

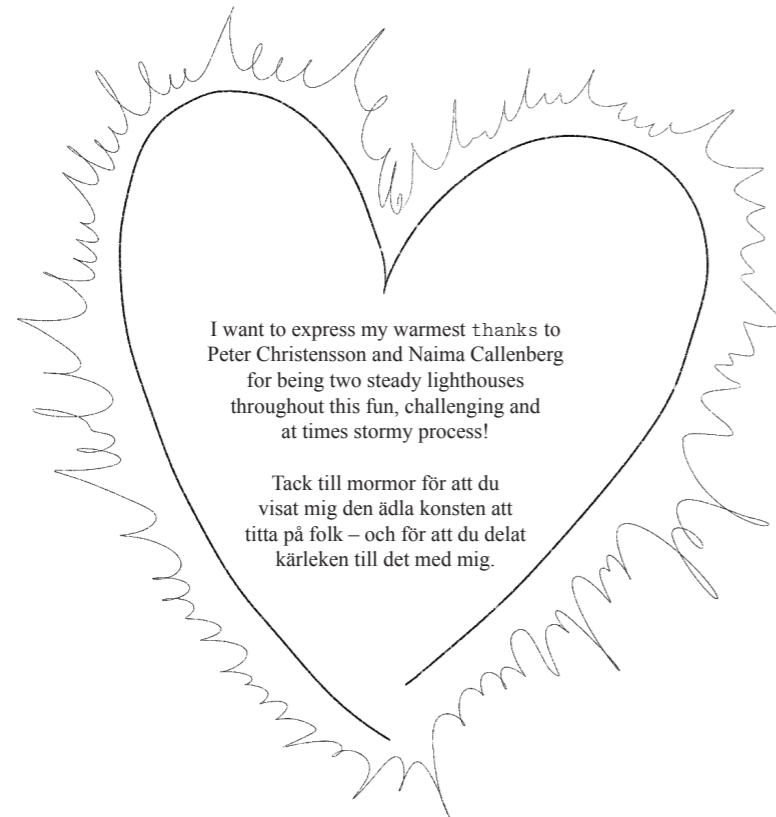


ASSEMBLY / ASSEMBLY

Master's Thesis 2026
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Abstract



This master's thesis aims to rouse the collective from its passivity in the public realm; encourage people to claim their right to public space; and show what an alternative type of urban development that focuses on enhancing public life could be.

The motivation behind this aim stems from two personal situations demonstrating a disassociation between people and the public realm. This gap was further established through reading a work of Richard Sennett, where he pinpointed a shift where urban space "is not a place to *be in* but to *move through*". This became a point of departure.

The way some contemporary, urban projects are developed neglects qualities that support public life, which deprives people on spatially, socially, culturally and politically pivotal forums and adds to the disassociation. This is exemplified through the area emerging on an artificial peninsula in Gothenburg – *Masthuggskajen*. In order to counteract this type of development and redirect the light to how public life can be enhanced, the question is then: how can the architect, using architectural interventions, create conditions for urban space to become public space?

To understand how this can be achieved, methods ranging from literature studies and case studies, to prototyping and speculation were used. The site *Skeppsbron*, neighbouring and juxtaposing *Masthuggskajen*, was chosen to contextualise the thesis, and a theoretical framework was compiled to support and broaden the scope.

Through the theoretical framework, the design strategies triangulation, prototyping and speculation as well as the design principles informality, revisability, the live-aspect, assemblage and small scale were extracted – all striving to contrast the approach *Masthuggskajen* inhabits and rather support the transition from urban space to public space. Thus, a second thesis question became: how can triangulation and prototyping be used as catalysts for public life in a speculative project at *Skeppsbron* in Gothenburg?

The research resulted in a speculative project in three phases showing a gradual development of the site. Through this project, the master's thesis shows an alternative development approach, bringing perspectives on architecture's role in our world-in-common, how our mindsets shape our spatial realities and what factors we prioritise at the expense of public life.

Keywords:
architecture, public space, urban space, triangulation, prototyping, speculation, assemblage, informality, revisability, small-scale, Skeppsbron, Masthuggskajen





Fig. 1: photograph by Håkan Elofsson, from his book *Dance mig. Dance me.*

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introduction

this chapter explains how and why this master's thesis was conceived. it includes parts such as method, process, aim, purpose, dictionary and research questions.

"Okay, ladies..." - a milf in her 40s melts over the table and looks intensely at my friends and I - "I have a question for you"

She inhales and she aims. "Where do you meet someone, if it is not on a dating app, nowadays?"

Here we go again.

I have half of my lunch box left when the sun moves behind a building and leaves me and the balcony in shade. I go inside and the dining chairs call for my attention. They are in a cheeky mood and long for some sun.

I find myself debating whether it is legal or not to bring one of them out onto the street and sit in the sun there instead? Am I allowed to sit wherever I want?

Purpose

Architecture became a way for me to combine my fondness and fascination for people and spaces – and it is in the focal point of these subjects my passion is the strongest. The idea behind this master thesis arose from two, independent of each other, situations in my life that started a thought process that later on became the catalysts for my investigations and interventions. They are presented on the two previous pages.

The first situation took place at a bar, a warm evening in August, and the second at the premiering outdoor lunch at my balcony on the first day of spring. These situations showed me that it is not obvious that we can meet the potential love of our life in urban spaces and that it is not obvious that the streets are ours to occupy and use in a life-embracing way. This is not how it should be, I thought.

I found myself wondering what the reason for this is. Undoubtedly, there are various factors playing into why these thoughts, feelings and situations emerge. Since I am studying architecture, and have an interest in people and spaces, I started looking for answers in how we design for people in our cities.

Soon, I was recommended the book *Democracy and Urban Form*, a transcription of lectures held by Richard Sennett at Harvard University Graduate School of Design in the 1980s, published in 2024. He stated that there seems to have been a shift, where the private is considered a refuge from the public rather than the other way around and that urban space "is not a place to be in but to move through" (Sennett, 2024, p 57). This pinpointed the disassociation between the people and the public realm, that both the woman mentioned in the text above and I had felt.

The hesitation the woman felt towards where and how she could find a person to date and the hesitation I felt towards bringing my own chair onto the street and finish my lunch there, could potentially be reversed if this gap was reduced and we were certain that our common urban environments were ours to claim, use and interact within. This had to be investigated further.

Aim & Thesis Questions

The aim of this master's thesis is to rouse the collective from its passivity in the public realm, encourage people to claim their right to public space, and show what an alternative type of urban development that focuses on enhancing public life could be. The aspiration is to evoke a discussion on how we develop our cities, and encourage people to use public spaces in a life-embracing way.

This leads to the first research question: How can the architect, using architectural interventions, create conditions for urban space to become public space? In order to answer this, a definition of what *public space* and *urban space* mean must be made, and we must also understand what the *alternative* is an alternative to. This is done by studying different theories and reference projects.

The next part of this thesis is explored through a speculative project showing a process, a development in three parts, that begins with prototypes of urban furniture and events on the site, that get upscaled and revised into a radio kiosk and prototype workshop, and ends with a scenario where this has grown into a new type of urban space under.

The thesis does not only want to adjust the world out there, but also the mindsets that shape our world out there, and therefore calls for a site that can be strategically used as a tool for discussion, and principles and strategies that are not solely architecturally anchored but also socially anchored. Through a theoretical framework these principles and strategies were extracted and became prototyping, triangulation and speculation, and the project site became *Skeppsbron*, neighbouring the urban development-project *Masthuggskajen*. So, the second research question is: how can triangulation and prototyping be used as catalysts for public life in a speculative project at *Skeppsbron* in Gothenburg?

Dictionary

Urban Space:

The total physical conditions of the city, including e.g. buildings, streets, squares.

Public Space:

A space that people feel free enough to occupy, act and interact spontaneously within, that also inhabits spatial qualities that support and spur this type of actions.

Triangulation:

In this thesis, William H. Whytes' definition is used. The process that begins when an object or phenomenon, for instance a street performer or a beautiful view, enables strangers to interact.

Prototype:

A first version of something, a test-structure, used to explore, study or develop an idea before "the real change"

1. HOW CAN THE ARCHITECT, USING ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTIONS, CREATE CONDITIONS FOR URBAN SPACE TO BECOME PUBLIC SPACE?

2. HOW CAN TRIANGULATION AND PROTOTYPING BE USED AS CATALYSTS FOR PUBLIC LIFE IN A SPECULATIVE PROJECT AT SKEPPSBRON, IN GOTHENBURG?

Method & Process

This master's thesis was developed in two iterative phases. The initial one was dedicated to defining and framing the scope and narrative that would form the foundation of the thesis. Methods such as literature studies, writing, reference analysis and site visits were used. The site visits were done in search of a site capable of supporting the narrative, addressing the issues outlined in the scope, and later help responding to the thesis questions. *Skeppsbron*, adjacent to *Masthuggskajen*, was the site that was chosen. The main outcome of this phase were the thesis questions.

The latter phase was dedicated to exploring what the response to the thesis questions could be, by research through design and continued research for design. During this phase design strategies and principles were formulated and the collected findings were interpreted into a design proposal, which was also developed through an iterative process. Here, exploration, speculation, sketching and prototyping were introduced in addition to the first phase's methods that were used once again. The result of this phase was, thus, an architectural intervention with the inherent aim of addressing the scope and answering the thesis questions.

It is worth mentioning that the making of this booklet also became a tool in itself, constantly altered depending on the insights made throughout the process.

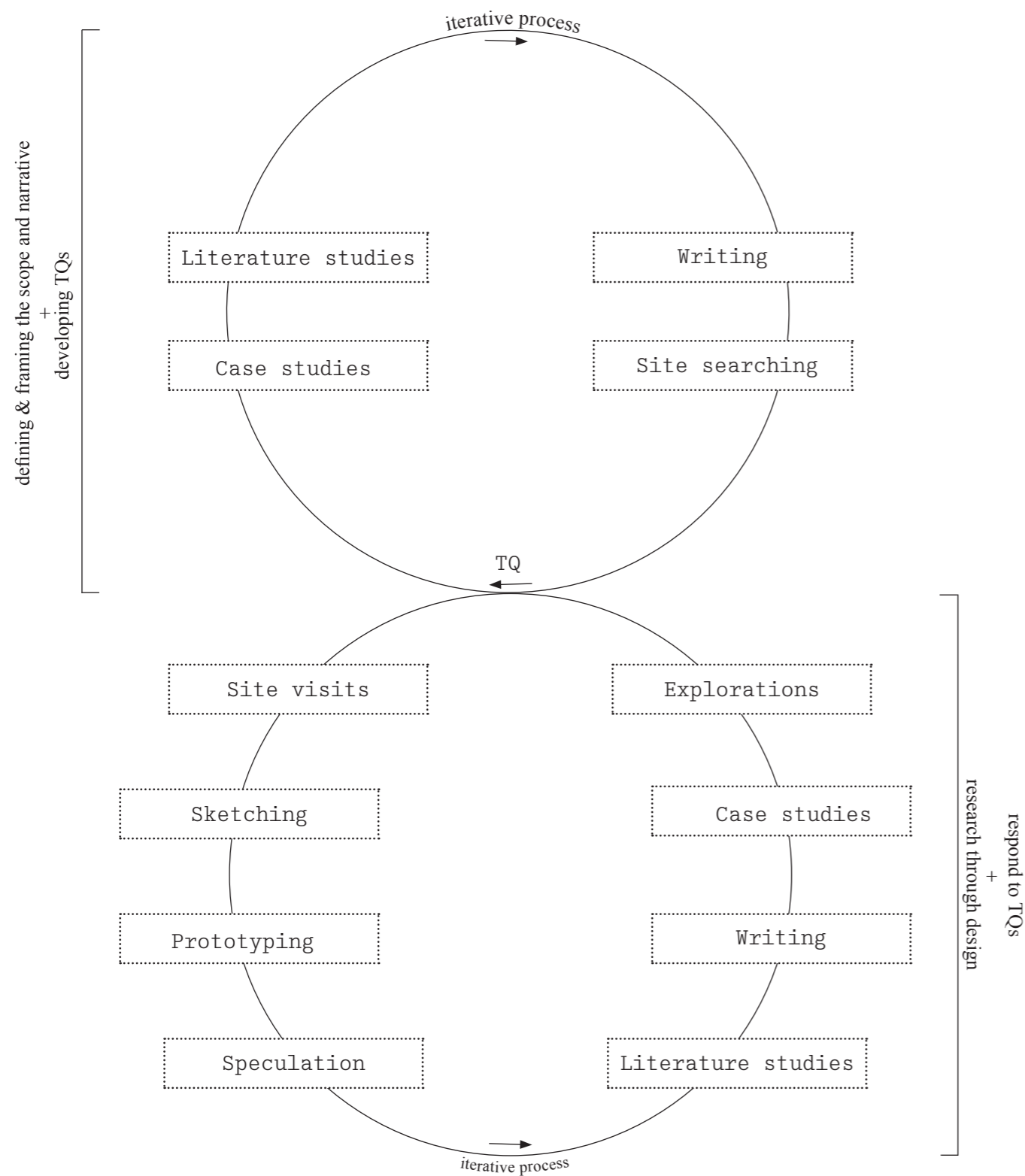


Fig. 2: method diagram.

depar^tur^e

this chapter shows the background of the work, gives a further introduction to the site and introduces the theoretical framework.

