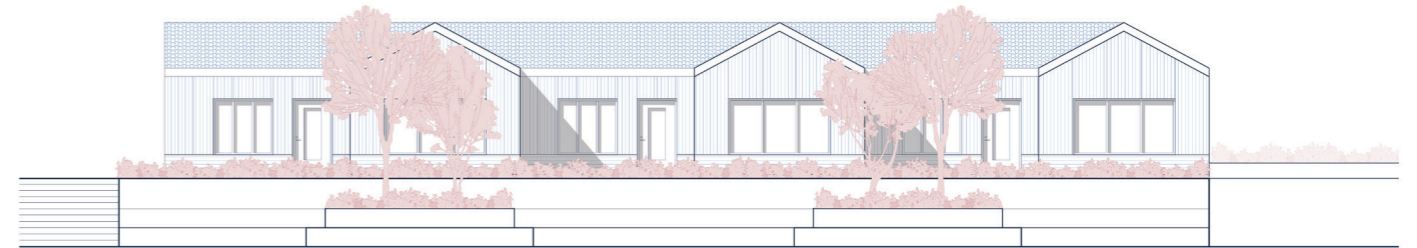
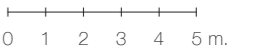


FACADE TO THE EAST
TOWARDS KAJGÅRDEN

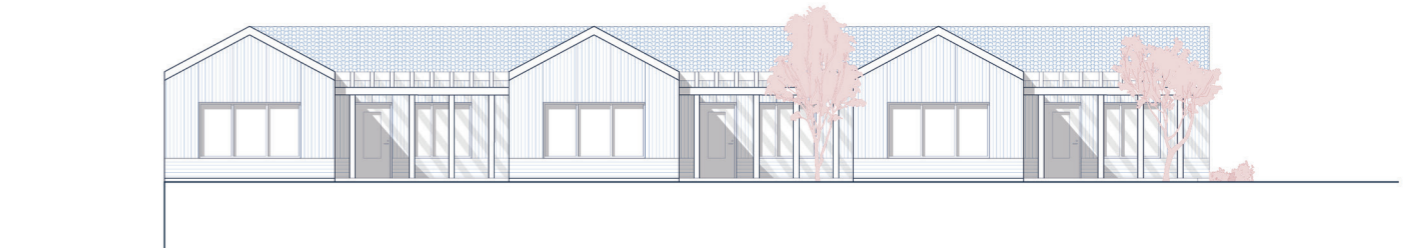


SECTION A - A
TERRACED HOUSING

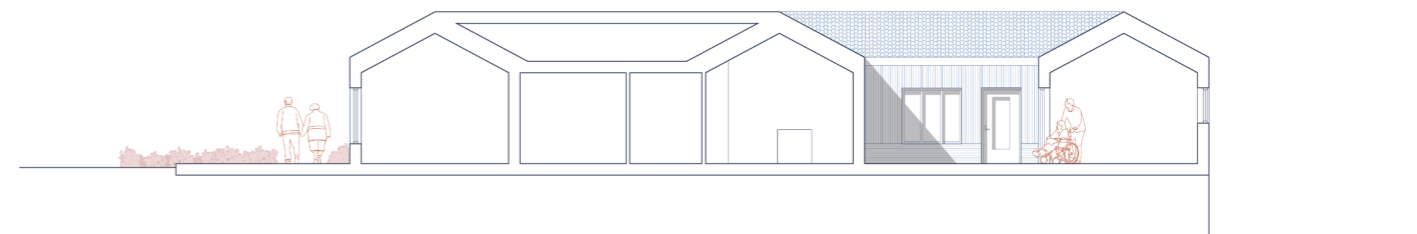
SCALE 1 : 200



FACADE TO THE EAST
TOWARDS THE HARBOUR WALK PATH



FACADE TO THE WEST
TOWARDS KAJGÅRDEN



SECTION B - B
SENIOR HOUSING

Hamngatan becomes a vibrant urban space where a clear separation of traffic creates a safer space for pedestrians and cyclists. The integrated greenery contributes to an attractive and inviting street with enhanced spatial and experiential qualities.



Kajgården becomes a social meeting place for people of different ages, creating opportunities for spontaneous interaction through the relationship between shared spaces and private gardens.



The harbour walk path strengthens the connection to the waterfront and creates new public spaces for all residents in Bergkvara. Building on existing movement patterns between Dalskär and the harbour, the promenade also supports the continued development of the harbour area to the south, enabling new meeting places, recreational spaces and activities to emerge in close connection to the water.



PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS ON DESIGN

In the final stage of the process, a presentation of the thesis was conducted for some of the previous participants. The purpose was both to gather their reflections on the project and to investigate to what extent they felt they had influenced the design, as well as how they perceive their own thoughts and ideas to be integrated into the final proposal.

Overall, the participants describe the design proposal as inspiring and express strong confidence in the project as a whole. They highlight that the proposal is perceived as convincing both on a theoretical level and in its design. In particular, they appreciate the strategy of not competing with nearby cities, but instead emphasising the specific qualities of the rural context. The integration of the protective embankment at different levels, the public functions, and the phased development strategy are also regarded as well considered.

The participants describe the phased development strategy as especially important, not only from an economic perspective but also as a way of gradually creating understanding and acceptance of the project among the residents of Bergkvara. During the concluding reflection, the participants discussed the challenge of convincing especially the older generation of the value of transforming the harbour area. The participants argue that the resistance can partly be understood through the connection to the site's history and the period when the harbour activities were still active, as well as concerns regarding change and the potential privatization of the area. Against this background, the proposal is therefore perceived as convincing, both through the vision presented, by concretely illustrating what the area could become, and through the phased development strategy that enables a gradual transformation of the site.

One of the participants describes their motivation for taking part in this process as being rooted in a strong commitment to Bergkvara and a desire to demonstrate care for the place. According to the participant, this sense of care is also reflected in the final design. After the presentation, the different parts of the project were discussed together, and the participants identified several aspects that had previously been addressed during the workshops. They perceive their own ideas to be reflected in the design, both directly and indirectly. Direct expressions are considered to be the activation of the waterfront, the harbour walk path with its greenery, the activities surrounding Hamntorget, varied housing typologies, and the possibility of a year-round restaurant or café. Indirectly, the participants argue that their discussions are reflected through the proposal's consideration of the existing environment and buildings, as well as through the preservation of important sightlines towards the sea.

At the same time, the participants express that they initially found it difficult to recognise the extent of the new buildings introduced in the design. However, after the presentation they describe a greater understanding of the relationship between the new buildings, the site, and Bergkvara as a whole, as well as how the built environment becomes a prerequisite for the transformation of the entire area. The landmark building is highlighted as particularly convincing, as the participants had previously been critical of taller buildings in this context, but now see clear connections to the significance of the former silo for the identity of the place.

Finally, the participants express that their contributions have been realistically integrated into the final design. They especially appreciate the smaller details incorporated into the design and argue that the result reflects a combination of their local knowledge and the architect's professional expertise.

Chapter 4.

DISCUSSION

The Project's significance for Bergkvara
The Methods' significance for Rural Development

DISCUSSION

The starting point of this master's thesis has been Bergkvara, a place that holds a very special personal significance for me, as it is the community where I grew up. Later in life, moving to a larger city has given me a new perspective on the environment that once constituted my everyday life. What was then perceived as self-evident and appropriately scaled now appears in a different light.

During my childhood, Bergkvara was my safe haven, a context that contained everything necessary for that stage of life. Today, when I look at the context from a distance, with an adult perspective, the contrast becomes clear. We see how urbanization and demographic changes have gradually affected and eroded smaller communities. The consequences are evident in everything from economic conditions to the organisation of welfare services, where budget reductions and the closure of institutions such as schools serve as concrete expressions of a development that increasingly creates uncertainty regarding the future of smaller towns.

In a time characterized by these changes, I believe we have reached a point where this development needs to be reconsidered. It is not only about describing an ongoing decline of rural areas, but also about beginning to formulate alternatives that can create hope for the future and a sustainable everyday life beyond the context of cities.

I am personally aware of how valuable Bergkvara is. A central driving force has therefore been to give something back, and through my experience highlight the potential that exists, beyond the often simplified image of rural areas. Through this work, I have aimed to emphasise the opportunities that exist in the community that once shaped me, and which I still see a bright future for.

An important source of inspiration at the beginning of this work was the thesis *Framing Varberg* (Carlsson, 2023). In this work, Angelika Carlsson uses place identity as a foundation for urban development, building upon existing values and qualities in Varberg to strengthen a recognisable architecture and local identity.

In the discussion, the author also highlights a limitation of the work, that it is largely based on her own experiences and perspectives. This became an important starting point for my own work and led to an ambition to broaden the empirical basis by involving multiple target groups, in order to achieve a more nuanced understanding than one limited to only my own perspective.

