

Built-in happiness

Crafting community spaces that embrace nature



Sukanya Srinivasan
Chalmers University of Technology
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
Supervisor: John Helmfridsson
Examiner: Lars Marcus

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Master Thesis in Urban and Rural Design and Planning - Spring 2025

Chalmers University of Technology
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability

Author: Sukanya Srinivasan
Examiner: Lars Marcus
Supervisor: John Helmfridsson



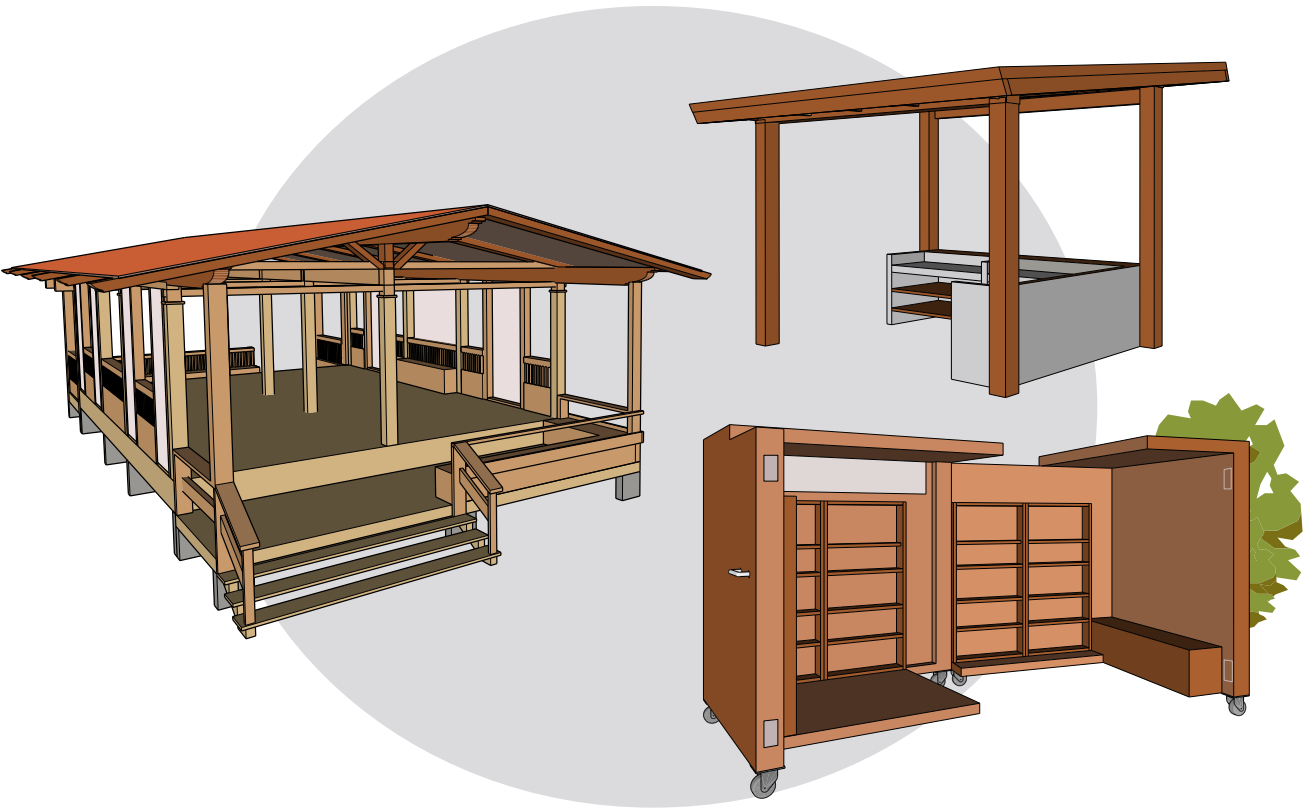
Abstract

Shift of population from rural to urban regions, is happening globally at a rapid pace. It has resulted in technological and infrastructural development, thereby producing more economic opportunities and improving the way of life. Conversely, it hurts the physical and mental well-being of individual. Due to the fast pace of the current world, people are becoming more stressed and unaware of their surroundings. Social centers can become hubs where an individual can unwind and socialize with others. However, due to limited space, developers prioritize giving infrastructural and economic needs, and social hubs are not given a thought. This thesis investigates how one can transform underutilized spaces into a sustainable community hub, promoting physical and mental well-being, and enhancing social skills in the community.

Biskopsgården, a residential district in Gothenburg, is taken as a case example, and the prospect of multifunctional outdoor spaces in the area is explored. A thorough area evaluation, supplemented with interviews with local authorities, a study of available literature resources, and case studies, has indicated a lack of gathering space for the local community.

The proposed solutions include interactive fitness spaces, open kitchen, open gathering areas, and flexible communal hubs. These interventions integrated with the theories of biophilic design elements such as natural materials, lighting, and ventilation, to achieve a stronger connection between people and nature in the modern world. The application of third place theory ensures that these spaces encourage spontaneous social interactions, cultural exchange, and experiences as knowledge sharing, which strengthens urban inclusivity and social well-being. The findings illustrate that intentional spatial design can reduce urban stress and improve air quality to create restorative surroundings that help both individuals and communities.

Key words: community well-being, biophilic design, third places, social inclusivity, sustainable urban planning.





SUKANYA SRINIVASAN

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EDUCATION

Master

Chalmers University of Technology
M.Sc. Architecture and Planning
Beyond Sustainability

2023 - 2025

Studios and Courses at Chalmers

- Beyond Sustainability

- Sustainable Development and the Design Professions

- Key Projects for Sustainable Development in a Local Context

- Managing Design Projects

- Dare 2 Build

- Community Architecture and Urban Design

Bachelor

Anna University, B.Arch- Degree
School of Architecture,
Chennai, India

2011 - 2016

EXPERIENCE

Work

Architect- Central Public Works
Department (C.P.W.D),
Chennai, India

09.2016 - 08.2021
(5 years)

Internships

Padgro Consultants,
Chennai, India

01.2015 - 04.2015
06.2014 - 10.2014

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the base of this thesis with a background, problem description, aim, purpose, delimitation, research questions and methodology

BACKGROUND

Urban life today

Until couple of decades ago, most people lived in small communities in rural parts of the world. This has changed significantly in the last decade as mass relocation from rural to urban places occurred across the world. In most of the developed nations, about 80% of the population live in urban areas where in developing nations, this figure is between 50%-80% (Ritchie H *et al*, 2018).

Urbanization brings its own benefits. Rapid pace of urbanization forces technological advances which transforms the way of life. Constant hustle of urban life keeps one on toes reshaping the daily schedules and social interactions. Similarly, a need to accommodate more number of people in limited space has resulted in infrastructural developments which one would have rarely imagined half a century ago.

However, on the other end, it has led to social isolation and fragmented community (Gehl, 2010). Fast paced urban life has increased stress and have introduced time constraints. People rely more on digital communication, connecting with people far away, but shying away from face-to-face communication.

Communal Well-being

A growing topic of research now links urban design with health outcomes, social inclusion and mental restoration. Restorative cities-urban health and wellbeing by Roe and McCay (2021) argues that urban environments should actively support emotional and cognitive recovery for people by promoting comfort, safety connection, and access to nature. Community centres - if reimaged through the lens of wellness architecture, can include these restorative principles. Elements such as biophilic design, and spatial openness can contribute to stress reduction, improve mood and increased social interaction (Kellert *et al*, 2008; Roe & McCay, 2021).

In parallel, wellness architecture and urban design by Tabb and Tatriele (2022) presents a fascinating for integrating holistic health strategies into the built environment. The authors highlights the need for environments that nurture the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions of human life. They advocate for regenerative design, seasonal awareness and community driven placemaking. These principles are especially relevant in rethinking the role of community centres- not just as functional spaces, but as urban sanctuaries that support lifestyle based wellbeing and social vitality.

This Research focuses on transforming underutilized spaces in Biskopsgården, Gothenburg, into multi-functional, wellness oriented community hubs. Unlike conventional parks, these spaces will integrate recreational design strategies to encourage physical activity, relaxation, and social events; socially inclusive architecture based on Oldenburg's (1989) Third place theory to promote informal social interaction; biophilic design to strengthen the connection between people and nature (Wilson, 1984). The study aims to redefine community spaces as essential elements of urban well-being, bridging the gap between urban design and social sustainability.

"The success of a city is measured by the quality of its public spaces - places that invite interaction, promote inclusivity, and enhance well-being."

- Jan Gehl

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Need for community spaces and urban living challenges

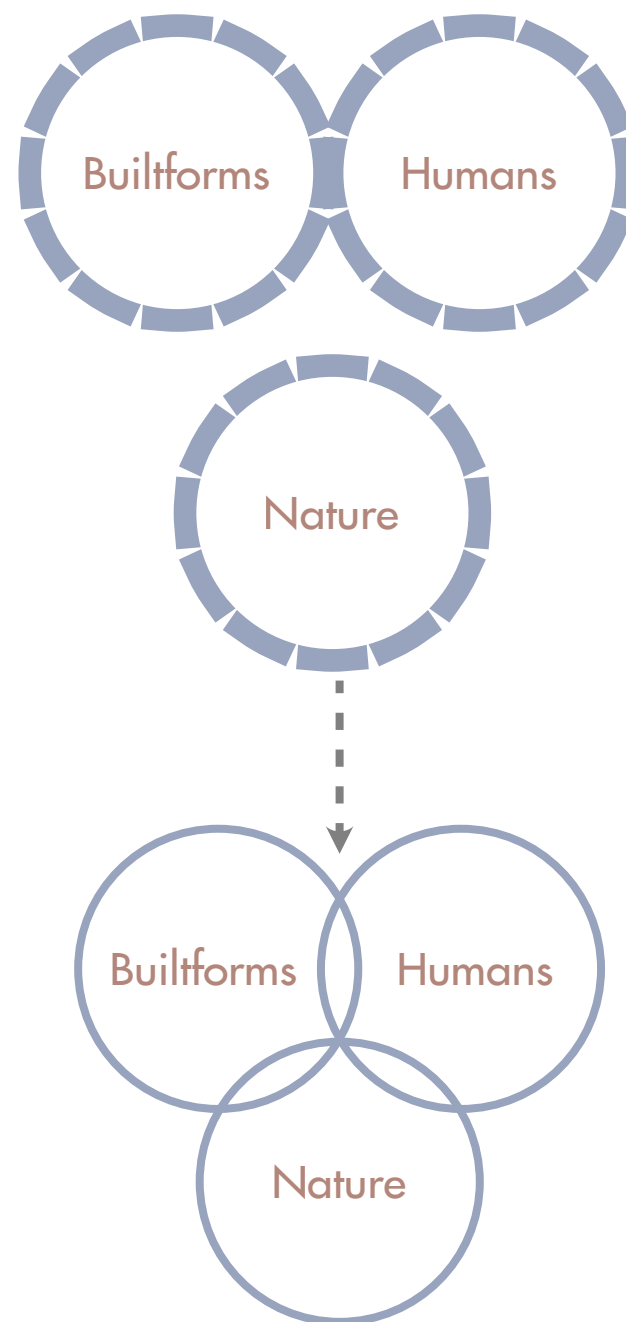
The trend of urbanization is increasing in the world. As cities are expanding and densifying, the urban infrastructure is put through tests unlike any it has known before. On one end, urbanization has turned out to be a positive transformative force fostering economic growth, improved infrastructure and easy access to services.

Due to the rapid pace of development, prioritization is given to immediate economic, residential and infrastructural needs. Most urban developing spaces stop at residential and commercial zones and do not expand to include public spaces, leading to a limited scope for social engagement (Roe & McCay, 2021). Community centers, which are neutral civic spaces, holds a great opportunity to act as anchors of social life to promote social cohesion, and psychological well-being. However, these are often left as an afterthought in the design process (Gehl, 2010). Where available, many public spaces remain inefficient and fail to adapt to the evolving needs of communities, leading to their underutilization (Giddings & Reeve, 2018).

The role of architecture in solving these issues

Architecture plays an important role in reshaping urban environments to promote interaction, inclusion, and well-being. Thoughtfully designed community spaces can reduce loneliness, improve mental health, and strength social bonds (Roe & McCay, 2021). Public plazas, recreational parks, and multi-use hubs encourage active engagement, while integrating nature and accessibility ensures that these spaces remain welcoming for all (Gehl, 2010). By applying strategic design principles, urban spaces can be transformed into vibrant, inclusive environments that support both social

and physical well-being. Certain strategies can be integrated to enhance social engagement in urban areas- multi-functional community hubs with play areas, shaded seating, and cultural zones. Another strategy is to have installed fitness areas, sports zones, and outdoor meeting place, encouraging physical activity and community interaction.



AIM AND PURPOSE



The aim of the study is to improve social well-being, and promote healthier lifestyle through the integration of wellness architecture- biophilic design principles in the third place as a space to have social inclusivity and sustainable practices.



The purpose of the study is to explore the connection between people and nature by analysing how architecture can be used to shape public spaces that promotes interaction and well-being.

Sustainable Development



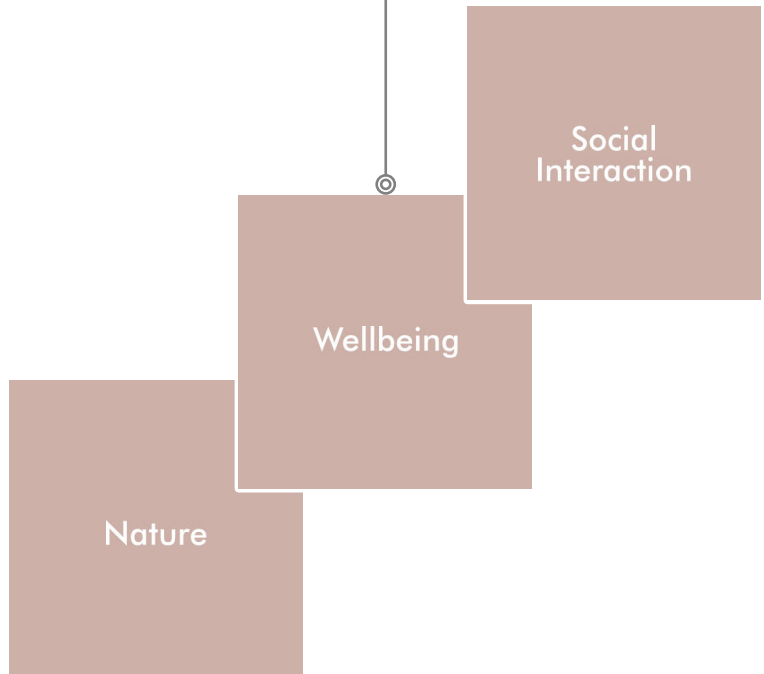
Sustainability is a practice of a progressive architectural design since establishing practices that enable an ecosystem to develop resilience while uplifting the wellbeing and living standard of the urban populace.



Integrating nature using sustainable materials with the construction of the community brings this design closer to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) that address health as well as inclusive and environmentally sustainable methodologies.

RESEARCH QUESTION

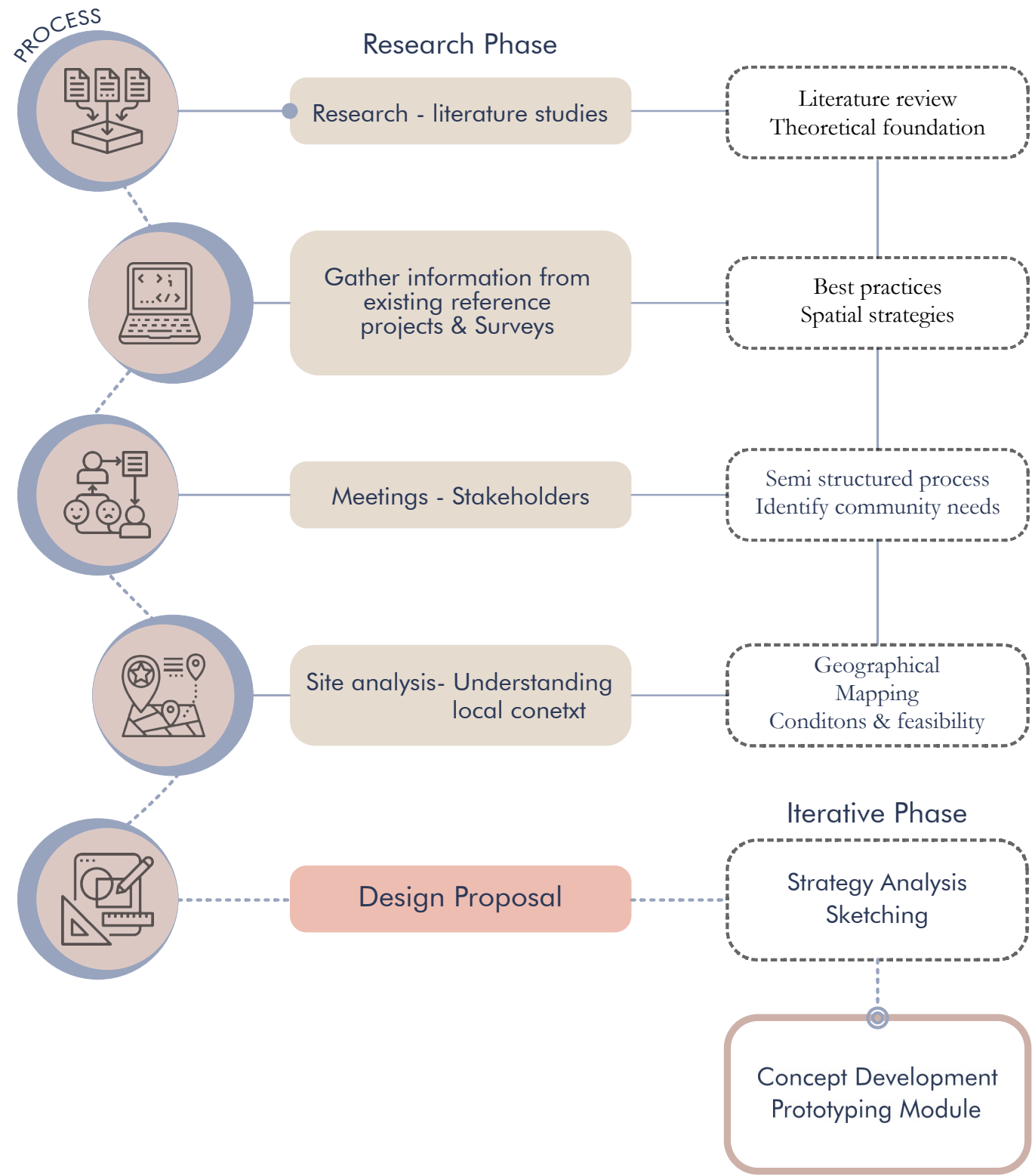
HOW CAN COMMUNAL LIVING SPACES IN SÖDRA BISKOPSGÅRDEN, PROMOTE HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES ?



Conceptual image this thesis aims to create

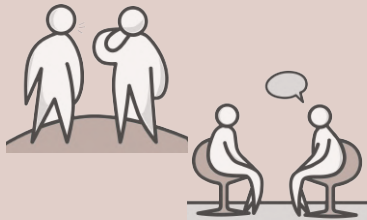
METHODOLOGY

The schematics show a process, while it starts performing research, with a review of literatures, surveys and stakeholder meetings to find and realize the needs of the community in local context. It moves into site analysis, of mapping to assess conditions and feasibility. The next stage is an iterative phase of leading to design proposal and concept prototyping and strategy development and sketching.



DELIMITATION

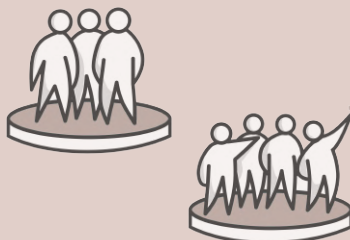
Targeted Group



To make the scope manageable and impactful, a small area of biskopsgården, with ethnically diverse population, is taken as the focus. Green areas surrounding residential buildings are targeted for transformation.

These spaces will incorporate gathering zones to create hubs of community activity and connection. The functions and programs of these spaces are mentioned further in detail, such as meeting places for events, outdoor kitchen, therapeutic zones for relaxation, and community hubs for workshops and physical activities. This focused approach will allow for clear and measurable outcomes while addressing the project's broader objectives.

Main Functions



Design Outcomes



These spaces will incorporate gathering zones to create hubs of community activity and connection. The functions and programs of these spaces such as meeting places for events, outdoor kitchen, therapeutic zones for relaxation, and community hubs for workshops and physical activities. This focused approach will allow for clear and measurable outcomes while addressing the project's broader objectives.