What is the role of the architect?

On the first page of *A World History of Architecture* (Fazio et al., 2013), the book that became my introduction to architecture theory, the Roman architect and engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio is mentioned. Vitruvius wrote *De Architectura* (The Ten Books on Architecture), which is often considered the genesis of this field of study. Despite it being poorly written, his definitions of architecture and the role of the architect are pinnacled and still echo through architecture schools around the globe, approximately 2000 years after being composed.

The reason why the ideas of this ancient Roman man are still entrenched might be that he managed to enunciate the value of the architect as a polymath, with knowledge in philosophy, history, culture and geometry. What Vitruvius did through his definition was to position the architect in not just a physical context, but in a social, philosophical, cultural and political context as well, which makes the definition timeless and time-dependent at the same time. To put it in another way: the architect is a seeker and definer of zeitgeist and architecture is a versatile phenomenon that depends on various factors.

One could subsequently argue that perceptiveness and empathy are two of the most important qualities an architecture student needs to procure in order to become an interdisciplinary weaver. If achieved successfully, it enables the architect to work as a mediator of different perspectives, but also a chameleon taking on different roles. This, in combination with learning how to skillfully channel and use our creativity to identify problems and propose solutions, is the unique part of architecture education. Despite the fact that this zeitgeist-embracing and shape-shifting idea might be introduced to students quite early on on their architectural journeys, it is, however, often forgotten along the way. Perhaps the perspective gets skewed by quick processes and tight budgets, and the importance of speculation, exploration and actively positioning ourselves in a contemporary discourse is somehow dismissed.

On the 4th November 1981 Moshe Safdie, at the time Director for the Urban Design program at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, gave an introductory speech to the upcoming lecture series by Richard Sennett (2024). He said:

“These are bewildering times for urbanism and architecture. It is a period of search and reexamination. We have come to realize that the modern movement, in its urge to cleanse and purify the city, metaphorically and practically, abandoned traditional urban structures – the streets, the public space, the piazza, the square, the market, the urban garden – for alternative urban forms that at first appeared to be utopian, and soon proved to deny the substance upon which urban life depends. In a panic of this realization, we returned to the study and embrace exploration of urban structures and patterns of the past.”

(Safdie, 2024, p. 18)

This was of course uttered in the 1980s, but the image Safdie depicted is still present. Throughout his introduction he problematised the way we desperately try to find solutions by looking to the past, instead of in a “Vitruviesque” manner acknowledging “the relevance of our own times to generate urban forms” (Safdie, 2024, p. 20), keeping an ear to the ground and addressing current issues with current solutions.

The architect profession has always been sensitive to economic cycles. When approaching the graduation of my 5-year education in midst of an economic crisis, rapid climate change and conflicts arising around the globe, I cannot help but wonder whether I'll ever end up working as an architect in a traditional sense and whether it's even a desire of mine. The way architects work will have to change; meanwhile, it is unsettling not knowing what it will ultimately become.

Early on in their book *Speculative Everything*, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (2013) lift a thought made by the American philosopher and literature critic Frederic Jameson; that “it is now easier for us to imagine the end of the world than an alternative to capitalism, yet alternative is exactly what we need” (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 2).

The architectural solutions proposed in a contemporary setting are not always a result of a thorough context analysis, speculation, creativity and interconnected perspectives to what an intervention and the role of the architect *could* be, but a result of an expectation of what an intervention and the role of the architect *should* be (which is too often an inadequate, non-evolving, traditional and unfortunately unsustainable approach).

So, perhaps the role of the architect needs to be revised from a Vitruviesque definition once more. What if the architect becomes an interdisciplinary weaver of people. A mediator who creates spaces that puts different people together for speculative discussions on how we should regenerate the urban forms Safdie talks about, but also the host bringing together the people who can turn the visions into reality. That would put the architect in centre of civic engagement and open conversation, but as catalyst instead of observer.

Moving further with this project, I therefore have to lower myself into a bathtub into which the faucets of actuality stream and give it my best try to absorb it, and to practice the art of speculation in order to show the versatility of architecture and an alternative possible future, because that is my responsibility as an architect.



Fig. 3: collage of “bathtub of actuality”.



Fig. 4: portrait of Hannah Arendt, 1933. Wiki commons.

What is urban space & what is public space?

The philosopher Hannah Arendt defines public space as a “critical space of appearance” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2024). What she means by this is that public space is not physically dependent, but rather a space that appears whenever individuals gather, act and interact in concert to establish a shared reality. It is, thus, a fragile phenomenon, as “the space of appearance must be continually recreated by action; its existence is secured whenever actors gather together for the purpose of discussing and deliberating about matters of public concern, and it disappears the moment these activities cease” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2024).

The architect duo Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample reason about the conditions of public space in their book *Public Space NY* (2025) in a similar manner. They claim that “public spaces become public through use” and that “no space is inherently public or private”. Public spaces can in this way never be neutral, as they are affected both by people who are active in them but also by people who oversee them. It is a forum that requires constant maintenance.

A crucial condition for public space to exist is therefore action. According to Arendt, action has two main features: *freedom* and *plurality*. As she explains it, freedom is not “the ability to choose among a set of possible alternatives, but **spontaneity**, i.e. the capacity to begin, to start something new, to do the unexpected”. This is discussed in relation to various revolutions, such as both the American and French revolution, where men and women courageously took a step from their private lives and everyday activities in order to create a public space where freedom could emerge (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2024).

The second feature of action is, as mentioned, **plurality**. As we have already established, for Arendt, to act is to take initiative, engage and introduce the unexpected into the world. However, this is only meaningful when it is done **together with or in presence of others**. If it is done in isolation, there is no one who acknowledges, judges nor responds to it, and it becomes impossible to turn into a shared reality. **Plurality encapsulates both equality and diversity** due to the fact that all humans are unique individuals yet all belong to the same human species. The chance of being confronted with the unexpected is therefore more likely in a group of strangers than in a group where

everybody knows each other (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2024).

Hans Teerd, architect, urban designer and senior lecturer at ETH Zürich, writes in his dissertation at TU Delft about architecture and the public through the lens of Hannah Arendt (Teerd, 2017). He articulates that architecture, as practice and phenomenon, is crucial in the shaping of our everyday spaces, more so than any other intervention or addition to the world. As a practice it intervenes with the construction of our world-in-common, whereas it as a phenomenon contributes to its permanence. Subsequently, architecture holds a lot of potential and power, which also leaves the architect with a powerful role. It therefore, in relation to Vitruvius’ definition of the architect as a polymath, has an extensive responsibility to actively bring together different perspectives and create environments where different people can meet.

So, from Arendt’s point of view public space is “space of appearance” that only exists through spontaneous actions that is done together with or in presence of others. What is urban space, then? If we look at how Cambridge Dictionary defines *urban*, it is “of or in a city or town”; and if we look at what it says about *space* it is “the area around everything that exists, continuing in all directions” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). By putting these definitions together, and considering Hannah Arendt’s arguments, urban space could be described as the total spatial conditions of the city. The difference between *public space* and *urban space*, is then less about physicality and more about access and use.

To conclude, Arendt argues that public space is “space of appearance” that only exists through the spontaneous and collective engagement of diverse individuals. Urban space, on the other hand, describes the total spatial conditions of our cities, including building volumes and the spaces in between them.

The architect constructs the physical conditions where public spaces appear, and it therefore has a huge responsibility to do so with care.

What does contemporary, urban development look like?

Different urban development projects have different aims and accomplish different things, and this is perhaps how it needs to be. An example of a contemporary urban development project is *Masthuggskajen* in Gothenburg, which is estimated to be completed in 2030. This is a rapidly growing project; a neighbourhood emerging on completely new exploited land, as it is built on an artificial peninsula in the river Göta Älv. The project is explained in its catchy marketing:

“The area between Järntorget, the Långgatorna and the harbour is an open place that has always kept its soul in close relation to the world. With its pulse and cultural dynamism, the area continues to be a stimulating environment with international influences that connects the city’s different parts. It is a place full of contrasts between old and new; grand and small-scale; high and low; global and local; of businesses, urban life and interactions. A place where it is easy to live and work sustainably, and where you can come as you are and be who you want to be. Here, you can take part in the shaping of a new history.”

(Masthuggskajen, n.d.)

These words vividly depicts the life that the planners imagine will take place in the area – and it sounds like there is great potential of the spaces to become *public space*. It is uncertain whether this life will become reality or not, as it is detached from lived reality and merely an assumption. One could argue that all architecture projects are speculative, and that the promised outcomes that a project conveys can never be guaranteed. But there are, however, urban projects that inhabit another approach that contrasts projects like *Masthuggskajen*. These alternative approaches have an inherent purpose to enable and establish public life, and are therefore more likely to in a truthful way turn visions of vivid streets, squares and spaces into reality. There is a discrepancy between what is expressed in the marketing of *Masthuggskajen* and what it wants to accomplish and what the plans actually show, if we look through the lenses of Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl.

Masthuggskajen is an example of what the urban activist Jane Jacobs described as *tabula rasa* planning. A type of development that rarely succeeds with supporting public life. Jacobs criticised this approach already in 1961 in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Jacobs, 1961). She argued that “cities are characterised by organised complexity” and that urban life emerges and benefits from gradual and organic change, instead of appearing from a clear slate with a top-down perspective.

Arguments that touch upon the same theme are presented by the postmodernist theorist and architect Jan Gehl in his publication *Life Between Buildings* (1971). He discusses the interrelationship between different building-scales and explains that “if the prerequisites for reasonably well-functioning and well-used public spaces are not created through decisions at the primary planning level, a basis seldom exists for working at the small scale” (Gehl, 1971, p. 83). In some cases of contemporary urban development, profit and physical form comes first and

public life comes second. By looking at the plans for *Masthuggskajen*, it is easy to assume that other interests and scales were prioritised at the expense of the small scale, and consequently public life, in the early design stages.

This assumption is made based on that the basic conditions for making pleasant urban spaces to *be in* and not just *move through*, such as good wind-and daylight-conditions, have not been designed for. The chance that these urban spaces will be occupied and used as much and in the way the planners imagine, is therefore unlikely. In addition, another risk with a development like *Masthuggskajen* is that it becomes sterile, homogeneous and generic, as its identity relates to nothing but itself, instead of growing gradually in relation to an existing urban fabric and urban life. It will therefore, most likely, not be as diverse as expected either.

The distinction between urban space and public space has been defined using Hannah Arendt’s theories, in the following way: *urban space* is the total spatial conditions of the city whereas *public space* appears when people are free enough to act spontaneously and do so in company of others. This definition will be further developed, since there are theories and strategies for enhancing public life. In this master’s thesis, public spaces will be defined as space that people feel free enough to occupy, act and interact within, that additionally inhabits spatial qualities that spur these actions. In opposition to urban spaces, which are spaces lacking basic qualities that make people want to occupy and spend time in them.

The spaces of *Masthuggskajen* will thus, remain as *urban space* that people move through, and not become *public space* that people use, engage and interact in. In a dystopian depiction, there would be a risk of further deprioritisation of urban space due to the lack of incentive to invest in space that no one uses, and people could get further deprived on a socially, culturally and politically pivotal forums. Another layer to the issue is therefore how the marketing is establishing a narrative that public life has been cared for, even though this is something the area has neglected. It is problematic because, as Gehl expresses it, “in all cases the small scale – the immediate environment– is where the individual person meets and evaluates decisions made at all planning levels”, and this does not seem to have been of concern (Gehl, 1971, p. 83).

In the search for a site to work with for this thesis, the *Skeppsbron* area adjacent to *Masthuggskajen* became the final choice. It is as if the project site inherently emphasises the scope and narrative this master’s thesis strives to inhabit, through the contrasts to its neighbour. It was clear that *Masthuggskajen* manifests an approach that obstructs the blooming of public life, which is fundamental if I want to make it obvious for the milk at the bar that she can meet people in public spaces and if I want people to be reminded that urban spaces should be their extended living room that could be used spontaneously and shaped by their presence.



Fig. 5: rendering of *Masthuggskajen*. Masthuggskajen.se. With permission.

Theoretical framework

One of the methods used in this master's thesis was literature studies. An extensive part of the thesis has therefore been to develop a theoretical framework that sets the conditions for the scope and narrative, frames the background, contextualises and positions the thesis in a discourse, and provides design principles and strategies that all help to reach the aim of the master's thesis.

A theoretical framework, consisting of seven works, was compiled. These works were selected because they brought perspectives on themes such as: the definition of public space, development approaches and how they relate to public life, the relation between public life and physical form, and the nature and role of architecture. Through the studies, several design principles and strategies that all relate to how to create public space and enhance public life were extracted, and helped lay the foundation for the architectural interventions.

Hannah Arendt's theories, provided by Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2024

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy compiles Hannah Arendt's philosophy, and this has therefore been the source to her theories, particularly on the themes action, public space, freedom and plurality.

Arendt's definition of public space is an important part of the background, and has therefore been of great value to the framing of the scope, but also for creating conditions to what design principles and strategies were useful in order to reach the aim of the thesis.

The Death and Life of Great American Cities
Jane Jacobs, 1961

This work by the urban activist Jane Jacobs, published in 1961, brings perspectives on and attacks modernist city planning, which is significant for the master's thesis as this is what the thesis in many ways also opposes.