THE PROJECT'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR BERGKVARA

A challenge in the design process was managing participants' strong desire to avoid new building construction. All target groups chose to focus the development on public spaces and shared environments. At the same time, some level of built environment is an economic prerequisite for enabling the desired qualities in the public spaces.

The design has therefore been based on participants' wish to respect existing buildings, but has instead worked with scale and placement rather than avoiding buildings altogether. This has resulted in a proposal that utilizes approximately half of the potential gross floor area in the proposed detailed plan (Torsås kommun, 2021), about 7,500 m² of 14,500 m². This naturally affects the economic conditions, but the project's aim has not been to maximize development, but rather to test an alternative direction with strong local anchoring. The proposal can therefore be seen as a deliberate contrast to the earlier proposal by White Arkitekter, which has been criticized for not feeling sufficiently anchored in Bergkvara's identity.

However, this approach raises questions regarding feasibility. A fundamental requirement for implementation is that both the municipality and external developers choose to invest in the area. In addition, there are challenges related to soil contamination, which entail the need for extensive remediation measures and investment.

At the same time, the project's purpose is not primarily to present a fully negotiated, implementable proposal, but to formulate an alternative vision for how Bergkvara's harbour area can be developed into a more attractive and locally anchored residential environment. By starting from the site's cultural-historical context and the experiences of residents, a proposal is created that strengthens the identity of the place and can contribute to increased trust in its future development.

The phasing strategy is based on a flexible principle in which development can proceed gradually in relation to how the area is established and how demand changes over time. This means that implementation is not tied to a fixed structure, but can be adapted according to economic, social, and market conditions. At the same time, this model depends on a number of external factors, such as investments from the municipality and developers, as well as how the area is perceived over time. The phased structure should therefore be understood as a planning principle rather than a finalized implementation model.

In the longer term, the project can function as a platform for continued dialogue between the municipality, residents, and developers, as well as spark renewed interest in the site's development potential. It may also contribute to broadening the perspective on how smaller communities can be developed through more participatory and place-based processes.

THE METHODS' SIGNIFICANCE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

PLACE IDENTITY

How can place identity be interpreted and translated into design to strengthen local meaning and character?

RESULTS

Mapping place identity is a central first step in understanding a context, particularly in rural environments where historical and cultural values have often shaped the place over a long period of time. By dividing identity into physical, social, and personal elements, the model enables a deeper understanding of the place while also creating a structured analytical framework for the site analysis. While the physical and social elements reveal the structures, needs, and users of the place, the personal element creates space for the architect's own interpretation and spatial reading of the site. Together, these parts form a foundation that can motivate and support later design decisions, while increasing the conditions for the design to relate to the existing values of the place and be perceived as meaningful within its context. The ambition is to create architecture that is recognised by those who live there, where the new design is experienced as integrated within the site's identity.

REFLECTIONS

The aim has been to develop a model that can also be applied in contexts where the architect has no personal connection to the place, which is often the case in real-world projects. Although the model has not been tested in such a situation within the scope of this thesis, the intention is for it to be transferable and function as a support tool in similar contexts.

In this project, the interpretation of place identity, structured through the different elements, enabled a deeper understanding of Bergkvara. This understanding was translated into design through strategies such as small-scale development, local architectural references, and a strengthened harbour walk path. At the same time, the analysis also influenced the project's programme and functions, for example through a focus on meeting places and housing typologies responding to identified local needs. In this way, the project seeks to strengthen local significance by creating environments that connect to existing values and narratives.

At the same time, the translation remains selective and dependent on the architect's interpretation, raising questions about whose identity is represented and which aspects are prioritised. Place identity is, after all, something that changes over time and is experienced differently by different individuals.

PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

How can participatory design methods be used to create local involvement, influence, and anchoring in rural development?

RESULTS

To broaden the understanding of a place, participants from different generations were involved in order to capture diverse perspectives. The process was organised in two parts: an initial briefing workshop on the site's qualities, challenges, and development potentials, followed by a design workshop focused on future development. The results show that the participants experienced the process as both engaging and meaningful. A final feedback session indicates that participants felt their perspectives were taken into account both during the process and in the final design. They reported a high degree of recognition in the ideas that were later developed into the design proposal, which in turn contributes to a proposal that several participants can support and take pride in. At the same time, the process demonstrates that the sense of participation is not only dependent on actual influence, but also on how the process is structured and how continuous dialogue is maintained throughout.

