



**CHALMERS**  
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# Defining attractive cities with focus on social sustainability and aesthetics

Examination of the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg

Master's thesis in Architecture and Civil Engineering  
Emma Engnell

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AND CIVIL ENGINEERING

Design and Construction Project Management

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*Master's Thesis in the Master's Programme Design and Construction Project  
Management*

EMMA ENGNELL

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Chalmers University of Technology

ABSTRACT

Creating attractive cities is a complex process, where the urban environments play a central role in shaping the everyday experiences of their inhabitants. The surroundings affect people's social interactions, economic opportunities and overall quality of life. The aim of this study is to define what the concept of attractiveness in urban spaces is, with focus on aesthetics and social sustainability. This is examined through a literature study of urban theories and policy documents, particularly policies of the New European Bauhaus (NEB), Gestaltad Livsmiljö (GL), and the Architectural Policy of Gothenburg (AP), and the urban theory *Life between buildings* by Jan Gehl. Attractiveness is further studied through a case study at Selma Lagerlöfs torg in Gothenburg. This case study compares perceptions from both a project management perspective and from a residential perspective after the redevelopment. This was done through an interview study with 10 main contributors to the project, and site visits with a survey study, which was answered by 59 residents in the area.

The results of this study show that an attractive city is not solely characterized by visual qualities, but also by its capacity to promote social sustainability, inclusiveness, and aesthetics. To plan an attractive city the process of urban development must be an iterative, inclusive, human centred and context aware process, creating inclusivity with the contemporary and future locals in the area.

Selma Lagerlöfs torg was overall a successful project, appreciated both by main contributors and by locals in the area. However, none of the policy frameworks were consciously used when planning the redevelopment, only the theories by Gehl were partly considered. This concludes, that while policy and theory provide valuable guidance true attractiveness ultimately depends on how spaces are perceived, used, and lived in by diverse groups over time.

Key words: Attractive city, New European Bauhaus, Gestaltad livsmiljö, Architectural policy of Gothenburg, Jan Gehl, Selma Lagerlöfs torg.

Definiera attraktiva städer med inriktning på social hållbarhet och estetik

En granskning av ombyggnationen av Selma Lagerlöfs torg

Examensarbete inom masterprogrammet: Design and Construction Project  
Management

Emma Engnell

Institutionen för arkitektur och samhällsbyggnadsteknik

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## SAMMANFATTNING

Att skapa attraktiva städer är en komplex process där den urbana miljön spelar en central roll i att forma invånarnas vardagliga upplevelser. Omgivningen påverkar människors sociala interaktioner, ekonomiska möjligheter och den övergripande livskvaliteten. Syftet med denna studie är att definiera vad begreppet attraktivitet i urbana miljöer innebär, med fokus på estetik och social hållbarhet. Detta undersöks genom en litteraturstudie av urbana teorier och policydokument, särskilt riktlinjer från New European Bauhaus (NEB), Gestaltad livsmiljö (GL) och Göteborgs arkitekturpolicy (AP), samt den urbana teorin *Life Between Buildings* av Jan Gehl. Attraktivitet studeras vidare genom en fallstudie vid Selma Lagerlöfs torg i Göteborg. Fallstudien jämför uppfattningar både ur ett projektledningsperspektiv och ur ett boendeperspektiv efter ombyggnationen. Detta gjordes genom en intervjustudie med 10 huvudaktörer i projektet, samt platsbesök med en enkätundersökning som besvarades av 59 boende i området.

Resultaten från studien visar att en attraktiv stad inte enbart kännetecknas av visuella kvaliteter, utan även av dess förmåga att främja social hållbarhet, inkludering och estetik. För att planera en attraktiv stad måste stadsutvecklingsprocessen vara iterativ, inkluderande, människocentrerad och kontextmedveten, och skapa inkludering för såväl samtida som framtida boende i området.

Selma Lagerlöfs torg var överlag ett lyckat projekt, uppskattat både av huvudaktörerna och av de boende i området. Dock användes inga av de policyramverk som studien undersökt medvetet i planeringen av ombyggnationen, endast teorier av Gehl togs delvis i beaktande. Slutsatsen är att även om policy och teori ger värdefull vägledning, avgörs verklig attraktivitet i slutändan av hur platser upplevs, används och levts i av olika grupper över tid.

Nyckelord: Attraktiv stad, New European Bauhaus, Gestaltad livsmiljö, Göteborgs Arkitekturpolicy, Jan Gehl, Selma Lagerlöfs torg.



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## Preface

During the spring 2025, from January to June, this master's thesis has been shaped. The report is written as a thesis for the last part of the Design and Construction Project Management master's program at Chalmers University of Technology and summarizes five years of studies in civil engineering. The theme of the thesis was carefully shaped with the help of Anna-Johanna Klasander and Louise Didriksson at White Arkitekter, together with my supervisors at Chalmers University of Technology Greta Faxberg and Paula Femenias. Without their knowledge and opinions this thesis would not have been what it is, and therefore I would like to express my greatest gratitude for their contribution. Further, I would like to thank every interviewee who participated in the interview study and all respondents who contributed with their perceptions on the survey, without your cooperation this study would not have been possible. Lastly, I'd like to express my strong appreciation to Emilia Evertsson and Tilda Andersson for their opponent work on this thesis, your support and notes were highly valued.

This interesting field of study has provided me with a greater knowledge of what makes a city attractive and enjoyable, not just from a technical or architectural standpoint, but also social sustainability. By exploring urban design, infrastructure planning, and the dynamics of the development of Selma Lagerlöfs torg, I've gained valuable insights into how different factors interact to shape cities where people thrive. This comprehensive perspective will be a strong asset in my future career as a building engineer.

Gothenburg, June 2025  
Emma Engnell





# 1 Introduction

Urban environments shape the daily lives of their inhabitants, influencing peoples' social interactions, economic activities, wellbeing and overall quality of life. The concept of attractiveness in urban spaces has gained increasing attention in both academic discourse and practical urban development. An attractive city is not only defined by its aesthetic appeal, but also by its ability to foster social sustainability, inclusivity, and environmental responsibility (Brenner et al., 2012; Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). Yet contemporary urban development faces some challenges, in homogenization of architecture, lack of human centered urban design, and tensions between economic efficiency and quality of life (Sim, 2022). Over the past decade, observations have been made that many newly constructed urban environments tend to appear more uniform and less visually appealing (Carmona, 2010). It's argued that contemporary public spaces often are characterized by standardized and aesthetically sterilized designs, which may lack local identity and visual richness. Whether this trend is a result of personal preferences, the influence of cost cutting measures and profit maximization in the construction industry, or other underlying factors is an interesting question. What are the driving forces behind modern architectural design choices from a project's perspective, and its impact on urban aesthetics?

The debate surrounding urban attractiveness is particularly relevant in the context of rapid urbanization and sustainability goals. Cities today must balance economic growth, social cohesion, and ecological considerations, all while ensuring that public spaces remain welcoming and accessible to all (European Commission, 2021). In Sweden, national and international policy documents such as New European Bauhaus (NEB), Gestaltad Livsmiljö (GL), and Gothenburg's Architectural Policy (AP) aim to integrate aesthetics, sustainability, and inclusivity into urban design (Boverket, 2023; Stadsbyggnadskontoret, 2019). Despite these ambitions, there seems to be a gap between theoretical aspirations and practical implementation, making it essential to evaluate how such policies manifest in real-world projects. This research contributes to the broader discussion on urban development by examining the effectiveness of policy-driven design interventions and assessing their impact on local communities.

## 1.1 Aim

This thesis explores how urban planning can create more attractive and socially sustainable cities, with a specific focus on the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg in Gothenburg. The square serves as a compelling case study because of its transformation from a declining commercial center to a revitalized urban hub. The project raises crucial questions about how well-planned urban design can enhance both aesthetics and social sustainability.

Consequently, the study aims at contributing to discussions of how an attractive city space is described and lived. The study is limited to discussing an attractive city from aesthetics-, and social sustainability perspectives. The goal of the study is to provide insights into definitions and challenges for attractive cities, and thus support future projects in implementing more attractiveness into the development of city areas.

## 1.2 Research questions

The specific aim of this study is to evaluate the goals of attractiveness in projects, how it is described by urban theory, urban policies, and project managers, and compare it to the daily users' opinions of the chosen location; Selma Lagerlöf's torg at Hisingen in Gothenburg.

The questions that the research aim to answer are:

- With the focus on aesthetics and social sustainability, how is an attractive city defined by urban theories and relevant policy documents?
- Focusing on the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöf's torg, how is an attractive city perceived practically, from the perspective of the project group and from a user perspective?

## 1.3 Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Primarily, it will mainly include the factors aesthetics and social sustainability regarding attractive cities and the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöf's torg, excluding economic, ecological and political aspects. The study from Selma Lagerlöf's torg will solely focus on the projects concerned stakeholders and the daily user's perspective. The study is conducted from a national perspective in Sweden -but will include international theories and policies. The study will also have a temporal limitation and will not include a study of the long-term effects on the neighborhood. Urban development is a long-term process, and the perception of attractiveness may evolve over time, which makes it infeasible to capture in this time frame for this study and this location.

Two other factors that can affect the result are external factors such as weather conditions, temporal events at the location, or seasonal changes, and the availability of respondents.

## 2 Background

In Sweden, national efforts to promote sustainable urban development are evident in policy frameworks and in the work of the central government authority Boverket. According to the research overview “Hållbar stadsutveckling”, sustainable urban development must balance ecological, economic, and social dimensions while being rooted in a democratic planning process (From, 2011). This includes strengthening citizen participation and utilizing cultural and historical assets as active components in shaping future urban environments. It emphasized that a sustainable city is not just built for efficiency but for people’s daily lives and sense of belonging.

The relevance of aesthetics and human-centered design is strongly affirmed by the work of Danish architect Jan Gehl. In his prominent theory on public space, Gehl argues that the quality of life in cities is largely determined by what happens between buildings, rather than the buildings themselves (Gehl, 2011). He categorizes human activities in public space as necessary, optional, or social, and underlines that well-designed urban environments should encourage optional and social activities by offering safety, comfort, and visual interest. Cities designed on a human scale, with short walking distances, active street fronts, greenery, and inviting meeting places, are more likely to support social interaction and long-term use.

The background to this study is built upon institutional ambitions and human centered theories both nationally and internationally, to explore how aesthetics and social sustainability contribute to urban environments that people perceive as attractive.

### 2.1 Policy documents

The following section provides an overview of the different frameworks New European Bauhaus (NEB), the Swedish national Policy for designed living environments called Gestaltad livsmiljö (GL), and the Architectural Policy of Gothenburg (AP) used to contain information about an attractive city's framework in Europe and Sweden.

#### 2.1.1 New European Bauhaus

The New European Bauhaus is a policy and funding initiative founded in 2020 by the European Union, to make green transitions in built environments enjoyable, attractive and convenient for all (European Union, n.d.). It was initially founded to create sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion into the built environment and societal transformation (European Commission, 2021a). The framework is a cross disciplinary movement, which aims to bridge the gap between art, culture, technology, and environmental responsibility to foster innovative solutions that address contemporary global challenges. It also aligns with the European Green Deal, reinforcing the necessity for a holistic approach to sustainable living and urban development (European Union, n.d.).

The New European Bauhaus framework is built upon three fundamental values that shape its framework and guide its implementation across various projects: sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion (European Commission, 2021a). Sustainability is a crucial component of the NEB initiative as it encompasses a broad spectrum of environmental concerns including climate action, biodiversity conservation, circular economy principles, and zero pollution strategies. A project within the framework is encouraged to minimize its carbon footprint, promote generative ecosystems and

integrate nature-based solutions to urban development. This focus is extended to material selection, waste management and energy efficiency to ensure that designs within NEB contribute to long-term ecological resilience.

Aesthetically, the New European Bauhaus emphasizes the importance of beauty in urban spaces, architecture and public infrastructure (European Commission, 2021a). Beyond functionality, it advocates for a meaningful and contextually responsive design that enhances the wellbeing of individuals and communities. This value is rooted in the belief that aesthetically pleasing environments foster social cohesion, mental health, and a deeper connection to cultural heritage.

Lastly, inclusion is an important key concept in the New European Bauhaus framework (European Commission, 2021a). Social equity and accessibility are integral, and the initiative strives to create environments that cater to more diverse communities, to ensure equal opportunities and representation in urban architectural development. Projects within the NEB framework prioritize affordability, participatory decision making, and empowerment of marginalized groups, to foster collective ownership of public spaces and advancements in the infrastructure

### **2.1.2 Gestaltad livsmiljö**

Gestaltad livsmiljö, designed living environment, is a proposition (Prop. 2017/18:110) made by the Swedish Government in 2018 (Boverket, 2023a). The proposition presents new national goals in architecture-, form- and design politics (Riksdagen, 2018). The purpose is to contribute to a sustainable, equal and less segregated society through carefully designed living environments. Similar to the New European Bauhaus framework, GL has the ambition for all individuals to have great opportunities to affect the development of the communal environment.

The main goal of this proposition is to foster quality in the designed living environment and to support development in different areas and cities in Sweden, through a clear and strong responsibility structure presented in this collected national architectural policy (Riksdagen, 2018). According to the proposition, the state policy for architecture, form and design in Sweden shall actively foster:

- A holistic approach characterized by quality, collaboration, and dialogue in shaping an attractive designed living environment,
- An inclusive and democratic society with access to high quality living environments, both private and shared,
- Exemplary actions from the public sector, in all its roles, to enhance the quality of the designed living environment, and
- Broad and cross sectoral knowledge development within education as well as for practitioners and stakeholders in the field of designed living environments.

These national goals aim to be attained through several strategies, including:

- Sustainability and quality should not be subordinated to short-term economic considerations.
- Knowledge of architecture, form, and design should be developed and disseminated.
- The public sector should act as a role model.

- Aesthetic, artistic, and cultural historical values should be preserved and enhanced.
- Environments should be designed to be accessible to everyone.
- Cooperation and collaboration should be developed both nationally and internationally.

Through implementations of these strategies, the proposition aims to create inclusive, well designed and sustainable environments which puts peoples' requisites and quality of life first (Riksdagen, 2018).

### 2.1.3 Architectural Policy for Gothenburg

Gothenburg City has its own architectural policy, with a starting point from the policy of Gestaltad Livsmiljö (Stadsbyggnadskontoret, 2019a). Gothenburg's architectural policy aims for a clear direction of the city's development, and to strengthen Gothenburg's role as a "bold example" for other cities within architecture. It is also supposed to work as guidance for all planned, ongoing projects and managing administrations and companies. Moreover, as an inspiration for other actors within urban planning and architecture in Gothenburg to create an attractive city.

There are three key principles in the policy: an attractive city with a strong identity, a city for the people, and a bold model in the department of architecture (Stadsbyggnadskontoret, 2019a). An attractive city with a strong identity means that Gothenburg will develop with respect to its historical heritage and unique characteristics, such as its vicinity to water and its nature site. Public places should be portrayed strategically to strengthen the city's identity and to create an inviting environment for residents and visitors. The city's development should be based on people's needs and contribute to safe, inclusive, and accessible living environments, which is stated in the principle "A city for the people". Public spaces should encourage social interactions, participation, and a high quality of life. Lastly, Gothenburg should be seen as a bold model in the department of architecture. Gothenburg should focus on innovation through pilot projects, architectural competitions, and creative solutions. The city should also serve as a role model by prioritizing long term sustainability over short term economic gains.

These three goals should be achieved by:

- Ensuring that sustainability and quality are not subordinated to short term economic considerations,
- Developing and disseminating knowledge about architecture, form, and design,
- Setting an example through public sector leadership,
- Preserving and enhancing aesthetic, artistic, and cultural-historical values,
- Designing environments to be accessible to all,
- Promoting cooperation and collaboration both nationally and internationally.

As stated in this policy, Gothenburg's aim to be an attractive city is not only about aesthetics but also about social sustainability and accessibility. Through strategic decisions and a holistic approach to urban development, Gothenburg positions itself as a leader in architecture and urban planning, where quality of life and innovation take center stage. The architectural policy emphasizes the importance of creating an attractive city where architecture, urban planning, and sustainability work together to shape an inclusive and vibrant living environment. The policy is also a part of Gothenburg's Overview plan, which is the vision of how the municipality's ground and

water will be used long term (Stadsbyggnadskontoret, 2022). The foundation is that the city will develop sustainably.

## 2.2 Literature study

According to the New European Bauhaus, Gestaltad Livsmiljö and the Architectural Policy of Gothenburg there are some key components in the planning and construction of attractive city areas. These frameworks collectively highlight that the attractiveness of a city is not solely defined by its visual aesthetics but also by its sustainability, inclusivity, cultural richness, and strategic long-term planning. Integrating these shared principles can help cities create high quality living environments that prioritize both human health and wellbeing, as well as ecological responsibility. The following section provides a selective literature study based on existing literature to provide information about what an attractive city is. The angle is to examine an attractive city from the different perspectives' aesthetics and social sustainability, according to the limitations of this study.

### 2.2.1 Aesthetics

Aesthetically pleasing constructions are in all likelihood different for different spectators. According to “Cities for People, Not for Profit” (2012), the concept of an attractive city extends far beyond mere visual appeal; it encapsulates a multitude of elements that contribute to the overall experience and functionality of urban spaces (Brenner et al., 2012). Aesthetically pleasing cities must include accessible public spaces to foster community interactions, spaces which not only include beauty but also serve as venues for social exchange and cultural expressions to contribute to a city's overall attractiveness. The precipitation of conventional architectural norms in further challenges, resonating that the favor of iconic structures at the expense of inclusivity and communal character should not be expected. It's posited that attractive architecture should resonate with the local context, cultural practices, and historical narratives of the inhabitants, thus fostering a sense of belonging and identity within urban spaces. Simultaneously, it's important to notice that attractiveness is affected by its target group. If a city wants to attract tourism or if it's aiming to please its residents, different measures cause different outcomes. Beautiful nature and interesting destinations attract more tourists, and good service, green areas and limited motorism is more attractive to permanent residents (Andersson et al., 2008).

According to the framework New European Bauhaus, there are three core principles for an attractive city: beauty, sustainability, and inclusivity. Based on these core principles a survey study was conducted in 2021, targeting architectural students at Gdańsk University of Technology to conclude primary driving factors of individuals' preference for a place to live (Voineag et al., 2024). The results of the study categorized aesthetically appealing cities into five different categories. The first category is green spaces and nature integration, meaning that ecological design and natural elements within urban settings are a key aspect of attractiveness. Secondly, cleanliness and order. This aspect indicated that residents from the survey results in this study associate a well maintained and visually organized environment as a key aspect of urban attractiveness. Well-designed public spaces are the third key aspect according to the study, which emphasizes the importance of accessible public spaces that promote social interactions, community engagement and inclusivity. A city without community engagement and social interactions could be considered dysfunctional. The fourth category for an aesthetically attractive city is architectural harmony, the balance between historical buildings with modern architecture, promoting both sustainability and historical value

with modern technicalities. Lastly, an attractive city needs human centered urban planning, designed with walkability, multimodal transportation options and mixed-use developments. Human centered urban planning aims to ensure that public spaces are functional, accessible and aesthetically pleasing for all.

As declared, aesthetical aspects in city development are not only about visual beauty, but also how the design of the city is made, since it affects people's identity and sense of belonging (From, 2011). According to the research overview made by the council Formas, aesthetic sustainability aspects are often overlooked in research, despite the fact that design and architecture play a central role in how people experience and interact with their surroundings. Swedish sustainability research lacks completely of research in cultural science perspectives today, and examinations of the cultural perspectives meaning and its contribution to a sustainable development is consequently neglected. Likewise, it lacks research in aesthetics significance for a long term sustainable and attractive city. Therefore, independent research plays a more crucial role on the topic.

### **2.2.2 Social sustainability**

For a city to be considered attractive, social sustainability is another important aspect (Mulliner & Maliene, 2011). According to the article *Social Sustainability: A New Conceptual Framework*, social sustainability can be defined as a framework that integrates social, economic, and ecological aspects to address risks in society (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). It is proposed that social sustainability comprises four interrelated concepts: equity, safety, eco presumption, and sustainable urban forms. Equity encompasses justice, redistribution, recognition, and participation to foster community attachment. Safety recognizes the right to protection from environmental and social risks and emphasizes adaptation measures. Eco presumption promotes sustainable consumption and production practices in socially and environmentally responsible ways. Sustainable urban forms focus on physical planning and urban design to enhance social cohesion, safety, and environmental sustainability. Conclusively, meaning that a social sustainable city is designed to be safe, inclusive, inviting and coequal to all residents.