Her theories therefore helped position the thesis within the discourse on urban development and discuss what alternatives to the contemporary development of *Masthuggskajen* could be. Jacob's idea that gradual, careful change is superior to rapid change which advocates for total clearance of existing structures, was the main finding.

Democracy and Urban Form
Richard Sennett, 2024

Since this master's thesis' focus is public space, a search for a theory that investigated the relation between people, the public in public space, and the public realm therefore begun. This led to the reading of *Democracy and Urban Form* by Richard Sennett (2024). This work, as the title suggests, bridged thoughts on democracy (which includes concepts such as freedom and plurality) and physical form.

Through the reading of *Democracy and Urban Form*, many design principles that help build good preconditions for spaces to become more democratic, which increases the chances of spaces to become public spaces, were extracted. These were the live-event/actuality, assemblage, informality and revisability.

The work was also used to support and frame the initial idea that sparked the thesis and later on became its purpose.

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces
William Whyte, 1980 & *Life Between Buildings*
Jan Gehl, 1971

If Sennett's theory is more politically informed, Whyte's and Gehl's works were more socially informed in the perspectives they brought on how people act in relation to physical space. These works provided the thesis with the design principle – small scale, and the design strategy – triangulation, both supporting public life and interaction.

Turning to William H. Whyte's work, he analysed why some urban spaces (in this case plazas in New York) were more popular, and populated, than others in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980). The key finding from this publication was the process of triangulation, which begins when an external stimulus prompts strangers to interact.

Gehl is one of the most prominent voices in contemporary urban development. Gehl's, *Life Between Buildings*, is a postmodern classic published in 1971. This book puts the human scale in the center of urban development, and the main finding was thus, the importance of the small scale. It is an important work, both to the positioning within the discourse, but also because it provides a design principle.

Speculative Everything
Anthony Dunne & Fiona Raby, 2013

In this publication, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby proposes speculation as a design strategy for addressing complex issues and bringing new perspectives on them. By using imagination or speculation in a constructive way, an alternative reality to the one we see can be depicted, which can open up the discussion on our world-in-common.

As the thesis calls for a method that can help show an alternative reality in regards to urban development, this was a suitable strategy for this thesis. *Speculation Everything* therefore provided the thesis with a design strategy – speculation.

Prototypa!
Göteborg Stad, SLU & Tankesmedjan Movium, 2023

Parallel to the tabula rasa-development we see at *Masthuggskajen*, another design approach is practiced around Gothenburg – prototyping. The city of Gothenburg, in collaboration with SLU and the think-tank Movium published *Prototypa!* in 2023, presenting this approach. The publication explains what it is, how it works and how it has been tested around the city.

It is a practice that focuses on processes and collaboration, where ideas are tested before "the real change" happens. It is an approach that opposes *Masthuggskajen* and offers an alternative that emphasises exploration, testing, evaluation and organic change instead. *Prototypa!* became significant for this work as it provides a design strategy – prototyping – which goes in line with the thesis' aim and purpose, and therefore bridges the thoughts on public life and organic change.

Theoretical framework → extracted design principles

To begin with, we dive into Richard Sennett's *Democracy and Urban Form*. He stated that "there seems to have been a shift, where the private is considered a refuge from the public rather than the other way around and that public space" is not a place to be in but to move through" (Sennett, 2024, p 57). This pinpoints a disassociation between the people and the public realm, contrasting the ideal image of public space that Arendt depicts.

According to Sennett, there are features that create better preconditions for democracy (and so, better preconditions for spaces to become *public* spaces), of which a selection of four has been considered especially relevant for this master's thesis. The first quality is very much in line with Arendt's thoughts on spontaneity: the "**live-event**". Sennett means that everyday life is for most people dominated by routines and musts. Occasionally, however, we are struck by a notion of freedom. This notion often appears when something unexpected or spontaneous lets us break away from the routine, and lets us be present. "Freedom in the modern city can give us a life of presence, presentness, actuality, and nowness." (Sennett, 2024, p. 111). **We are therefore more willing to be spontaneous when a live-event is taking place, simply because we have to experience in this precise moment, otherwise it will be missed, this makes it a suitable design principle for the thesis since it aims to encourage people to occupy urban spaces in a life-embracing way. This also relates to Arendt's thoughts on freedom, which is an important factor for public space as a "space of appearance".**

Another one of these urban forms is **assemblage**, which he discusses through *Villa Adriana* in Tivoli that manages to embody multiple narratives, even contradictory ones, through gathering different architectural parts from different cultures and different realms in a so-called assemblage. He argues that this is a democratically resilient design strategy as it is not seeking "total and "faultless" solutions which the condition of politics can only abort" (Sennett, 2024). This relates to Arendt's thoughts on plurality, but through urban form, **as it brings together diverse perspectives through the assembling of a range of physical elements from different times and cultures, which relates to Arendt's ideas of plurality as a factor significant to public space, but this time in terms of urban form.**

Sennett further proposes that **informality** facilitates democratic engagement. He writes: "There is no such thing as discourse that doesn't have as its object the production of a decision. That, for Tocqueville, was tyrannical, because a decision means that ultimately you have to simplify things to a yes or no, or choose one of the four. In the ideal town square, discussion is much better, more fully, when you're not under the pressure to make a decision about them. That is to say, you learn more in informal situations like chatting in a bar than formal debates and point-scoring in a voting chamber. People drink and smoke in our ideal town

square." (Sennett, 2024, p. 190) **If we would add this idea to Arendt's stands, action and interaction more easily emerges in an informal setting than in a formal one. This is a principle addressing the purpose of the thesis, that people don't feel certain that they can meet and interact spontaneously with strangers in public spaces, and is a design principle useful for enhancing public life.**

The last key finding that I would like to highlight from Richard Sennett's *Democracy and Urban Form* is the value of the **revisable** or changeable. Sennett contends that as soon as the built becomes too unalterable, and people are prevented from influencing it, the urban life becomes passive instead of interactive. He phrases it: "You can't have a public realm unless a building's imagery can be revised by its citizens. The moment you assert a notion of image purity, you've decided that the whole process of social exchange in that building is meaningless." (Sennett, 2024, p. 220) **A part of the aim of the thesis is to encourage people to be active in and claim their right to urban space. Revisability as a design principle increases the chance for this to happen – if the spaces signal that they can be influenced by people, people will be more likely to influence them in return.**

Moving onto Jan Gehl. He has dedicated his work life studying urban spaces and urban life, identifying criterias and formulating strategies on how we create urban spaces that foster spontaneous, human interactions (that thereby become public spaces, in Arendt's sense) – ranging from mundane encounters, to public snogging and organised demonstrations.

In *Life Between Buildings* (1971) Gehl, as mentioned in the background as well, emphasised that the **small scale** is an important factor when creating good conditions for urban spaces and urban life. This is an idea that runs through his entire philosophy. The preparation work for the small scale – the immediate environments where people actually operate – should be done even in early stages of a development project. **Considering and caring about the human scale in the dimensioning and designing of spaces is, thus, important for creating good potential for public life as well.**

To summarise, five principles that help create good conditions for public life, and increase the chances for public space to appear, has been extracted from these theories. From Sennett's *Democracy and Urban Form*, these are the **live-aspect, assemblage, informality and revisability**. In Gehl's *Life Between Buildings* **small-scale** has been identified as especially significant.

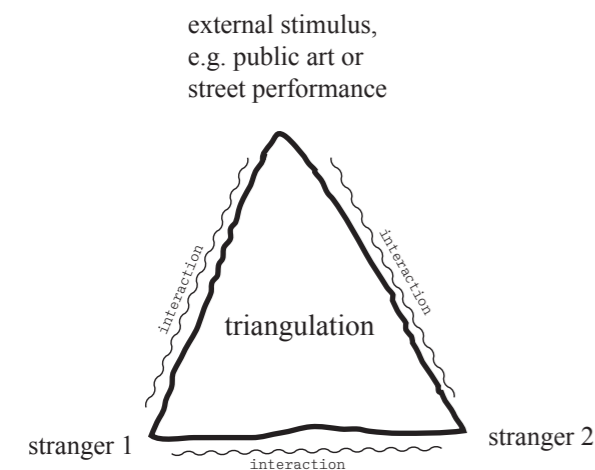
Theoretical framework: extracted design strategies

In William H. Whyte's work *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980). Many of the findings he made through the analysis of how people operate in urban spaces was that **people attract people**.

He writes: "When a space begins to fill up, people don't distribute themselves evenly over it; they go where other people are" (Whyte, 1980, p. 68). If there are two outdoor serving areas, one buzzing with people and the other one empty, we are more likely to choose the one that is crowded with people. Two other observations he made are that food helps to attract people (which in turn attracts more people) and that corners are superior to other facade spaces as they face more than one direction and thereby give a better overview of the public life. This once again emphasises that urban life leads to more urban life.

Good microclimate is also lifted as a key feature to popular urban spaces. In connection with Sennett's thoughts on revisability as an important quality for creating public spaces, Whyte's studies showed that people tend to sit wherever there are places to sit, but that moveable chairs are preferred over screwed-down benches. This shows that people enjoy making an impact on their environment, even in the slightest way.

However, one chapter that brought many of the other findings together was the one where Whyte writes about the phenomenon of **triangulation**. Triangulation, as he explains it, is: "that process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to each other as though they were not" (Whyte, 1980, p. 94). According to Whyte, this external stimulus could be both physical or phenomenological, e.g. a public artwork, a street performance or a view.



Whyte stresses that it is not the *quality* of the triangulation that is important, but the fact that *it is there*. Even terrible entertainment would potentially bring people together. The external stimulus that enables triangulation could, in other words, be a food cart, a gathering of people or sunlight filtered through the crown of a tree. It is a process that links many of the other factors Whyte establishes. **Triangulation is a process that sparks interaction between strangers, and thus, has the potential of being vital to the appearance of public spaces as well.**

Moving onto the publication *Prototypa!* (2023). For Gothenburg's 400-year-anniversary, the book was published. With this, Göteborg Stad, SLU and the think-tank Movium shone light on an alternative design strategy for urban development – **prototyping**.

Parallel to the development we see at *Masthuggskajen*, this design strategy is practiced around Gothenburg. Prototyping as a practice has been tested in the city through different projects, and often includes co-design, evaluation and upscaling. The prototyping process always starts with an initiative, that either comes from a site that is going to be developed, or from a need that requires a site in order to be satisfied. It derives from three strategies; working with temporary structures, working with values in the local context and its people, and working within a set time frame (*Prototypa!*, 2023). Thus, prototyping as a design strategy embodies revisability which, according to Sennett, enhances public life.

In urban development co-design does, however, sometimes mean something different. On a site like *Skeppsbron*, where a majority of the plot is covered in asphalt and parking spots, it might be difficult to derive from values in the immediate context. In scenarios like this one, co-designing is used as a tool for letting citizens build a relationship to the space before it undergoes change, and before the conversation with other stakeholders begins. This, as explained in *Prototypa!* (2023), is an important phase that increases the chances for continued spatial engagement among citizens, but often requires more time and an adequate budget.

Engaging local citizens in urban development is of great significance, if we want to fully understand what the city and its citizens need. Self-evidently, they have the answers, as it is their needs that should be satisfied. Prototyping is a suitable method for accomplishing this, as **its inherent purpose is to look at needs, test ideas and re-evaluate them. It is, therefore, a way of working that allows for organic change.**

Prototypes are temporary structures, which often result in projects with an aesthetic that contrasts other structures in the urban fabric. Simultaneously, they seek engagement and perspectives from the citizens. These are two factors that in common support public life.

Lastly, *Speculative Everything* (2013) provided this work with the design strategy of **speculation**, a strategy suitable for this master's thesis as it calls for a strategy that can depict an alternative development to the one currently taking place at *Masthuggskajen*.

Dunne and Raby (2013) argue that design is often considered a problem solving practice inhabiting an "inherent optimism" that is problematic. Firstly, because the optimism downplays the issues we currently face, and secondly, because it directs the energy into making small adjustments to the world out there instead of changing the mindsets and attitudes inside our heads that shape our world out there.

Building further on this, Dunne and Raby propose speculative design as a tool for addressing complex issues and opening up for new perspectives on the overwhelmingly large problems we face. They write: "We believe that by speculating more, at all levels of society, and exploring alternative scenarios, reality will become more malleable and, although the future cannot be predicted, we can help set in place today factors that will increase the probability of more desirable futures happening. And equally, factors that may lead to undesirable futures can be spotted early on and addressed or at least limited" (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 6). This form of design manages to use imagination in a constructive way to depict alternative realities, and furthermore critique our contemporary way of living in a graspable way. **As the master's thesis strives to change people's attitude towards urban space and not just the physicality of urban space, speculation is thus a suitable strategy as it helps to make societal structures visible. This can be applied as an adequate approach in regards to changing the idea of the role of the architect and the anticipation of what type of interventions she should propose as well.**

To conclude, three design strategies, each important in order to address the different layers of the thesis' aim, were extracted from the theoretical framework. Firstly, **triangulation** in Whyte's *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980). Secondly, **prototyping** from *Prototypa!* (2023), and last but not least **speculation** from *Speculative Everything* (2013).

Fig. 6: diagram explaining the process of triangulation.

I talk to my grandma a few times a week, and so I rang her up one day for a little chat. "How would you meet someone when you were young? Where would you flirt?" I asked her.

In her hometown there used to be four cinemas on the main street when she was young: Lyran, Röda Kvarn, Palladium and Saga. She explained that you would keep track of what films that were on show. You would then walk the street, up and down from cinema to cinema, close to showtime. If you saw that someone you thought looked cute was buying a ticket for a film, you would hurry to get a ticket to the same one.

When it had ended, the crowd of people poured out into the street and the one you fancied would hopefully be spotted. You would exchange glances, or a few words. It was of course easier if you were there with a couple of friends, but it wasn't too difficult starting a conversation with someone new even if you were there by yourself, because now you suddenly had something in common.

And then, depending on if you were lucky or brave, one of you would ask "What are you up to now?" and you would planlessly wander away and continue the evening together.

I understand that it was not really about the cinema in itself. It was about wandering slowly outside it; people-watching and having a space that enabled spontaneous interactions. What the cinema did was to bring an ease to the conversations that were to follow after the movies had ended, and the entrance beneath the neon lit canopy was the forum for it. This was a case of triangulation.



Fig. 7: A few friends sitting on the stairs of Palladium, Växjö, 1970s. With permission.

The site

The site chosen for this master's thesis is *Skeppsbron* in Gothenburg. An aspiration was to use a site that helped frame and emphasise the purpose, narrative, discourse and spirit of the work, and this site manages to do so because it neighbours *Masthuggskajen* – a project embodying many of the concepts this thesis opposes. The site in itself, thus, became a tool for juxtaposing some of the issues found in contemporary urban development, and their lack of qualities that support public life.

The *Skeppsbron* area is located in between the river and *Kinesiska Muren*, *Merkurhuset* and the powerplant *Rosenlundsverket*, in central Gothenburg. Plans of creating a modern culture- and community house are in the making at the bottom floor of *Kinesiska Muren* (Föreningen Fasad, n.d.), and *Merkurhuset* hosts several offices, as well as storefronts that are currently being renovated. The part of the site that will be used for the design proposal in this master's thesis is, more specifically, in front of *Merkurhuset* which is the middle one of the three large volumes.

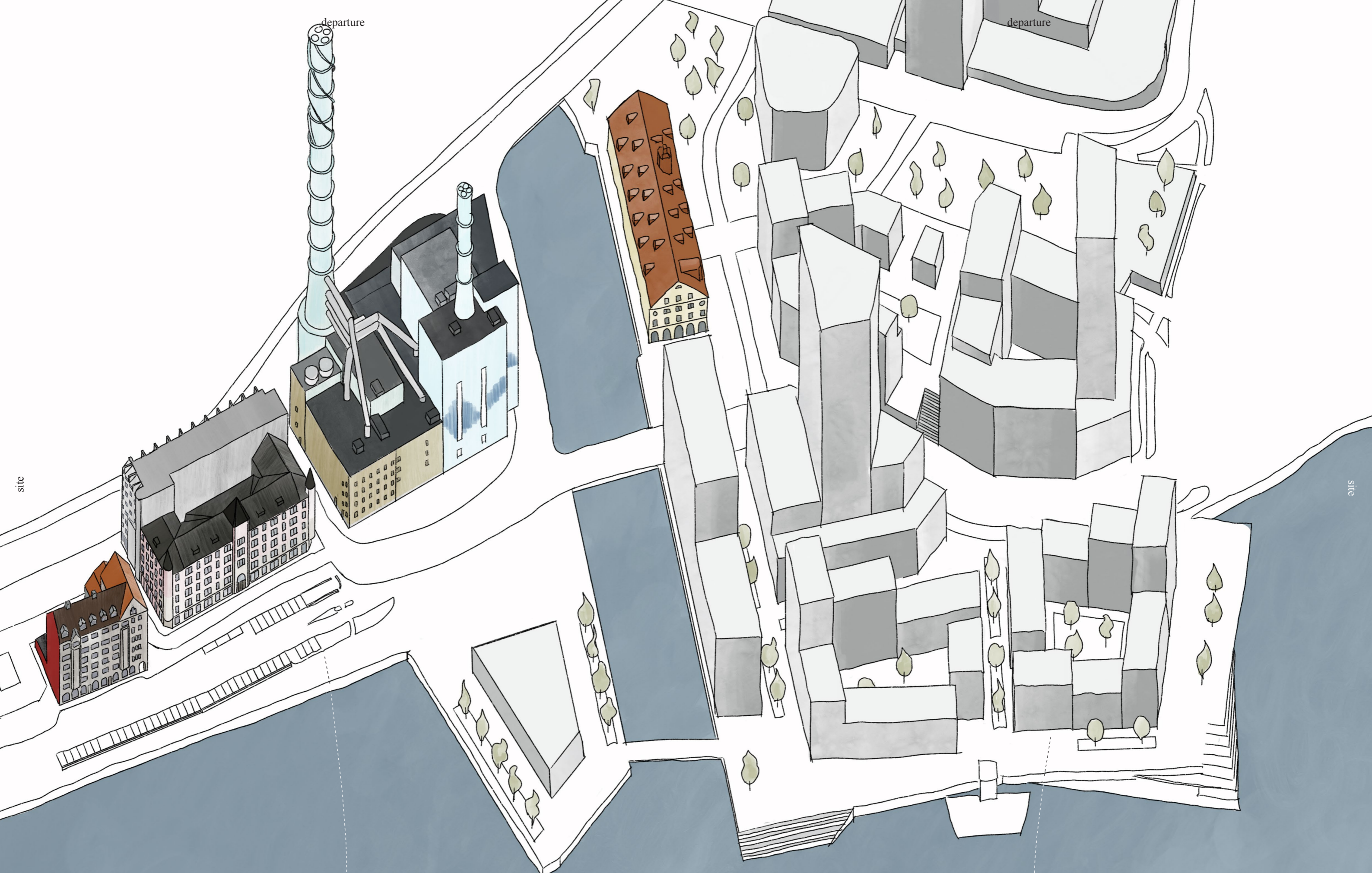
A bicycle and pedestrian path runs alongside the riverfront. It is heavily used by commuters, and connects two important transport hubs – *Stenpiren*, west of the site and *Järntorget*, east of it – which gives it a high flow of people closest to the water. The rest of the site is separated from this lane, by a line of concrete blocks creating a thick physical barrier.

A majority of the site is covered in asphalt, with parking spots, roads and urban infrastructure such as traffic signs, space-dividing railings and lampposts of various heights. However, there are a few patches of grass, interrupting the rhythm of parking spots. The people of an architecture practice in *Merkurhuset* have placed two picnic benches, chained to a lamppost, on one of these patches.

The site provides many qualities. Its close proximity to the water, its central location between two transport hubs and its rich flow of people makes it an interesting site for exploration of a new type of space for the city of Gothenburg and its citizens.



View showing part of the project site, in front of *Merkurhuset*.



the project site
Skeppsbron

the artificial peninsula
Masthugskajen



The project site, in front of *Merkurhuset*, view towards *Kinesiska Muren*.

the design translation

to reach the aim of the master's thesis, the findings from the theoretical framework needs to be embodied in architectural interventions. in order to get an idea of how this can be achieved a series of case studies have been done. the findings from both these parts have then been interpreted into architectural interventions.

Design translation

The aim of this master's thesis is to rouse the collective from its passivity in the public realm, encourage people to claim their right to public space, and show what an alternative type of urban development that focuses on enhancing public life could be. In order to reach this aim, the design principles and strategies need to be translated into interventions. As a guidance for how this can be done, a series of case studies have been made.

On the following pages the reference projects will be presented and analysed as well as translated, in tandem with the findings from the theoretical framework, into architectural interventions. The diagram on the next page explains this process.

Narrative Condition

Overarching the design proposal, and affecting the project as a whole, is what I call *the narrative condition*. The latter part of the aim, to show an alternative type of urban development that focuses on enhancing public life, calls for the proposal to juxtapose *Masthuggskajen*, as this is the symbol for what the project opposes.

Since *Masthuggskajen* is an example of tabula rasa-planning, it is therefore necessary for the design proposal to show a gradual change which requires a time-aspect to be presented. The architectural interventions should therefore all be phases within the same process.

The narrative condition is therefore that all interventions are part of a speculative scenario. This is represented through a speculative document. By placing them in this scenario, the aspiration is for the narrative to be strengthened, but also for the thoughts and discussions that follow after to open up and be pushed beyond the project in itself.

It is also a method for liberating myself and my creativity in the continued work. This document was sent as a letter, and put me in a zone where I could freely speculate on how the site could be developed in the different phases.

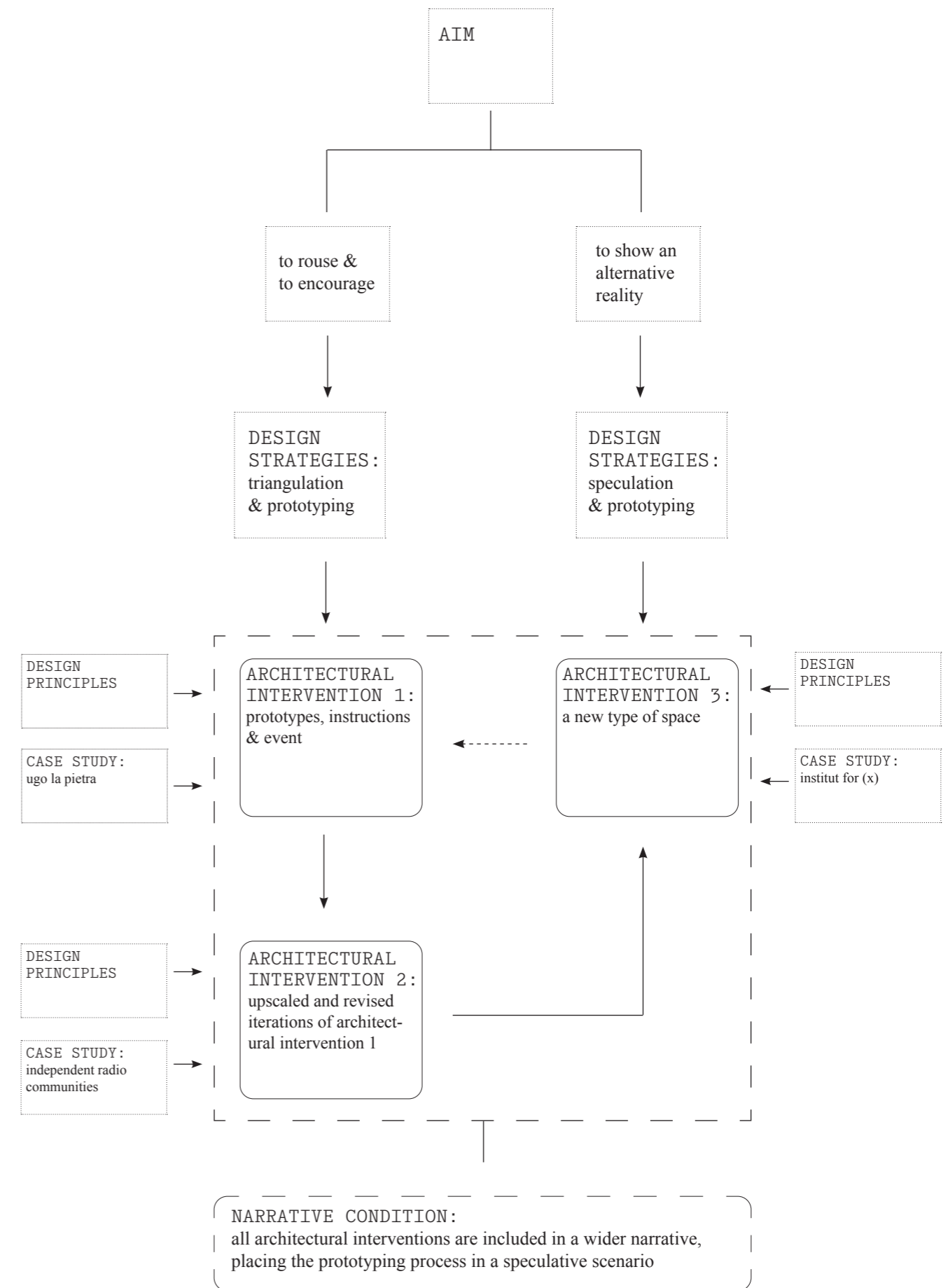


Fig. 8: process diagram for design translation.

CASE STUDY:

Attrezzature urbane per la collettività / Ugo La Pietra

The work by the artist Ugo La Pietra presented in *Attrezzature urbane per la collettività* (Urban furniture for society) (La Pietra, 2013) is all related to the urban design slogan: “living is being at home everywhere”. What he did was to create a campaign where he documented urban, infrastructural artefacts around Milano and fictively, through sketching, reconverted and repurposed them into furniture for inhabiting.

Giacinto Di Pietrantonio writes in the prologue of the book that La Pietra saw that the infrastructure represented divisions, barriers and constrictions and, thus, wanted to liberate these “guardian of conflict” and turn them into objects that followed the slogan and produced the feeling of home (La Pietra, 2013, p. 7). He took the private out into the public, converted the barriers into opportunities, and managed to make people perceptive of their own surroundings by doing so. A hammock was tied between two lamp posts and became a place for resting; an electrical cabinet became a refrigerator; a traffic mirror became a mirror over a sink alluding to a bathroom.

According to La Pietra, urban spaces should have two primary functions, just like objects: they should be practical and they should be possessed. In order for them to be possessed, he explains, they need to bring satisfaction in a similar way that private spaces do. This means making it possible to perform the necessary, optional and social activities we do at home, in the public. He writes: “Living in the city does not just mean using the city, it means expanding the personality of he who lives there, distinguish and give an identity to the place, possess it mentally and sometimes even physically” (La Pietra, 2013, p. 9), and relates it to the home even more.

REFLECTION:

As this master’s thesis strives to explore how the threshold for spontaneity, participation and engagement in the public realm can be lowered, a crucial part is, firstly, to find strategies that make people aware of their everyday behaviours and spaces and, secondly, willing to take a step forward from these and changing their attitudes.

Interventions like La Pietra’s, for example putting a lampshade on a road light, might be seen as trivial, or even cheesy, but it does nevertheless evoke spatial awareness and spark a conversation on the potential of our urban spaces and what they signal. This informs me that it is the opposite of trivial; it is rather an effective method for embodying a large scope in a very modest scale. An intervention does not need to be grand in scale and complexity, in order to hold a lot of layered perspectives and angles.

Its modesty, and perhaps even its humour, contributes to the lowering of the threshold of interaction, reflection and discussion, which also enables the discourse on urban spaces and its lack of everyday life and people.

In relation to the theoretical framework of this master’s thesis, we can identify principles such as informality, small-scale, revisability and assemblage in La Pietra’s work. Additionally, they are effective catalysts for a triangulation process, and thus, for making a base for public spaces according to Arendt’s definition. These interventions are refined, but can easily be a source of inspiration for prototypes that activate urban infrastructure.

The last quote of the case study-text, where La Pietra talks about “expanding the personality” and “give an identity” to the city, proposes a valuable perspective on how we can learn from the private when it comes to organically developing urban spaces. We do not need to ask for permission on *how* or *if* we can change or expand the personality or identity of our homes, and this is perhaps how we should view our public spaces too.

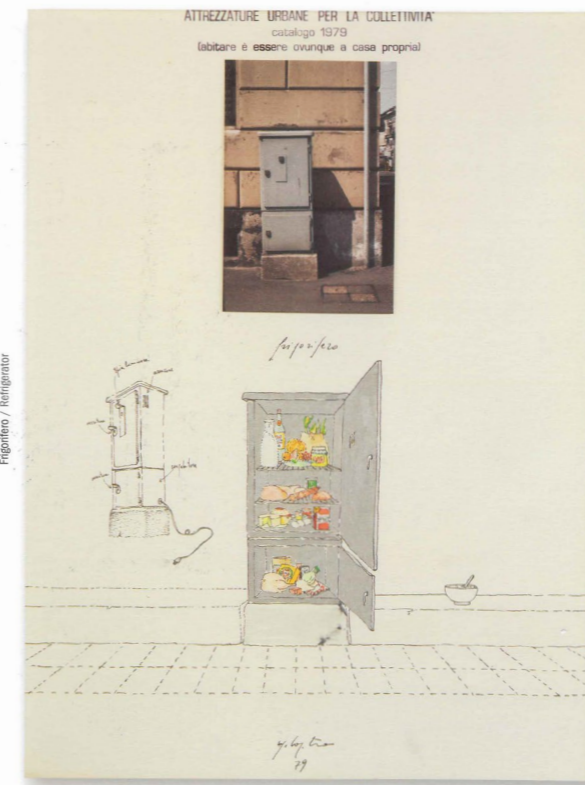


Fig. 9.

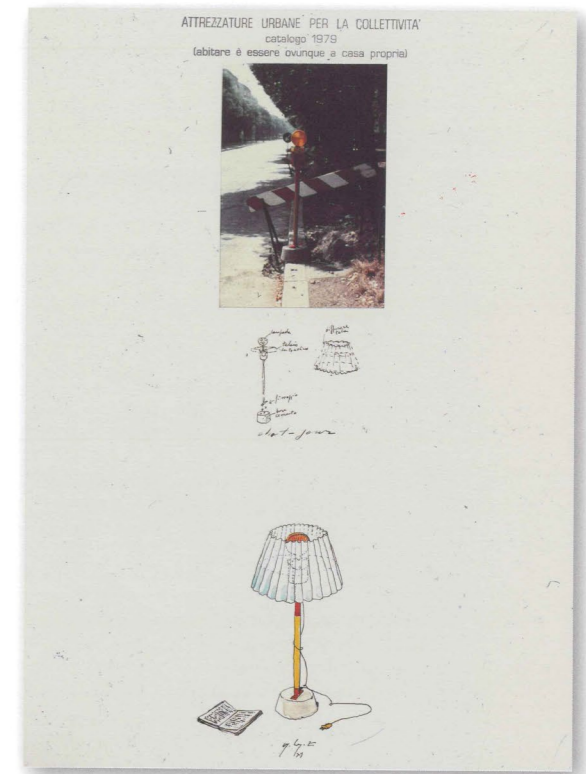


Fig. 10.

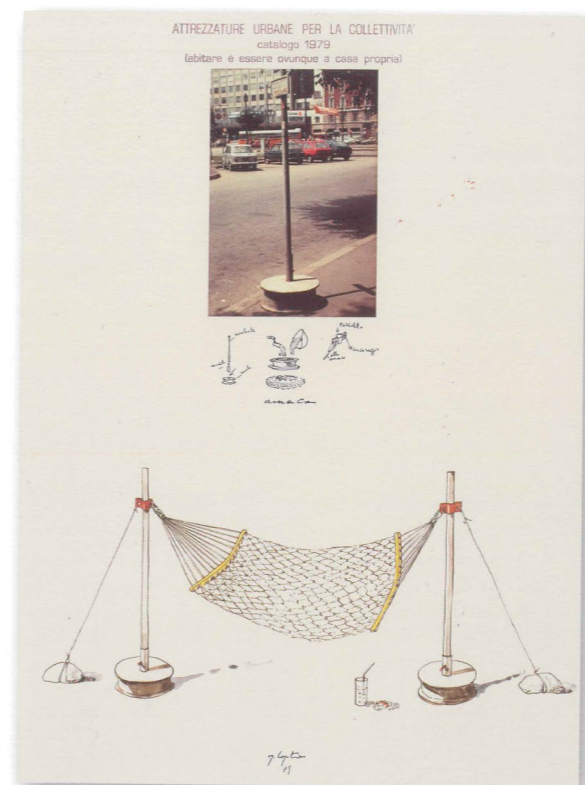


Fig. 11.

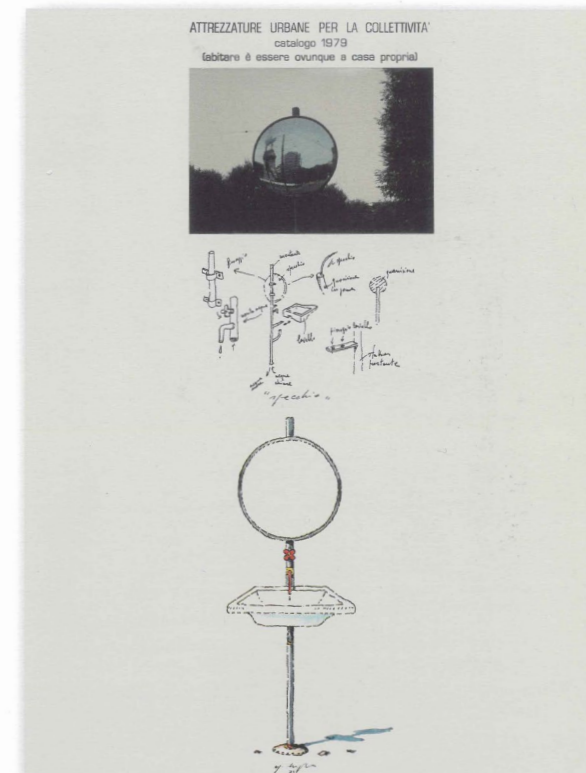


Fig. 12.

Fig. 9-12: pages from Ugo La Pietra’s *Attrezzature urbane per la collettività*.

Architectural Intervention 1:

This intervention addresses the first part of the thesis' aim, to rouse the collective from its passivity in the public realm, and to encourage people to claim their right to public space.

Subsequently, the intervention needs to show people the fact *that* they can use urban spaces, *how* this can be done and further encourage them to act spontaneously together with others in them. In addition, if people are going to be roused from their passivity in the public realm, it needs to be an intervention that becomes an exclamation mark intriguing enough to take them out of this passive position.

The case study of Ugo La Pietra's work becomes the inspiration for this intervention in how he brings the private out into the public, and does so by activating the urban infrastructure with small-scale interventions. By doing this he manages to evoke both spatial and behavioural awareness.

The design strategies used for this intervention are triangulation and prototyping. The architectural intervention becomes the stimulus that enables spontaneous interaction between strangers, in a triangulation process. Prototyping as a method is, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, built on three strategies: working with temporary structures, working with values in the local context and its people, and working within a set time frame, and these ideas are therefore applied to this intervention as well. In addition, it is used as a design strategy because it allows people to build a relationship to the site through testing and co-designing-processes before the "real" change, which encourages and lowers the threshold for civic engagement. Lastly, the design principles are embodied in how the architectural intervention is designed.

These factors are translated into an architectural intervention consisting of prototypes with accompanying instructions to how they are made, as well as an event in which the prototypes play an important role. For the architectural intervention to be positioned within the context, these prototypes are designed specifically for the urban infrastructure at the site and become activated through it. The instructions' purpose is to encourage and allow people to try to build their own prototypes, striving to lower the threshold for continued activation. When it comes to the event, it aims to take an everyday activity out into the public and use the prototypes as a set for this.

CASE STUDY: Independent Radio Communities

While the relevance of traditional public service radio channels are debated, various independent radio stations keep attracting new listeners and more are emerging. *NTS Radio*, founded by Femi Adeyemi in London, broke new ground in 2011. Adeyemi reinvented the format by using the infrastructure of the internet rather than AM/FM frequencies and created a platform where people could listen to radio shows by a curated selection of DJs (Hackney Co-Operative Developments, n.d.).

Since the genesis of this new era for radio, several independent stations have joined the evolution, for example, *The Lot Radio* in New York and *Kiosk Radio* in Brussels. A common thread in all of these examples is that they are rooted in the sense of community. The communities are more than just digital phenomena for people who want to listen to music, as all of them occupy physical space as well.

NTS Radio began its journey in a small “hole in the wall”-studio facing Gillett Square in east London (Hackney Co-Operative Developments, n.d.). *The Lot Radio* is broadcasted from a shipping container in Williamsburg where one half is hosting the radio station the other half a kiosk (The New York Times, 2017). Lastly, *Kiosk Radio* is streaming from a wooden kiosk in Parc Royal in Brussels and serves as a gathering point “where different communities overlap, with music as the common ground”, as well as a traditional kiosk (Kiosk Radio, n.d.).

REFLECTION:

The aspect of actuality is important to reflect on in relation to these projects. Actuality is something Richard Sennett brought up in his *Democracy and Urban Form*, as a quality that prompts people to be spontaneous and break from their routines and habits.

The radio shows are live events, present-bound, occurring online and in the place in which they are broadcasted at the same time. A strength behind these projects is dependent on the fact that it is happening in a specific moment, as it creates a connection both between the host and the listener, but also a connection between the inside and the outside of the booth in the physical environment. Even if you come to these places by yourself, the music and the host will be there as company. It is a good condition for people who are lonely, or people who want to be alone among others.

These projects are also examples of catalysts for triangulation. Music becomes the external stimulus that lowers the threshold for strangers to interact. Additionally, both *Lot Radio* and *Kiosk Radio* prolong people’s stay around the volumes, by selling simple snacks and drinks, which increases the chances for interactions to occur as well.

The physical volumes that these radio stations inhabit are all small-scale, with a humble, informal aesthetic, from a wooden park pavilion to a shipping container, associated with the kiosk typology. *Kiosk Radio* of course carries it in its name as well, but even the *NTS*-booth at Gillett Square and *Lot Radio* container embody a kiosk spirit.

Why are the kiosk connotations a recurring feature in these projects? I do not believe that it is a coincidence. The kiosk typology can be found all over the globe. Even the word is the same in several languages, the Swedish *kiosk*; the French *kiosque*; the Turkish, *köşk*; and the Persian *kušk* which is the original (NE.se, n.d.). Regardless of where you find them, they always have more or less the same function: selling simple items such as beverages, light meals and magazines or providing information about the place where they are located, such as maps and pamphlets.

Moreover, the kiosk typology is unique in the urban fabric. Kiosks often differ in scale and style compared to the rest of the urban fabric. They are usually freestanding with a lot of facade area in relation to the few square meters they occupy, which make them suitable for grass-root projects that often have limited budgets. Aesthetically, they can be informal, sculptural, nostalgic, ad hoc, ugly, creature-like, messy – and yet they feel comfortingly familiar.

A typology signalling this familiarity is also suitable for this type of community-driven projects, as it might help lowering the threshold for people to approach and perhaps join the community. It therefore makes the kiosks suitable for experimental or alternative layers as well, because it is a versatile and tolerant typology, and still manages to feel familiar.



Fig. 13: photograph of *Kiosk Radio*, Brussels, by Jente Waerzeggers.

Architectural Intervention 2:

The second intervention is an iteration of the previous one, and therefore addresses the same part of the thesis' aim as well. To repeat it once more, this is to rouse the collective from its passivity in the public realm, and to encourage people to claim their right to public space.

Re-evaluation is an important part of the prototyping process, and upscaling often becomes a consequence after. The second phase therefore strives to show how the prototypes, instructions and event can be re-evaluated and upscaled, whilst triangulation and prototyping are still used as design strategies. This is done with the second architectural intervention, which is a radio kiosk and a prototype workshop.

The prototypes and their accompanying instructions are upscaled to a prototype workshop, pedaling the creation and testing of more prototypes and ideas. The events are upscaled into a volume enabling more and other events to take place.

The case study inspiring what the upscaling of the event can be, are the independent radio communities *Kiosk Radio*, *NTS Radio* and *The Lot Radio*. What I take with me from these projects is how they use music as a gathering force as well as how they reinvent and use the kiosk typology. Both these factors spark triangulation, in the live-event of broadcasting radio and the usage of a conventional typology and adding an alternative layer to it.

CASE STUDY: Institut for (X)

Godsbanen is the name of an area that has emerged in the old, industrial railway freight yard in central Aarhus, Denmark. It is a product of a collaboration between *Institut for (X)*, various other associations, the municipality of Aarhus and people living and working in the area. *Institut for (X)* is an association with the aspiration to redefine public space through experimentation and co-operation but it is also physically occupying a part of the area. It was one of the pioneers at the site and has been given the role of coordinator for the innovative development-board that was created for this particular project, and is therefore a key actor (Aarhus Kommune, 2017).

The vision for the *Godsbanen* area was to create a new type of neighbourhood that could constantly reinvent itself and become a creative, cultural hub with high diversity of people. In order to turn the vision into reality, four strategies that would guide the development were formulated (Aarhus Kommune, 2017). These strategies are:

① *Strategy for Identity*

This strategy focuses on how to balance the preservation and transformation of the area's identity, both in terms of the built environment but also the spirit. It also discusses how to create a characteristic, diverse neighbourhood that supports residents, workers and visitors.

② *Strategy for Urban Life*

This strategy accentuates a hierarchy within the urban development, where plans for urban life should always be superior to, for instance, traffic plans. They also want to ensure that the residential buildings come at a varied price range, so that different people can establish themselves here.

③ *Strategy for Involvement*

This strategy describes the organisation of stakeholders, and how it should operate in an inclusive and dynamic way that secures the quality of public life and public spaces.

④ *Strategy for Culture and Creativity*

Culture and creativity are significant for the spirit of the area. This strategy discusses how it should be protected and further encouraged.

Godsbanen is an example of an area that accomplishes to satisfy the municipal needs of developing conventional living and working spaces but not at the expense of public life, as it manages to combine it with and make space for small-scale, explorative, grass-root initiatives such as *Institut for (X)*. The "conventional" and "alternative" approaches are not used in conflict with each other, instead, in this project they make use of each others' qualities and differences and function in concert, in order to create a new type of space and system that nurtures itself and its ideals.

REFLECTION:

What the development of *Godsbanen* should be like is not a question of either or, which is an approach applicable to *Masthuggskajen* and *Skeppsbron* as well. For this master's thesis, *Godsbanen* functions as an example of what the *Skeppsbron* area could become over time. It is an inspiration project that demonstrates that a collaboration between the municipality, associations and citizens is possible in reality, and that all development does not need to be following one homogeneous direction – it can be multifaceted. It is a matter of trying something different, satisfying many desires, and letting it grow and change organically. We should ask ourselves whether our cities should be developed and designed from above, or whether our cities should be developed and designed from an eye-level or a grass root-perspective, which goes very much in line with the philosophy of Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl. Even though the plans for *Masthuggskajen* are already being realised, the neighbouring sites are still available for speculation and exploration. And they could help nurture and support the people that already live, work and visit the area as well as the people who will soon live, work and visit the area when the construction of the artificial peninsula is completed.

So, a question that is naturally evoked is: what is it *Institut for (X)* manages to do that we could learn from and potentially apply to the *Skeppsbron* project?

It is both a physical space, an association and a phenomenon that has grown over time. *Institut for (X)* is an area built on the principles of prototyping, when it comes to co-design, testing and re-evaluation. The intrinsic desire is for it to constantly reinvent itself. This, on the contrary, is not typical for prototyping. Prototyping processes often have a pronounced beginning and end, but in this case the unfinished has instead become a part of the area's identity.

As explained, it is also an association functioning as a coordinator for the development, organising the collaboration between the stakeholders, residents and workers in the area. Additionally, it lies in the association's interest to encourage citizens to participate in the development, and it is therefore beneficial to have a clearly defined physical space that people can come to if they want to take part in the change. That it is both occupying physical space as well as social and political space makes it a phenomenon, a resilient phenomenon, that becomes the voice for values and principles that are at times not heard or listened to.

In regards to the other findings in the theoretical framework, this project exemplifies many of the qualities. Aesthetically, *Institut for (X)* is designed through small-scale volumes with a strong sense of informality and revisability. A majority of the volumes are assemblages, with an ad hoc spirit, built using reclaimed elements and materials and the area becomes an urban assemblage in itself. Consequently, the nature of *Institut for (x)* is a platform for triangulation, in its otherness and uniqueness.



Fig. 14: An view of the entrance to *Institut for (X)*.

Architectural Intervention 3:

The third intervention addresses the latter part of the thesis' aim, which is: to show what an alternative type of urban development that focuses on enhancing public life could be.

In order to accomplish this, the architectural intervention needs to show a development that contrasts an urban development that does not enhance public life. Thus, the intervention calls for a design strategy that manages to oppose *Masthuggskajen* spatially, but also the narrative it conveys.

Consequently, the design strategies that come to hand are speculation and, once again, prototyping. Speculation is suitable as it encourages and allows the architect to not only suggest adjustments to the world-in-common, but also direct attention and address necessary changes to the mindsets that shape our world-in-common, by imagining an alternative reality.

Furthermore, prototyping is used especially since it enables organic change, encourages civic engagement, temporary structures and testing, which juxtaposes the tabula rasa approach at *Masthuggskajen*. The design principles extracted from the theoretical framework – informality, actuality, revisability, small-scale and assemblage – are contrasting the aesthetic principles of the artificial peninsula and its proposed volumes as well.

The case study for this intervention is *Institut for (X)* in how it turns the concept of constant reinvention into a part of the area's and association's identity; how it acts as a coordination between different stakeholders in the urban development of Godsbanen; and how it occupies both physical, political and social space.

An additional aspect applicable to both the second and third intervention, is how *Institut for (x)* becomes an approachable host for the development. I believe this lowers the threshold for engagement, as it makes it clear where to go and who to approach if you want to take part in the change. Their presence both physically, socially and politically in the area therefore plays into this as well.

the design proposal

Welcome to a new type of space!
The material presented wants to be used as an initial inspiration, to spark the imagination and discussions of how the real development of *Skeppsbron*, Gothenburg, could be.

FIRST PHASE:
prototypes &
triangulation dinner



first phase

first phase



Prototypes at the project site.



first phase

The first phase of the development process of *Skeppsbron* is targeting the first part of the thesis' aim: to rouse the collective from its passivity and encourage people to claim their right to public space.

This is a first exploration testing whether the combination of triangulation and prototyping are compatible as strategies when it comes to sparking public life. Triangulation was thus enacted through the event Triangulation Dinner, and prototype furniture supported it. The dinner was hosted by an architect as a statement addressing a need for spontaneously using the urban spaces as an extension of one's home.

The exploration is an exclamation mark, both physically, but also socially as it brings the private out into the public in an unusual way. During the first Triangulation Dinner, several people approached the dinner guests and asked what kind of event it was, took photographs of the spectacle and cheered it on.

What are the prototypes?

With inspiration from Ugo La Pietra's activation of urban space, the prototypes are urban furniture, in this case in the shape of a stool and two types of tables, tailored to fit and activate the urban infrastructure at the *Skeppsbron* site.

What is a Triangulation dinner?

A Triangulation dinner is a dinner held in an urban space. It is not an action equivalent to buying takeout and eating it on a random bench; it deliberately aims to replicate a dinner party that would normally take place in someone's home, as an action for claiming the urban space and turning it into a public space. Therefore, music was playing in the background, the home-cooked food was served in pots and pans and the table was laid with table cloths, porcelain plates, glasses and cutlery.

A letter arrived
in the mailbox.

Municipality of Gothenburg

Directive for Experimental Development at *Skeppsbron*

To architect, Hilma Åkesson,

it has come to our attention that the weekly “Triangulation Dinners”, hosted by architect Hilma Åkesson, has sparked a new prototyping movement at *Skeppsbron*, Gothenburg. The municipality of Gothenburg has identified desirable qualities in the effects it has had on the spirit of the city and among its citizens, and therefore offers architect Hilma Åkesson to lead the continued development of the *Skeppsbron* site as an attempt to let this life-embracing approach evolve further.

As part of an ongoing commitment on reevaluating the city of Gothenburg’s governance and approach when it comes to the designing of urban areas, the municipality strives to try new collaborative methods. The *Skeppsbron* area shall therefore be a product of a collaboration between several stakeholders: representatives from local associations, businesses, the Municipality of Gothenburg as well as residents, workers and visitors.

The municipality hereby issues this document as a directive for the urban development of *Skeppsbron*, Gothenburg, in recognition of the architectural practice as a means for change and attempt to address contemporary urban challenges. This document serves as a preliminary framework for the site’s development, but further strategies and principles will be clarified as the project develops.

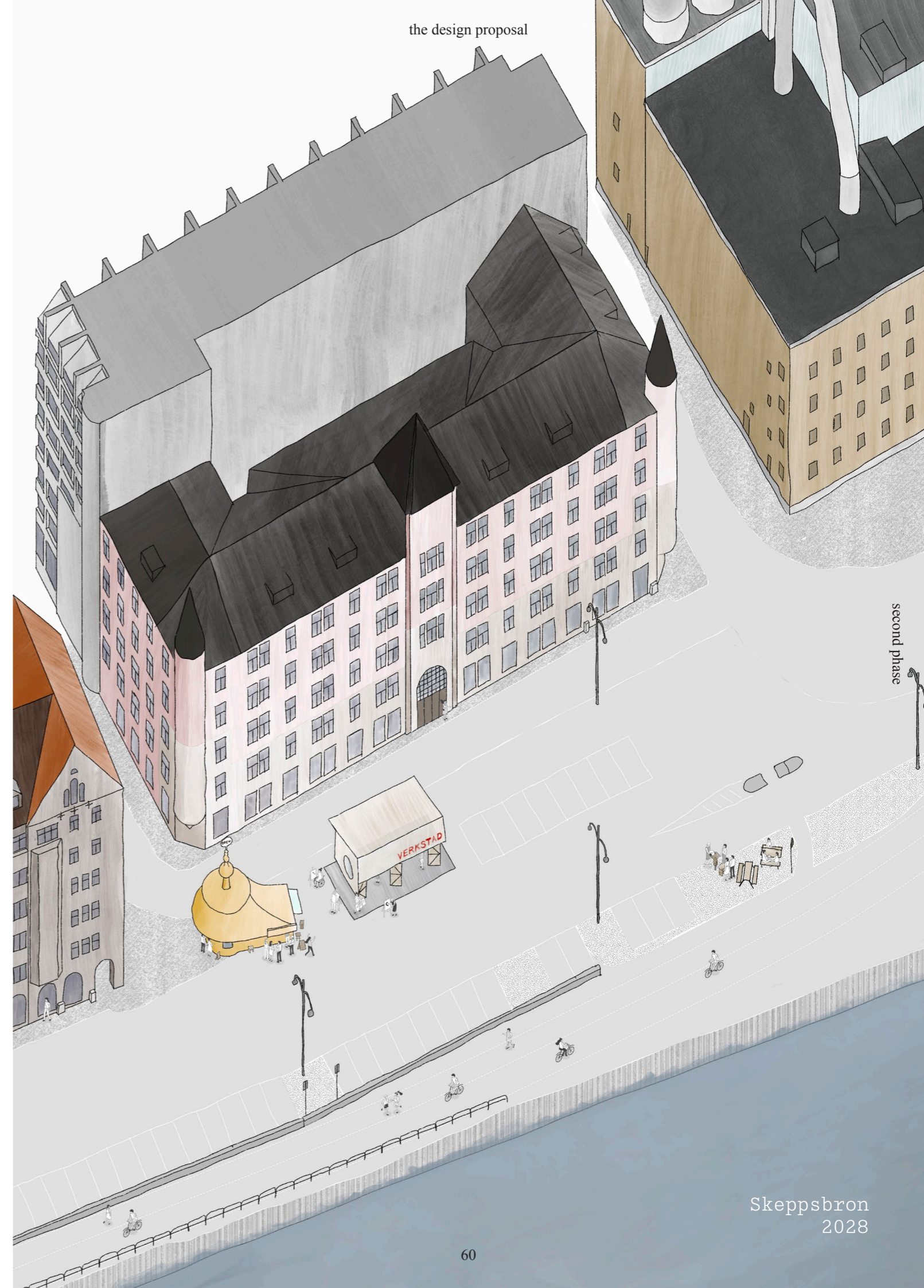
The participants in the project are entrusted with the capacity to develop a new type of space in accordance with their own interdisciplinary perspectives, visions and choice of methods. Architectural interventions proposed within the designated site should aim to create conditions and test alternative methods for enhancing public life, foster a new perspective on architecture as a means for change and become a platform for the citizens of Gothenburg to engage in the shaping of the city.

The Municipality of Gothenburg firmly emphasises its encouragement for the development to challenge prevailing architectural norms. With this, conventional regulations are deliberately set aside in order for an experimental approach to take place. The area should, however, be accessible and approachable to all.

If architect Hilma Åkesson is interested in participating in this project: please use the attached envelope for your response. Postage is paid.

Sincerely,
Municipality of Gothenburg

SECOND PHASE:
the radio kiosk,
the prototype workshop &
the Assembly/Assembly association



second phase

second phase

What is the Assembly/Assembly association?

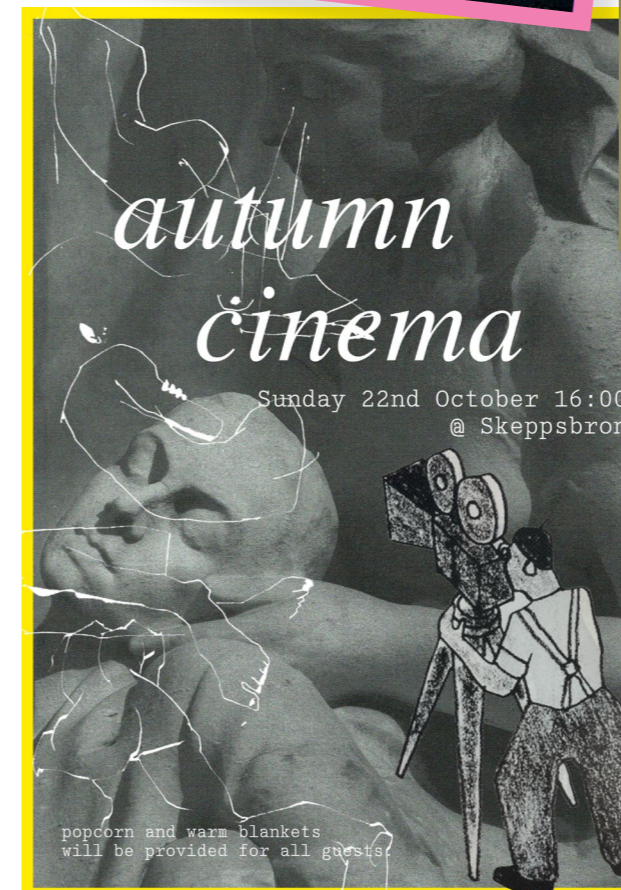
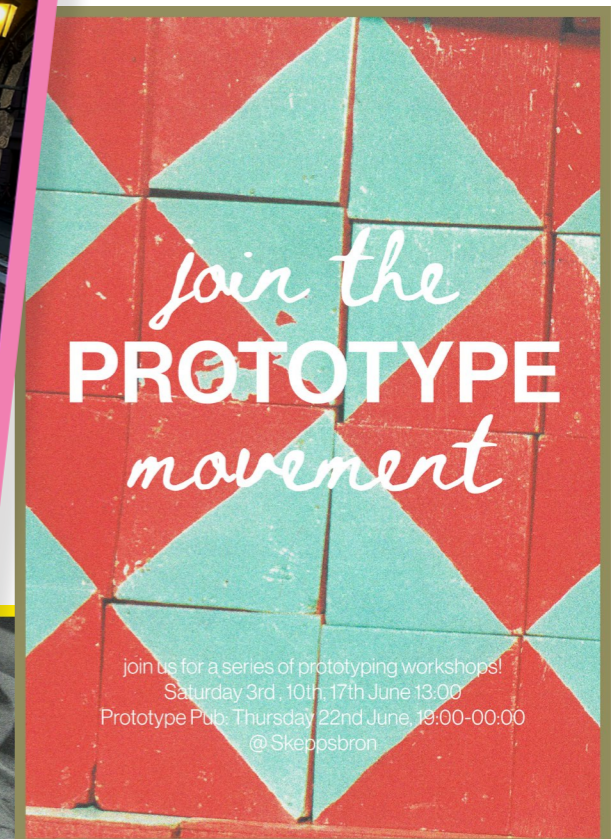
An association emerges as the architect wants to decentralise the responsibility from herself to a group of individuals with different perspectives and knowledge, for instance carpenters, sociologists and architects. The *Assembly/Assembly* association is therefore established.

It is an interdisciplinary association, with the same goal of acting as catalyst and coordinator for the development of the *Skeppsbron* area on the riverfront of Göta Älv. The goal is to turn the area into a public space where urban development can be tested, discussed and co-designed. This is, as mentioned, a development that is done in collaboration between various stakeholders in the area, such as the municipality of Gothenburg, associations, businesses, workers and residents. *Assembly/Assembly* advocates that the collaborative part of the project is of importance for the identity of the area to remain and values such as diversity, civic involvement and creativity persistent, even as the project grows. During this phase,

the context is analysed and mapped out, the organisation of the collaboration takes shape, and common strategies are gradually formulated.

Assembly/Assembly occupies and runs two physical spaces on the site; the radio kiosk and the prototype workshop which are spaces open to the public. As a visitor, you can therefore buy a hotdog, sit down and listen to the radio shows broadcasted, get some help fixing your bike or build a stool, but is equally as much a space to visit if you want to hear about the development, engage in it yourself, discuss or just share thoughts.

The association hosts community dinners, workshops and events; broadcast radio and sell simple snacks in the radio kiosk; build prototypes in the workshop; give support to other initiative-makers as well as many other things.



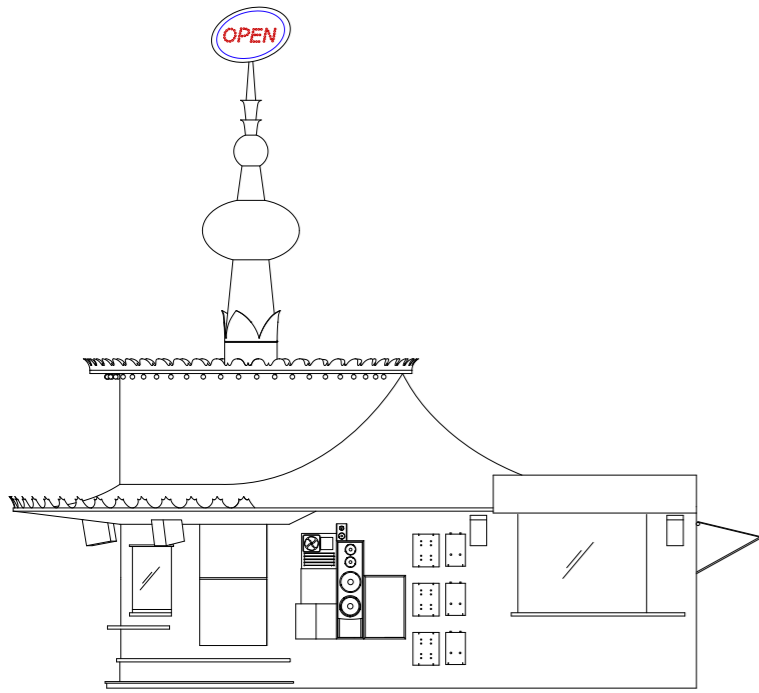
second phase

second phase

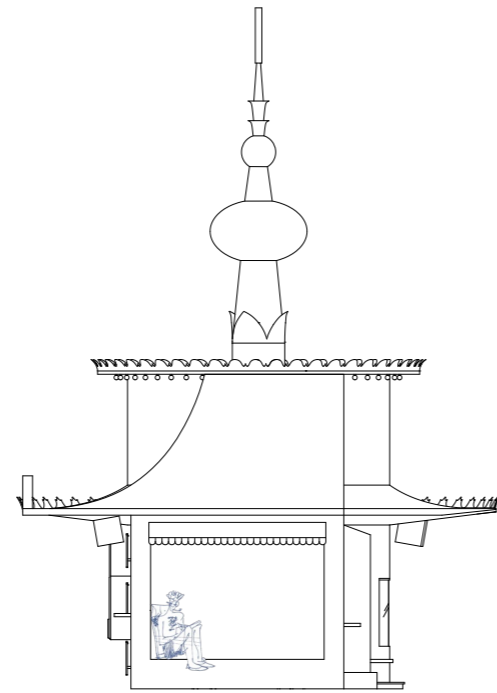
What is the Radio Kiosk?

What is the Prototype Workshop?

second phase



Elevation: the north facade of the *Radio Kiosk*



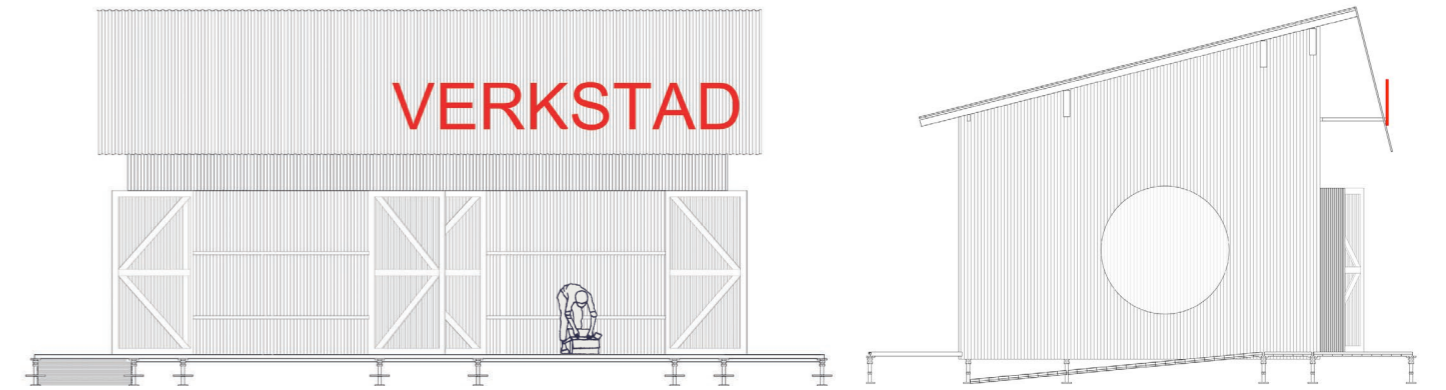
Elevation: the west facade of the *Radio Kiosk*
Fig. 15: scale figure.*

The radio kiosk is the headquarters of the *Assembly/Assembly* association. One half of it is an independent radio channel, broadcasting radio both on site and online; whilst the other half is a kiosk selling light meals, beverages, and magazines and pamphlets by local creatives.

It functions as an attractor of people to the site, using triangulation both through its architecture and through its program. The aspiration for this kiosk-creature is to reach a balance where it is familiar enough to make the visitor feel comfortable, but it is sculptural enough to evoke a curiosity within them, so irresistible that one has to approach it. It inhabits design principles such as small scale and informality by using the kiosk typology.

Revisability is used as a tool for encouraging people to interact with the space: posters can be put up on the facade, and prototype parts can be taken down from it and assembled into extra seating. Additionally, the kiosk is an assemblage of three Gothenburg-kiosks, one from the 1920s (*Svenska Telegrambyrån*), one from the 1950s (*Korv Kiosk*) and one contemporary (*Rödmönja*).

The radio channel uses the internet to broadcast its content online, and therefore lets the community and ideas reach outside the *Skeppsbron* site and the city of Gothenburg, but vice versa attracts people to the site by being a digital phenomenon too.



Elevation: the north facade of the *Prototype workshop*
Fig. 16: scale figure. *

The Prototype Workshop is the upscaled version of the urban furniture-prototypes and their accompanying instructions. It is a maker space, enabling the turning of visions and ideas into reality. Here, new prototypes are designed, built, tested and others are revised and refined.

It embodies the design principles informality, revisability, small-scale and assemblage through its design and structure. It is a temporary structure built of scaffolding and wood, that can easily be disassembled and placed somewhere else, or turned into something completely different.

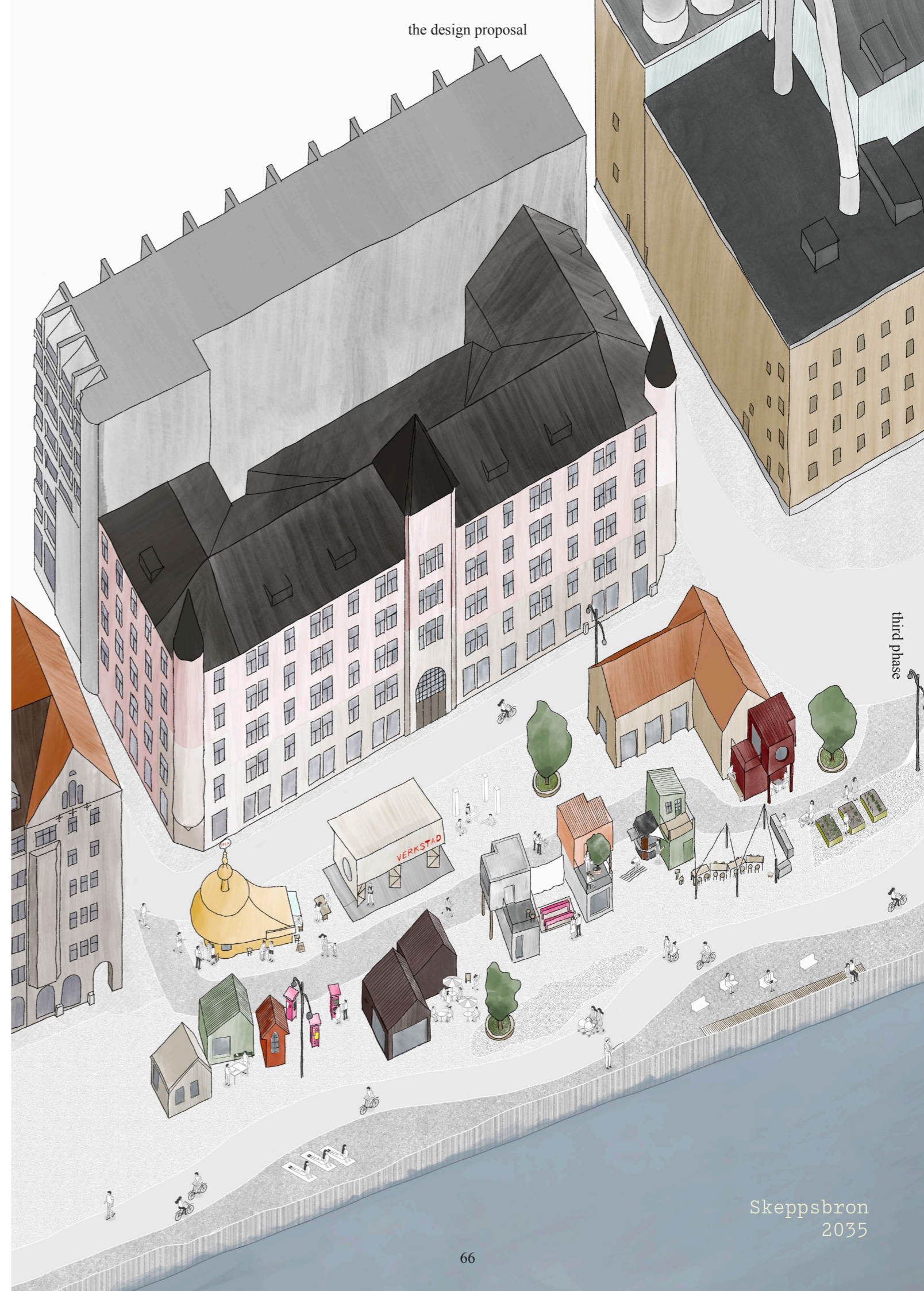
One of the first prototypes that are being tested and built in the workshop is an outdoor kitchen and a simple roof

structure, supporting the Triangulation Dinners that are still happening on the site every Thursday.

THIRD PHASE:
A new type of space

third phase

third phase



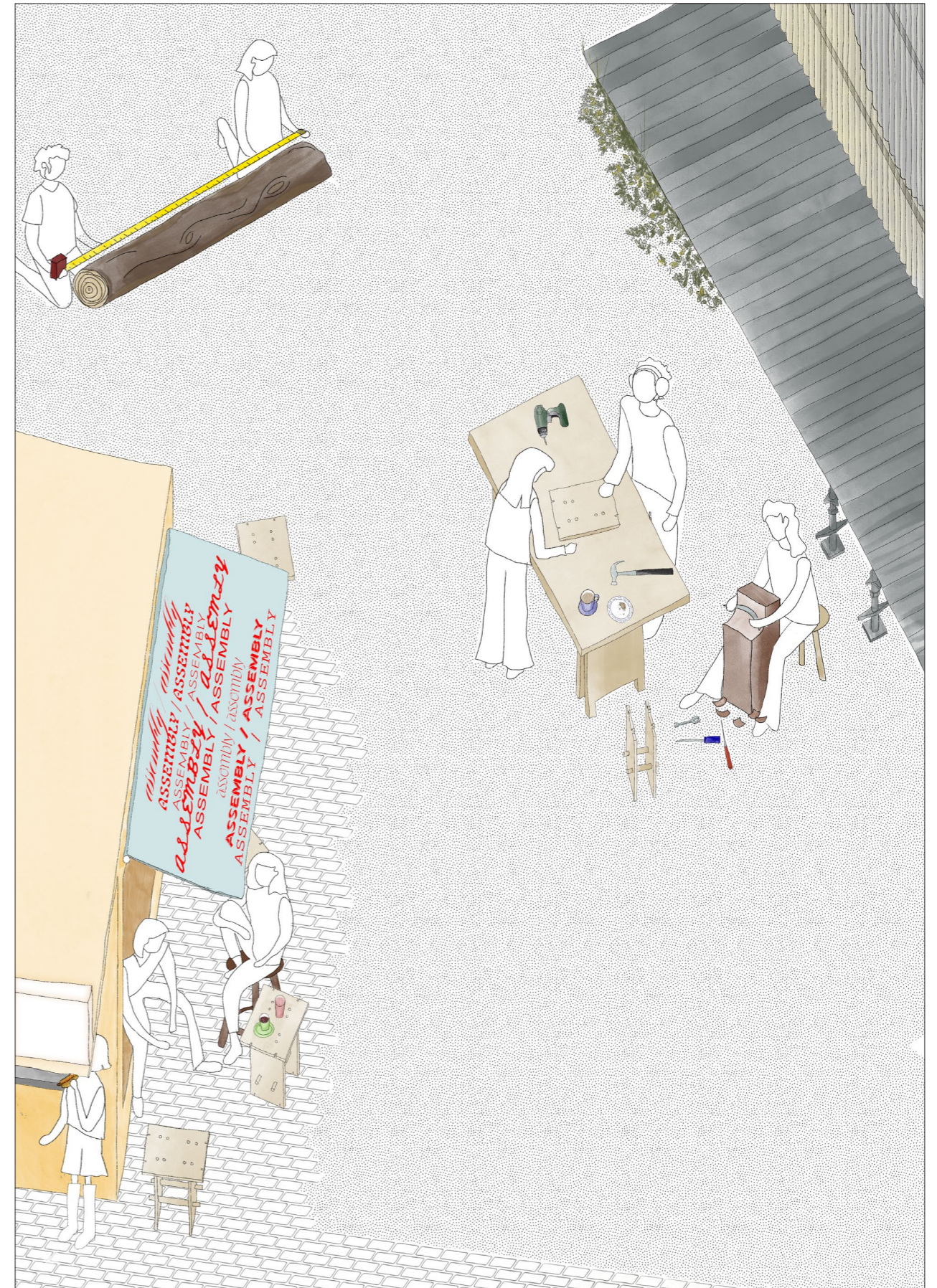
Welcome to a new type of space, at *Skeppsbron*, in the heart of Gothenburg! This is an urban assemblage, a space weaving together multiple narratives through various volumes and people that come together.

The *Assembly/Assembly* association has now become an established part of the area, but also an established part of Gothenburg, succeeding its mission to bring light to the act of turning urban space into public space and encouraging people to take part in this transition.

Some prototype projects on the site have been initiated by *Assembly/Assembly*, but in many cases the association has only acted as a support for turning other people's visions into reality through prototypes. Old structures have been

placed here, new kiosks, businesses and associations have opened and occupy small volumes at *Skeppsbron*, and in between these are patches of land where public life can continue growing.

The movement, which arose on this very site, has sparked discussion on how to develop the rest of the city. Through this project, architecture as a tool for creating conditions for a public life that is more heavily influenced by spontaneity, freedom and lust has become a concern more people care about.



Zooming in on the life between the kiosk and the workshop.



Zooming in on the life taking place between two new volumes.



Zooming in on the life taking place at a community dinner.

the closing chapter

The ending reflection

When I look at a development like *Masthuggskajen*, I have thought to myself that the municipality of Gothenburg is channeling its energy and effort in the wrong direction, prioritising financial interest at the expense of public life. A project in the heart of the city holding a lot of promises of life and diversity – yet, opposing everything I’ve learned about how to enhance these things throughout my architectural education. A frustration over the false marketing for this development arises within me. I wonder what impact I will have as an architect in a traditional sense when it comes to this type of development, as I’m approaching the end of my education. How can it be allowed? How do I address it? How can my knowledge as an architect cut through the noise? If I see a need for change, how and where do I channel it?

It is of my belief that the city should, through how it’s designed, promote the feeling of freedom, spontaneity and entitlement to public space, rather than suppressing it. It should be obvious that we are allowed to bring a chair out onto the streets and use urban space as our extended living rooms. If it is not obvious, it’s a problem. So, the exploration of how to address this issue has been interesting, not only in my role as an architect but also as a person who’s a part of the city.

I think my answer has been to, whenever I can, use a subtle type of urban activism – where I move within the frames of the laws but still evoke a sense of rebellion, because I have a big need of feeling free. As part of the design proposal, a real triangulation dinner using the prototypes for *Skeppsbron* was held. It was clear that a simple initiative like that did not just spark a sense of freedom in me – it also became an exclamation mark that cut through the noise for the people witnessing it. People passing by took photographs, asked what kind of spectacle it was, smiled and cheered us on, despite it being nothing other than a dinner among a group of friends. The only difference was that it was held out in public. It was a minimal architectural intervention, and a mild semi-rebellious action, that became an efficient tool to awaken forgotten discussions and an overlooked space.

Throughout the project, I’ve at times questioned whether my critique is valid or not and whether my project has substance or not. A development like *Masthuggskajen* is a product of democratic processes, and the likelihood that areas like it will continue being built in our cities is high. My opinion and the interests I have should not be worth

more than others, and I do not believe that the type of development I’ve suggested should replace it. However, I think it is of great significance to emphasise, communicate and discuss what effects architectural choices have on our everyday spaces and lives, based on the knowledge we have. I call for honesty concerning what values and interests have been prioritised and deprioritised in a project like *Masthuggskajen*, so that a balance can be restored and no aspect ignored. If a project like *Assembly/Assembly* at *Skeppsbron* were to be realised, it should be seen as an addition to *Masthuggskajen* where the public could genuinely be cared for and given space, both spatially and socially, in this part of the city. *Skeppsbron* would become an antidote to the bad sides of *Masthuggskajen*. Because, it undoubtedly seems to be a common dream of vivid streets, dynamic spaces, civic engagement, spontaneous interactions and diversity, not just one that I possess.

Early on in this booklet, I wrote: “perhaps the role of the architect needs to be revised from a Vitruvian definition once more. What if the architect becomes an interdisciplinary weaver of people. A mediator who creates spaces that puts different people together for speculative discussions on how we should regenerate the urban forms Safdie talks about, but also the host bringing together the people who can turn the visions into reality. That would put the architect in centre of civic engagement and open conversation, but as catalyst instead of observer.” It is in many ways what I have tested, and aspired to achieve through my project. Through the theoretical framework I composed, and in particular Arendt’s theories, it became clear that people and their activity are pivotal in the making of public spaces. This, thus, made the project more focused on the potential activity the architectural interventions created through the design principles and strategies, rather than the appearance and aesthetic of the objects in themselves.

This spring, my last at Chalmers School of Architecture, I’ve looked around the corridors where all my student colleagues sit and I’ve seen all their master’s theses taking shape on screens and paperrolls. It is striking how many of the projects that focus on small-scale interventions. Perhaps it is a sign of the times; a product of a shaky economy and a stormy globe, but I choose to also see it as a desire to reconfigure the role of the architect and what type of interventions an architect should propose.

About the author



When I look back at the projects I've created throughout my studies at Chalmers School of Architecture, I've noticed a red thread. It seems like I am drawn to exploring architecture through themes anchored in freedom and democracy.

The master studios I chose were always in the category of experimental architecture, and they challenged me to reimagine what architecture could be and how it can be used as a means for change.

This master's thesis did, in many ways, serve as a testbed for applying the knowledge I've gained through my studies, and as an exploration of how I dream of implementing it in practice. It is a little cocktail of my love for urban planning on an eye level and experimental architecture – an attempt of channeling what I've learned at Chalmers in Gothenburg, Arkitektskolen in Aarhus, and in my life.

M.Sc Architecture & Urban Design
Chalmers University of Technology
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Architecture in the Anthropocene
Sustainable development & the design
professions
Building on Context
Building on Buildings & Contexts

Exchange Semester
Arkitektskolen i Aarhus
Aarhus, Denmark

Individual & Society: Architecture in
the Welfare state
Studio 1D - Desirable Densities

B.Sc Architecture
Chalmers University of Technology
Gothenburg, Sweden

2019-2022

Other relevant coursework:

Aesthetics A
Uppsala University
Uppsala, Sweden



Fig. 17: photograph by Håkan Elofsson, from his book *Dansa mig Dance me*.

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Figures

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Fig. 4: Wiki Commons. (1933). *Hannah Arendt*. [Photograph] <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=hannah+arendt&title=Special%3AMediaSearch&type=image>

Fig. 5: Masthuggskajen.se. (n.d.). Masthuggskajen. [Rendering]. <https://masthuggskajen.se/omradet/>

Fig. 7: Olsson, A. (1972). [Photograph].

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