REFLECTIONS

The process highlights several strengths in the structure of participation. The division into age-based groups not only collected different perspectives, but also created a sense of recognition within the groups. Participants were able to relate to each other's experiences, which contributed to a more open and in-depth discussion. At the same time, this structure reduced the risk of hierarchies that can otherwise emerge in more mixed groups.

However, there are also clear limitations related to the participant selection. Although an intentional diversity of ages and experiences was sought, the process is based on a selective recruitment where participants were personally invited. This means that other potential voices and perspectives were not included, which affects the scope of the empirical material.

Another aspect concerns the limited time frame of the process. In more long-term planning contexts, sustained dialogue would be essential to strengthen trust and ensure continuous anchoring. In this project, a final feedback session was conducted, but with a limited number of participants, meaning that it cannot fully be considered a broad validation of the outcome.

The most significant insights that influenced the design process relate to the importance of respecting existing conditions, the need for year-round functions and meeting places, and the value of creating attractive public spaces. In this context, the harbour emerges as a place that should be accessible to the entire community of Bergkvara. It should belong to everyone.

At the same time, a clear difference emerged between the participants' and the project's perspective on the extent of new development. The participants' preference for a more limited level of development influenced the design, where the proposed building volume was reduced to approximately half of what the detailed plan allows. This illustrates how local knowledge and architectural expertise were balanced. Feasibility considerations were weighed against local input, which in turn led to a careful consideration of scale, placement, and the relationship to the existing structure.

A central question is therefore how the process can be understood in terms of participation and influence. Here, an important distinction emerges between being involved in a process and having actual influence over the outcome. In this case, participants' perspectives were present in the final design, even when not fully implemented. Issues that emerged, such as those concerning the level of development, were instead processed through the concluding reflection and dialogue, contributing to a shared understanding of the decisions made. This suggests that participatory design is not only about translating ideas directly into form, but also about establishing a continuous dialogue in which participants' perspectives are integrated into the reasoning behind the design. In the long term, this can contribute to a stronger shared understanding and increased legitimacy for the development.

Meanwhile, the question remains to what extent participatory methods alone can ensure local anchoring. It is important to emphasise that the final design decisions were not co-produced, but interpreted by the architect. Therefore, these interpretations, selections, and prioritisations are crucial for the outcome. The process should therefore be understood as an important but early step towards anchoring, the full potential of which depends on continued dialogue and implementation.

REFLECTIONS ON PLACE ATTACHMENT AND PROCESS

Initially, it was challenging to use my personal connection to the place as a strength rather than a limitation. A close relationship to a place can provide valuable understanding, but it may also risk influencing openness to other perspectives. To counter this, it became particularly important to involve people of different ages and thereby actively highlight a diversity of experiences. This was also one of the reasons why sketching was postponed during the early stages of the process. The aim was to avoid searching for my own ideas in the discussions with others and instead allow participants' perspectives to form the foundation of the design. This required a deliberate effort to hold back personal interpretations and remain open to other ways of understanding the place, both within the participatory process and in the analysis of the site's identity. At the same time, the prior understanding of the place proved to be an asset, as it contributed a deeper contextual insight to the work.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

The thesis has also aimed to show how architecture can function as a catalyst for community engagement and contribute to a strengthened local society through a more active and inclusive design process. In this process, local knowledge and professional architectural expertise interact to support a more locally anchored and resilient rural development.

Ultimately, this master's thesis aims to broaden the understanding of architecture's role in rural development. It is about more than just physical form; it is about strengthening the relationship between people, place, and future.

Appendices

AI Appendix
Exhibition Photography
Model Photography

AI APPENDIX

AI was used in the project to identify relevant references, refine written material, and assist with translations.

EXHIBITION PHOTOGRAPHY



MODEL PHOTOGRAPHY



References

Image Sources
List of References

IMAGE SOURCES

Unless otherwise stated, all images and illustrations in this thesis are the author's own. The following section lists all external image sources used.

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Title
Author
Year of Publication
Institution

Master's program
Profile
Examiner
Supervisor

HEMBYGDEN
Isabella Landtreter
2026
Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Architecture and Urban Design
Chalmers School of Architecture
Kaj Granath
Susanne Clase

Title
Author
Year of Publication
Institution

HEMBYGDEN
Isabella Landtreter
2026
Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering