

# Fresh Winds for Biskopsgården

*The Need for Public Spaces in Developing Neighbourhoods*

*Master Thesis - Taavi Antoniazzi - 2024*

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Urban and Rural Design and Planning (MPDSD)

Architecture and Urban Design Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering

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UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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I am very happy and thankful to have these people around me!



# Abstract

Gang violence and criminal activities are significant issues in Sweden, particularly in areas designated as ‘vulnerable’, where parallel social structures and a high concentration of crime occur. This spiral of violence has a direct impact on residents of “vulnerable areas”. Unfortunately, the solutions proposed by politicians and officials for tackling violence and criminality are often short-term and lack a vision of the future and fail to consider a human aspect of the situation (Bergvall, 2023). Moreover, discussions frequently forget the importance of social cohesion among inhabitants in the so-called “vulnerable areas”. This thesis focuses on Biskopsgården, a district in Sweden’s second-largest city Gothenburg, classified as a vulnerable by the police, and explores potential solutions to its problems related to crime and segregation.

Examining if these problems are caused by or related to the district’s layout can help to identify long-term and potentially architectural solutions to urgent problems. In order to learn from the past and to avoid controversial demolition tactics of whole neighbourhoods like in Denmark, this Master thesis will look at the historical planning of Biskopsgården and other districts from the same time that were planned with similar ideals. This historical analysis of the functionalist planning during the mid-nineteenth century lays the foundation of future design decisions and will bring valuable information that could avoid demolition and will ultimately lead to design decisions that respect the current residents.

The City of Gothenburg has already proposed plans to redevelop Biskopsgården through urban densification, particularly in the central area of Friskvåderstorget. In this thesis, I will critically study the plans with an historical analysis in mind and will present an alternative proposal. This thesis argues that the plans from the City of Gothenburg are, apart from the general right intentions of bringing long term change to the district, insufficient to counteract segregation and are at the same time even threatening the existing social cohesion in Biskopsgården.

The alternative design of Friskvåderstorget will prioritise social architecture, focusing on the social coherence of current residents. The development of public spaces is a key aspect of the design. Further, the design also considers the future needs of the Biskopsgården community.

*Keywords: Urban meeting spaces, functionalism, vulnerable area, Friskvåderstorget, Biskopsgården*

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# Thesis questions

- What kind of physical interventions are necessary in Norra Biskopsgården in order to counteract urgent problems like segregation, overcrowding, social-economic differences and crime?
- Taking the historical perspective into consideration, what are the ideals Friskvåderstorget was planned around?

What is the result of the planning today/what is the situation today?

- Taking the current plans of transforming Biskopsgården into a “Garden City” and the plans to build housing with high exploitation around Friskvåderstorget into consideration, how is a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable redevelopment possible?

## Glossary

Neighbourhood - A geographically localised community of residents within a larger district or area. Norra Biskopsgården is a neighbourhood within the district of Biskopsgården.

Neighbourhood Unit - “Grannskapsenhet” in Swedish is a defined area with several apartment buildings with access to public education, health care and small commercial services.

ABC-stad - Arbete (work) - Boende (housing) - Centrum. A decentralisation of the city and a development of the Neighbourhood Unit which also includes the workplace within the units.

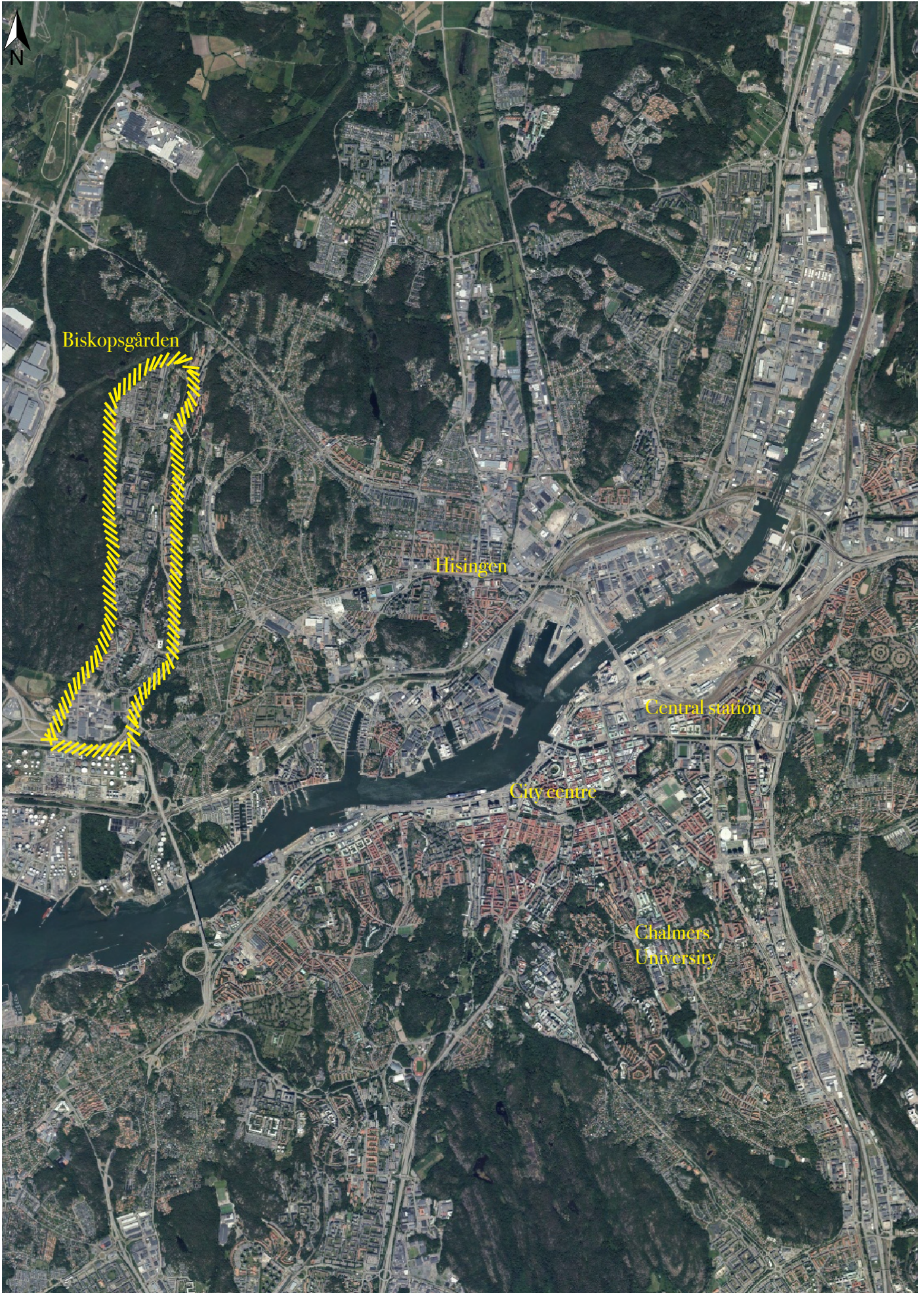
District - An administrative division within a city. In this thesis the whole of Biskopsgården is referred to as a district.

Community centre - A concept of access to commercial and essential services for every Neighbourhood Unit often placed around a central area within a district.

Meeting spaces - Outdoor or indoor areas where people from the surrounding neighbourhoods and external people can meet spontaneously or in planned occasions.

Square - “Torg” in Swedish. Physical area often placed centrally within a district for commercial and social services. Community centres are often located around squares.

Vulnerable area - A classification of the police describing districts with a high concentration of organised crime and structures of a parallel society. Of the current 17 especially vulnerable areas in Sweden, 4 are located in Gothenburg. Biskopsgården used to be classified as “especially vulnerable area” and is as of today a “risk area”.



*Location of Biskopsgården within Gothenburg (Landmäteriet, 2024).*



# Context

Gun violence in Sweden has escalated in the last few years and is now the second highest in Europe. This violence is only the brutal tip of the iceberg and caused by other factors that are statistically measurable. Socio-economic differences, worse school results or increasingly younger criminals in the districts exposed to more violence than other parts of Sweden are a huge problem that cannot be solved without a long-term plan (Sunnemark, 2023). To what extent the architecture of the districts and their physical layout influences these statistically measurable disadvantages is a recent debate in media and politics. Eighteen out of nineteen so-called vulnerable areas are functionalist districts (Isitt, 2022).

The context chapter for this master thesis will analyse the district of Biskopsgården and describe the current social situation. The physical layout of the district will give an introduction into Biskopsgården to understand the context of the design project at the end of this master thesis.

## *Biskopsgården*

The district of Biskopsgården is located on the Northern side of the river Göta Älv in Hisingen, the Northern part of Gothenburg. The approximately 30.000 inhabitants live about twenty minutes by tram from the city centre of Gothenburg. The district stretches between two ridges in North-South direction forming an interesting landscape with huge height differences. As seen on the map on page 11 the main transportation lane for trams, buses and cars - Sommarvädersgatan - follows the valley in North-South-direction. The built part of Biskopsgården takes up approximately 2.4 km<sup>2</sup> of land with a small industrial district in the South and mostly housing placed in between green areas in the rest of the district. The district is about 600 metres wide from East to West and 4000 metres long in South-North direction.

Biskopsgården was built mainly during the so-called “Miljonprogrammet” or Million Program during the nineteen sixties and -seventies in order to counteract the housing crisis. The fast and revolutionary building plans were also implemented in many districts around the country. There are several other districts in Gothenburg with similar city planning ideals like Bergsjön, Kortedala, Tynnered and Angered that partly face similar problems as Biskopsgården today.

In the centre of Biskopsgården the neighbourhood of Norra Biskopsgården is located between Södra Biskopsgården in the South and Länsmansgården in the North. In the West it is connected to the nature reservoir of Svarte Mosse with a large lake and a forest that separates Biskopsgården from a large highway and the famous Volvo factory. The main traffic route on Sommarvädersgatan through Biskopsgården is its border to the East with several tram stops along it.

Norra Biskopsgården as well as the other neighbourhoods in Biskopsgården face several social and economic challenges. Until recently the whole district of Biskopsgården was classified as a “particularly vulnerable area” by the Swedish Police (Polisen, 2023). The Police defines “vulnerable areas” as geographically defined areas with systematic threats towards witnesses of crimes from some individuals that make regular police-work nearly impossible. Parallel social structures occur to some extent

that are run by a high concentration of criminals acting in the area (Polisen, 2023). Even though the whole district of Biskopsgården was re-classified as a ‘risk-area’ in 2023, meaning that the police assess Biskopsgården nowadays as safer than other “vulnerable areas”, many problems remain.

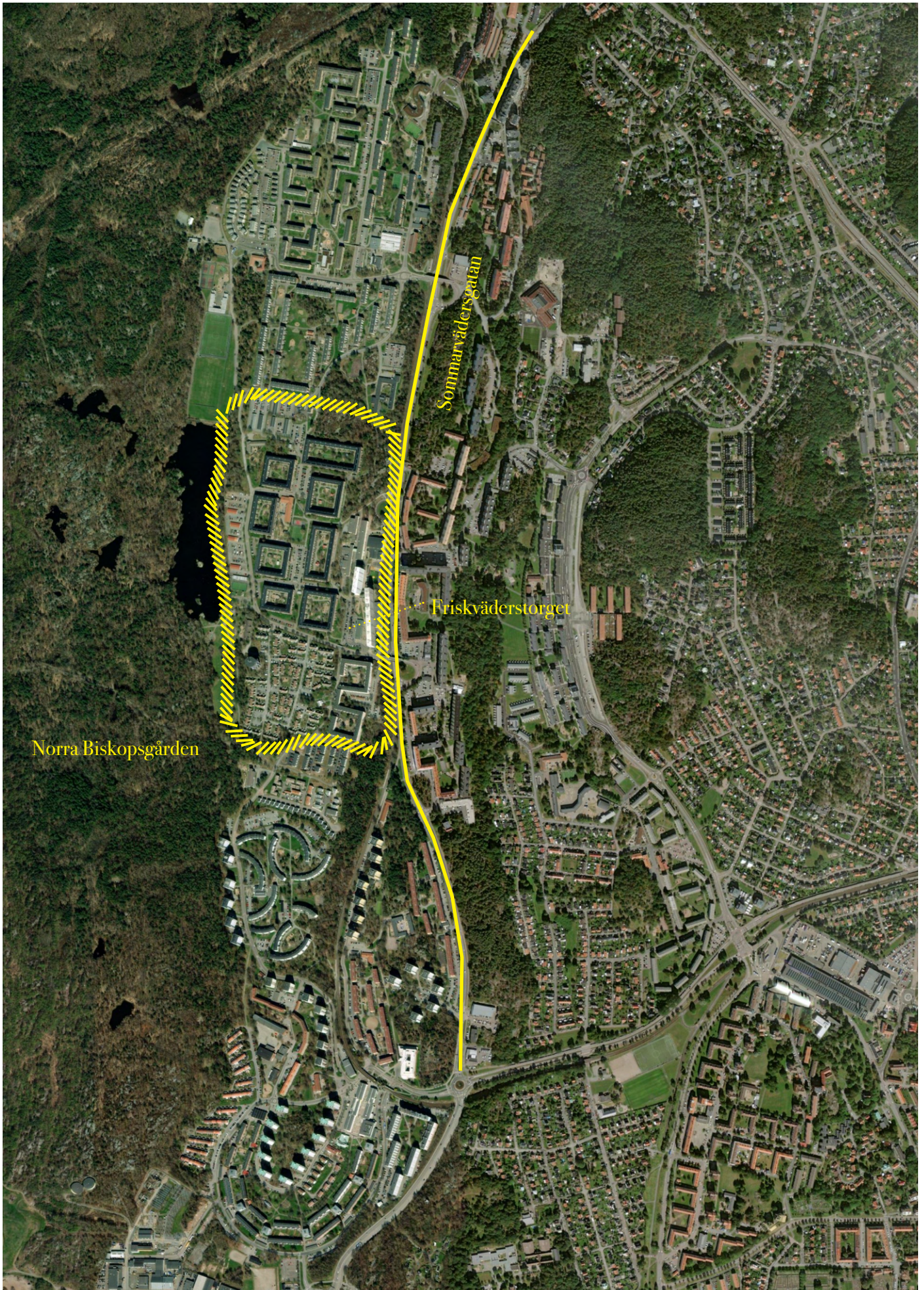
Apart from the police’s definition, there are several, partly correlated, issues in Norra Biskopsgården that have to be kept in mind to understand the district’s current social situation. The neighbourhood’s unemployment rate is 16,6 percent, more than three times as high as the average in Gothenburg (Göteborgsbladet, 2023). About 40 percent of households with children live in “relative poverty” in Västra Biskopsgården (which Norra Biskopsgården is part of) and only 65 percent of pupils from year 9 have competence for further education which is very low in comparison to the rest of Gothenburg. The remaining 35 percent are not able to continue their studies, leaving them with poor job market opportunities in the future. The percentage of children between one and five years that are not registered in one of the free, public preschools is 16 percent compared with only 5 percent on average in Gothenburg. Also, health statistics of children in Västra Biskopsgården are worse than the Gothenburg average. The percentage of children with manifest caries and overweight or obesity are also higher than the rest of Hisingen (Göteborgs Stadsbyggnadskontor, 2023). These statistically measurable disadvantages compared to other parts of the city or the country are concerning and are highlighted often both in media and politics. But apart from those negative statistics that shape the bad reputation of the whole district there are also positive aspects that are often forgotten in the often one-sided reporting about Biskopsgården.

In a survey commissioned by the city owned housing company Bostadsbolaget (2016), about one hundred residents of Norra Biskopsgården were asked about the problems of the neighbourhood from an inside perspective. The results show a very contrasting view of the neighbourhood. The two words that were used most to describe Norra Biskopsgården by its residents were “insecurity” and “community (affinity)” which shows that the social community aspect is perceived as positive, which again means that the problems shown in statistics are not the whole truth. The residents perceive their district differently from the mostly negative media coverage and common public perception (Aylward Alvelin, 2024).

This contrast shows that Norra Biskopsgården is, apart from the negative statistics, still a neighbourhood with many positive aspects. Strong social cohesion is something that is hard to show in statistics but can be seen in numbers for example by the many active associations that are located around Friskvåderstorget (Biblioteksvänner i Biskopsgården, 2023).

Still, there are many areas that residents experience as unsafe in Biskopsgården as shown in the survey by Bostadsbolaget (2016). The area that was perceived unsafe most times in the survey was Friskvåderstorget. There are 27 written complaints in the survey about negative experiences in relation to the area where most people are highlighting that they feel unsafe due to youth gangs and criminal activities, lack of meeting spaces both for elderly and children, and a general feeling of unsafety at Friskvåderstorget (Bostadsbolaget, 2016).

To conclude, the atmosphere in Biskopsgården is divided. In several personal conversations with residents and experts, I got the impression that the district is perceived better by its residents than its general reputation. Crime and the resulting feeling of insecurity is undoubtedly a huge problem that correlates with other undesirable statistics like bad school results and insufficient health care but can not overshadow the many positive aspects of Biskopsgården like good relationships of residents and an active community within the different neighbourhoods.



*Location of Norra Biskopsgården within Biskopsgården and the main transportation lane Sommarvädersgatan (Landmäteriet, 2024).*



*A threatening message sprayed on the facade of the grocery store at Friskvåderstorget. "Don't witness... greetings Norra (Biskopsgården). Shoot to kill" is a public display of the gang war that is raging in Biskopsgården between the Northern and Southern parts (GP, 2021).*

## Friskvåderstorget

Friskvåderstorget is a typical central square that was planned by the Ahlsén Brothers during later functionalism in the nineteen sixties before the start of the Million Program.

Around half of the ground area is dedicated for parking while the square is framed by Flygvådersgatan in the South, a bicycle road in front of an apartment housing block in the West, and towards the North and East by the two characteristic long and high rise buildings with eight floors each. The approximately one hundred fifty metre long high rise building stretches along the Eastern edge of the square and separates it from the tram stop at Sommarvådersgatan located about ten metres below the square. The high rise building forms a wedge together with the one floor high grocery store building that stands in the middle of the square next to the large parking spot. The layout of the two main buildings of the square opens up towards the South and creates a feeling of a long road that leads through the area rather than an open place to linger.

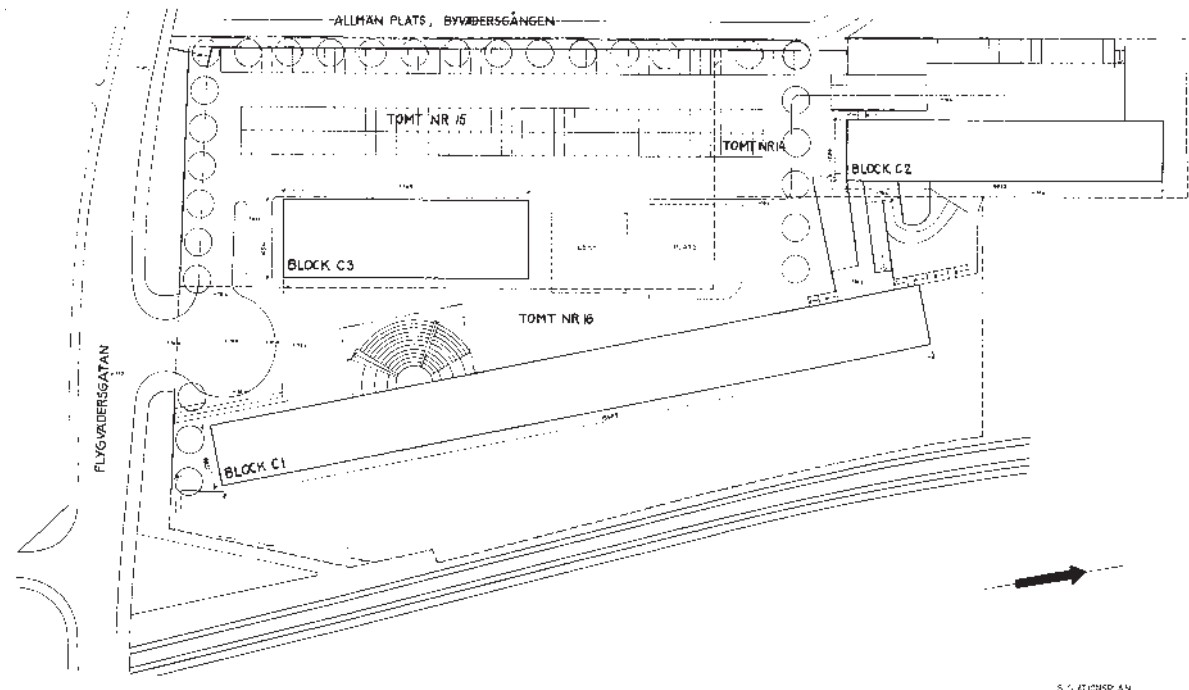
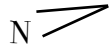
In the ground floor of the long high rise building and in the grocery store building there are several commercial stores located. In the Southern end of the building, a temporary children's library moved in a few years ago and in the Northern end a health care centre is located. Several non profit associations like a small theatre, integration help, women groups or youth clubs meet and are active around Friskvåderstorget but have difficulties to find spaces and rooms to hold their meetings (Föreningar i Biskopsgården, 2021).

Friskvåderstorget changed a lot since it was built. The grocery store building used to be divided into several smaller stores and towards Flygvådersgatan in the South there used to be a small street food stand. In a small gap in the mountain that is located under the long high rise building in the East, a small amphitheatre was placed. The small scene in the basement of the long high rise building used to be the entrance to a community meeting room for residents of the neighbourhoods of Norra Biskopsgården.

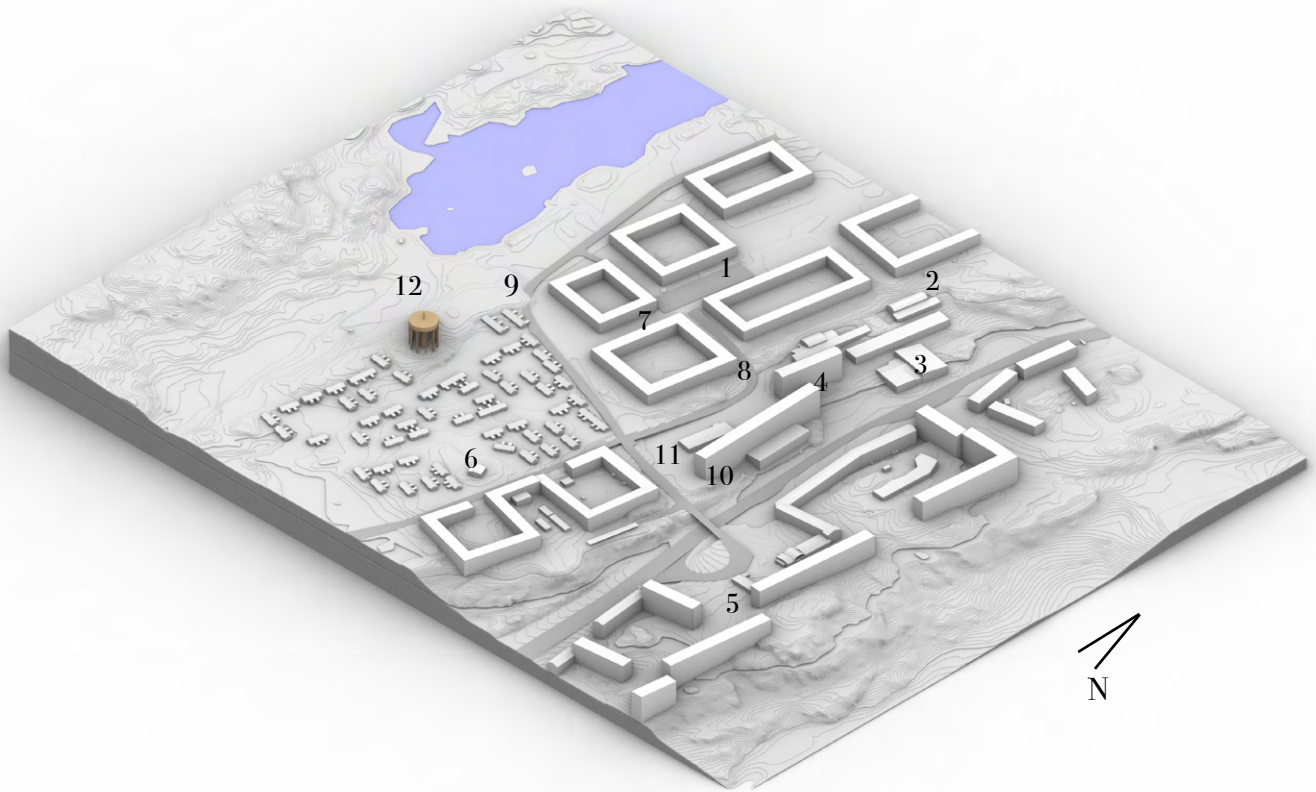
The problems of insecurity culminate around Friskvåderstorget. Especially in the evening and at night residents feel threatened by young people who meet and hang out at the square (Verdicchio, 2016).



*Friskvåderstorget today (Landmäteriet, 2024)*



*Original drawing of Friskvåderstorget (Stadsbyggnadsförvaltning Göteborg).*



### Meeting spaces

### Facilities

### Associations

1	Orkanen & Fixoteket	Rentable meeting space	Moving Queens
2	Studieförbundet	Facilities in ground floor of apartment building	Homework Help
3	Sjumilahallen	Local school's sports centre	Capoeira, Hill, Conde, Dock City Rollers, Ryu Dojo, Västra Hisingens Basket
4	Slottet	Small meeting space	Meeting Plays
5	Väderbodarna	Small meeting space in basement	Leisure organisation for seniors
6	Solglimten	Rentable meeting space	Moving Queens
7	Stadsmissionen	Facilities in ground floor of apartment building	City mission
8	Islamiska Kulturcentrum	Mosque in apartment building	Muslims cultural centre
9	Neutrala Ungdomsförening	Small container building at Svarte Mosse	Youth club
10	Childrens Library	located in former bank of long high rise building	Library, Night-hikers

### Outdoors

11	Friskvänderstorget	Local central square
12	Svarte Mosse	Forest with playground, lake and iconic water tower



*Cover of the catalogue from the “Libraryfriends in Biskopsgården” which maps all social associations active in Biskopsgården today.*

In the catalogue, a lot of associations claim that they do not have spaces to meet at all or that the spaces they have are insufficient even though that they are listed with a meeting space on the map on page 14. The leisure organisation for seniors for example holds its meetings in a basement at Väderbodarna that is not accessible for people with difficulties to walk or physical disabilities. In order to continue their associations the people of Norra Biskopsgården need new meeting spaces.

*Pictures on the following pages taken from Friskväderstorget on a rainy Sunday depict an empty square with poor maintenance and little attention to details (Author).*











# Method

In order to interpret the context of Biskopsgården, a historical analysis of societal and architectural ideals of the time when it was built is presented below, which will give a better understanding of the reasons for the shape of the urban plan as it is today. The critical view on the shortcomings from the planning of districts like Biskopsgården will give an indication on how to avoid similar mistakes in the future and what changes could improve the situation.

Since the city of Gothenburg already has plans to change the physical layout of Biskopsgården the plans will also be critically analysed and described.

*”Swedish housing standards were the worst in Europe in 1900.  
Some decades later, in the end of the 1960s, the most apartments in  
the world per capita were built in Sweden.”  
(Nylander, 2018)*

Before the nineteen sixties when the plans for mass production of dwellings in order to counteract the housing crisis took form, Swedish society was in a very different state than today and life was not the same. But there are similarities between today’s housing crisis and that of the first half of the past century. A brief look at the housing situation before 1960 and the planning ideals and persons that stood behind them is necessary to understand the built environment of today. Furthermore, it is necessary to analyse the ideas of the so-called Folkhemmet and functionalism, the Swedish interpretation of the international architectural modernism, to better shape the future developments in areas like Biskopsgården in order to avoid similar mistakes in the future.

## *Historical Perspective*

During most of Swedish history the country was populated by an agrarian society. Like in many other European countries, the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century changed cities and the rural countryside as more and more people found jobs in larger industries with better salaries. Those jobs were often concentrated in larger urban areas which resulted in cities to grow in population. In the end of the eighteenth century workers demanded more rights and improved working conditions as well as health benefits which led to major political and social developments. Unions could now fight for workers rights and the social democrats grew into a political power as an advocate for the working class and due to the huge economic growth, Sweden became a richer country. But despite the improved economy and better social- and working conditions, the working class still often lived in slums with unfit housing in the crowded city centres. Along with other social reforms like the founding of unions that advocated improved working hours and health insurance, a new idea to improve the living conditions for the growing working class started to form. The revolutionising idea of the Folkhemmet (The People's Home) with social-democratic prime minister Per Albin Hanson as a main figure was born.

The idea of the Folkhemmet arose from the thought of the creation of the modern human that lived in a modern country with modern homes. The social-democrats that stood behind the Folkhemmet had in mind that the Swedish welfare state would create a country that acts like a huge family where everyone looks after each other. In order to create this modern lifestyle where residents felt better and had better health than the people of the old "fattig Sverige" (poor Sweden), the first concern was to start supplying citizens with decent accommodations.

Radical new architectural approaches influenced the shape of these accommodations. For the first time the functionality of accommodations was most important and the modern human was given an adequate environment which was visible also in the floor plans. Carefully laid out windows for optimal lighting with standardised window heights and light, functionally adapted materials created beautiful and modern apartments. New types of rooms were developed like the living room that replaced the most of the time unused "finrummet" (the fine room) for the families to gather in. Kitchens were equipped with the newest technique and had as a main function only the preparation of food. Before functionalist planning the kitchen was often used as a family room where residents also slept and spent most of the time in. This obviously had many negative health effects. Also separate bed rooms for children and parents of the family were a new thing that would change the life of the modern families (Nylander, 2018). The floor plans of the apartments were in general more carefully adapted to how the ideal modern home would function. Equality and health was central to the new thinking instead of representative layout and splendour. New technical equipment like running water, central heating and a system for garbage disposal became standard for every household.

For the city planning of the new accommodations of the Folkhemmet a lot of new land was needed. Often, the mid rise apartment buildings were placed in spacious park areas that would give the residents the feeling of living in nature while providing for natural lighting and fresh air.

In the eyes of the times leading functionalist architects all of these new principles of modern planning were inevitable which was manifested in a pamphlet that was simply called "acceptera" (accept) (Asplund et al, 1931). The only way of creating a modern environment for modern citizens was to get rid of the old ways. Architecture will change with the developing society. The changes were inevitable and functionalism was the direction. The only thing to do about these changes was to accept them, according to the authors of the manifesto.

Later during the nineteenth century, this functionalism developed into a more literal interpretation

of the word “function”. Together with the housing crisis of the mid nineteenth century the stressed situation led to a rationalisation of functionalism in order to provide modern housing for even more people that found jobs in the growing industries. Politics and industries made ambitious plans to build one million dwellings in the coming ten years during the nineteen sixties and seventies. The so-called Million Program was initiated and could only be executed by new methods of prefabrication and standardisation. Despite the common perception, the apartments built during the Million Program consisted only of one fourth of high rise buildings with more than six floors while the rest of the housing types were smaller multi family houses. About one third of the houses were on the other hand for single families. To achieve the ambitious goal of one million dwellings in a decade, the driving force behind the constructions was the creativity and boldness of the architects according to Chalmers professor emeritus Claes Caldenby (personal communication, 16 February 2024). Beside the determined politicians that orchestrated the plans, architects helped to realise the goal by social experiments and creativity. At the same time, the architects had a smaller role in the whole construction process as many important decisions about the quality and layout of buildings were left to the producers, the construction companies, that had the last word in almost all decisions (Nylander, 2018). The mass production of housing for the modern human started already in the late nineteen forties which led to a rationalisation of the carefully thought through functionalist architecture. The case study of Biskopsgården and the neighbourhood of Norra Biskopsgården including their architects show the ideas of the late and rationalised functionalistic era and can give the opportunity to learn from the historic planning.

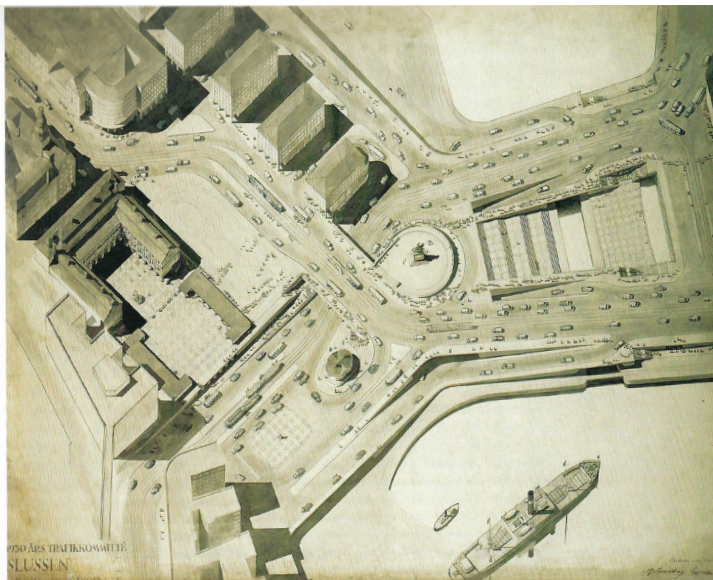
## Tage William Olsson

Tage William-Olsson, commonly known as W-O, was born 1888 in London. He started his professional career as a mining engineer in Great Britain and the US before he moved to Sweden in 1916. Soon, he started to develop an interest in architecture helping designing mining factories for his company. After studying at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm he started his own office with different smaller commissions. During his work in his office, his interest in urban planning formed and he began to write debate articles and planning smaller districts (Rudberg, 2004). After a few years of building his reputation he got in charge of the design of the central traffic node Slussen. For the project he got praise in a letter from the famous modernist LeCorbusier but also harsh critique for the heavily car centred design. The main idea of separating the traffic in lanes for motorised transportation and zones for pedestrians was formulated in an international conference where W-O participated. The problem of the utopian ideas was often the implementation of the huge traffic lanes that were thought to be at different heights than the pedestrian zones. After showing his planning skills in the project of Slussen, W-O could continue developing the ideas in new suburban districts. Even though W-O never had a driving licence himself, he was a pioneer in planning cities for the demand of the growing car industry.

The complicated street layout was seen as beautiful in itself at the time with Slussen as a prime example. The access to cars for almost the whole population and its modernising wealthier society was represented by the enormous traffic apparatus. The dynamic of the intertwining streets of Slussen was seen as a symbol of elegance and grace by many at the time and was the ideal representation of the new modern Sweden (Caldenby, 2003).

In 1943 W-O became the head of city planning in Gothenburg where he initiated several functionalist districts like Guldheden and Kortedala where the difficult terrain with great height differences made urban development too complicated before. His earlier districts were heavily influenced by the idea of neighbourhood units with all social and commercial services for its residents in close proximity. Also the separation of traffic was central to the planning with tram stops at every smaller central area or “secondary centre” (Caldenby, 2004).

His last project in Gothenburg in his time as head of city planning was the first parts of the new district of Biskopsgården, Södra Biskopsgården. In this project the contrast between the Public Real Estate



*Artistic illustration of Slussen drawn by Tage William-Olsson (Rudberg, 2004).*

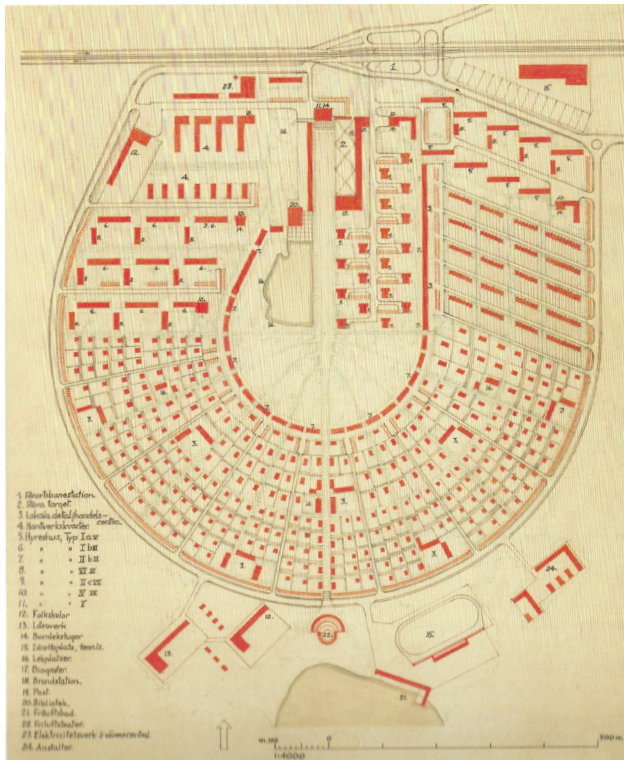
Office, whose main priority were material interests and the Planning Authority, that had the ideal interests of planning good neighbourhoods in mind, was strong. In the end, W-O had to make concessions and said about his plans in Biskopsgården that he “failed”. Of his almost poetic visions for Södra Biskopsgården of creating neighbourhoods that had both views over the sea and direct contact to spacious park areas, only few things remained in the end when his successor Koj Jonsson, who also was in charge of the later development of Biskopsgården further North, took over the plans for the district after W-O left office. But also the small quarter of Hagelstormen, that W-O himself worked with, got negative reviews in the Swedens architectural review magazine “Arkitektur”: “Here, one of Gothenburg’s post World War II:s biggest mistakes has been committed by throwing out a group of eight storey high long high rise buildings with 560 apartments on an area where half of it would have been plenty.”

Biskopsgården should have been W-Os last big urban planning project where he wanted to implement all of his ideals of terrain adaptation, separation of traffic, social meeting spaces and thin housing volumes with views over the landscapes as he invisioned his ideal neighbourhood years earlier. W-O himself saw the shortcomings of the project in lack of time, the demand for high exploitation and the many demands for car accessibility. The proud architect that always fought hard for his ideas and was not an easy person to work with was in the end a typical character of the later functionalist era. For him, streamlining of production was after all equally important as architectural esthetics and social commitment. The shortcomings of the planning of Biskopsgården were a symptom of the time (Caldenby, 2004).

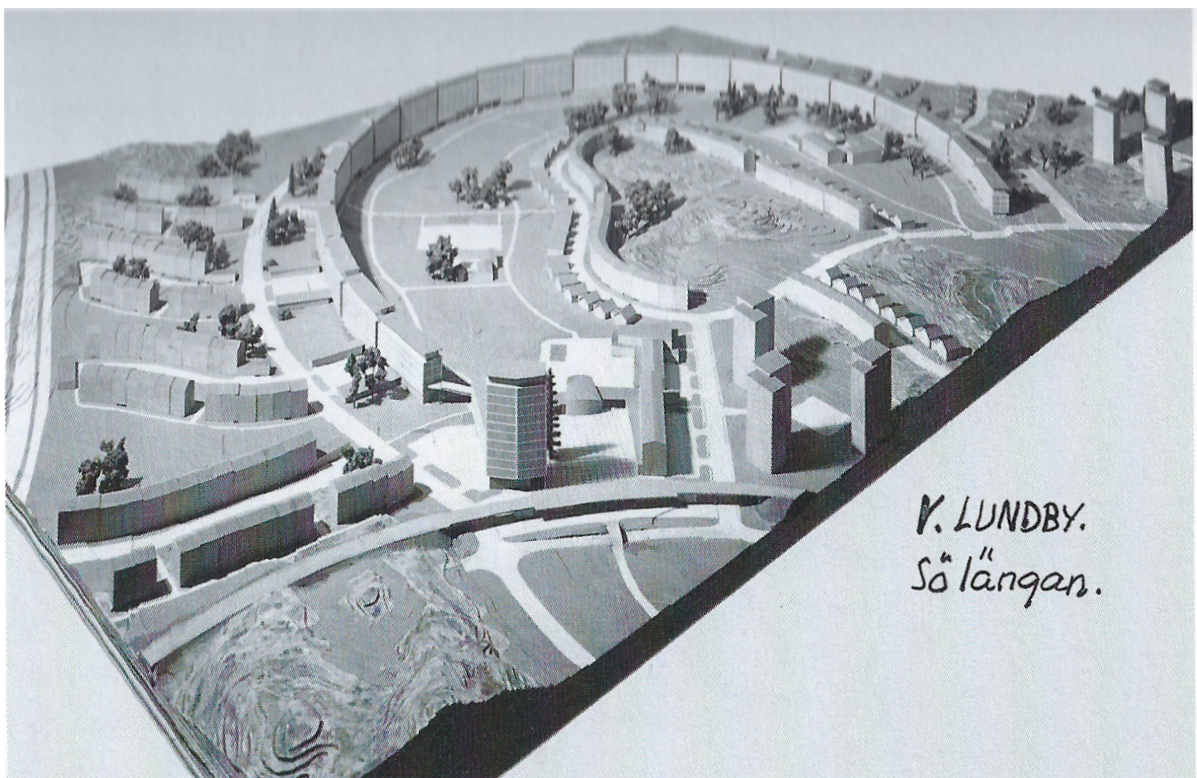


*Tage William-Olsson illustrated by Birger Lundquist (Caldenby, 2003).*





*Idea for plans of a suburban district for 10.000 inhabitants with a striking resemblance to the plans of South Biskopsgården that was later planned by Tage William-Olsson (Caldenby, 2004).*



*Modell of Tage William-Olsson's own plans for South Biskopsgården (Caldenby, 2004).*

## *The Ahlsén brothers*

During the nineteen sixties the construction of Biskopsgården extended further North. The two architects and brothers Tore and Erik Ahlsén got the commission to plan the new community centre of Norra Biskopsgården. After a period of working in their hometown Stockholm in different offices including the functionalistic Kooperativa Förbundets Arkitektkontor they founded their own office. Chalmers professor emeritus Claes Caldenby met the two brothers personally several times and depicts them as “interesting characters” in an interview about the history of Biskopsgården and the two architects (personal communication, 16 February 2024). The work at their office was described as more of a party with wild ideas, long work days and playing the violin during work hours. At the same time their careers were sustained and made possible by their traditional family values and having housewives who took care of their children and homes while the Ahlsén brothers were building their careers as architectural businessmen.

Hanna Höglund (2018) describes their style as young architects in the nineteen forties as way too “unleashed” and “undisciplined” or even “dionysian” which is why most of their buildings from their later career often feel so vital today. The Ahlséns’ architectural style can be seen as a “sensual realism” according to Claes Caldenby as he characterises the essence of the Ahlséns architecture as a rational view of designing structures that always went hand in hand with an important artistic influence (personal communication, 16 February 2024). Meeting spaces and social functions were always the core of their architecture. Their strong belief in a better society was tangible in their social designs.

Those radical ideas were also made possible because of the construction market of the time. In the nineteen sixties there were three large public housing companies in Gothenburg with determined and powerful male bosses at the top. If an architect was on good terms with those bosses, it was possible for them to build almost whatever they wanted with the help of the public housing companies. Since the Ahlsén brothers were gifted architects with a broad network, they were on good terms with the public housing companies and therefore got commissions for several housing projects in Gothenburg (Caldenby, personal communication, 16 February 2024).

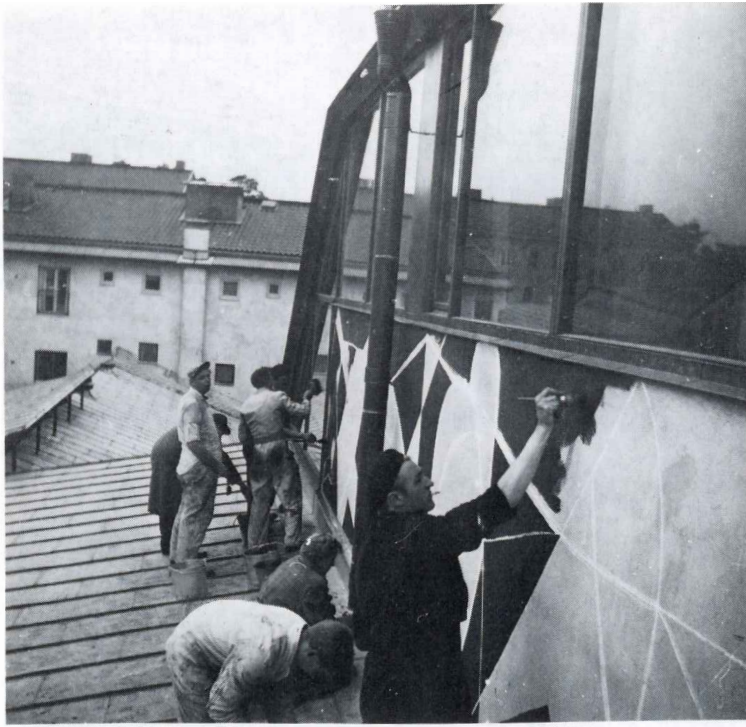
Already before the Million Program, the Ahlsén Brothers were commissioned to plan a housing complex just South of Norra Biskopsgården. “Mistralen” was planned in 1959 by the two architects and was soon nicknamed the “Banana Houses” by the residents of Biskopsgården. The three floor high building volumes that adapt to the surrounding height curves with its long banana like shapes are an excellent example of the adaptable and groundbreaking floor plans of the time. Light from two sides, a modern kitchen and a flexibility in the floor plan that at the same time had a clear distinction between the public and the private made the apartments practical, beautiful and elegant. The rounded facades were defined by the striking glazed staircases that later lost their grace in a renovation during the nineteen nineties.

Another project that the brothers planned in Biskopsgården was the central square of Norra Biskopsgården, Friskvåderstorget. The square was built a few years before the Million Program in 1958 and even before Mistralen but shows already a very strong rationalisation of the functionalist planning compared to their other projects. Therefore it is more typical for the modernism of the Million Program than the classic functionalism even though it was built earlier. The project included the grocery store building and the two long high-rise buildings that are also elegantly placed around the square according to the height differences in the landscape. One of them separates the square both physically and visually from the slope in the East towards the tram stop. In this building the Ahlsén brothers’ strong social ambitions and clever use of the terrain are noticeable. An amphitheatre was placed in a gap in the rocks along the slope, which centred around a scene that also marked the entrance for an

indoor meeting space for the residents of the building. Stores were opening up towards the square on the ground level of all three buildings. These design decisions indicate the ambition to create a community centre with both social and commercial functions. In the end, the large scale of the buildings combined with the monotone facades didn't create the social atmosphere that was desired. Along with bad maintenance and poor renovations that didn't improve the quality of the built environment, Friskvåderstorget never was the community centre that would make the neighbourhood of Norra Biskopsgården an attractive choice for new residents to move to or even for current residents to stay. In other projects from the Ahlsén brothers like the neighbourhood centre of Årsta in Stockholm these ambitions are seen in practice until today. The Square in Årsta is surrounded by an open air theatre, a library, and a community meeting place along with other small commercial functions. It functions at the same time as a meeting point for all ages and as a passage through the neighbourhood. The similarities in functions and planning ideas between the two centres are very striking but the reality of today couldn't be any more different. Claes Caldenby speculates that one reason for the decay of Friskvåderstorget was probably budget problems and the hastily planning of the buildings that ended in bad design choices (personal communication, 16 February 2024). This once again shows that the planning of a meaningful urban environment needs both skilled architects and a willingness from the municipality to allow the plans for architectural quality.



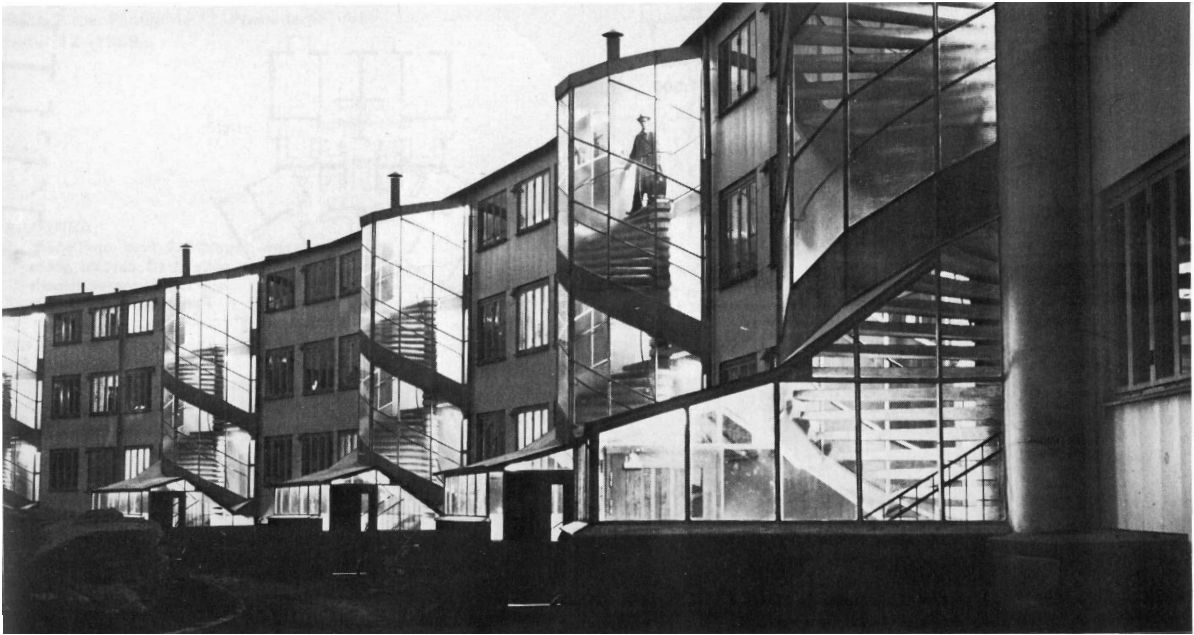
*Left: Tore Ahlsén, drawn by his brother Erik , right: Erik Ahlsén, drawn by his brother Tore. (Tidskriften Arkitektur, 1968)*



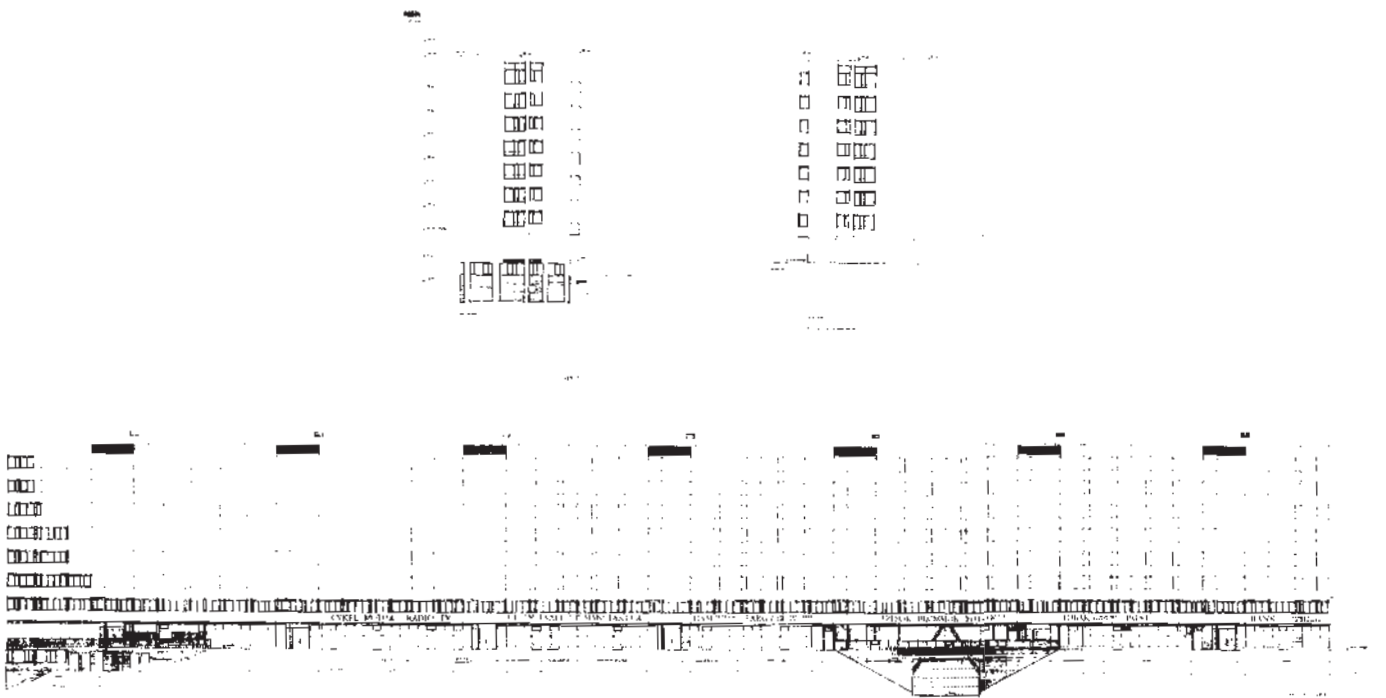
*The facad painting of the community centre of Årsta where the architects helped personally (Arkitektur, 1980)*



*View of Friskvåderstorget during the construction of Norra Biskopsgården. The amphitheater is visible between the grocery store building and the long high rise building (Flygfoto AB)*



*"Mistralen" with its glazed staircases (Arkitektur, 1980).*



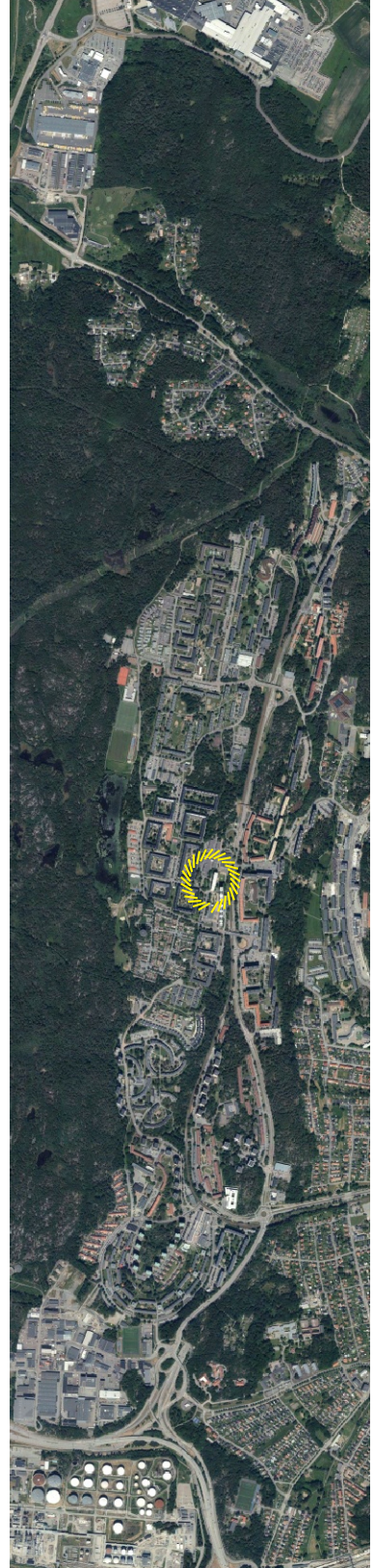
*Drawings of the facades of the long high-rise building (Stadsbyggnadsförvaltning Göteborg).*



*Flight photo from 1960*



*Flight photo from 1975*



*Flight photo from today*

*“Society’s goal for the provision of housing should be healthy, spacious, well-planned and appropriately equipped dwellings of good quality for a reasonable cost for the whole population”  
Swedish Social Democrats in 1967*

### *Functionalist planning ideals*

To build better homes for everyone in all social stratas was the idea that would change Swedish architecture and more important Swedish society in the second half of the nineteenth century. The housing crisis of the mid-nineteen hundreds led the authorities to initiate a housing program that could be rapidly implemented with the ideas of a modern country in mind. As Sweden grew into a modern society the authorities had to provide the circumstances for modern citizens as fast as possible. Along with the idea of the Folkhemmet, which goal it was to provide modern homes for everyone, came social reforms like free daycare for children and accident insurance. Technical innovations like the radio, electricity and central heating, the telephone and most importantly the automobile became accessible for every household. These social and technical reforms made information more accessible, travelling faster and in general everyday life more easy (Lundevall, 2024).

In this modern society, citizens would be able to focus on their leisure time after work instead of the struggles of everyday life like they did before those technical and social innovations drastically changed things. The ideas of the Folkhemmet concerned many aspects of Swedish society but as the name already suggests one of the most important pillars the idea built on was accomodation, or the home - “hem” in Swedish. The answer to this fast demand for modern housing was a massive production of housing that later ended in the so-called Million Program, a large public housing program implemented in 1965 that accomplished to build one million new housing units over a period of ten years.

Even though many of the buildings during the Million Program were actually provided in form of smaller single family homes and the row house was introduced as a optimal form of living during functionalism, the huge demand for new dwellings was also overcome by building new districts with mostly multi-family housing that were often placed in the suburbs outside of bigger cities. Like other new districts from the same time, Biskopsgården was planned around a few simple principles that were central to the city planning of the Folkhemmet.

The new apartment buildings in the functionalist districts were often planned on previously unused land. The buildings were placed in generous park areas so that every apartment had access to greenery while at the same time having enough sunlight and fresh air to provide for healthy living conditions. Views from the apartment were generous and carefully laid out. In Biskopsgården especially, the views of the high rising apartments are stunning. The high rise buildings that are placed on the moun-

tain ridge are overlooking the whole city of Gothenburg. The large amounts of empty space between them on the other hand created empty streets, very different from the inner city. In later functionalist planning when the car became more central to the layout of the districts, the green park areas between the buildings were often reused as parking spots. In later functionalism, the districts were therefore often planned for optimal car travel so that the layout of the buildings had to adapt to the streets for individualised motor traffic and not the other way around.

Since the new districts often required huge amounts of land, some of them were built on the periphery of cities which also brought undesired effects to the suburbs. Like in the case of Biskopsgården this resulted often in physical segregation from the city centre even though the public and private transport was carefully laid out. Essential services for everyday needs were therefore often provided in so-called community centres. Smaller shops for everyday-errands were accessible directly in those community centres as well as healthcare, elementary schools and daycare for children. For everything else that wasn't necessary for daily life, the big city would be accessible by car or public transport within a short travel time.

One of the original city planning ideas was to provide so-called ABC-districts, where everything from labour as in "Arbete", housing as in "Boende" and a centre "Centrum" for everyday errands was accessible. During the later years of rational planning this rather complex city planning ideal was simplified and the centres often only provided the bare minimum of service while workplaces were located outside of the districts even for those who didn't work in the industries.

Also traffic was thought more functional in the new districts. Radically new methods of traffic planning had a huge influence in the layout of Biskopsgården as a functionalist district. In the nineteen sixties a research group at Chalmers worked on improving traffic safety while finding a way to provide fast travels by car. The SCAFT-model (Stadsbyggnad, Chalmers, Arbetsgruppen för Trafiksäkerhet) promoted the separation of modes of transport. The separation intended that pedestrians and cyclists within the neighbourhoods shouldn't cross motorised streets and resulted in a tree like street network instead of the usual grid structure of naturally grown cities. The community centre and schools were then logically placed in the middle. The problem of noise pollution was often taken care of by spacious green areas or parking spots between the streets and the apartments. The main traffic lane - in Biskopsgårdens case Sommarvädersgatan - could be crossed by bridges and tunnels. In the end, the planning efforts could therefore improve traffic safety while providing fast routes for cars with few distractions. (GP, Nylander, 2018)

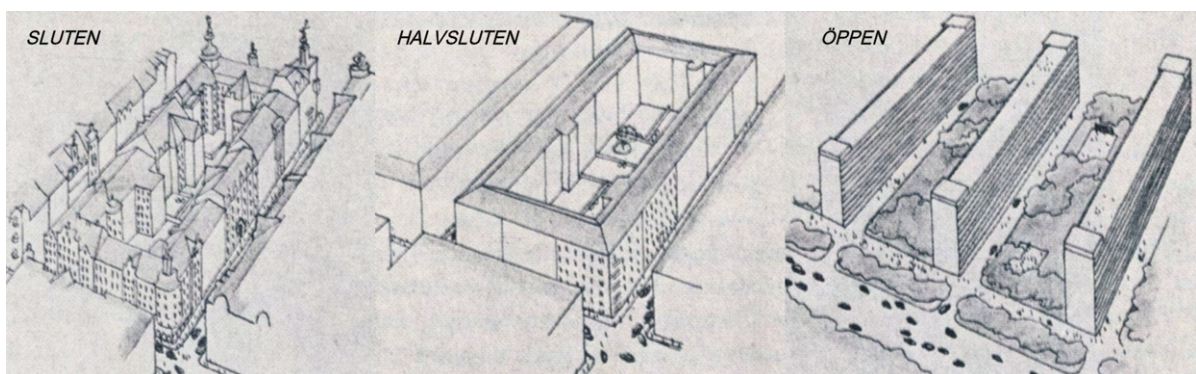
Another important factor for the development of functionalistic planning was the standardisation of the construction sector. Similar to the new methods of production in the car industry, individual building components were prefabricated and assembled on site. The method allowed quicker and cheaper constructions that were needed to answer to the demand for new modern homes. With the prefabrication of the housing production a rationalisation of the functionalism in architecture came along. The organisation of the production of the buildings was mainly possible because of the large companies that were responsible for the whole building process. Turnkey contractors (totalentreprenad) had control over both smaller and larger details which often were driven by profit and in the end had negative impact on the quality of the buildings (Nylander, 2018).

The fast methods of production allowed less time to plan the large projects giving the architects more room for experimentation in the layout of the new districts. At the same time the standardisation was very limiting for the creative process and the new role of the powerful constructors took over the influence of the architect as a decision maker. The limited time frame for example also influenced the lay-



out of the districts. During the so-called “rekord åren” (Record Years) of the Million Program some districts were planned so that huge rails for cranes were installed first that could easily lift the prefabricated elements into place. Especially the architectural details that made the buildings of the earlier functionalist periods so vivid and dignified were often rationalised due to time-, cost- and physical limitations. This shows that construction of the late functionalistic era aimed at providing as much housing as possible without regards to the social qualities of the new districts. In Biskopsgården this is especially visible. The construction started during the nineteen fifties in the South and expanded North. In South Biskopsgården the neighbourhood units are provided with a centrum at Vårväderstorget and the housing is mostly carefully planned after the functionalist ideals even though there already were significant issues in the planning as described earlier. In the middle of Biskopsgården the rationalisation is more visible for example at Friskvåderstorget’s long high rise building and the rationalised buildings around the square. In the Northern part of Länsmansgården that were built during the Million Program the neighbourhood centre has already become only a small shopping centre without social ambitions. Huge parking garages dominate the Northern parts of Biskopsgården showing the focus shifted from the social utopia of early functionalistic planning to providing housing only with minimal service.

The standardisation of the building process was exactly what the architects of the functionalist era also promoted in their manifest “acceptera” from 1931 in order to bring the ideals of the modern human in every home.



*City planning ideals presented in the manifesto “acceptera”. From the old closed blocks to the open housing volumes (Asplund, 1931).*

Especially during the Million Program the fast and expansionist methods lead to the wished outcomes of providing modern homes to everyone. The profit oriented way of constructing the new districts came along with many foreseeable and unforeseeable shortcomings that partly created today's problems in districts from the mid nineteenth century including Biskopsgården.

*“Riv Skärholmen!” (Demolish Skärholmen)  
Lars-Olof Franzén in 1968*

### *Functionalist shortcomings*

Biskopsgården was planned to optimise life in a modern society. Fast and convenient travels to the jobs in the big industries like the shipyard or the Volvo factory and a life without unnecessary distractions in the leisure time were the main priorities in the thinking of the initiators. Apart from the positive effects of the modern lifestyle that the planners achieved, these ideas also had many negative effects.

The districts often created dull environments as they were mainly designed for the working residents that could recover from a hard day of work without distractions in their leisure time. The main priority of the later functionalist planning was to provide for the well being of the residents that worked during the day while the rest of the families or people with different lifestyles were forgotten or purposely left out of the planning. The success of the industries was prioritised over the well being of the individuals in different living situations. This general critique from the left was already openly discussed during the time of construction (Hallemar, 2018).

These priorities resulted often in districts that had two totally different characters during the work day and the afternoon. Especially for women in the traditional family, the functionalist planning put them into a very isolated position. They often had more free time due to modern machines and children daycare but were trapped in the segregated and dull districts that were not intended for spending time other than recovering from work and leisure.

When more and more women began to enter the labour market, these problems accelerated and the already empty streetscape became lifeless during the day. Like other functionalist districts, Biskops-

gården became a place where people only stayed the night and did not spend time in the streetscape during day time. Olle Bengtzon concluded this phenomenon already in 1953 as he described the functionalist district of Skärholmen as a “dead sleeping city” (Död sovstad) (Hallemar, 2018).

Already during the building phase of the Million Program, debater Lars-Olof Franzén had strong opinions about the prestige project Skärholmen which can be seen as a general critique of the fast expanding, rationalised functionalist suburban districts. He describes the centre of Skärholmen as “hostile to human: function - motorist, function - consumerist; but no room for the whole human” (Franzén, 1968).

Traffic planning in the modernist districts also contributed to the dull streetscapes. The separation of traffic that improved safety and kept the noise pollution from the street at a minimum had many obvious disadvantages. Huge amounts of space within the neighbourhoods were used for the wide streets and parking spots needed to maintain the fast and easy travel. The streetscape appeared wide and empty and the many pedestrian tunnels and bridges created a feeling of insecurity.

The general critique of this rationalised functionalist planning continued in a debate about the beauty of the built environment that even today is very frequently discussed. The method of cheap modular production often resulted in deadpan facades and brutalistic high rising building blocks. That image of high rising concrete volumes in otherwise empty landscapes is still today what people have in mind when they think of districts from the functionalist era. In the case of Biskopsgården this critique is only partly applicable since most of the buildings are made out of bricks and the scale is often not higher than four floors. Only around the more central areas of Vårväderstorget and Friskvåderstorget the building height varies with few higher buildings close to the public transport stops. This careful layout of the building volumes that decrease in height and scale further away from the centres is often forgotten in the general discussion about Biskopsgården’s historic architecture as well as the more classic brick facades of the Northern parts of Biskopsgården. Nevertheless, the human scale in the design of Biskopsgården and other functionalist districts comes not only from its building heights and their materials. Jan Gehl (2010) argues that cities have to be defined by their quality at eye level. Apart from the ability to recognise faces which is crucial for life to thrive in public spaces and difficult to achieve in the upper floors of higher buildings, also details in the layout of the lower apartment blocks contribute to a human centred design at eye level. Also Hanson et al. (2022) argue that for example huge parking spots and housing entries that face away from the streets contribute to a less lively streetscape. Those streetscapes are thereby less human friendly. That is unfortunately often the case in Norra Biskopsgården where the streets are separated from the buildings by parking spots and housing entries facing into the yards block structure of the apartment buildings. This leads to the often empty streets with perceived insecurity.

Apart from the discussions about the more technical aspects of functionalism that contribute to the negative impressions of districts like Biskopsgården, also economic and social changes led to developments in Biskopsgården that only partly could have been predicted.

Along with the economic crisis of the nineteen seventies that came before Biskopsgården even was fully built, relocation of many residents started. Claes Caldenby (1986) argues that this has several reasons. In the beginning mainly people from outside of Gothenburg with little local connection moved to Biskopsgården and other districts that were segregated from the centrum. While locals wanted to stay close to the city centre in other new functionalist areas like Frölunda or Södra Guldheden, outsiders rather moved to the more segregated districts. When jobs started to disappear due to the recession, the same people were the first to move away from the segregated parts again leaving

the districts even more empty. Locals on the other hand stayed in their newly built districts closer to the city centre even through the economically difficult years. The problem of Biskopsgården and other functionalist suburbs that were built with a rather rational view on providing housing for the workers of the industries was that the people had little reasons to stay. Since the districts consisted mainly of housing only, residents had difficulties interacting with people from other neighbourhood units. The economic life of the community centres suffered double under the recession with consumers that spend less money and less residents in the area in general. Maintenance of the empty districts was therefore too expensive and therefore often rationalised again.

Another factor for the decaying suburbs were misjudged priorities during the planning process. As mentioned earlier, the capitalist view of the exploited workers could also be seen in the planning itself. Björn Andersson and Sören Olsson (1986) describe in the research report “Att förändra förorten” (To change the suburbs) that there were two planning-ideals for suburbs at the time: the neighbourhood ideal and the city-life ideal.

“Neighbourhood districts” are planned around social units with focus on people’s connections to each other which results in social control.

In districts planned with a “City-life” ideal in mind on the other hand there is a clear distinction between the private and the public life as well as a bigger focus on their resident’s anonymity, freedom and dynamics.

Biskopsgården is a mixture of the two ideals as especially in Norra Biskopsgården clearly neighbourhood-ideal inspired housing blocks are still in use today and many social meeting areas were planned from the beginning while the anonymity of the entirely commercial community centres and the emptiness of the dull streetscape are signs of a more city-life oriented design.

Andersson and Olsson (1986) claim that many districts were planned with City-life ideals due to the developing welfare state. The strong welfare state could take care of the individual instead of a functioning collective. Therefore, the individual doesn’t depend as much on neighbourhood relationships anymore and can live a more anonymous life in the urban environment. Other factors that influenced Biskopsgårdens “City-Life” ideal was the economics of the large building projects as it is way more expensive to build social meeting areas, especially in rationalised, prefabricated and fast planned housing blocks. In the end the rationalised functionalism was a pragmatic answer to a severe housing shortage and to provide for modern homes. In this pragmatism the “neighbourhood qualities” seemed to be less important in order to provide enough apartments with good quality for everyone. Unfortunately, those new modern apartments were placed in a dull City-life environment.

Garden Cities and some later modernistic districts are however dominated by the ideas of the social importance of a functioning neighbourhood which stresses the need for connection between neighbours and their dependence on each other. In the so-called New Towns, which were a popular city planning ideal during the nineteen forties, a small number of neighbourhood units were planned around a common centre. In order to counteract the social shortcomings of the dull suburbs of the time, the goal for the New Towns was to provide for shops, meeting spaces, social services, culture and pleasure (Nylander, 2018). Since Norra Biskopsgården is dominated by housing blocks with large yards and a community centre that at least in the beginning was a flourishing hub for social activities it is clear to see that the good relationship between neighbours is at least something the planners had in mind. Today’s many active associations in Norra Biskopsgården are a sign of that neighbourhood planning with the ideas of the Garden City. One of the main failures in the planning of the district was consequently the malfunctioning of its centre.

Friskvåderstorget is therefore a brilliant example of this conflict between economic pressure, the exploitive view on the working class and the need to create functioning neighbourhoods. Planned by the skilled architects that already demonstrated their capability of designing a functioning community centre in Åstra, Stockholm and a community centre in Örebro, Friskvåderstorget is today a badly maintained square with positive but also many negative aspects, regardless of what the architects originally intended.

A symbol for this hastily planning with a tight budget and high ambitions that resulted in bad implementation in reality is the amphitheatre at Friskvåderstorget. After a few years of ignorance and misuse the structure was closed and filled with earth. Also the once vivid store building with several different small shops were replaced by one rather anonymous supermarket. A small street food-sausage shop in the South of Friskvåderstorget disappeared and the building was torn down. Today, only the shops in the long high rise building remain. This shows on the other hand that not always only the hastily planning was the reason for the partly dysfunctioning of the neighbourhood's community centre today but also other rather unforeseeable reasons like the economic crisis in the nineteen seventies that forced stores to close as well as administrative errors like bad maintenance and poor renovations (Caldenby, 1984).

Complementary to the already dull concrete atmosphere of Friskvåderstorget is the giant parking spot that takes approximately half of the groundspace of the square. This relic of the SCAFT-era is unnecessarily large for today's needs and creates more insecure space and dark backsides on a square that has problems with residents feeling insecure (Bostadsbolaget, 2016).

From an urban planning perspective Friskvåderstorget is placed strategically in the middle of Biskopsgården and could be an important connection between the North and the Southern part of the whole district. At the moment, Friskvåderstorget is cut off by the busy street of Sommarvådersgatan to the East as the terrain makes it hard to reach the square. Furthermore, it is badly accessible by walking from other areas outside of the neighbourhood. Therefore, it only serves as an attraction point for residents who live in close proximity. Also the access by public transport is made unnecessarily hard with a small staircase and a long ramp as the only walking paths to overcome the height difference from the tram tracks to the square. Overall, the traffic situation around Friskvåderstorget is still too focused on the individual motorised traffic and has to be thought over.

The intentions of the SCAFT-planning were to provide traffic safety which it achieved. The problem is that the favouring of motorised vehicles made the intended community centre badly accessible by walk and contributed to the dull environments by counting in important space in the neighbourhood for huge parking spots and streets with fast motorised traffic.

All in all the square of Friskvåderstorget is still today an important part of the neighbourhood but has failed as a community centre.

Therefore, it is important to be critical to the functionalist planning despite all its successes and to understand the shortcomings of the past in order to avoid similar mistakes in future developments. A better physical environment is possible only with a rational perspective on the status quo and the historical planning. At the same time a clear vision for how Biskopsgården is imagined in the future is necessary. The new zoning plan for Biskopsgården is a good start that needs a vivid discussion.

*The problems of today's neighbourhood can be counteracted by providing a real community centre with focus on social coherence. The goal has to be to give both the neighbourhood around the square a real area to meet and to attract outsiders from all over Biskopsgården and maybe even Gothenburg to end segregation within Biskopsgården and from the city.*



*Cover of the booklet presenting the new zoning plan (Stadsbyggnadsnämnden, 2023)*

## *Program for Biskopsgården*

Today's situation in Norra Biskopsgården together with the historical investigation including its shortcomings and planning ideals imply that changes to the physical layout of Biskopsgården have to be made. A philosophical discussion about what future to imagine for Biskopsgården can help to create such changes. Today's challenges are very different from the problems of the time of the functionalist era that, despite the many shortcomings, reached its goal of providing modern homes for everyone. Today, life is becoming ever faster with technology arguably evolving even more significantly than in the middle of the last century. On the brink of new social reforms like the right to work from home, basic social income, new modes of air transportation and artificial intelligence the question has to be asked how the built environment will be influenced by these changes and vice versa. The spirit of the nineteen sixties was brave and tackled the innovations and social reforms with radical new ideas of functionalist architecture. Not everything worked out and of the things that didn't work out many could have arguably been avoided with a different focus. That focus was in my opinion too much on the interests of the profitability (stordrift) than on the actual well being of the individual. The new zoning plan of the city of Gothenburg that redraws the layout of Biskopsgården is the closest it comes to a vision of the future that tries to tackle urgent problems with long term development in currently socially-economically weaker districts. Cities in the future will face, besides the almost unforeseeable technical innovations, social challenges and trends that are visible already today. Loneliness and anonymity in urban environments are today huge problems and will probably increase with developing technology (Klintstedt, 2019). Democracy is questioned for the first time by too many since World War II, also as a result of the shift of the discussion platforms to the digital (Wikforss, 2024). As discussed earlier, gang violence with increasing gun deaths (Sunnemark, 2023) is a growing problem in Sweden despite the many efforts from politics and society. Many of those trends in society can be approached with a more social architecture where people can connect more with each other in real life. As shown later in this report, the City of Gothenburg sees those problems but rather than learning from the past, the new zoning plan is once again dominated by a city life ideal that will do good for investors and with a great chance bad for the current and future residents.

Similar to the period of rationalised functionalism, private building companies today are not setting the well being of the building's future residents first but often their own profits. The municipalities like the city of Gothenburg in the case of Biskopsgården are often willing accomplices since they also save valuable tax money if they can let private investors build the environment as Claes Caldeby described the situation in an interview (personal communication, 16 February 2024).

This economic pressure also leads to shortcomings in today's private building sector. One of them is once again the quality of the buildings.

The quality of buildings is hard to measure and hard to find statistical evidence for. But dissatisfaction-movements like "Yimby" (Yes, in my backyard) or "Arkitekturupproret" (Architecture uprising) for example are evidence that many people are unhappy with contemporary new buildings. Even if the movements cannot really grasp what exactly is wrong with the building industry and are promoting often implausible, backward thinking solutions, such as advertising for building ideals and thereby building standards from the eighteen hundreds, their critique of today's building industry remains understandable given the above presented shortcomings and social consequences.

The economy of new buildings that often stand in the way of bringing real change to "vulnerable areas" are complicated and it is easy to criticise the construction sector for building cheap and profit orientated without naming solutions. But profit oriented projects often lead to unsatisfying outcomes both in the historic and contemporary perspective. Even today there are many examples of new build-

ings and districts like Nya Kvillebäck where the quality of the neighbourhood was influenced by economic pressure and in the end created bad housing environments. Considering that one of the main reasons for the shortcomings of the Million Program was the bad quality of the buildings that were mass produced and hastily planned and laid out, quality of the build environment matters. To avoid similar mistakes and to build more sustainable and long lasting buildings in the future, politicians, private investors and architects have to seek alternative ways of creating better neighbourhoods.

But there are also other similarities today to the problems that initiated the Million Program. A massive housing shortage in Gothenburg is met with construction of large amounts of new dwellings. Overcrowding in the socio-economic weaker parts of the cities like Norra Biskopsgården is once again an issue and similar to the nineteen sixties education and health is worse in those districts and neighbourhoods.

Crime and preserved insecurity are huge problems but long term solutions to those urgent problems are often missing. The current Swedish government's plans for their term in office doesn't include long term solutions to the housing shortage. Nor does it even acknowledge the fact that the physical environment has an impact on the vulnerable neighbourhoods and rather focuses on short term solutions like more police and higher punishment for criminals (Tidö-avtalet, 2022). The city of Gothenburg on the other hand takes these problems seriously and has a long term approach to the situation. The city has the obligation to influence the building process which they are currently doing with the new zoning plan to redevelop the district of Biskopsgården with a lot of new housing which intends to improve the living condition in the neighbourhoods and their bad reputation. This is a great sign that could really state an example for how to change the negative trend in "vulnerable areas". As shown later, the plans are not more than mostly empty words but the fact that there is at least a plan is a beginning for a discussion and the reason for the choice of the case study in this Master Thesis.

A solution to the named problems of districts like Biskopsgården could be to provide spaces where people can connect to each other. Increasing loneliness in society together with the anonymity of the growing city with new people moving in while current residents being possibly forced out of the neighbourhoods require places where old and new residents can meet and connect to each other. This is important to both counteract the increasing anonymity in society and to avoid conflicts with old and new residents. Similar to the mid-nineteenth century, technical innovations are developing fast. The future holds challenges of developing technologies and division of society not alone in politics. A more social architecture can be the answer. A look back of the ambitions of the functionalist era can help to avoid mistakes on the way. This social architecture doesn't have to reinvent the wheel but has to focus on the essentials of functioning neighbourhoods first.

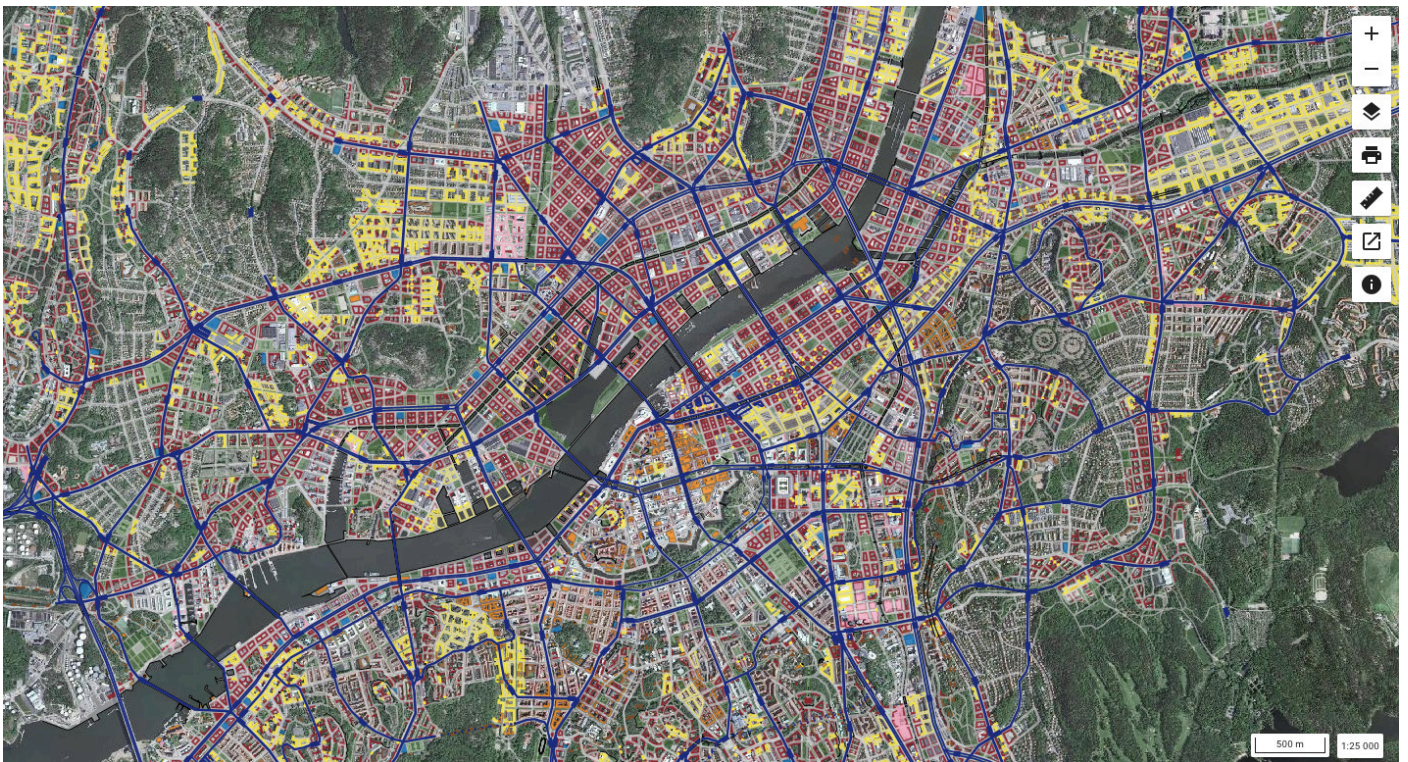
The life in many functionalist districts did not work out as it was intended and the current ideas of densification are at risk of repeating many mistakes in a similar way. That is why the conflict between profitability and sociality has to be led by the municipality. If the city of Gothenburg first provides functioning neighbourhoods by building social spaces, consequently also housing prices will go up and new projects will be also profitable. A redevelopment of the functionalist districts like in Biskopsgården and possibly also in other districts should be more a reinvention of the existing built environment rather than a complete make-over.

What is rarely discussed in the demand for new housing is the question if there is even a need for the planned amount of new dwellings. The Million Program showed that the demand for new housing was satisfied before the last buildings in Länsmansgården were even built which created foreseeable problems from the very beginning (Nylander, 2018). Today, private building companies are paying



residents to move into their newly built apartments in other big Nordic cities as it is hard to find residents who are willing to move into the fresh new neighbourhoods (Kurki, 2024). In the following it will be discussed on a more technical level why the current plans do not significantly contribute to increasing the life quality of the neighbourhoods of Biskopsgården with focus on Norra Biskopsgården and why it is important to build social spaces.

*In a radio interview in 2012 a representative of the municipal Älvstranden said that he thinks that those who moved to Nya Kvillebäcken would be “more modern people”. (Andersson, 2015)*



*Screenshot from the plans for an “extended inner city” that is supported by officials in Gothenburg (Fastighetskontoret, 2023)*

## *Future developments*

The city of Gothenburg plans to redevelop Biskopsgården into what they call a “Garden City” with inspiration from other districts in Gothenburg like Kungsladugård and Örgryte (Tollgerdt, 2023). An example project for the development is the Parisian district of Le Plessis-Robinson, a former modernistic district planned by a communist government in the nineteen forties and now redeveloped into a classicist district. The ideas are supported by many local politicians and officials including some of them with close ties to the Yimby-movement - an internet forum that promotes a rather radical approach to city planning. The main idea of Yimby is to rebuild Gothenburg into a walkable city with a high density of buildings in block-structure with enclosed yards.

The internet forum calls the concept “extended inner city” (utvidgad innerstad) with the aim to complement the existing built environment or replace it all over the city with mid rise, dense building volumes. The density of the new city seeks to create more walkable, less car-dependent traffic which at the same time saves new land from being exploited. To achieve those plans of a dense and walkable city the group promotes diverse functions (blandstad) in the buildings around the different areas with commercial functions in the ground floor (levande bottenvåning) (Höstmad, 2012).

This urban consolidation makes sense in some parts of the city and is certainly necessary in consideration of today’s housing shortage.

A first experiment for this densification project is the “Program for Biskopsgården”, a new zoning plan that has been discussed frequently in the local news and was one of the inspirations for the case study of Biskopsgården for this master thesis. Besides the proposed transformation of Biskopsgården into a “Garden City” with the archetype of Le Plessis-Robinson in mind the plans include the densification of the whole district.

Despite the good will of transforming Biskopsgården for the better, the plans leave many question marks. One of the main issues of this zoning plan is that it does not seem to take the historical background of Biskopsgården into serious consideration. Given that the historic planning is heavily criticised in the report, the circumstances of how Biskopsgården came into being should play a major role in redeveloping it in order to learn from the past shortcomings. In an interview with Martin Clase, one of the architects involved in the zoning plan, he confirmed that the historic analysis did not play a big role in the redevelopment of Biskopsgården.
















Nevertheless, the zoning plan takes urgent problems into account in its analysis. The analysis of today’s problems in Biskopsgården is very convincing and addresses the main issues that residents struggle with. The actual plans on the other hand seem to ignore its own analysis. The risk that the zoning plan becomes a simple gentrification of Biskopsgården with no remark for the current residents is high considering the placement of the proposed buildings in the program and its lack of consideration of the existing social coherence. A striking example of this is the mentioning of a new library that is never shown in the actual plans while over 4000 new dwellings are placed between the existing buildings. The zoning plan’s own accurate analysis seems to be nothing more than empty words or are just simply ignored (Stadsbyggnadsnämnden, 2023).

In today’s Biskopsgården there are challenges that sound similar to the arguments that inspired the Million Programme. One of the most striking similarities is the housing shortage and the resulting overcrowding which reaches its highest level in Norra Biskopsgården (Bostadsbolaget, 2016). Apart from the bad reputation of Biskopsgården, the housing shortage is one of the main arguments for the urban densification of the zoning plan. Housing expert Ola Nylander (2023) also acknowledges the housing shortage in Gothenburg but warns to neglect the building standards of today in order to reach a higher density. Especially in Biskopsgården the standards have to be preserved and respected

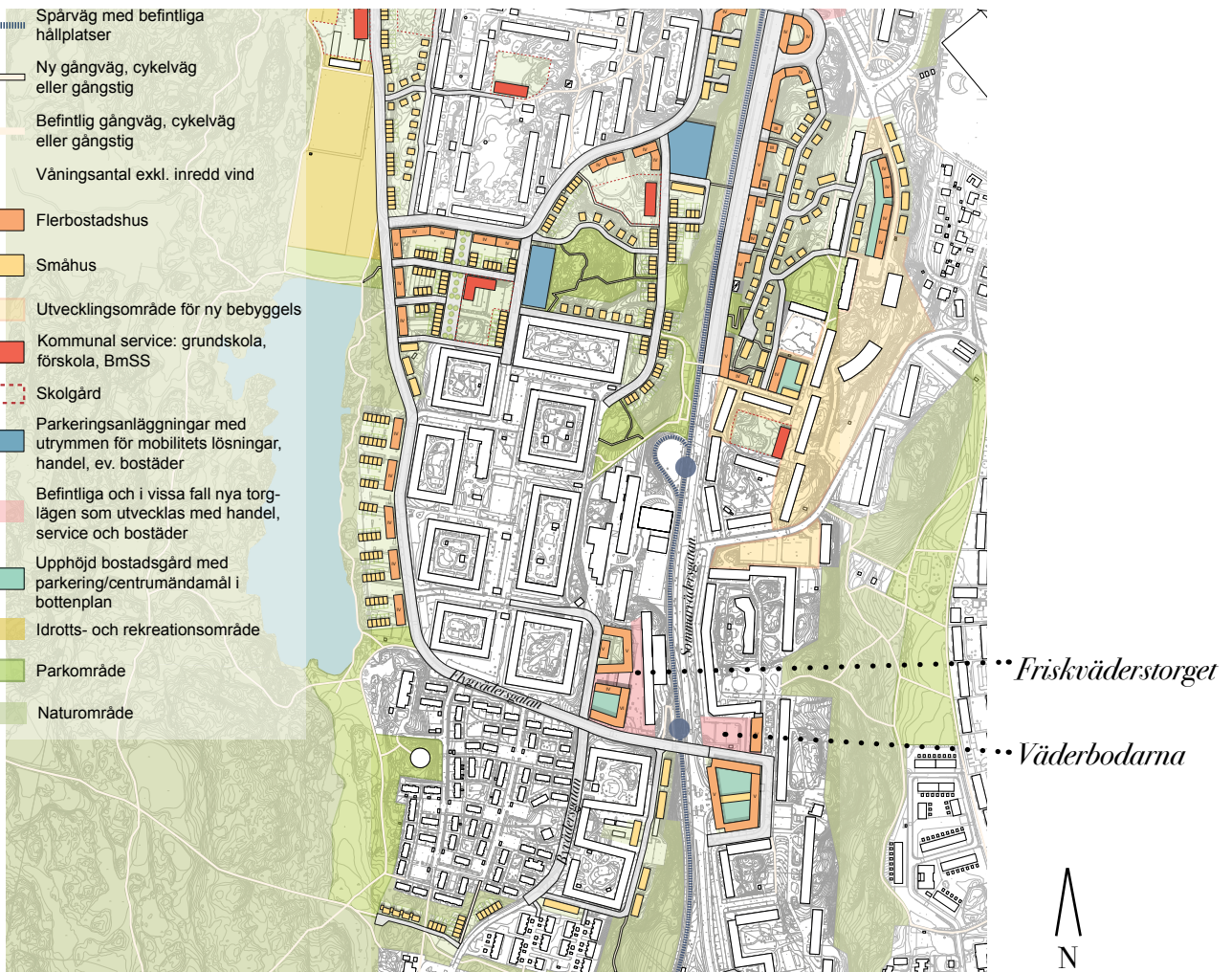
in new buildings. Floor plans of the functionalist era in Biskopsgården but also in other existing role model areas like Kungsladugård created apartments with a lot of light and nature around. These ideas are at risk in the urban consolidation plans. He also stresses that new building blocks that are higher than 5 floors will have difficulties to achieve the same qualities. All that seems to be ignored in the zoning plan as new high rise buildings in the whole district are planned. Luckily, in Norra Biskopsgården the zoning plan provides for new buildings only on existing parking spots which is reasonable and will not disturb the existing buildings too much. The only exception is Friskvåderstorget where the new apartment blocks will make it difficult to achieve today's building standards due to the surrounding high buildings. In an answer to the debate article of Ola Nylander, architect Lukas Memborn and politician and head of the Gothenburg's building council Johannes Hutter who both have close connections to the Yimby movement and were involved in the new zoning plan, defend the densification plans. They argue that the quality of the housing is not as important as its quantity right now (Hulter, Memborn, & Nylander 2022). This reasoning sounds a lot like the origins of the Million Program whose heritage they fight against frequently in discussions and articles. But this is not the only thing that rhymes with the arguments for constructing the large amount of dwellings in the nineteen sixties. Another important thing that the zoning plan neglects is the fact that the new dwellings will not solve the problem of overcrowding. As the majority of dwellings are planned as condominiums and ownership apartments, the people that live in overcrowded apartments will not have a chance to take advantage of them. The reason for overcrowding is often a lower socio-economic background so that the new dwellings will mainly attract other residents instead of giving more room for the people of the existing neighbourhoods. Therefore, the problem of overcrowding has to be solved otherwise in long-term planning of social housing and could be temporarily improved by providing better public spaces. That would for example help children that live in overcrowded apartments to study and socialise in public facilities within their neighbourhood. However, new social public spaces are not included in the zoning plan.

The written text of the zoning plan's program mentions Friskvåderstorget several times as a potentially important central area for future Biskopsgården. In the development proposal (Stadsbyggnadsnämnden, 2023) it is suggested that the area of Våderbodarna on the other side of Sommarvådersgatan together with Friskvåderstorget will become a central area with room for a library and a nursing home. Unfortunately, the height differences make it difficult to connect Sommarvådersgatan with Friskvåderstorget and Våderbodarna at the same time. As can be seen in the commercial building in Våderbodarna this was the intention from the beginning but did not work out since the two commercial centres competed against each other and were too far apart to create a coherent centre. Instead, the focus on creating a functioning square as a community centre for the neighbourhood that connects Norra Biskopsgården with the Southern parts of Biskopsgården should lay on Friskvåderstorget. Secondary square functions like a health care centre could be moved from Friskvåderstorget to Våderbodarna. Friskvåderstorget itself should be developed into a commercial and above all a cultural centre instead. If those responsible for the zoning plans would have analysed the historic misjudgements of the functionalist planning, they would have noticed that the main issue was to focus too much on housing and providing too little social meeting places or at least an adequate neighbourhood centre.

Also, the zoning plan mentions on several occasions that an adequate library is missing in the Northern parts of Biskopsgården whilst the good neighbourhood spirit amongst current residents is highlighted but never addressed in the actual proposal. The central location of Friskvåderstorget would therefore be an optimal place to solve many highlighted challenges by building a cultural centre.

-  Nya gator och/eller befintliga som byggs om/ut
-  Spårväg med befintliga hållplatser
-  Ny gångväg, cykelväg eller gångstig
-  Befintlig gångväg, cykelväg eller gångstig
- III-VI** Våningsantal exkl. inredd vind
-  Flerbostadshus
-  Småhus
-  Utvecklingsområde för ny bebyggelse
-  Kommunal service: grundskola, förskola, BmSS
-  Skolgård
-  Parkeringsanläggningar med utrymmen för mobilitetslösningar, handel, ev. bostäder
-  Befintliga och i vissa fall nya torglägen som utvecklas med handel, service och bostäder
-  Upphöjd bostadsgård med parkering/centrumändamål i bottenplan
-  Idrotts- och rekreationsområde
-  Parkområde
-  Naturområde

\* Bebyggelseförslaget ska läsas schematiskt. Det är de övergripande typologierna, strukturerna och markanvändningarna som är det väsentliga. Gränser ska inte tolkas som definitiva.



*New zoning plan for Norra Biskopsgården from August 2023. At Friskvåderstorget two five- to six-floor high residential blocks are planned. (Stadsbyggnadsnämnden, 2023)*

At the same time Biskopsgården is disconnected into two parts between the North and the South that have bad physical connection but also few attractions and reasons that bring residents from one part to the other.

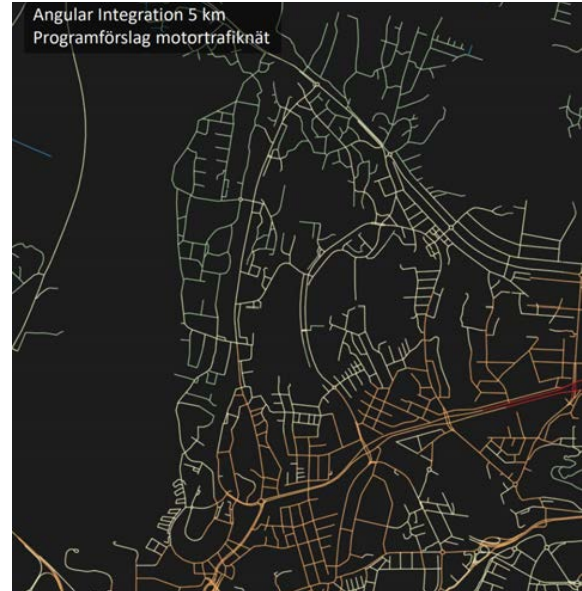
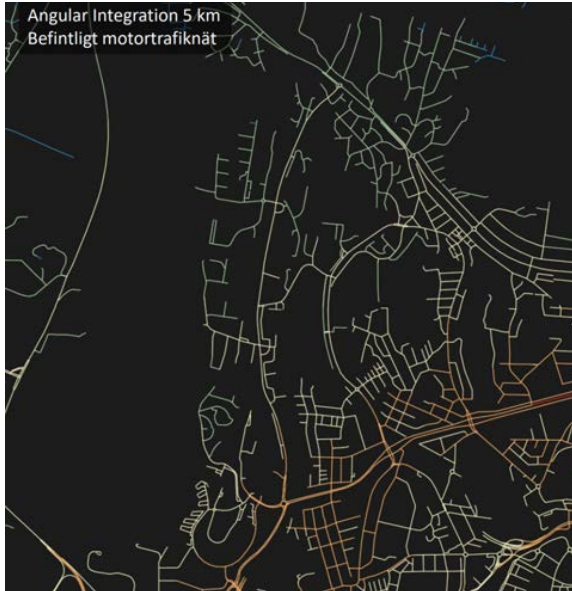
This is why Friskvåderstorget would be a very suitable place for a library. The fact that there already is a small children's library in the ground floor of the long high rise building to the East that is frequently used by the families of the neighbourhood and even by some of the local associations like the Nattvandrare - the Night Hikers, a group that hikes through Biskopsgården during the nights to create more security - (personal conversation, 30 January 2024) supports the argument (Strömbom, 2021). Also other cultural associations in Biskopsgården support the claim for a cultural centre on Friskvåderstorget in a debate article in Göteborgs Posten (Atlestam, 2021).

The zoning plan also addresses the problem of bad connectivity within Biskopsgården. This is a response to the SCAFT-era of the historic planning of Biskopsgården. The Space Syntax is the analysis' tool and shows interesting results. By widening Byvädersgatan and opening it for cars as well as taking away the tunnel under Flygvädersgatan, connectivity from the South towards Friskvåderstorget is improved. This certainly makes sense and the planners have taken the motorised traffic-focus of the functionalist planning carefully into consideration while providing an adequate solution to the traffic situation in Biskopsgården. The goal of the zoning plan is to create a more car independent district in Biskopsgården. A question that remains is that why there are about two hundred new parking spaces created around Friskvåderstorget in two new parking garages under the new housing blocks and a large garage with a playground on the roof while only 109 parking spots from Friskvåderstorget will disappear. The mostly empty parking garage on the East of the long high rise building is not even taken into consideration. The need for a playground on top of a parking garage that would replace the one on Friskvåderstorget is also questionable while the forest of Svarte Mosse is as far away from Friskvåderstorget as the planned garage. The budget for constructing a new garage that will benefit only the new residents who can afford an own car can instead go into providing adequate social spaces for the neighbourhood.

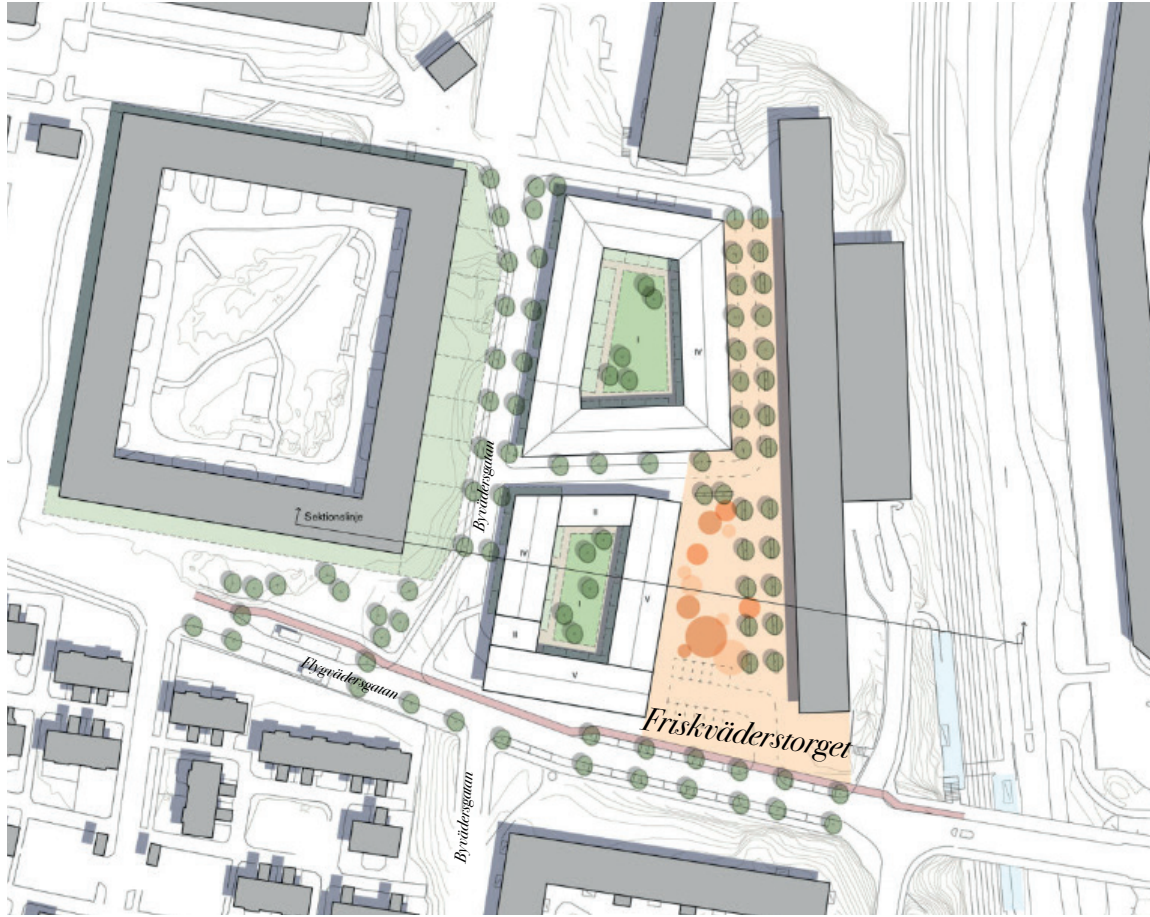
Friskvåderstorget is also weakened as a square due to the proposed mid-rise apartment buildings which makes the already small, wedge-formed space next to the long high rise building seemingly even smaller while getting rid of the free space currently used as a passage next to the playground. This space is instead transformed into a tree avenue. The scale of the buildings have to be more carefully thought through as well as the conflict between the written text in the zoning plan and the actual program for the building on this important central area of Friskvåderstorget. The question of what kind of a square this neighbourhood deserves is asked in the written analysis but answered with disrespect towards the current residents in the proposed layout.

The concept of a walkable city is also taken up in the zoning plan but met with a confusing contradiction in the plans. While promoting a district with less cars and mixed traffic, three new parking garages are planned around Friskvåderstorget. At the same time a desperately needed library is not even shown in the plans, nor is it mentioned in the text where it could be built other than on Friskvåderstorget.

In general, the zoning plan and the densification of Biskopsgården fits into the idea that some politicians and planners have in mind for the whole city and makes a lot of sense in the context of other recent projects in Gothenburg. The gentrification of the neighbourhood can be morally put in question but is obviously what the city of Gothenburg has as a goal for new neighbourhoods as seen in several occasions from earlier (Andersson, 2015). The main goal of the new zoning plan should be to take



*Space Syntax of Biskopsgården with new street proposal (Stadsbyggnadsnämnden, 2023).*



*Detailed plans for the new housing blocks on Friskvåderstorget  
(Planansökan, Framtiden AB, 2024)*

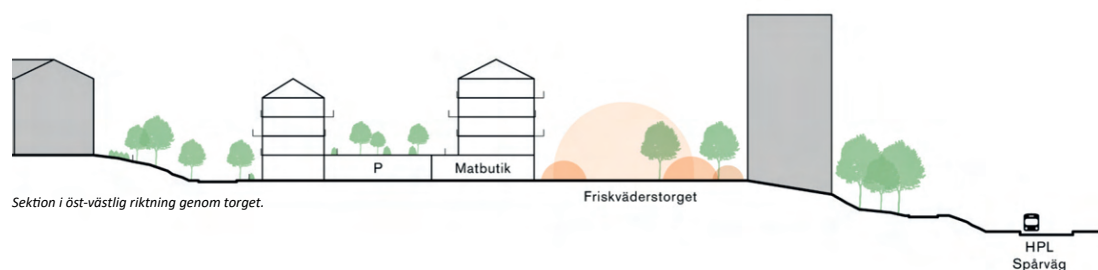


advantage of the existing neighbourhood structure and get rid of the planning errors of the late functionalist era which are described earlier. The suggestion of the modification of the street network and housing on the existing parking spots for example seem to be a good start to change Biskopsgården for the better and to learn from historic mistakes. Most importantly it is positive to mention that there actually is a general plan and a long term view on how the area should develop. The discussion about those plans is an important part of the future positive development of Biskopsgården.

What the zoning plan lacks though is a deeper understanding of what really was the problem that created today's circumstances and especially its implementations in the build environment represented in the building proposal. The ideas that are behind the new zoning plan lack the greater vision of how Biskopsgården is imagined in the future, as only housing is added with the concept of a Garden City in mind. The Garden City concept is neither visible in the proposed new buildings nor mentioned in the analysis of the zoning plan as a social idea of a community based district. Neither have the drawings of the zoning plan anything in common with their role models of Kungsladugård or Örgryte. In the end the zoning plans are supported by empty words and will be nothing more than a gentrification of a left behind district.

The gentrification is most clearly visible in the neglect of the historic analysis of Biskopsgården and the planning of new dwellings only for residents of higher income groups. Similar to the Million Program era this will attract outsiders, probably from other parts of the country or even internationals, that would possibly only stay during times of economic growth. In case of a similar economic crisis like the one in the nineteen seventies when residents moved away from the not even completed Biskopsgården, the new residents will leave the newly reconstructed district again if there is no reason for them to stay. This reason cannot be the anonymity of a City-life district but only the strong social cohesion of a functioning neighbourhood. The goal has to be to develop the district into a place where new people are integrated into the neighbourhoods and want to stay, even through times of economic trouble.

In the following, an alternative design for Friskvåderstorget is proposed that takes careful consideration of the historic and contemporary context of Biskopsgården.



*Section of the proposed housing blocks on Friskvåderstorget  
(Planansökan, Framtiden AB, 2024)*

# Concept

The historical and contemporary analysis of Norra Biskopsgården show that both planning mistakes, poor maintenance, social developments in Sweden, and economic reasons lay behind the decay of Friskvåderstorget. The suggested zoning plan presented by the City of Gothenburg fails to tackle the most urgent, current problems and lacks ambition to take advantage of the existing social cohesion. Even though the report acknowledges the lack of meeting spaces for the many associations in Norra Biskopsgården in particular, few social spaces are suggested in the plans (Stadsbyggnadsnämnden, 2023).

The design of a new cultural centre and more commercial facilities at Friskvåderstorget seeks to show what would be possible to build within the neighbourhood of Norra Biskopsgården instead of the proposed housing blocks. The design should be an inspiration for other districts and takes at the same time inspiration of already existing projects with similar circumstances like the Peckham Library in London, Nørrebrohallen in Copenhagen or the Bergsjön Kulturcentrum in Gothenburg.

The concept of this thesis is therefore to show the necessity of investing in social meeting spaces that first creates the necessary infrastructure for a growing neighbourhood before building more housing for new residents.

## *The library of the future*

Even though the suggested alternative design for Friskvåderstorget will hold several functions, the main idea is still to create a free meeting space for the public in the form of a library.

Libraries in Sweden have to serve as a public space by law. Every municipality has to give access to a so-called “Folkbibliotek” (people’s library) for its residents in order to “promote reading, impart knowledge to the public and to make free opinion formation possible” (Bibliotekslag, 2013). Even though libraries always used to be popular in Sweden, the visitor numbers are slowly decreasing over the last years even though the numbers went up in the last two years due to the pandemic (Clemens, 2023) and several libraries in Gothenburg are closing (Frid, 2024). The aim of this thesis is therefore to define a new concept of a library of the future. Like in libraries in other Nordic cities like Turku, Copenhagen, or Helsinki where it is possible not only to read and loan books to increase knowledge but also loan machines to learn new skills for free or even a car to make travelling and transport more accessible for everyone (Fahllund, 2023) . The concept of a library as a book storage has to be renewed. This thesis presents a concept of doing so by integrating social meeting spaces, various interdisciplinary learning opportunities, and thus a modern idea of what a public library can look like and contribute to its local community.

As the percentage of young adults without further education is much higher in Biskopsgården compared to the rest of Gothenburg it is important for the municipality to first of all invest in schools because less qualified teachers often work in vulnerable areas and social segregation contribute to worse school results and thereby to a less equal society (Göteborgs Universitet, 2023). At the same time the schools could work stronger together with libraries and share knowledge, personnel, and rooms. The vision here is that libraries become a place where especially young people want to spend time to give them an opportunity to be in a meaningful and controlled environment as it seems that there are too few of these spaces around Friskvåderstorget today. This would also be in line with what the police, for instance, lists as things that parents can do in order to protect their children from criminal networks (Polisen, 2024):

- Active leisure, safe routines
- Go to school, with extra support if necessary
- Do things together with adults
- Adults speak against and set clear rules
- Adults listen and ask

By providing rooms and equipment that could form new hobbies and skills, libraries could help parents and society to counteract the recruiting of new members to criminal networks which is a huge problem for the residents around Friskvåderstorget today (Verdicchio, 2016).

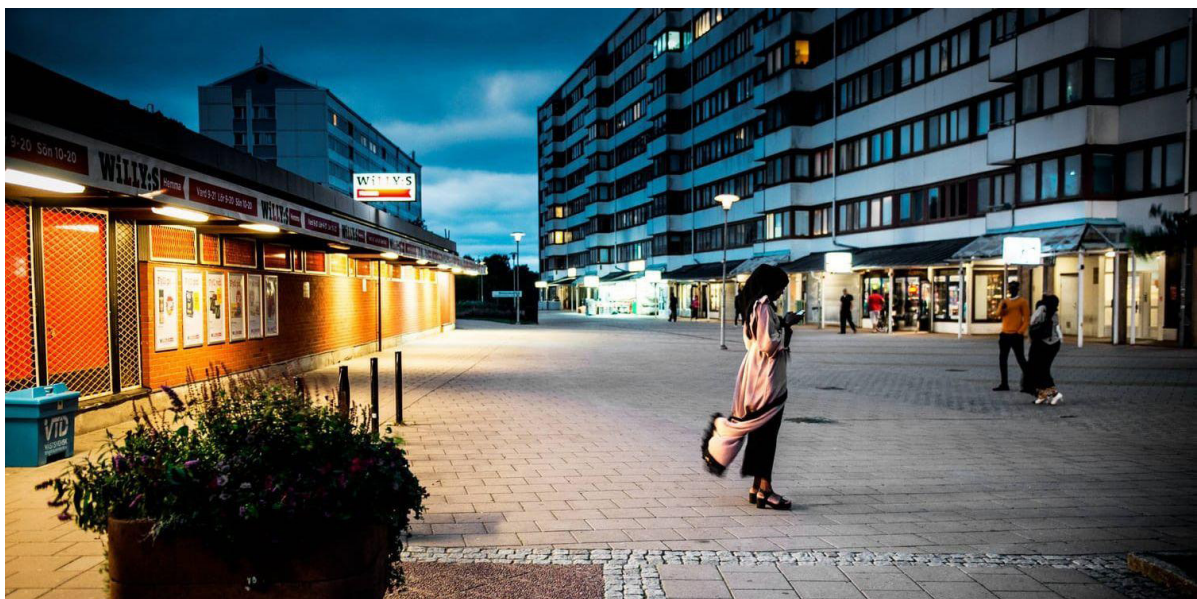
Most importantly for the new kind of library is to provide a meaningful freetime for all residents of its neighbourhoods.

Until a few years ago, there used to be a free repair shop in Norra Biskopsgården, called Fixoteket. A Fixotek is a public establishment, where trained professionals and volunteers help repair everything from bicycles to radios and in a Fixotek it is even possible to loan tools (Bostadsbolaget, 2024). This concept is very easy to unite with a library and could even be developed further. In the library's Fixotek it could be even possible to use more advanced machines like 3D-printers, sewing machines or other expensive equipment that is otherwise not too easily accessible for individuals. The Fixotek could also be used to hold courses in arts and crafts.

Another part of a library that could be loaned to the public are meeting spaces. As spaces where residents can meet are rare and requested by many associations in Biskopsgården, smaller meeting rooms, a kitchen where residents can cook and eat together and a larger activity room for big meetings, theatre groups or sports could be available under the supervision and administration of the library personnel. Even gardening to promote a more sustainable lifestyle could be possible with tools and knowledge on the publicly accessible roof of the library.

# Design

In this chapter an alternative design for the area of Friskvåderstorget is presented. The SWOT-analysis will give a summary of the most important strengths and weaknesses and the developments of the neighbourhood presented in opportunities and threats. Taking the new zoning plan of the City of Gothenburg and the SWOT-analysis into consideration the design will show an alternative to the important central area of Friskvåderstorget. The goal is to develop the strengths of the area and counteract the weaknesses.



*Friskvåderstorget in the evening (Stefan Berg, 2016)*

## SWOT

This Swot-analysis about the neighbourhood of Norra Biskopsgården with a focus on Frskväderstorget will give an overview of the main strengths and weaknesses of Norra Biskopsgården. The analysis focuses on today's situation and therefore excludes the historical perspective.

The opportunities and threats will take the ongoing zoning plans of the City of Gothenburg into consideration including the interview with Framtiden ABs Martin Clase and the "Nya Planprogram för Biskopsgården" (Stadsbyggnadsnämnden, 2023).

<p>strong social cohesion</p> <p>diverse population</p> <p>Many young people</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths</b></p>	<p>overcrowding</p> <p>crime</p> <p>bad health</p> <p>bad education</p> <p>unemployment</p> <p>lack of meeting spaces</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>new zoning plan</p> <p>many young people</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats</b></p> <p>displacement of old residents</p> <p>weakening of existing social structures</p> <p>continuous criminal activities</p>

### Strengths

#### Strong social cohesion:

As described earlier Norra Biskopsgården has many active social associations that work as non-profit organisations. They have an important role in the local society and work actively in the improvement of the situation in the whole of Biskopsgården. Many of them work together in topics such as education, expression of religion, integration, freetime activities and safety on the streets during day and night. (Biblioteksvänner i Biskopsgården, 2021)

#### Diverse population:

88,6 percent of the residents of Norra Biskopsgården have a foreign background. Compared to only 39,1 percent in the rest of Gothenburg. (Göteborgsbladet, 2023)

### Weaknesses

#### Overcrowding:

A study by Hyresgästföreningen (2022) found that 20 percent of apartments in Västra Biskopsgården are overcrowded which is the highest percentage in Gothenburg with an average of 6,2 percent in the whole city. An apartment is overcrowded when at least three persons live in less than 40 square metres. Reasons for overcrowding are often economic which means that for example a family that cannot afford a larger apartment cannot either move into the new and more expensive apartments. The negative effects of overcrowded apartments need to be counteracted within the neighbourhood. For children for example the effects of overcrowded apartments are directly linked to bad school results due to lack of calm study environments at home. Meeting spaces for associations like Lärhjälpen (“Homework-help”) could therefore compensate for the situation while a long term solution for this problem is found.

#### Insecurity:

Only 61 percent of the residents of Västra Biskopsgården feel safe in their neighbourhood, which is the lowest in Hisingen. Even though the police does not classify Biskopsgården as a “particular vulnerable area” anymore there is still an ongoing gang conflict and criminal networks have partially more control over the neighbourhood than the police. Especially around the squares and community centres in Biskopsgården where stores close in the evening, the feeling of lack of security is severe. Since security is one of the most important conditions for life this is one of the most important weaknesses that have to be addressed.

#### Bad health:

As mentioned in the previous chapter the measurable average health statistics in Norra Biskopsgården are very bad.

#### Unemployment:

The unemployment rate in Norra Biskopsgården is high. Financial freedom is important to achieve personal goals and to have a belief in the future.

#### Lack of meeting spaces:

In many reports and personal conversations it was mentioned that Norra Biskopsgården lacks public and free or at least cheap meeting spaces. Especially the squares and in particular Friskvåderstorget was named as unpleasant for meeting others. The lack of meeting spaces will lead to segregation within the neighbourhood.

### Opportunities:

#### Many young people:

The population of Norra Biskopsgården between 0-24 is bigger than in the rest of Gothenburg. The many young people with a diverse background have great potential but the schools have to be better as many young individuals have a low belief in the future (Nåbo, 2024).

#### Zoning plan:

The new zoning plan includes a lot of new housing in Norra Biskopsgården and with it new residents. If the number of housing units with cheap rents in public hands stay at the same level, the new apartments with different owning forms could diversify the housing market. This would bring a lot of opportunities for the neighbourhood in the form of financial and social benefits.

### Threats:

#### Displacement of residents:

If rents rise due to the new zoning plan many residents would have to move. This would destroy the essence of the existing social structures in Norra Biskopsgården. The risk of gentrification is eminent and has to be taken into consideration in talks with current residents and stakeholders.

#### Weakening of existing social structures:

Despite the lack of meeting spaces in today's Norra Biskopsgården, the flourishing social non-profit associations, mapped in the context chapter in this report, are an essential part of the social life in the neighbourhood. If new residents come to the neighbourhood and the existing social structures cannot survive due to lack of meeting spaces, the risk of negative effects of gentrification could change the neighbourhood for the worse.

#### Continuous criminal activities:

Since the police officially classifies Biskopsgården as a "risk area" the threat of crime and with that the feeling of insecurity is still eminent. Continuous unsafety will lead to a low belief in the future and continue the negative spiral of crime and insecurity.



*The back-side of Friskvåderstorget along the bicycle lane creating empty and unclear spaces especially at night time (Picture: Author).*



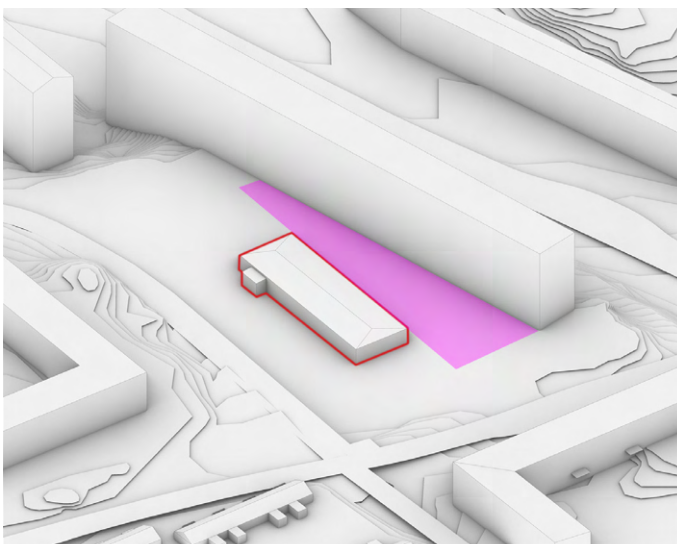
## *Architectural qualities of Friskvåderstorget*

Friskvåderstorget has an important role as the community centre in the neighbourhood of Norra Biskopsgården. Today the layout of the square gives a feeling of unimportance since the two buildings in the middle of it, the grocery store and the high-rise building towards the tram stop form a wedge that opens towards the street. The height relationship of the one floor high grocery store and the eight floor high-rise building creates a sensation of unbalance. Since the layout suggests a clear direction of movement and because of the rather small distance between the buildings, the space does not invite visitors to stay, even though outdoor furniture was placed in the middle of the square. Furthermore, the wind tunnel effect that the long high-rise building creates is not taken care of, rather contributed by the wedge layout of the main buildings and the tall height of the high-rise building in the East. The surrounding apartment complexes take the negative effects of the strong winds in Norra Biskopsgården into careful consideration by forming closed, protecting yards.

Another main disadvantage of today's Friskvåderstorget is the huge amount of space dedicated for parking. The parking spot takes up 3700 m<sup>2</sup>, approximately 8500 m<sup>2</sup> of Friskvåderstorget and includes the delivery street for the grocery store and a trash station for local residents. Because of the grocery store and the health care centre at Friskvåderstorget, parking has to be provided also in the future. The 109 parking spots for private vehicles can however also be compensated by opening the parking garage on the Eastern side of the long high-rise building to the public.

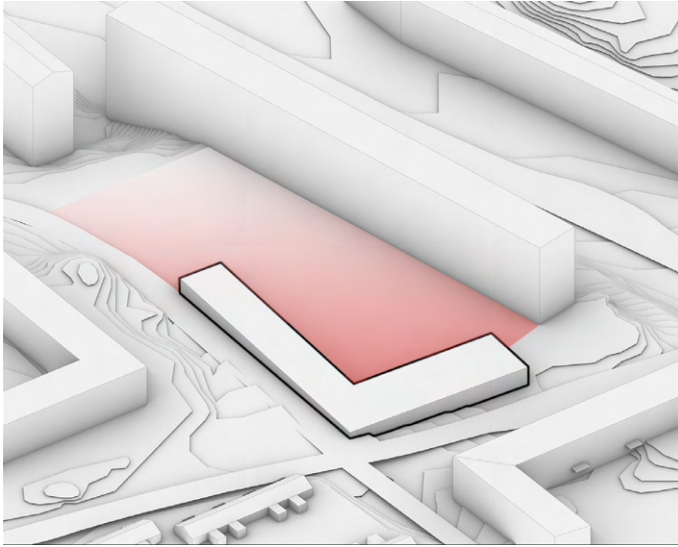
The Western border of Friskvåderstorget is marked by a bicycle road that continues all the way to Vårvåderstorget in the South of Bisopsgården and from there on towards the city centre of Gothenburg. Keeping that important connection to the rest of the city is a good idea to promote other transportation than motorised vehicles.

The parking spot on the backside of the grocery store creates dark areas that promote undesirable criminal activities and will be transformed.



*Current layout with wedge form as square. The grocery store in the middle of the square will be demolished.*

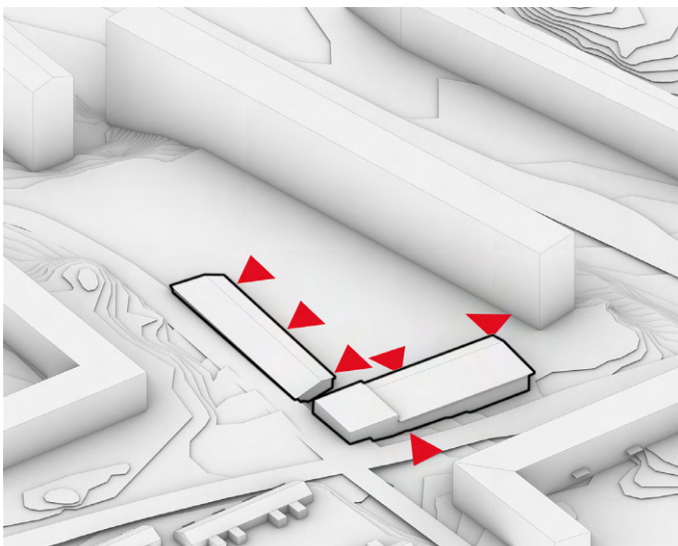
## *New building concept*



*Create market square as a neighbourhood centrum*

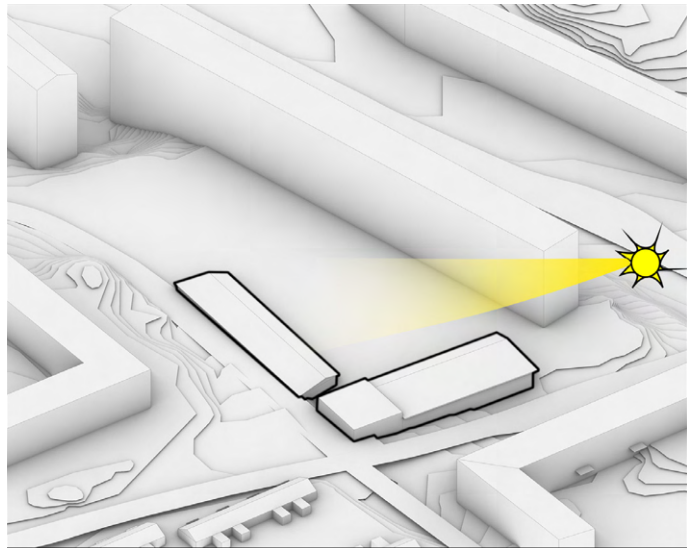


*Access from the whole neighbourhood*

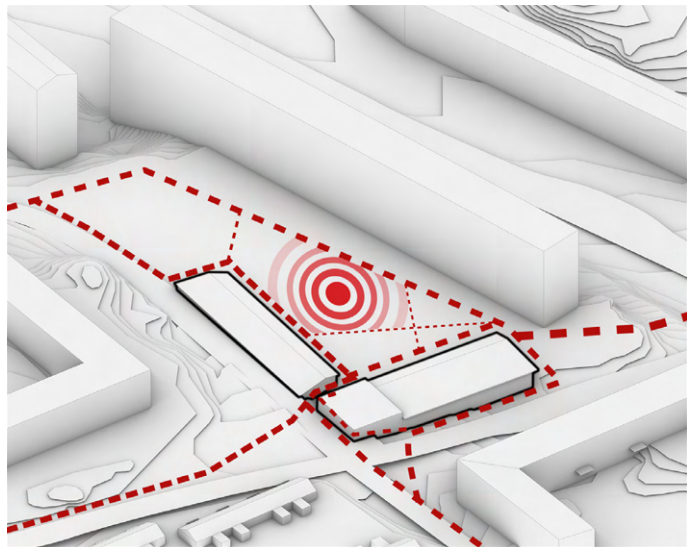


*Entrances to the building from all sides for better access*

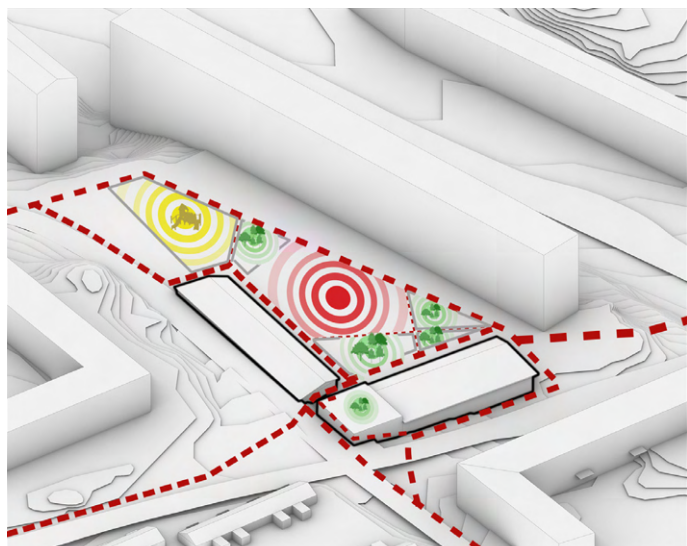
*Orient buildings to maximise sun hours*



*Divide square in paths with a clear centrum*



*Create lively neighbourhood centrum*



## *New program for Friskvåderstorget*

The proposal for Friskvåderstorget itself seeks to create a safe and pleasant public meeting space. The square invites to linger and to meet other residents as well as outsiders. The entrances (A) to the square are important and redone with greenery and new sight lines. The new library is already visible from the tram stop and as the square itself is accessible from all directions and serves also as a passage. In order to strengthen the felt security for residents especially at night, there are no backsides to the buildings and all areas are well light and easy to view. The ramp and the roof of the multi-purpose hall (B) is accessible for the public at daytime and functions as a gardening area for residents and at the same time as a viewing platform over the new square (C). The bushes and green areas (D) provide quality environments and are not higher than forty centimetres to maintain the visibility of the whole square as well as the renewed playground (E). At the same time, the green areas divide the square in clear directions and spaces.

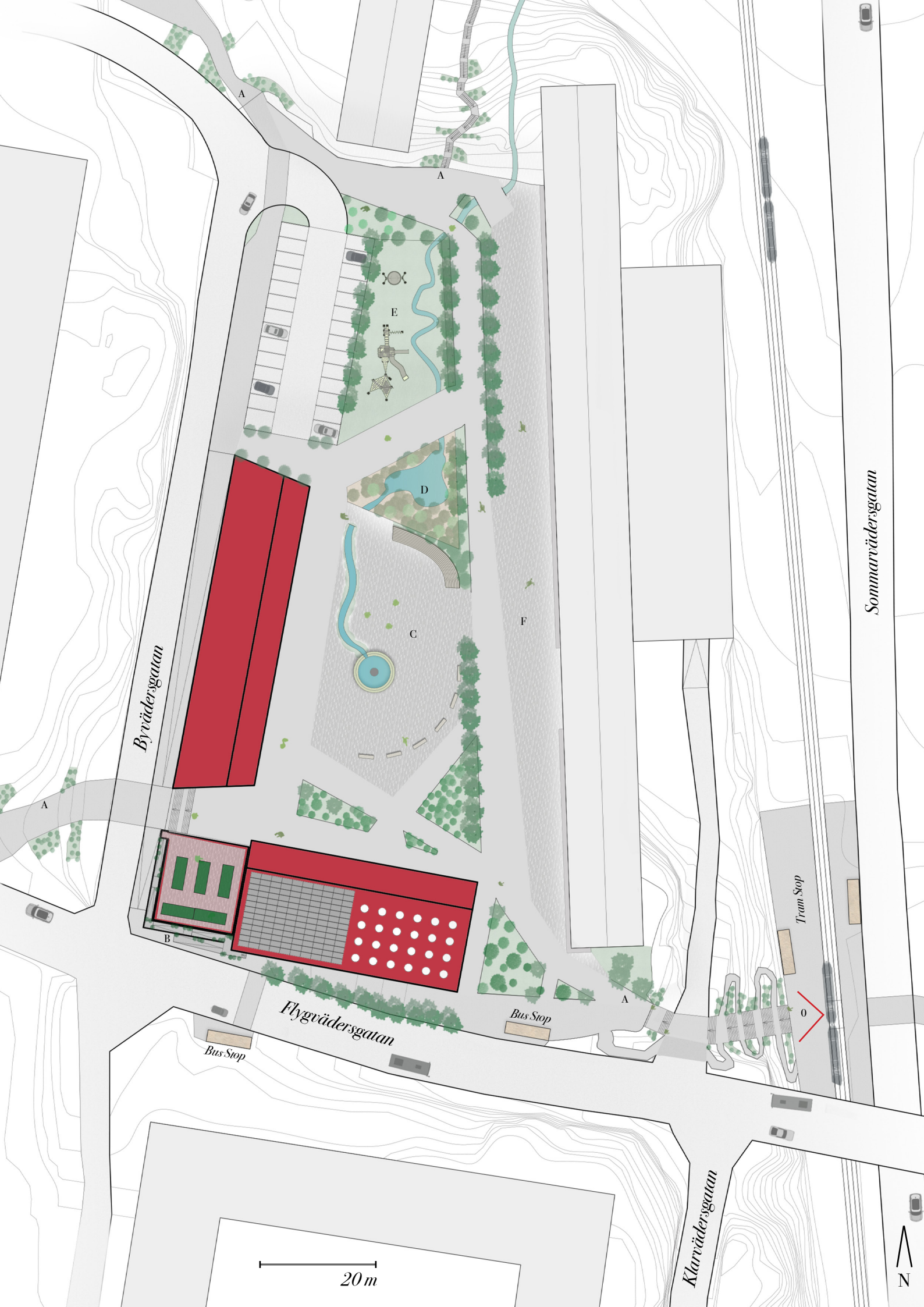
The canopy roof of the long high rise building with its shops are designed to be more attractive and to give a safe passage from rain. Further, the space in front of the building is renewed and complemented with a boulevard of trees (F).

- A: Entrances to the Friskvåderstorget
- B: Green roof and Ramp
- C: Area with new amphitheatre and fountain
- D: Green areas with small pond
- E: New playground
- F: New boulevard in front of long high rise building



*0: Perspective Render of the stairs and ramps leading up to Friskvåderstorget from the east from where the new library already is visible.*

*Opposite: Situation Plan of New Friskvåderstorget (1:750)*



*Byrvädersgatan*

*Sommarvädersgatan*

*Flygvädersgatan*

*Klarvädersgatan*

*Tram Stop*

*Bus Stop*

*Bus Stop*

20 m

N

*Inspiration pictures*

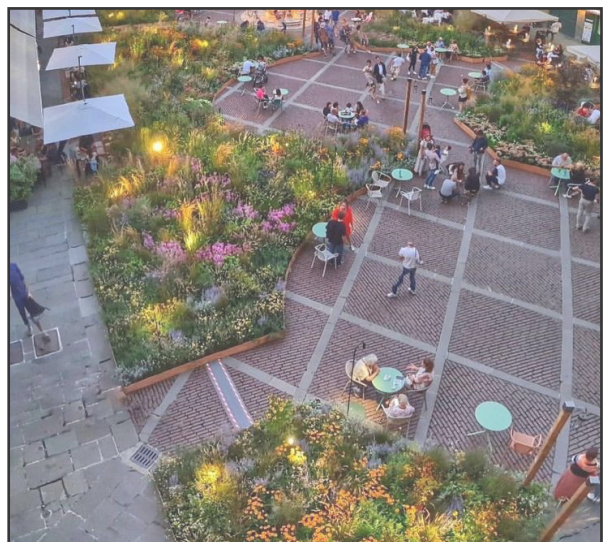
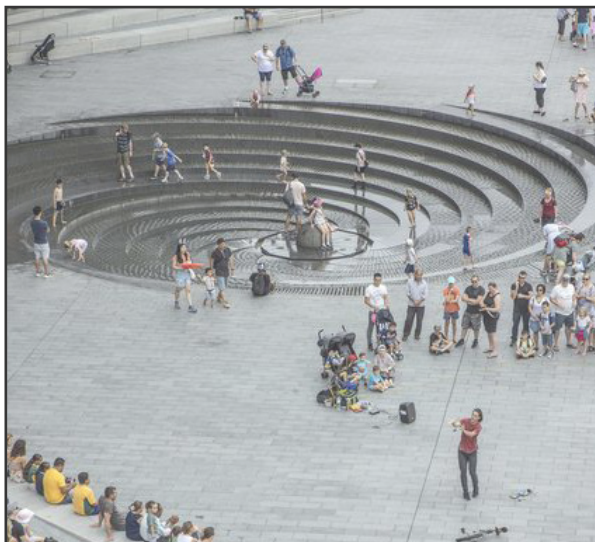
A



B



C



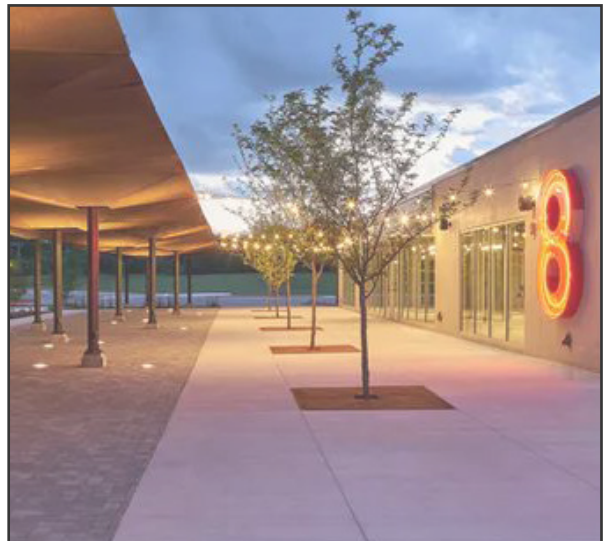
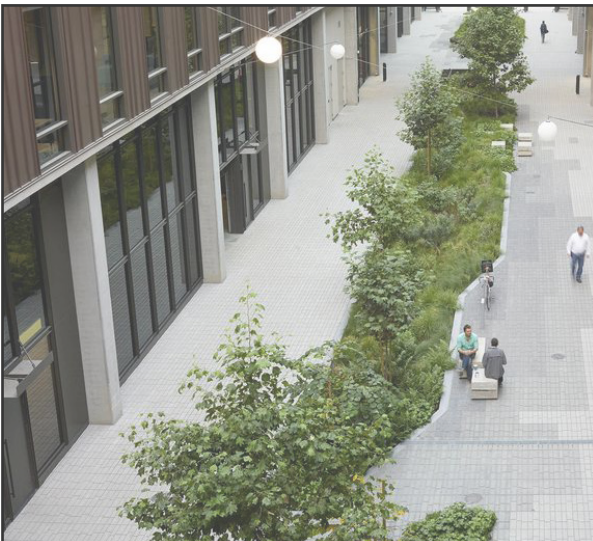
*D*



*E*



*F*



All inspiration pictures taken from Pinterest

## Program for library

The program chosen for the design of the building are strongly connected to the needs seen in the previous analysis with considerations of the built environment from a historical perspective and today's situation in Norra Biskopsgården.

As mentioned, the library should not only function as a typical book storage, but rather work as a cultural centre for the whole neighbourhood.

The design for the cultural centre suggests multiple spaces besides the classical library spaces for both children and adults:

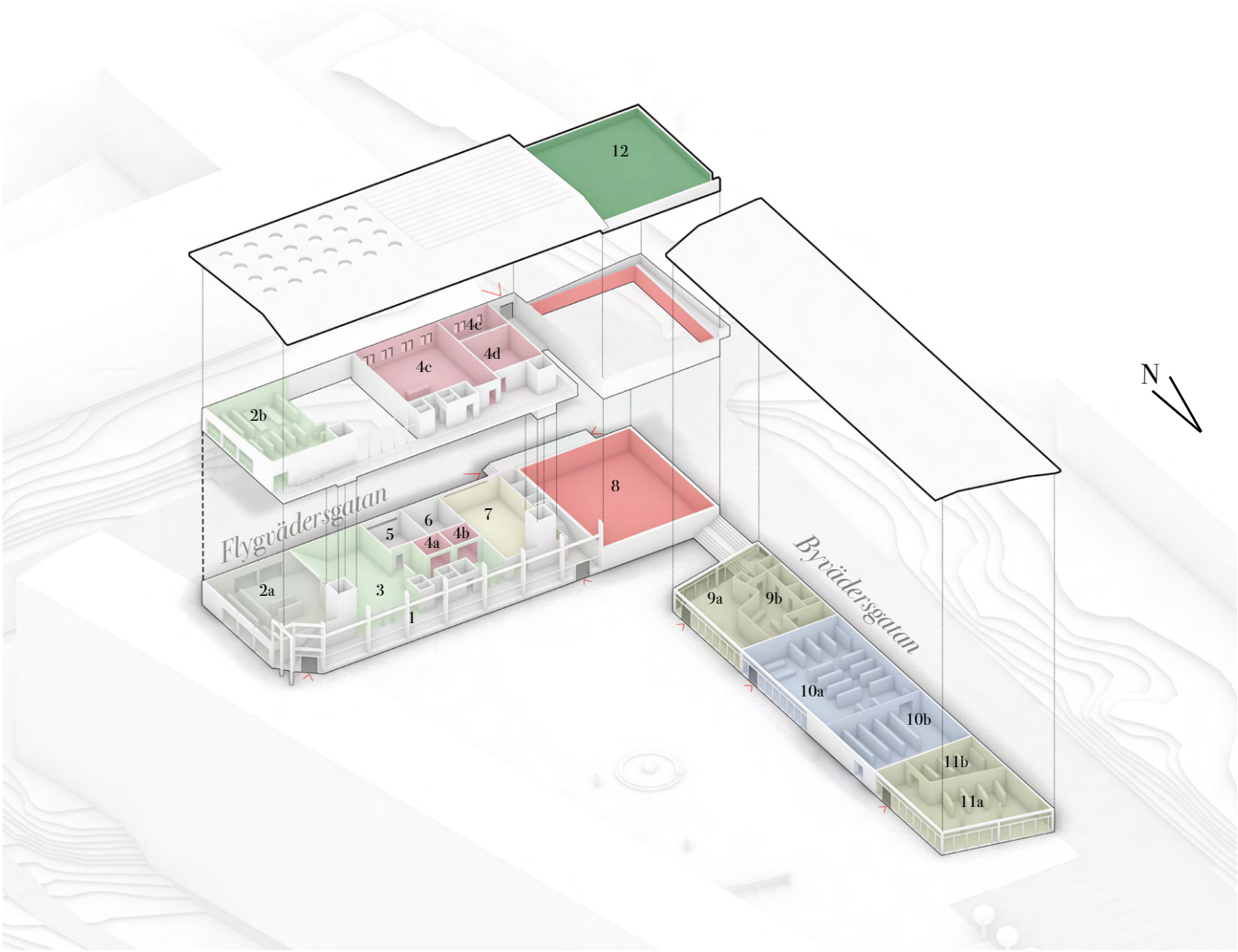
- 1: Entrance hall, open most hours of the day, semi heated (155 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 2: Library
  - 2a: Childrens library (153 m<sup>2</sup>)
  - 2b: Library with quiet learning spaces (135 m<sup>2</sup>)
  - 3: Library entrance, open sitting stairs with temporary lecture hall (101 m<sup>2</sup>)
  - 4a: Learning room (10 m<sup>2</sup>)
  - 4b: Gaming room (10 m<sup>2</sup>)
  - 5: Employee room (27 m<sup>2</sup>)
  - 6: Storage & Techinque room (26 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 4c: One bigger meeting room with kitchen and dining area (121 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 4d: Rentable meeting room (42 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 4e: Rentable meeting room (26 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 7: A workshop or Fixotek for fixing and loaning tools and machines that is connected to the library (94 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 8: Multi purpose hall with dressing room (223 m<sup>2</sup>)
  - Eleven toilets
  - Two elevators
- 12: Accessible roof for gardening (223 m<sup>2</sup>)

In the complementary building that is placed orthogonal to the cultural centre are housed three different functions:

- 9a: A small café (88 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 9b: Kitchen & staff rooms (73 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 10a: Grocery store that replaces the old one (203 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 10b: Grocery store storage & staff rooms (121 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 11a: Shop for local business (128 m<sup>2</sup>)
- 11b: Storage & Staff rooms (47 m<sup>2</sup>)

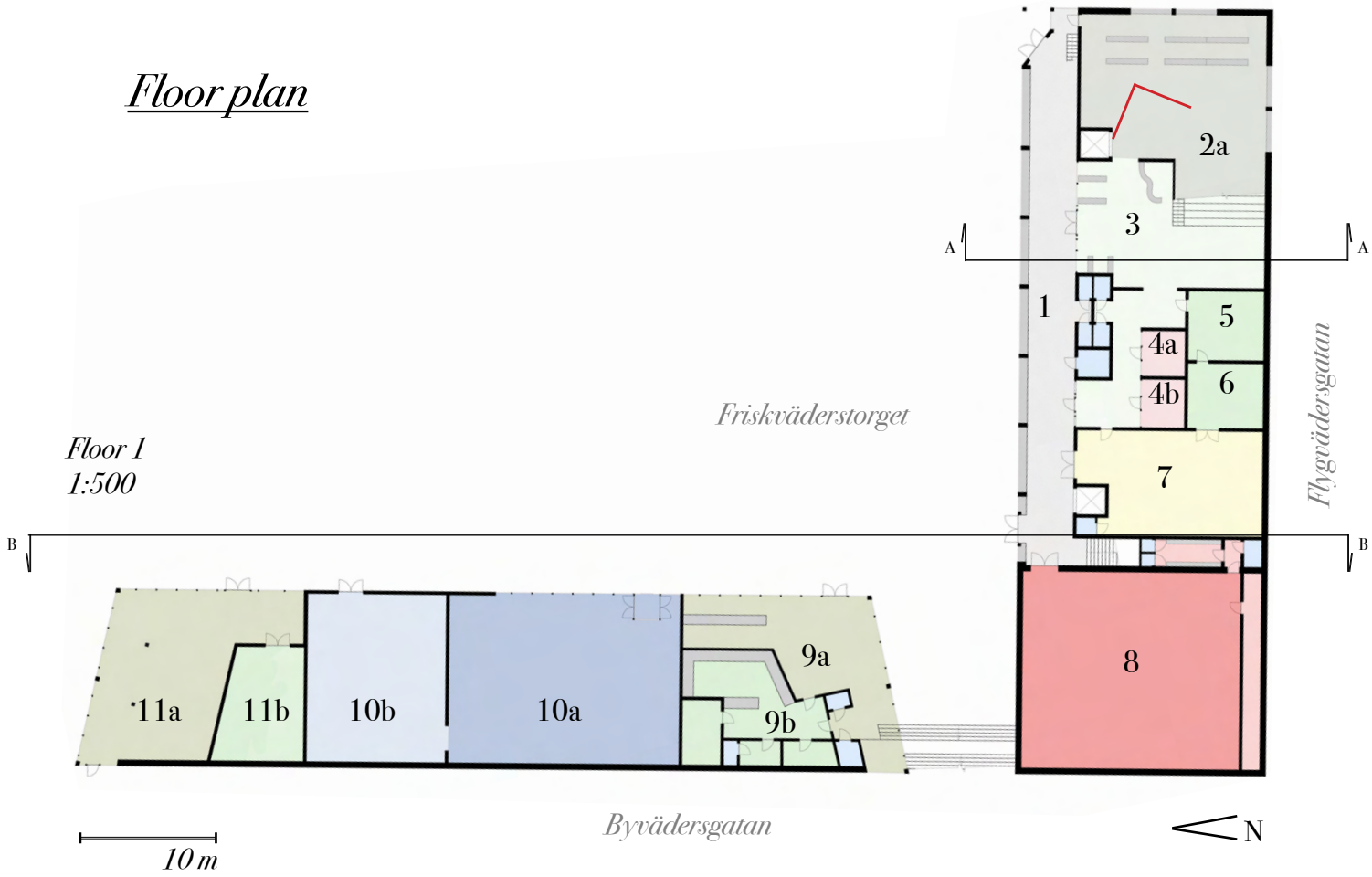


All rooms and spaces are based on one or several already existing associations and/or businesses in Norra Biskopsgården. The need for each space is taken from personal conversations or texts and demands from local residents.

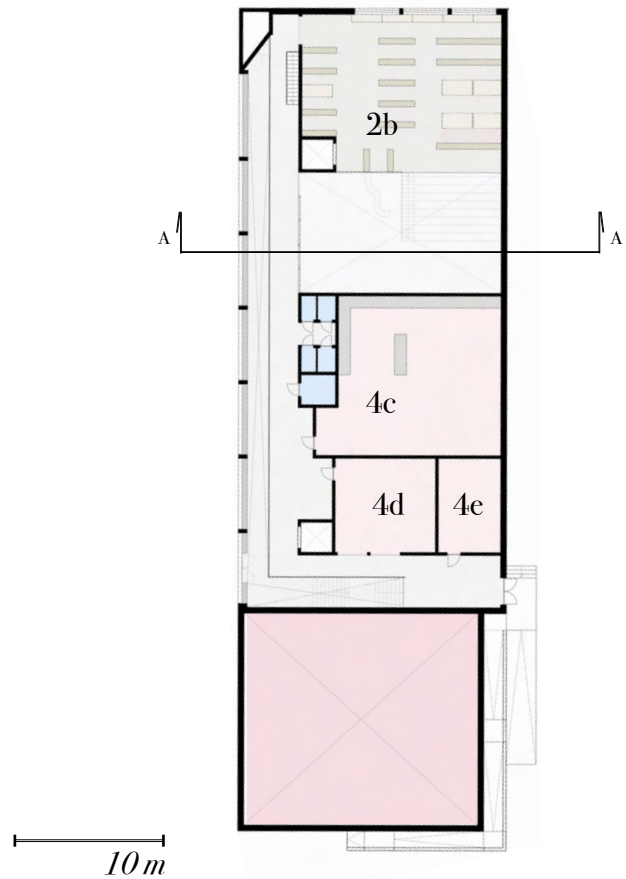


Floor plan

Floor 1  
1:500



Floor 2  
1:500



*Inspiration pictures*



3: Example of sitting staircase in library for reading or speaker events (Pinterest)



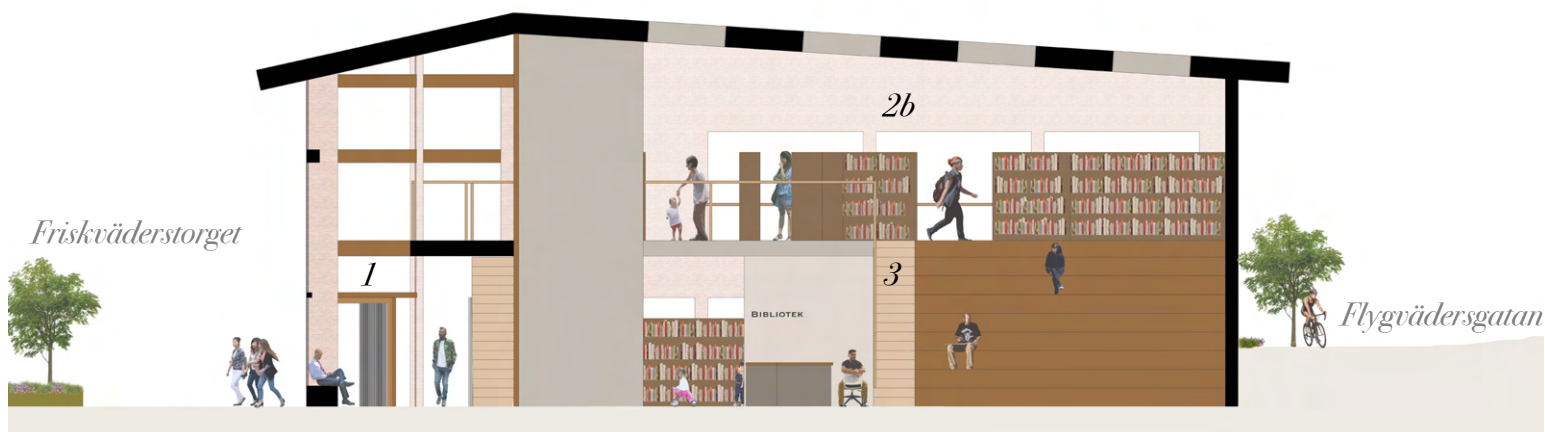
8: Example of multi purpose hall for sports activities, theatre or larger meetings (Pinterest)

*Interior rendering*



2a: Children's Library in the ground floor of the proposed building. Natural lightning and a playful atmosphere are important for the spacious meeting room for children and parents (own rendering).

## Sections & facades



*Section A-A*  
*1:150*

10 m

The open glass facades of the entrance hall (1) function as an expansion of the square as a public space between the library and outdoors. The main library with its sitting stairs (3) and the quieter part of the library (2b) are well lit from windows in the east and south facade as well as the roof windows.

The commercial building that together with the library forms the square keeps also an open facade towards the public space as well as partly to the street running parallel to the square in the west. The café in the Southern part of the building and the shop in the North create openness towards the street and a more welcoming feeling towards the square. The stairs between the two buildings make the access to the public space easy.



*Section B-B*  
*1:500*

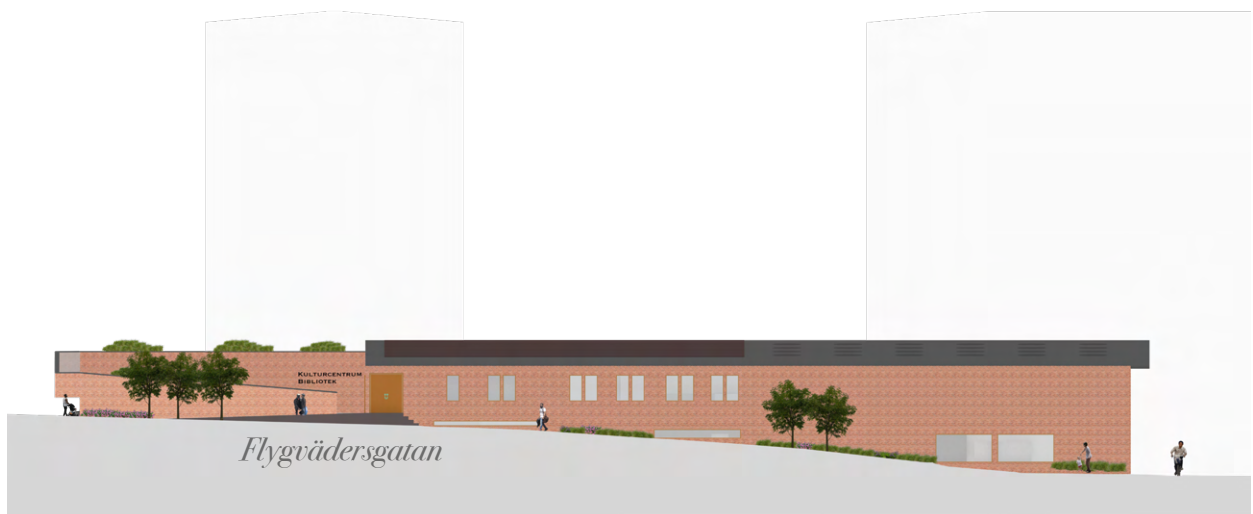
10 m



*North Facade*  
1:400



Two entrances in the Northern facade towards the square are the entrances to the library building. The platform on the roof in the south western corner overlooks the square and is accessible by a ramp.



*South Facade*  
1:400



# Conclusion

The analysis and the alternative design for Friskvåderstorget are my personal contribution to the ongoing debate in the industry that I am about to be part of on how to counteract the problems in “vulnerable areas”. One of my personal observation from the industry is that social meeting spaces are not prioritised. As I showed in the historical analysis, profit-oriented design decisions were one of the main problems for how the idea of the Folkhemmet developed in the twentieth and twenty-first century and while the functionalist era is criticised today, similar mistakes like prioritising constructing only housing over public spaces and planning with a City Life ideal, are repeated. While the plans to develop Biskopsgården are going in the right direction with some of the decisions that were made, like the densification in some areas or the rearrangement of traffic, the most important point of strengthening the social cohesion within the district does not seem to play a bigger role. The zoning plan and the buildings on Friskvåderstorget are developed at the same time as the new district of Karlastaden, a new representative economic district, is built in Gothenburg. On the one hand, there is the segregated district of Biskopsgården that is struggling with crime and other socio-economic problems that the city is willing to invest in but only with help of private investors at a cost that is as low as possible for taxpayers. In a personal conversation with architect Martin Clase of the municipally owned company of Framtiden AB (personal conversation, 13 June 2024) that are currently developing the plans of Friskvåderstorget, the impression was that the plans are developed with a tight budget. On the other hand, Framtiden AB just bought land in the new district of Karlastaden. The private companies that speculated on the land have the right to buy the land back to the same price in a few years making Framtiden AB essentially the bank for those private companies (Yousuf, 2024). This focus on priorities shows that the change the city of Gothenburg tries to bring to one of its socio-economic weakest districts is half hearted while priorities are on the more prestigious projects currently developing in the city.



*Rendering of Karlastaden, a new housing and economic district on Hisingen including the tallest building in Scandinavia (Picture: Serneke)*

The argument of too high costs for a cultural centre in a struggling district is therefore non acceptable in my personal opinion. Apart from the moral side of the whole story of investing in the economic district of Karlastaden over investing more in a formerly vulnerable and already existing area and neighbourhoods, the long-term cost of supporting a socio-economic weaker district is probably much higher than investing in a more social architecture that will lead to real change in Biskopsgården.

The process of this master thesis was long and interesting. Starting from my personal interest in architectural solutions to societal problems like segregation, to finding a site that would support my argument of insufficient planning with good intentions, investigating in several directions made the design in the end logical and seemingly effortless. Personal life changes made the practical work process on the other hand a little bit difficult and with more time on my hands I would have liked to get more into details of the design and speak to more people involved in the zoning plan and to current residents of the neighbourhoods of Norra Biskopsgården. All in all I hope that this thesis can inspire others to develop architectural ideas for real-life projects and challenge the current building industry. Positive changes in social and environmental aspects within the building sector are inevitable with a political debate changing for the worse and climate change threatening society. If not students and young architects, who else is questioning the status quo in the building industry?

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