For a city to be perceived as safe, inclusive and socially sustainable, the design and maintenance of urban spaces and green areas play a crucial role (Jansson et al., 2013). The review *Perceived personal safety in relation to urban woodland vegetation* (2013) highlights that while urban woodland vegetation offers aesthetic, ecological, and psychological benefits, it can also influence specific individuals' perception of safety. Key factors affecting perceived personal safety include vegetation density, visibility, and maintenance, as open landscapes allow for better visibility and a sense of control over the environment. This is further underlined by the theory "eyes on the street" stated by Jane Jacobs in the 1960s (Jacobs, 2011). In her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* she explains that the presence of people in public spaces, which is referred to as "eyes on the street", is vital for ensuring urban safety. Streets and public areas automatically become safer when they are actively used and naturally surveilled by residents, enterprises, and passersby. This informal social control discourages criminal activity and fosters a sense of community responsibility which is vital for a safe and social sustainable environment.

Another angle of approach to social sustainability is provided in the thesis *Attractiveness in Urban Design*, which discusses social sustainability within the frame

for attractive city planning and design (Hidman, 2018). From this perspective, social sustainability is discussed from the residents' experiences of urban places and their history. Therefore, to understand what makes a place attractive, it is important to incorporate the residents' approaches and observations. The study emphasizes that attractive cities often are described as well measured, with good navigability, local identity, clear boundaries between buildings and nature, and well-connected districts. Further, the study highlights that attractiveness and social sustainability should be seen as interconnected. To achieve truly attractive and sustainable urban environments, urban planning must not only focus on economic and aesthetic development but also consider the needs, experiences, and participation of residents in the decision-making process. Furthermore, a city's density is another key component that affects social sustainability (Sim, 2022). A denser city provides less barriers, which leads to less segregation between different city parts. It is also effective since a denser city designed for pedestrians and cyclists is more likely to be socially inclusive, encouraging citizens to interact with their surroundings. Building design is another key component in socially sustainable cities (Woodcraft et al., 2012). Not only aesthetically, but different designs and outlines of buildings can create more open spaces for residents, and a more inclusive and attractive environment to interrelate in.

The New European Bauhaus framework is as mentioned in Chapter 2.1.1 built upon three core principles: sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusion (European Commission, 2021b). Social sustainability is in this case inwrought under inclusivity, since its definition is to include residents in urban planning for a more diverse and comprehensive city to enhance the quality of life for citizens.

### **3 Methodology**

This section describes the process of this research to collect reliable information, to answer the research questions in a way that fulfills the aim of the study. Predominantly, this is a qualitative study, answering questions on why, how and what makes a city attractive from different stakeholders' perspectives, with the case study of Selma Lagerlöfs torg.

#### **3.1 Research approach**

To obtain information for this study, empirical data was conducted through several interviews and a survey combined with site visits. This was a qualitative study to obtain and perceive experiences of the square Selma Lagerlöfs torg. Prior to the interview phase, a substantial variety of information was collected through a selective literature study. The literature was found to acquire relevant background information and theories within the subject, to construct more pertinent and reliable questions for the interviews. This is called an abductive research approach, where both induction and deduction are included in the research to obtain information (Löfberg, 2023). Through this iterative process between theories and empirical data, this research aims to formulate reasonable declarations on attractive cities. The abductive approach enables the development of new theories throughout the research process, complementing the empirical data, and gathering additional data during the writing phase was considered essential to providing a comprehensive and relevant overview.

#### **3.2 Literature study**

A selective literature study was conducted for this research. It contained information about academic resources definitions on attractiveness in cities, with the specification on aesthetics, and social sustainability. The information was conducted from searching on the different databases Science direct, Google Scholar and Scopus, with key words as “attractive city”, "Research Overview Sustainable Urban Development", and “urban planning”. The material collected included scientific articles, reports, and books. Information was also gathered from physical books borrowed from Gothenburg's Public Library.

The literature study was initiated early in the study to establish a solid foundation for the research topic. This early exploration of relevant literature helped to shape the framework and direction of the study, ensuring a clear understanding of existing knowledge before proceeding with the interviews. Organizing and synthesizing the literature was essential to guide the research process and provide context for the data collection. However, the literature study remained an ongoing process throughout the study, as new insights and information emerged during the interviews. This iterative approach allowed the research to remain aligned with the evolving understanding of the topic, ensuring a deeper and more comprehensive exploration.

#### **3.3 Interviews**

This research was further built upon interviews, and in total 8 interviews with 10 different main contributors for the Selma Lagerlöfs torg project were conducted. This was the primary data collection method for this study, to gather relevant information

for background and results on attractive cities and Selma Lagerlöfs torg. Each interview was held with main contributors from different parts of the project's lifetime, specified in table 1 below. The selection of interviewees was conducted through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Initially, individuals with significant roles in the redevelopment project at Selma Lagerlöfs torg were contacted through email or phone. The aim was to capture a broad and nuanced understanding of the project through a diversity of professional backgrounds and responsibilities in the project. Gaining access to the first interviewee proved to be the most challenging part of the process. However, once the first contact was established, subsequent interviewees were identified and recruited through recommendations from earlier participants, following a snowball effect. This approach ensured a well-rounded representation of perspectives, through the inclusion of main contributors from different stages and sectors of the project. All interviews were semi structured, due to its flexibility and favorable structure for qualitative research like this (Kircher & Zipp, 2022). There was a set of predetermined questions for each interview, with the flexibility to follow up questions and adjust their sequence based on the response. Mainly, the same questions were asked to all interviewees, but some were tailored to individuals. The interviews were recorded, and all questions can be found in Appendix A.

POSITION	EDUCATION	COMPANY	DATE	LOCATION	DURATION	PSEUDONYM
DEVELOPERS COMMON ARCHITECT	ARCHITECTURE	WHITE ARKITEKTER	12/3-25	ON SITE	1H 22 MIN	ARCHITECT 1
LEAD PROJECT MANAGER FOR THE DETAILED DEVELOPMENT PLAN	PLAN ARCHITECT	GÖTEBORGS STAD	20/3-25	ONLINE	37 MIN	PROJECT MANAGER 1
PROJECT MANAGER PARK EXPANSION	HORTICULTURIST	GÖTEBORGS STAD	20/3-25	ONLINE	44 MIN	PROJECT MANAGER 2
PROJECT MANAGER OF STREET AND SQUARE	ENGINEERING PHYSICS	GÖTEBORGS STAD	31/3-25	ON SITE	34 MIN	PROJECT MANAGER 3
PROJECT DIRECTOR & PROJECT ARCHITECT	ARCHITECTURE	GÖTEBORGS STAD	31/3-25	ONLINE	43 MIN	PROJECT DIRECTOR 1
PROJECT DIRECTOR	CIVIL ENGINEERING	FRAMTIDEN AB	1/4-25	ON SITE	1H 1 MIN	PROJECT DIRECTOR 2
COMMUNICATOR (EXAMINATION)	JOURNALIST	GÖTEBORGS STAD	3/4-25	ONLINE	28 MIN	COMMUNICATOR
THREE DIFFERENT PROJECT MANAGERS	SURVEYOR, CIVIL ENGINEERING, SURVEYOR	GÖTEBORGS STAD	9/4	ON SITE	2H 32 MIN	PROJECT MANAGER 4, PROJECT MANAGER 5, PROJECT MANAGER 6

Table 1: Chart overview of the interviews executed

### 3.4 Site visits & survey

To capture the public's perceptions of the redevelopment, site visits were used as a part of the method. On several occasions; 18th of March, 9th of April, 21st of April and 5th of May 2025, the square was visited to obtain information and interviews with people occupied at the square. All visits were made during relatively same weather conditions, but during different parts of the day, to collect a broader target group but with the same circumstances. People on and around the square were approached with a QR-code, which led to a form asking several questions about the square prior and after the

redevelopment (see Appendix B). In total, 59 individuals responded to the survey, while a significantly larger number of people were invited to participate, the majority declined. The survey was also emailed to some enterprises in the area, without further success.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The empirical material was analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method for identifying and analyzing paternal themes within datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data collected through semi structured interviews were analyzed manually and then categorized into different themes depending on the responses. These themes were reviewed and refined through iterative comparisons with raw data to ensure internal coherence. Themes were then clearly defined and named, resulting in a thematic structure that reflected both the explicit content and underlying meanings present in the data.

The survey was categorized according to thematic areas from the start, and did not consequently need further manual analysis but allowed for a structured analysis of patterns across different topics. While the survey data was primarily quantitative, open-ended responses were also examined using a simplified thematic approach to capture recurring ideas or concerns expressed by respondents. This helped complement the thematic closed questions and provided additional context to the themes identified in the qualitative analysis.

### **3.6 Use of AI**

Artificial Intelligence, AI, was used in this study as a tool to support the transcription of qualitative interview data. The transcription process was conducted using “Chalmers AI portal”, a beta testing version, to generate textual output from speech. The use of AI in this context aimed to enhance the efficiency, accuracy, and reproducibility of transcription, which is often a more time-consuming task in qualitative research. The resulting transcripts were reviewed manually to correct errors, misinterpretations, or formatting issues. AI was also used to help reformulate and correct parts of the text linguistically, but not to generate new text. However, AI was used to generate the cover picture for this thesis.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

To respect ethical integrity throughout the study, all participants in the interviews were informed about the purpose of the research and how their contributions would be used. Interviewees were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities, and their participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Survey respondents remained fully anonymous, and this anonymity was clearly communicated to them prior to participation. All data was handled with confidentiality and in accordance with relevant ethical guidelines for research, and all identification information from the interviews was later deleted.

### **3.8 Reliability**

To ensure a reliable approach for this study, various measures were taken into action. The reliability of different sources for the literature study was taken into account, depending on its date of issue, only choosing sources from after 2008 to assure a more

accurate relevancy. A diverse foundation was created for the interview study, by interviewing a diverse group of people with different interests and duties during the project of Selma Lagerlöfs torg. All interviews with main contributors were conducted using the same method, a semi structured interview approach with the same core questions in each interview, and follow up questions applied systematically to explore themes that emerged during the interviews. These interviews with citizens were conducted through a survey during the site visits to the square. The site visits were made on different occasions but with the same weather conditions, to minimize the risk of temporal biases and enhance the reliability further.

## 4 Selma Lagerlöfs torg



*Figure 1: Selma Lagerlöfs torg (Authors own image)*

Selma Lagerlöfs torg is a square at Hisingen in Gothenburg. During the 1970s the square and the area around it, Backa, was built as a part of the million homes program in Sweden, where mass produced apartments were brought up on former agricultural land. The square was up until 2014 a working center for the neighborhood with some shops, schools, preschool, library, church etc. (Grabowska, 2014). After 2014, something in the area shifted and the region became more unsafe, and faced several challenges, including declining commercial activity, social insecurity, and an urban layout characterized by traffic separation and underutilized spaces. To address these issues, the City of Gothenburg initiated a detailed planning process to transform Selma Lagerlöfs torg into a vibrant and sustainable urban center with a new updated cultural center, new attractive housings and a safe square and park street. The redevelopment plan included densification through mixed use buildings, improved public transportation infrastructure, and the introduction of new residential, commercial, and community spaces. According to the Plan description made by the City of Gothenburg the key objectives of the project included enhancing social sustainability, improving urban connectivity, supporting economic growth and promoting environmental sustainability (Grabowska, 2014). The aim was to enhance social sustainability by increasing safety, for instance by rebuilding underpasses, and to create inclusive public spaces, such as an attractive square area. The plan description also prioritized improving urban connectivity by redesigning Litteraturgatan, which is the main street in Backa, from a traffic barrier into a pedestrian friendly city street.

To support economic growth the goal was to revitalize local commerce and integrate municipal services into the area, to reverse the downhill trend. Environmental sustainability played a role in incorporating green spaces, sustainable stormwater management and energy efficient construction for new buildings.



Figure 2: Map of the location of Selma Lagerlöfs torg in Gothenburg, Sweden. (Lantmäteriet, 2025) ©Lantmäteriet

The redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg was expected to require approximately 10 years, and was structured into multiple phases, each addressing key aspects of the transformation (Gavel & Schiötz, 2014). During the first phase there was initial planning and infrastructure preparation. During this phase the detailed plan was developed, the adjustments and relocations to buildings, roads and utilities were planned and an environmental and geotechnical assessment was made to ensure sustainable urban development. In this phase, citizens were also invited into the conversation for potential opinions on their future neighborhood. In the next phase, there was demolition and site preparation. This phase included demolition of outdated buildings, site preparation for new residential and commercial areas, and temporary relocation of affected municipal services and businesses. The goal during the reconstruction was not to close businesses, but to help relocate them temporarily if necessary. Construction of new mixed-use developments was the next phase, which included the development of new residential buildings, including apartments, student accommodations and townhouses. The phase also included the establishment of new commercial spaces, such as shops, restaurants and the cultural center, and the construction of municipal buildings, such as a new library, healthcare and administrative offices. Later phases included development of public spaces and prioritizing green infrastructure. Throughout this phase, the redesign of Selma Lagerlöfs torg was done to create a more attractive and functional public space with seating areas, greenery, and better pedestrian access. Green corridors and parks were developed, made with the focus on spaces for children and young people. Transportation and mobility improvements were also focused on during the later phases, by upgrading the public transportation, expansion of safe cycling and pedestrian pathways, and construction of parking facilities. The last phase was finalization and long-term urban management. This phase includes completion of remaining infrastructure and landscaping improvements, and ongoing maintenance and potential future adjustments based on community feedback. This last phase also includes the evaluation of the project's impact on housing, economy and social sustainability in the area Selma Lagerlöfs torg.



Figure 3: aerial image of Selma Lagerlöfs torg 2025 vs. 1975 (Lantmäteriet, 2025)  
©Lantmäteriet

According to the final report from the project the goal with the reconstruction was to create an attractive and sustainable urban space with focus on green surfaces, pedestrian- and bike friendly lanes together with an increased sense of comfort and safety (Blomqvist, 2024). The goal in the project phase was to create "A city for everybody", "A comfortable city" and "An open city". The project encompassed several stages to ensure success, and one more rare stage was the citizen dialogue that occurred during phase 1. This dialogue was possible due to the temporary office that was positioned in the square, for the public to see and opionate on future plans in the area. Further, for the park lane, the district administration carried out a comprehensive dialogue process involving eight different focus groups within the area. These included local residents, the Disability Council, the Pensioners' Council, the Northern Hisingen Youth Council, an internal working group composed of managers from local municipal services, the middle school program at the local culture center, a drop-in workshop at Selma Center, and ninth grade students from Skälltorpsskolan. The aim was to gather a diverse range of perspectives and needs from both residents and professionals who use the spaces regularly. Participants were asked to reflect on their current use of the public spaces, identify positive aspects of the existing environment, describe desired activities they would like to engage in, and suggest what changes could encourage them to use the spaces more frequently. The results from this were used to create an architectural competition to design the park lane at the end of the square lane. This competition was won by ÅWL Architects in 2016 with their proposal "Backa Binder", which later was used in the construction phase.

The plan gained legal force on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2015, and after that there was a time frame of 10 years to fully develop the plan (Göteborgs stad, n.d.; Grabowska, 2014). Below is a visualization of the map of the comprehensively established area today.



Figure 4: Map of Selma Lagerlöfs torg today (Lantmäteriet, 2025). ©Lantmäteriet

## 5 Result

The result is divided into two parts; the first part includes the findings of the interviews conducted with main contributors to the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg. The questions aim to answer if, why, and how Selma Lagerlöfs torg was a successful project, and to examine potential deviations and mistakes made during the process. The second part of the result includes the public's opinion whether Selma Lagerlöfs torg was a successful project or not. It contains different viewpoints from residents, workers, and visitors to the area.

### 5.1 Interviews with main contributors

In this section, all information is based on the interviews conducted with main contributors, such as project managers, architects and engineers, who worked on the project Selma Lagerlöfs torg. The pseudonyms used are stated in table 1, section 3.3.

#### 5.1.1 Definitions of an attractive city

The concept of an "attractive city" emerged as a central theme in the interviews conducted with professionals involved in the Selma Lagerlöf's torg urban development project. Across the ten interviews, several reoccurring qualities were emphasized, qualities that contribute not only to physical aesthetics, but also to how residents and visitors interact with, perceive, and use urban spaces. The most common reoccurring phrase was "a city you want to stay in". More specifically, not a city where you arrive, do what you need to do, and leave. An attractive city is where you can do what you need to do and choose to stay.

The theories of Jan Gehl were also mentioned in several interviews, particularly the interviewees with a background in architecture. Out of the ten interviewed, architect 1, project manager 1, 2 & 3, and project director 1 & 2 mentioned the name Gehl. However, project manager 4, 5 & 6 indirectly mentioned these theories as well by mentioning "the life between buildings". Jan Gehl's theory is that great urban planning should originate from people's need to stay and move through public spaces, as project manager 4 mentions as important in that interview. Architect 1, who put the most effort into the aesthetics of planning Selma Lagerlöf's torg out of the people interviewed for this study, had a more elaborate answer to this question. "Presuppose from people and people's experiences of urban spaces. An experimental city, with good orientation and a balance between hard and soft, for instance greenery and water, with clear boundaries between private, public and semi-public areas is important. The microclimate is very important". These thoughts also originate from Jan Gehl's theories.

Other factors mentioned to contribute to an attractive city were a lot of greenery, nice urban meeting spots, and a calm environment. The combination of function and esthetics, to create a safe och social sustainable environment. Several interviews underlined the work with entries on Selma Lagerlöfs torg as a measure to create a safer environment, as the square becomes more open and convivial for residents and visitors. This is also a theory that originated from Jan Gehl.

### **5.1.2 NEB, GL & the Architectural Policy**

Several recent European and national initiatives aim to strengthen the connection between architecture, sustainability, and societal development. Among these are the New European Bauhaus (NEB), Gestaltad livsmiljö (GL), and the Swedish Architecture Policy (AP). These frameworks are intended to guide the planning and design of future sustainable and attractive communities. Yet, in the project Selma Lagerlöfs torg it is evident that these frameworks have not yet been widely applied in practice. The interviews with main contributors revealed that a majority of the project actives who were not architects, 5 out of 6, had never heard of NEB at the time of the interview. In contrast, all interviewed architects stated that they were familiar with all three frameworks. GL and the AP were more common, and all ten respondents had some prior knowledge. Project director 1 explained that none of the frameworks were actively used in the planning or execution of the project. NEB was established in 2020, by which time Selma Lagerlöfs torg was largely completed. Further, project director 1 noted that many of the values and principles represented in these frameworks, such as social sustainability, the relevance of design, and human-centered environments, were already reflected in the project's practical implementation.

Those respondents who were familiar with the frameworks generally expressed positive attitudes, viewing them as valuable tools for future urban development. The frameworks were seen as offering relevant guidance for creating inclusive, safe, and attractive urban spaces. Project director 1 also emphasized that they can serve as inspiration rather than strict regulations but still contribute to a shared value base throughout the development process. Even project leaders who had no prior knowledge of NEB, GL, or the Architecture Policy acknowledged, after hearing about them, that they could potentially support the creation of well-designed and socially sustainable cities. Project manager 4 specifically pointed out that policy documents are helpful in the planning process, as they strengthen arguments and facilitate demands toward other actors. When supported by national or European policy, it becomes easier to advocate for long-term values such as aesthetic quality, climate awareness, and social inclusion, especially in negotiations where short-term financial concerns might otherwise dominate.

### **5.1.3 The Goal of the reconstruction of the square**

The redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg aims to transform a socially vulnerable and physically deteriorated area into a vibrant, inclusive, and a more safe urban environment. Before the intervention, the square was characterized by a decline in commercial activity, numerous vacant retail spaces, and a general sense of neglect. A significant portion of the area was occupied by surface level parking, and the surrounding built environment included a limited number of residential units. Over the course of the project, approximately 1,200 new homes were added to the area, significantly increasing the local population and contributing to a more vibrant urban fabric.

One of the central motivations for the redevelopment was the need to address issues of safety and social cohesion. The district of Backa had high levels of criminal activity, including car fires, drug trade and other forms of urban unrest, which contributed to a sense of insecurity among locals. As noted by project director 2, a key ambition was to

"create the conditions for a safer environment and populate the spaces between buildings." The project team thus aimed to activate underused public areas to foster social interaction and natural surveillance. Project manager 3 further highlighted that the square was envisioned as a place "accessible to everyone," countering earlier exclusivity and spatial segregation. The team emphasized inclusivity, affordability, and everyday usability, designing for daily life rather than glorious gestures. A key strategy was to strengthen local commerce by developing the square as a community-oriented alternative to large scale shopping centers, thereby anchoring everyday activity within the neighborhood itself. These services included a grocery store, a pharmacy and coffee shops among others.

Another spatial change involved the removal of underpasses and tunnels for pedestrians and cyclists, which had previously contributed to feelings of unease around the square. These were during the reconstruction sealed and replaced by ground level crossings and a redesigned urban structure that emphasized visibility, accessibility, and a sense of presence in public space through pedestrian streets, the park lane and the square lane. The project in general was driven by a vision to comprehensively transform the area, not merely through physical renewal but by reshaping its identity and social dynamics. As project manager 2 expressed it, the goal was to "completely change an entire district and increase its attractiveness."

#### **5.1.3.1 Main focuses to plan a more attractive square**

A recurring priority mentioned by multiple respondents was the importance of designing for the human scale, particularly at ground level. Architect 1 emphasized that the design of ground floors and the quality of the streetscape were the most critical factors for improving the area's appeal. This focus on what happens "at eye level" reflects an awareness of how people experience cities in everyday life and how physical environments influence behavior, safety, and social interaction. Eye level additions include entryways facing the square for a safer outlook, greenery at the square for a calming environment, and extra seating for spontaneous use or meetings around the square. These factors were all closely planned as part of the detailed development plan for the square.

According to project manager 3, one of the factors that contributed to the increased attractiveness of Selma Lagerlöfs torg is the intentional design of the street network, which makes car traffic less convenient. Limiting car accessibility and traffic volumes, which were previously high in the area, enhances social sustainability by creating a safer and more inclusive space. This was clearly articulated in the area's quality program, to prioritize pedestrians and cyclists, and therefore carefully considered and planned. Accessibility and movement patterns were in general key design strategies in the area. Further, project director 1 described how the placement of the bus stop directly adjacent to the square was a deliberate move to improve both access and safety. Additionally, vehicle speeds were reduced in the area, to enhance walking and socializing even more. The square was envisioned as a "skvallertorg" (gossip square, a casual meeting place), encouraging lingering and informal interactions. Project director 1 highlighted that ensuring people both feel seen and can see others was a fundamental principle in improving perceived and actual safety, something that was also addressed with the strategic placement of seating, active frontages, and architectural attention to details at pedestrian height.

In line with these principles, project manager 1 and project director 2, noted that strong attention was paid to public dialogue and participation. A local planning office was established at the square before the reconstruction, where residents were continuously invited to engage with and influence the planning process. This inclusive approach helped guide design choices such as strategic placement of services like the grocery store and cultural center, and safe and visible transit connections. Project manager 3 emphasized the importance of this incremental, step-by-step approach to achieving the thoughtful and refined outcome they wished for. Unlike conventional fast track developments, the project on Selma Lagerlöfs torg took more iterative steps than usual, allowing for ongoing reflection, feedback, and adjustment throughout the planning process, with the help of residents in the area.

Another key factor in this project was the budget. In general, new constructions use more expensive materials at eye level and ground floors. At Selma Lagerlöfs torg the budget allowed for the same, more expensive materials to cover full buildings, which according to architect 1 made the square more attractive. It also allowed a more cohesive environment because different materials could be planned for different buildings from the beginning.

### **5.1.3.2 Social sustainability and aesthetics**

“I believe that aesthetics' is required for social sustainability”, stated by project director 1, further explaining that creating places where people want to be, makes the space more sustainable. This was also explained by the majority of the interviewees, meaning that the project aimed to create an aesthetically pleasing environment for the locals, to keep them occupied in the square. Project managers 1 and 2 mentioned that the method used during this project to enhance the atmosphere was an architectural competition. According to them it was less conventional to use these types of competitions for this kind of work at that time. Different architectural firms designed the park lane around the square, and the winning design would be implemented into reality. The competition was won by a firm called ÅWL arkitekter, with their design “Backa Binder”, a proposal aiming for social sustainability with a lot of green implements. However, their design was significantly downscaled, since the funding for their vision required more than double the funding provided in the budget. Nonetheless, this was an attempt to improve the aesthetics and interest at the square, which is not commonly used in projects like this according to project manager 2.

Project director 2 further explains that the aesthetical work on Selma Lagerlöfs torg was made to help social sustainability and affinity. “Our primary focus was on social sustainability, we worked extensively on safety issues, and with that as our guiding principle, we crafted an aesthetic that reinforced social cohesion. Typically, a quality program for the built environment is embedded within the planning documents, but in this case the developers created one separately, driven by a very high ambition for execution and a clear vision of how everything should look. This ensured a coherent thread throughout. Otherwise, with multiple developers involved, the result can easily become disjointed. Instead, we all agreed on a unified ground-floor treatment and a consistent vertical articulation of the buildings, so that when you walk through the Selma blocks, you immediately recognize and feel a sense of continuity.”

One commonly mentioned enhancer for the attractiveness at Selma Lagerlöfs torg was the Fish House located at the square. Architect 1, states that this was a decoy for the square already before the reconstruction. Consequently, the Fish House was redesigned and refined together with the square, to attract even more people.

#### 5.1.4 Deviations

In the Selma Lagerlöfs torg project, several planned elements ultimately had to be scaled back or postponed, most notably the proposed community sports hall. Project director 1 emphasizes that the sports facility was conceived as a critical “first move” to enhance local safety. It was planned to provide structured activities, such as a karate club, which aimed at engaging youth at risk. It was also intended for the nearby school to have physical education lessons in, since their current facility was of poor quality. Even though design measures were fully implemented, such as “eyes on the street” through active frontages, police reports indicate that street level recruitment continues. In this context, the absence of the sports hall represented a significant deviation from the original social sustainability strategy. This deviation arose during the procurement phase, when the strictures of the Swedish Public Procurement Act (LOU) prevented the city from signing a lease agreement before the building was completed. Under the intended model, the municipality would have committed to a long-term rental contract, enabling the developer Keywe to secure financing. However, without a pre-existing tenant commitment, Keywe could not justify the investment, and so the sports hall was removed from the early construction scope. Project managers 1 and 4 note that this procurement impasse illustrates the broader challenge of expecting purely commercial actors to underwrite essential public interest facilities.

The Project managers report that most significant obstacles tend to emerge in the transition from schematic design to procurement, where policy requirements and market realities collide. Construction logistics also introduces challenges, but it is in these early project stages that misalignments between vision (high social sustainability ambitions) and implementation mechanisms (LOU constraints, financing models etc.) most often force scope changes.

In hindsight, project manager 4 suggests that coupling the sports hall with adjacent housing, thereby diversifying revenue streams, might have mitigated financing risks. However, as project director 1 among others conclude, the LOU framework remains a structural barrier to delivering public good amenities within mixed-use developments and must be addressed at a policy level if future urban renewal projects are to avoid similar deviations. “It cannot be assumed that private commercial actors will underwrite the delivery of public facilities. The Swedish Public Procurement Act poses significant obstacles to achieving high standards of urban quality in built environment projects”.

Further, Project director 2 mentions that another deviation which was not in the detailed development plan was bomb shelters. On certain maps they discovered two bomb shelters in the basement of two center buildings at the square which they planned to rebuild. In the original plan there were no basements, because it's cheaper to build without basements, especially with clay ground as Selma Lagerlöfs torg is built upon. Therefore, when they filed for the building permit they applied to only tear down the bomb shelters and not rebuild them with the new buildings. However, this was declined, meaning that they had to rebuild bomb shelters with the same capacity as the old ones. This took extra time and money from the project, but was necessary according to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency.

#### **5.1.4.1 Potential improvements**

On the question “If you could redo something in this project, what would it be?”, all interviewees answered that the sports hall was a failure. For the safety measures, and the social sustainability measures this was, as mentioned above, a crucial point for all involved in the project. Aside from that, only three notable modifications were wished for: more greenery, more evolved traffic planning, and extreme rainfall management.

More greenery was mentioned by several project managers; hence the competition's influence on the park lane. Initially, the park lane was supposed to have more trees, bushes and flower beds but due to the lack of budgeting in the winning proposal, this was not afforded for the final product. There were also some issues because of pipes in the ground, hindering the planting of greenery. According to project manager 4, people probably perceive Selma Lagerlöfs torg as less green now compared to before the reconstruction, and further explains that this is because the area was mostly only consisting of lawns before. However, these were necessary to remove and reconstruct to create the square at all.

Both project managers 2 and 3 pinpoint traffic planning as one element they would revise. Project manager 2 explains that the original design assumed full compliance with vehicular regulations, an assumption quickly disproven when drivers repeatedly mounted the new park areas. The subsequent retrofitting of bollards solved the immediate safety issue, but felt discordant with the overall design intent. Therefore, a design integrated solution, using thoughtfully designed street furniture or landscape elements to delineate vehicle free zones from the outset, is advocated for. Project manager 3 matches this view, stressing that effective traffic control should have been built into the original plan to prevent unauthorized access while still accommodating emergency vehicle passage. Their combined reflections underline the critical need to embed clear, functional traffic management strategies within the urban design process, to achieve both aesthetic coherence and public safety.

Project manager 5, together with project director 1, were the only ones who mentioned extreme rainfall management as something that should have been examined further. During the planning process of the square, starting in 2009, extreme rainfall was not something project managers really discussed in any project. The detailed development plan for Selma Lagerlöfs torg was accepted in 2014, and it was not until during the construction phase in 2018 that the question came up. According to project manager 5, extreme rainfall management requires large surfaces, and since the detailed development plan already was accepted and the surfaces filled with planned buildings, nothing could be done at that stage of the project. Since the square is located in a valley, heavy rainfall will become an issue in the future. This will become a prerequisite for new plans around the square to take into account when designing their surroundings, to be able to handle large amounts of water from future extreme rainfalls.

#### **5.1.5 Common evaluation**

The overall assessment of the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg is markedly positive among all the interviewed professionals. Architect 1, Project director 1 and Project manager 3 all emphasize that the transformation has led to a significant improvement in both perceived and actual safety, contributing to a greater sense of social inclusion and community presence in the area. Further, Project Manager 2

highlighted that the project has successfully transformed the external overall image of Backa, an area previously associated with insecurity and social exclusion, by establishing a new identity through urban design, which is considered an important achievement in itself. Project managers 1, 4, 5 and 6 focused on how public life has been revitalized through the creation of a more vibrant and active square. They noted that spontaneous use of space and informal social interaction have become more common, which are clear signs of a livelier urban environment. Project director 2 acknowledges the high architectural and spatial ambition of the project, stressing the successful coordination between stakeholders that enabled a consistent and coherent urban expression across different development plots. Further noting that this level of design integrity is not always easy to achieve in projects with multiple actors involved.

Altogether, the respondents viewed the redevelopment as a strong example of how design- and community driven urban renewal can strengthen social cohesion, enhance safety, and contribute to a clearer sense of place. The square is now seen not only as more attractive and accessible, but also as a well-functioning and inclusive environment, that supports long-term social sustainability.

#### **5.1.5.1 Perceived satisfaction of the public**

The general perception among the interviewees is that the public is overall satisfied with the outcome of the Selma Lagerlöfs torg redevelopment. Multiple respondents, project manager 4, 5 and 8, together with project directors 1 and 2, highlight their belief that residents appreciate the increased availability of everyday services. In particular, the pharmacy and the supermarket are the main attractions, but other services such as cafes and small businesses around the square are also enhancers for potential crowds. Project manager 4 and project director 1 also point to strategically placed transit stops as a key component for an appreciated outcome. They also highlight the enhanced spatial layout of the square and the creation of inviting meeting places, which they believe is much appreciated by residents, because of their increased experience of safety. Project manager 1 expressed that some elements, such as the absence of a swimming facility and a shopping center, are still desired by locals, but these gaps do not seem to overshadow the broader sense of appreciation.

Further, architect 1 and project manager 2 emphasize that although some design aspects, like circulation- and moving patterns, may not be consciously noticed by residents, features like the Fish House and green park lane are widely liked. Project manager 2 also notes a general sense of satisfaction, inferred from the lack of either negative or positive feedback from the community. "This is generally a district that does not voice its opinions very often."

Project manager 3 underlines the importance of safety and robustness in traffic planning, suggesting that these invisible, yet effective, interventions contribute to a heightened sense of security among residents. Project manager 3 implies that this subconsciously encourages more people to stay at the square, further noting that the public consciously probably appreciates the visual investments in the area more. Taken together, all interviewees believe that the redesign has enhanced everyday life in the area by making it more functional and attractive, and believe that the public share most of their experiences.

## 5.2 Interviews with citizens

The second part of the interview study was conducted at Selma Lagerlöfs torg with the public, during several occasions. The information in this section is based on impressions from the square, and the public's opinions on the social impact the reconstruction has had on their everyday life.

### 5.2.1 Personal data

The public's opinions were conducted through an online form, which summarized their different thoughts on provided questions. In total, 59 different respondents were collected for this study. The first three questions were more personal questions to gather relevant quantitative information on the respondents. These questions are provided in the following three figures.

1. How old are you?

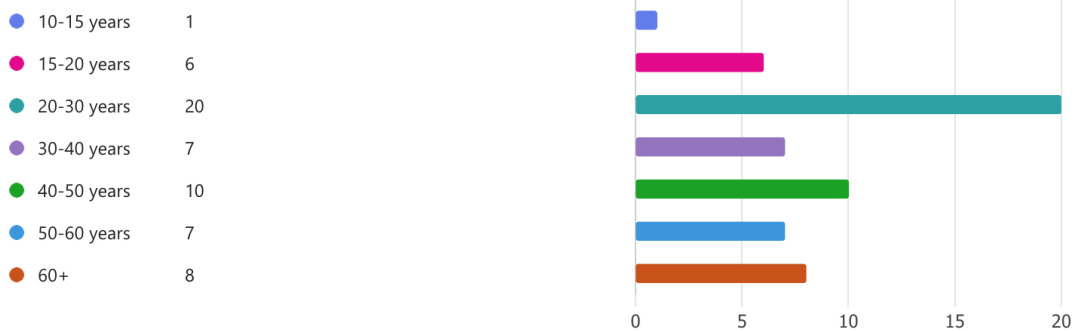


Figure 5: Age differences of participants of the public

2. What is your main reason for being at Selma Lagerlöfs torg?

I live here	18
I work here	13
I shop here	11
Leisure	17

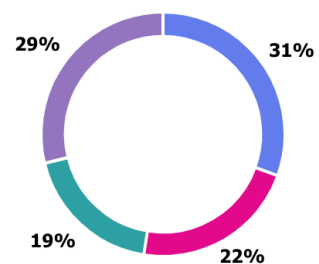


Figure 6: The public's different reasons for being at Selma Lagerlöfs torg

3. If you live in Selma Stad, how long have you resided in the area?



Figure 7: Time resided in the area has lived at Selma Lagerlöfs torg

The majority of the respondents were in the age group 20 – 30 years old, followed by the age group 40 – 50 years old. The occupational question was more even between the alternatives, and out of all of the respondents 31% live at Selma Lagerlöfs torg. None of the 18 people moved to the area between 2015 and 2022, only before or after.

## 5.2.2 Attractiveness at Selma Lagerlöfs torg

The attractiveness of the square and the redevelopment effect was asked through several questions in the form. Based on the responses to the question “Do you think the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg has made the area more attractive?”, the overall sentiment is predominantly positive. Only 2 answers out of 59 were no, and 4 people answered that they didn't know. Several respondents' express appreciation for the improvements in updated and more modern architecture, open spaces and the perceived freshness of the newer constructions. Out of the more elaborate answers, the opinions were more divided. “The redevelopment of the square was necessary, as it had deteriorated and been in steady decline over the past decades. However, I am not convinced that it has become significantly more attractive, given its bleak grey concrete appearance”. This is stated by one respondent, while another response is “The area appears very modern and fresh. I also appreciate the playful architectural forms; I like it when everything is not strictly linear, or box shaped”. Considering this, the perceived aesthetics of the area might appear different, but in 90% of the answers in this study, people experience Selma Lagerlöfs torg as more attractive now than prior to the reconstruction.

4. Do you think the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg has made the area more attractive?



Figure 8: Perceived increased attractiveness at Selma Lagerlöfs torg

Additionally, the question “*What do you find most attractive about Selma Lagerlöfs torg?*” was asked. These responses about the square revealed several recurring themes. A significant number of participants highlighted the newness and modern character of the area, frequently describing it as “fresh,” “open,” and “well designed.” The architectural coherence and contemporary appearance were particularly appreciated, with some respondents noting the consistent design language and open spaces, which contributed to a positive visual impression.

Another prominent aspect enhancing the attractiveness was the range of services and amenities, especially the supermarket Hemköp which was repeatedly mentioned as a valued part of the square. The library, cultural center, and fish house also emerged as appreciated features that added character and functionality to the area. Various individuals emphasized the value of having essential services nearby, to facilitate their everyday life, and contributing to a sense of convenience and community in the area. “I appreciate that it feels like its own self-contained community”. Several individuals also expressed their appreciation for the pedestrian-friendly design and traffic-free areas, as it creates “a safe and accessible environment”. Further, some express the value in the bus stop, enhancing the communication to the city center of Gothenburg, creating a greater feeling of “closeness”.

One divide in response to attractiveness was the presence of green spaces. The square is perceived as aesthetically pleasing and lively. One respondent expressed that they are drawn to the space during moments of emotional distress, as “its vibrant atmosphere with greenery, social activity, and children playing, provides comfort and a sense of connection, alleviating feelings of loneliness.” However, on the question “*What do you feel is missing in Selma Stad?*”, 12 % out of the responses in this study, included greenery. As mentioned, the area might be perceived as grey, due to some of the building's facades being covered in concrete. “More earthy colors would be appreciated. I find the area overwhelmingly grey during my visits. Incorporating some green spaces might help balance this impression.” Although some experience satisfaction with the existing vegetation, the repeated call for more greenery underlines a desire for greater visual diversity in the square’s design.

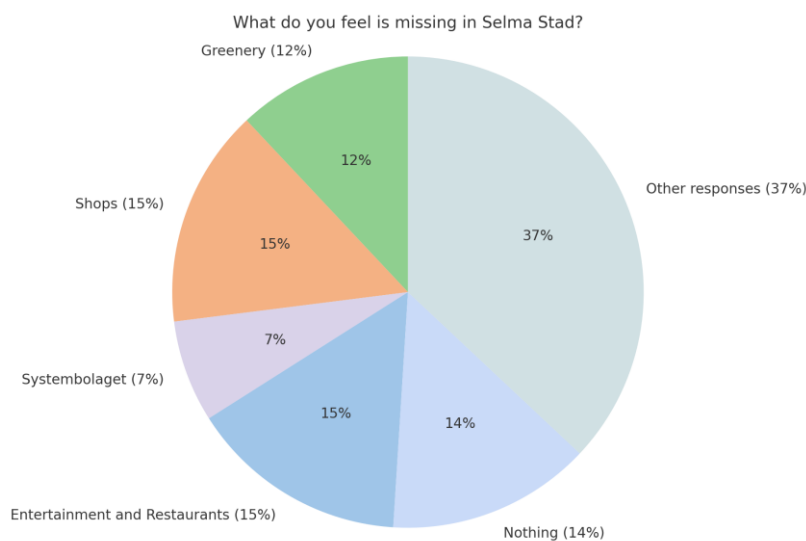


Figure 9: Pie chart of respondents’ perceptions of missing elements in Selma Stad

The category of entertainment, encompassing venues such as a cinema and an art gallery, was frequently cited as a key missing element in Selma Stad. Respondents

argued that these cultural and leisure facilities would enrich the everyday experience of local residents while also serving as a powerful catalyst for attracting visitors from beyond the neighborhood. Restaurants and cafes would work in the same way, potentially enhancing the attractiveness of the area. In particular, the fast-food chain McDonalds is mentioned by several respondents as something they would like to have located at or around the square. At the same frequency of 15 %, different shops are missed by residents and visitors. Principally, the respondents' requests for clothing stores, “It would be beneficial to introduce additional clothing stores, as these would attract a broader range of visitors and open up new market opportunities”. Further, three respondents express their discontent with the secondhand store that was removed during the reconstruction, and wish for it to be returned. The most frequently mentioned commercial establishment absent at Selma Lagerlöfs torg was “Systembolaget”, but none of these responses specified their viewpoint further.

The category “Other responses” includes all answers without frequent recurrence and constitutes 37% of all responses. “Enhanced connectivity to the city center via alternative transport modes beyond the bus”, and “tram” was mentioned by two people, and “a covered bicycle parking facility” was another response in a transportational category. “Enhanced support mechanisms to address gang-related criminal activity”, and “Cultural or artistic installations that visibly demonstrate human presence and local identity. You can't rely solely on playground equipment to generate feelings of safety and vitality, far more comprehensive measures are required”. Both of these responses specifically address the issue of safety, indicating that physical redesign can improve perceptions of security, but residents also call for targeted social and cultural interventions to reinforce lasting community resilience. “Extended opening hours”, “A stronger sense of a living square”, and “Greater residential occupancy. Several apartments remain vacant right now, which detracts from the life of the area”. These three responses emerged as distinct suggestions for potential improvements, although they show no clear correlation with other responses. Yet, they reflect individual perceptions of what might enhance the area's attractiveness.” In total, 14% of respondents reported satisfaction with the amenities and surrounding environment at Selma Lagerlöfs torg.

### **5.2.3 Safety at Selma Lagerlöfs torg**

A clear majority of respondents, 62%, stated that the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg has made the area feel safer. Most of these answers did not explain their thoughts further, but some state that the difference is noticeably substantial. One response clarified that they believed the increased feeling of safety came from the “open spaces, before the area felt more confined and obscure”. Several responses also make it clear that the area has improved its safety but still has a considerable road ahead to attain 100% security.

A smaller proportion of respondents expressed skepticism, 9% did not believe the area had become safer from the reconstruction, and 7% believed that it had only partially improved. “I did not live here before the reconstruction, but the area feels and is extremely unsafe” was stated by one respondent, while another answered, “I do not think safety has improved much at all”. However, 22% reported that they did not know whether the area felt safer or not after the redevelopment. One response indicates their difficulty in declaring an answer to this question but continues to state neither safer nor

not since “the fundamental social problems persist in the area”. Further, various responses elucidate that they've never experienced feelings of unease at the square, but can't state whether or not the safety has increased because of the redevelopment. The responses are visualized below in Figure 10.

Do you think the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg has made the area feel safer?

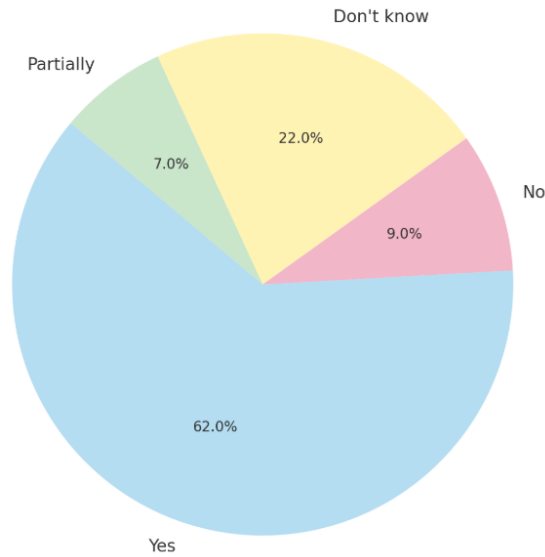


Figure 10: Pie chart of perceived safety improvement at Selma Lagerlöfs torg

## 6 Discussion

This chapter will discuss the results from this study, divided into two sections. The first section will compare policy documents and theories definitions of an attractive city, with the empirical data from interviews with main contributors to the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg. The second section will discuss the main contributors versus the citizens' perception of attractiveness and safety on Selma Lagerlöfs torg.

### 6.1 Defining an attractive city

The literature study in this thesis provides the conceptualization of an attractive city, emphasizing both aesthetic qualities and social sustainability. Highlighting that attractiveness is multi-dimensional, defined significantly broader than only through visual appeal. Elements such as inclusivity, cultural richness, and ecological responsibility are important to consider creating attractive urban areas. Further, this is in accordance with the viewpoint of attractiveness in public spaces by the main contributors on Selma Lagerlöfs torg. All three theoretical frameworks, New European Bauhaus, Gestaltad Livsmiljö and the Architectural Policy of Gothenburg, also articulate a multidimensional understanding of urban attractiveness (Boverket, 2023b; European Commission, 2021b; Stadsbyggnadskontoret, 2019b). These frameworks consistently emphasize three key dimensions: sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusivity. According to these documents, an attractive city is one that fosters ecological responsibility, promotes social equity, and integrates beauty and cultural identity into the built environment. Notably, the NEB framework puts strong emphasis on design as a tool for both sustainability and social cohesion, since beautiful architecture tends to sit longer and creates a deeper connection to cultural heritage (European Commission, 2021b). It also highlights the role of participatory planning and human centered architecture for wellbeing and sense of influence in your surroundings.

This is particularly compelling, as the majority of the interviewees were unfamiliar with the NEB framework, yet have indirectly applied its principles in their work. This underscores the pervasive influence of the framework, indicating its importance in future construction projects to attain consciously attractive urban areas. Moreover, this aligns closely with the theories of Jan Gehl, who emphasizes the importance of human centered design and the integration of social sustainability in urban planning (Gehl, 2011). His theories were mentioned by the majority of the interviewees as an inspirational source for their definitions on the concept of attractiveness in cities.

Further, Jan Gehl's theory of "Life between buildings", is one of the main inspirations of defying attractiveness in urban areas in both academic literature and interviewees. The human scale planning, greenery, invitational public spaces and the enhancement of active lifestyles he interprets is substantial and pervading in all this study's data. The interviews conducted reflect partial alignment with these theoretical positions and a recurring theme across the interviews was the phrase "a city you want to stay in," which resonates closely with Gehl's distinction between necessary and optional activities (Sim, 2022). The majority of the interviewees emphasized the importance of creating spaces that invite people to socialize and feel a sense of safety and comfort, while several interviewees also referred explicitly to Gehl's theories, particularly those with backgrounds in architecture. In the same way, the mentioning of "eye level architecture" mentioned by architect 1 is connected to the theory "eyes on the streets" to enhance perceived safety for the community, even though Jane Jacobs never was explicitly mentioned in the interviews (Jacobs, 2011).

However, the awareness and direct application of policy frameworks NEB, GL and AP were limited among the professionals without architectural training. While all architects interviewed were familiar with all of these frameworks, most main contributors with other educational backgrounds were either unaware of them or did not use them actively in their planning work. This discrepancy points to a gap between policy ambitions and practical implementation, possibly due to communication or the perceived relevance of such frameworks in everyday decision-making processes.

Forward, the New European Bauhaus, Gestaltad Livsmiljö, and the Architectural Policy of Gothenburg hold considerable potential to shape the development of more attractive urban environments, both aesthetically and socially sustainably. As this study has shown, even among those unfamiliar with the frameworks, there was a shared recognition of their underlying principles as valuable for guiding urban design. Their emphasis on sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusivity provides a comprehensive foundation for defining and implementing urban attractiveness in a way that transcends purely visual considerations. Further, respondents who were aware of these frameworks generally viewed them as constructive tools rather than restrictive policies. Some interviewees noted their function as sources of inspiration, offering a common value base which can align stakeholders around shared goals in complicated planning processes. This is particularly important in urban projects where negotiations involve competing interests and limited resources. In this context, the frameworks can strengthen arguments for long-term values such as human centered design and cultural identity that may otherwise be overshadowed by short-term financial necessities. As project manager 4 emphasized, policy frameworks backed by national or European institutions can enhance legitimacy and enable urban planners to advocate for quality in the built environment. When anchored in formal policy, abstract ideals such as beauty and social equity gain substantial weight in project decisions. This highlights the framework's potential to reduce the gap between ambition and action and enable a more conscious development of urban spaces.

As these three different policy frameworks exist cooperatively with several urban theories, they collectively strengthen the conceptual and practical foundation for urban development. However, the coexistence of multiple frameworks may at times risk conceptual overlap or confusion, particularly if their interrelations are not clearly communicated. Yet, together they provide a layered foundation for defining and implementing urban attractiveness, from European wide values in the New European Bauhaus, to national strategies in Gestaltad livsmiljö and locally grounded practices in the Architectural Policy of Gothenburg.

## **6.2 Selma Lagerlöfs torg**

In general Selma Lagerlöfs torg is perceived as a successful project, both by the project team and the public in the area. Every main contributor expressed fulfilment towards this project, and 90% of the public recognize the square as more attractive now. A result representing a satisfactory level regarding attractiveness of over 90% altogether is a desirable outcome for any project.

The main goal of the redevelopment was to increase the sense of safety at and around the square. As expressed by the interviewees, the area was recognized for its general discernment of neglect, and the criminal activities around the square. To achieve this, the square was envisioned as a place “accessible to everyone” and “a place you want to stay in”. While all interviewed professionals described the outcome of the project as a

clear success in terms of improving both actual and perceived safety, the responses from the public indicated a slightly more nuanced picture. A majority of 62% of respondents of the survey did express that the area feels safer after the redevelopment, but compared to the main contributors of 100% it is moderately different. Yet, only a few respondents emphasized that the change was substantial and noticeable while most did not elaborate on the reasoning behind their responses at all. This may suggest either a limited personal engagement with the square or uncertainty regarding what factors influence their sense of safety. Further, 9% still perceive the square as unsafe, 7% think the square has partially improved and 22% could not determine whether the area had become safer or not. The majority of those 22% pointed to the persistence of underlying social issues or unfamiliarity with the area prior to the transformation. This branching underlines the complexity of evaluating perceived safety and suggests that professional assessments emphasizing spatial and visual qualities do not always fully align with the everyday users' interpretations. According to one survey participant, "the fundamental social problems persist in the area," which indicates that physical transformation alone may be insufficient in addressing deeper structural challenges. Another respondent who reported never feeling unsafe still expressed uncertainty about whether the changes had directly contributed to a safer environment. However, it is also important to note that the professional interviewees often framed the success of the project not only in terms of crime prevention, but also through broader indicators. For instance, increased public life, improved aesthetics, and eye level additions are important. These dimensions, while essential from a planning perspective, may not always translate directly into a felt sense of safety among diverse user groups.

Another protruding factor for the sense of safety is the deviation mentioned by several main contributors to the project: the sports hall. According to project director 1 the facility was conceived as a critical "first move" for enhancing local safety, intending to offer meaningful activities for youth at risk. However, since the project was never realized, its actual impact remains speculative. Notably, none of the survey respondents mentioned the absence of a sports hall as a deficiency, which is particularly interesting given the emphasis placed on it by professionals. This difference may suggest a divergence between expert expectations and residents' perceived needs, or it may indicate limited awareness from the public of the original plans. Furthermore, it could potentially be interpreted that some respondents indirectly expressed a desire for the sports hall by expressing the need for increased support in addressing gang related crimes. This raises the question of whether it is possible to articulate in the absence of something that was never concretely introduced. Residents may not identify a missing element if they were never aware of its potential, suggesting that unfulfilled components of a redevelopment may go unnoticed by the public, even if they could have had a meaningful social function.

Two other reoccurring concerns in both interviews and responses from the survey were the lack of existence of Systembolaget and greenery in the area. According to project director 2 the decision not to locate Systembolaget at the square was strategic, aiming to foster everyday use centered on other target points as the pharmacy or the cafe, rather than alcohol related consumption. Since 7% of the responses from citizens express the absence of the corporation, it's certainly a divide between main contributors and the population's opinions on what is needed around the square. However, this could be a reversed example of the sports hall, where the population may not fully grasp what the presence of a Systembolaget could have entailed.

Moreover, regarding the project management's ambition to create green and aesthetically appealing environments, this perception was not always mirrored by the public. Among survey respondents, a recurring critique was the perceived lack of greenery and the dominance of hard and grey surfaces, as concrete. According to project manager 4 this contrast may arise from the fact that prior to redevelopment, a great quantity of the area consisted of open grass fields without constructions. With the addition of new buildings and infrastructure, the amount of accessible green space appears to have diminished in the eyes of some residents. Additionally, the fact that the architectural proposal by ÅWL that aimed to motif the park lane, was severely downscaled due to budget constraints might contribute to this perceived lack of green spaces around Selma Lagerlöfs torg.

One important aspect to critically reflect on is the demographic composition of the survey respondents, as both age and reason for visiting Selma Lagerlöfs torg may have influenced the responses and potentially establish biases. A significant proportion of the participants were between 20 to 30 years old, indicating a relatively young sample. This may affect perceptions, since experiences of safety, aesthetics and urban attractiveness can vary considerably across different age groups. Additionally, the majority of respondents were not residents of the area since only 31% lived there and 69% were there for work, shopping or leisure. This could also introduce biases into the perceived attractiveness of the square, since this distribution suggests that many respondents only interact with the square during specific times or for limited purposes, which could restrict their capacity to assess the full impact of the redevelopment. Those not residing in the area may lack long-term or nighttime exposure to the environment, which is often when safety and atmosphere are perceived differently. Furthermore, among those who live at Selma Lagerlöfs torg today, only half had resided in the area before the redevelopment, meaning their interpretations could be shaped differently compared to those who moved there later.

### **6.3 Future research**

Regarding potential future research, it would be captivating to explore how the concept of urban attractiveness is perceived and implemented in areas with varying socio-economic conditions. This study focused solely on one single urban development project, undergoing a transition from an exposed to an attractive area. Comparing perspectives from both more disadvantaged districts and more wealthy neighborhoods could reveal important variations in priorities, challenges, and opportunities related to inclusivity and attractive urban environments. Such comparative studies would also offer insights into how well current policy frameworks resonate across different urban contexts and whether they require adaptation to address spatial inequalities more effectively. Additionally, further research could complete comparative research between cities or national contexts that could provide insights into how the concept of attractiveness is culturally constructed and implemented differently across Europe, or globally. This would also allow for a more critical examination of frameworks like the New European Bauhaus in diverse urban and policy environments.

Another route for future research is to conduct extensive studies on the long-term impacts of urban development initiatives that explicitly aim to enhance attractiveness. This could involve evaluating how well projects sustain inclusivity, aesthetic quality, and social sustainability over time, and whether initial visions align with eventual outcomes. It would also be relevant to examine the case study of Selma Lagerlöfs torg study further, by collecting more data from a more diverse group of people. It would be pertinent to include a larger set of responses in total, and with a more spread result in age and living situation around the square, to obtain a more detailed knowledge. Additionally, further examining economic and political influences on attractiveness could be beneficial in future research, since it was excluded from this study.

## 7 Conclusion

This study sought to explore how the concept of urban attractiveness is defined from the perspective of aesthetics and social sustainability by urban theory and policy frameworks. The specific aim is also pursued to compare daily users' opinions and main contributors' opinions in the practical example of the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg in Gothenburg. As cities increasingly face the dual pressures of urbanization and sustainability transitions, the question of how to design attractive, inclusive, and sustainable urban environments remains central to planning discourse and practice.

The first research question examined, with a focus on aesthetics and social sustainability, is how an attractive city is defined by urban theories and policy documents. Through the analysis of policy documents New European Bauhaus, Gestaltad livsmiljö, and the Architectural Policy of Gothenburg, it is evident that attractiveness is framed as not solely defined by its appearance. It is understood as a multidimensional concept that encompasses beauty, functionality, inclusivity, and cultural meaning. These frameworks advocate for human centered designs and underline the integration of social values into spatial planning. Although originating from different scales and institutional contexts, they collectively promote a vision of urban development where aesthetic quality and social sustainability are inseparable.

The second research question explored how this conceptual definition is perceived and practiced in a real-world context, using Selma Lagerlöfs torg as a case study. From the perspective of the project group, the redevelopment is largely viewed as successful. Interviews with main contributors to the project emphasize how the square has become more vibrant, safer, and socially inclusive through careful urban design and human centered planning. High quality materials, active ground floors and spatial openness are highlighted as key contributors to this transformation. Moreover, the process itself was marked by its cross-sector collaborations and the shared design vision in the area's quality program, which can be seen as a model for future socially sustainable urban development. However, when compared to the user perspective, the picture becomes more nuanced. Survey responses reveal a generally positive but somewhat fragmented perception. While a majority feel that safety has improved, others remain unconvinced or uncertain. Some users express appreciation for the openness and activity, while others lament at the loss of greenery and criticize the environment as grey and lifeless. Notably, some responses may also indirectly imply the need for stronger social support or greater diversity in amenities. These findings suggest that while professional intentions align with broader urban ideals, the lived experience of attractiveness remains subjective and context dependent.

In returning to the broader picture, this study underscores the complexity of designing attractive cities. While policy and theory provide valuable guidance, and professional practice can deliver substantial improvements, true attractiveness ultimately depends on how spaces are perceived, used, and lived by diverse groups over time. As such, attractive urban development must remain an iterative, inclusive, human centered and context aware process, to actively narrow the gap between design intention and lived reality.

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## 9 Appendix A

The interviews were conducted in Swedish. Here are the questions provided in both Swedish and English:

### Interviewfrågor:

- Får jag spela in?
- Vad är din bakgrund, utbildning osv?
  - Vad hade du för roll i projektet Selma Lagerlöfs torg?
- Hur definierar du en attraktiv stad?
- Har du referenser för din syn på en attraktiv stad (skrivna källor, exempel).
- Vad har styrt valet av mål i olika projekt du genomfört (policy, inriktningsdokument)?
  - Använde ni er av NEB, GL eller Arkitekturpolicyn i Göteborg vid planeringen av Selma Lagerlöfs torg?
  - Vilka andra ramverk använde ni er av?
- Tror/tycker ni att ex. NEB, GL och Arkitekturpolicyn är bra ramverk, som bör användas i nu- och framtida byggnationer?
- Vad har ni haft för mål med ombyggnationen av Selma Lagerlöfs torg?
- Vilken problematik fanns med torget innan ombyggnationen?
  - Är det helt löst nu? Hur hade ni kunnat göra det ännu bättre?
- Gjordes några avsteg under processen? Vilka?
  - Varför och när gjordes avstegen i processen?
- Var social hållbarhet och estetik viktiga aspekter i ombyggnationen? Vilken var viktigast och varför?
- Vad la ni mest fokus på vid planeringen av torget, som gör det attraktivt?
  - Tror ni invånarna uppskattar det?
- Hur ser du på resultatet? Varför blev det som ni önskade / inte önskade?
- Om du fick göra om något vad hade du gjort?
- I vilka skeden uppstår flest hinder i processen att utveckla nya attraktiva stadsdelar och byggnader?
- Något du vill lägga till?

### Interview questions:

- May I record this interview?
- What is your background, education, etc.?
  - What was your role in the Selma Lagerlöfs torg project?
- How do you define an attractive city?
- Do you have any references for your view of an attractive city (written sources, examples)?
- What guided the choice of goals in various projects you've accomplished (policies, strategic documents)?
  - Did you use NEB, GL, or the Architecture Policy during the planning of Selma Lagerlöfs torg?
  - Which other frameworks did you use?
- Do you think NEB, GL, and the Architecture Policy are good frameworks that should be used in current and future constructions?
- What were your goals with the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg?
- What issues existed with the square before the redevelopment?
  - Are those issues fully resolved now? How could it have been improved further?

- Were there any deviations from the original plan during the process? If so, which ones?
  - Why and when did those deviations occur during the process?
- Were social sustainability and aesthetics important aspects of the redevelopment? Which was more important, and why?
- What did you focus on the most during the planning of the square, in terms of making it attractive?
  - Do you think the residents appreciate it?
- How do you view the outcome? Why did it turn out as you had hoped / not hoped?
- If you could change something, what would it be?
- At which stages do the most obstacles arise in the process of developing new attractive neighborhoods and buildings?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

## 10 Appendix B

The form was conducted in Swedish. Here are the questions provided in both Swedish and English:

Formulär på Svenska:

1. Hur gammal är du?

- 10-15 år
- 15-20 år
- 20-30 år
- 30-40 år
- 40-50 år
- 50-60 år
- 60+

2. Varför befinner du dig på Selma Lagerlöfs torg?

- Bor här
- Jobbar här
- Handlar här
- Nöje

3. Om du bor i Selma Stad, hur länge har du bott här?

- Flyttade hit efter 2022
- Flyttade hit mellan 2019-2022
- Flyttade hit mellan 2015-2019
- Bott här sedan innan 2015

4. Tycker du ombyggnationen av Selma Lagerlöfs torg gjort platsen mer attraktiv?  
(Motivera gärna)

5. Vad tycker du är mest attraktivt med Selma Lagerlöfs torg?

6. Vad saknar du i Selma Stad?

7. Tycker du att ombyggnationen av Selma Lagerlöfs torg gjort platsen tryggare?

Form in English:

1. How old are you?

- 10–15 years
- 15–20 years
- 20–30 years
- 30–40 years
- 40–50 years
- 50–60 years
- 60+ years

2. What is your main reason for being at Selma Lagerlöfs torg?

- I live here
- I work here
- I shop here
- Leisure

3. If you live in Selma Stad, how long have you resided in the area?

- Moved here after 2022
- Moved here between 2019–2022
- Moved here between 2015–2019
- Have lived here since before 2015

4. Do you think the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg has made the area more attractive? (Please elaborate)

5. What do you find most attractive about Selma Lagerlöfs torg?

6. What do you feel is missing in Selma Stad?

7. Do you think the redevelopment of Selma Lagerlöfs torg has made the area feel safer?



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