"There are no strangers here,
just friends who haven't met,"
and that pretty much captures
what we're about."
- Ray Oldenburg

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

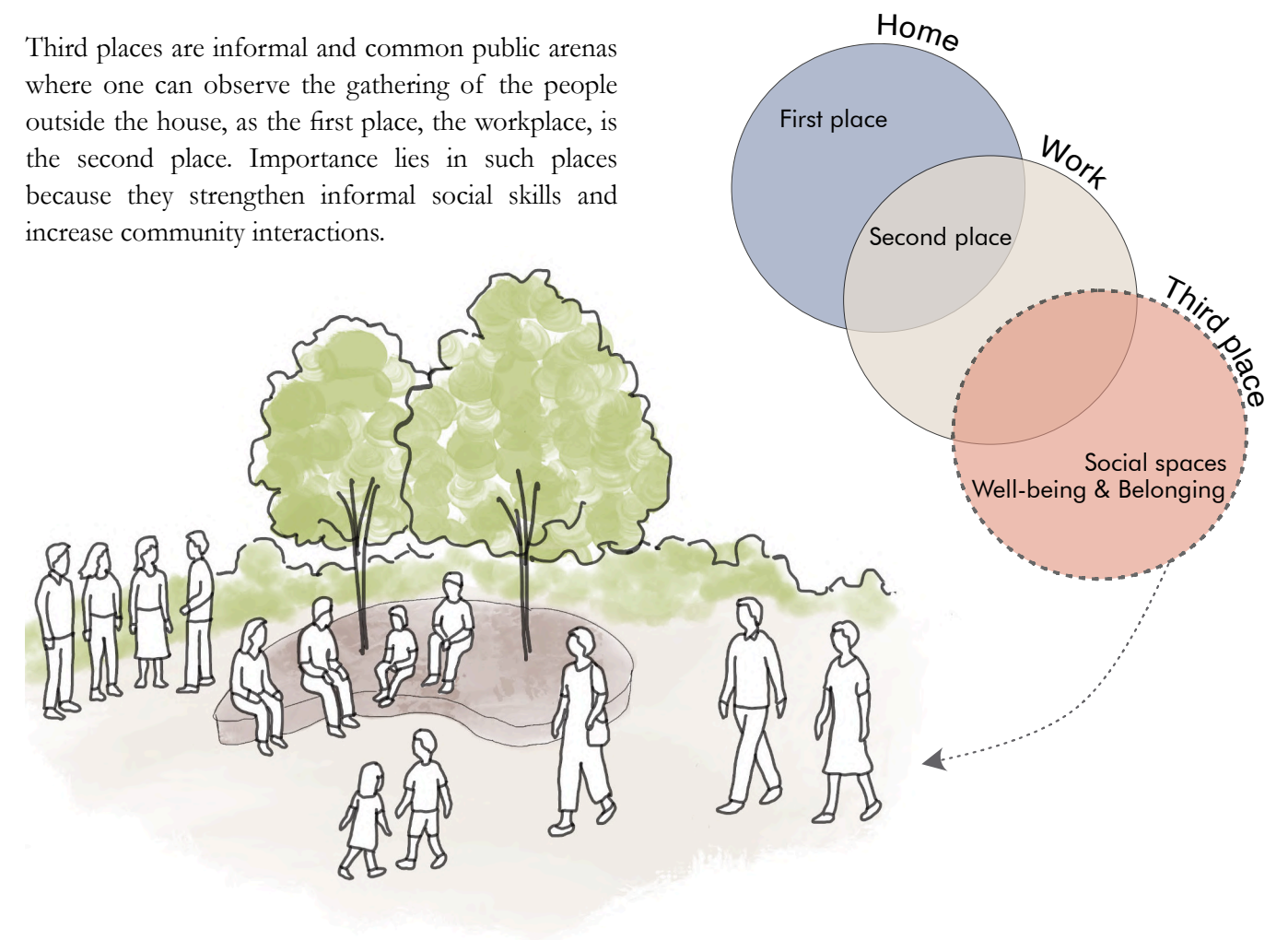
Before delving deeper into the thesis, one needs to understand the core theories based on which a solution is proposed. This chapter contains the theoretical framework which provides a clear foundation for the design process



THIRD PLACE

Concept of Third Places

Third places are informal and common public arenas where one can observe the gathering of the people outside the house, as the first place, the workplace, is the second place. Importance lies in such places because they strengthen informal social skills and increase community interactions.



According to Oldenburg, these are some key characteristics of third place:

Accessible and neutral: All persons can enter the place, and it has no attributes to exclude any category or kind of purpose, such that a general equal basis attendance is made possible.

Conversation: The third place stands for incidental and disorganized encounter making conversation attractive and provoking exchanges among the people, with the focus of interaction through activity. **Regulars and community:** Most third places hold loyal patrons, who tend to bond after a while, thus producing the feeling of belongingness and community.

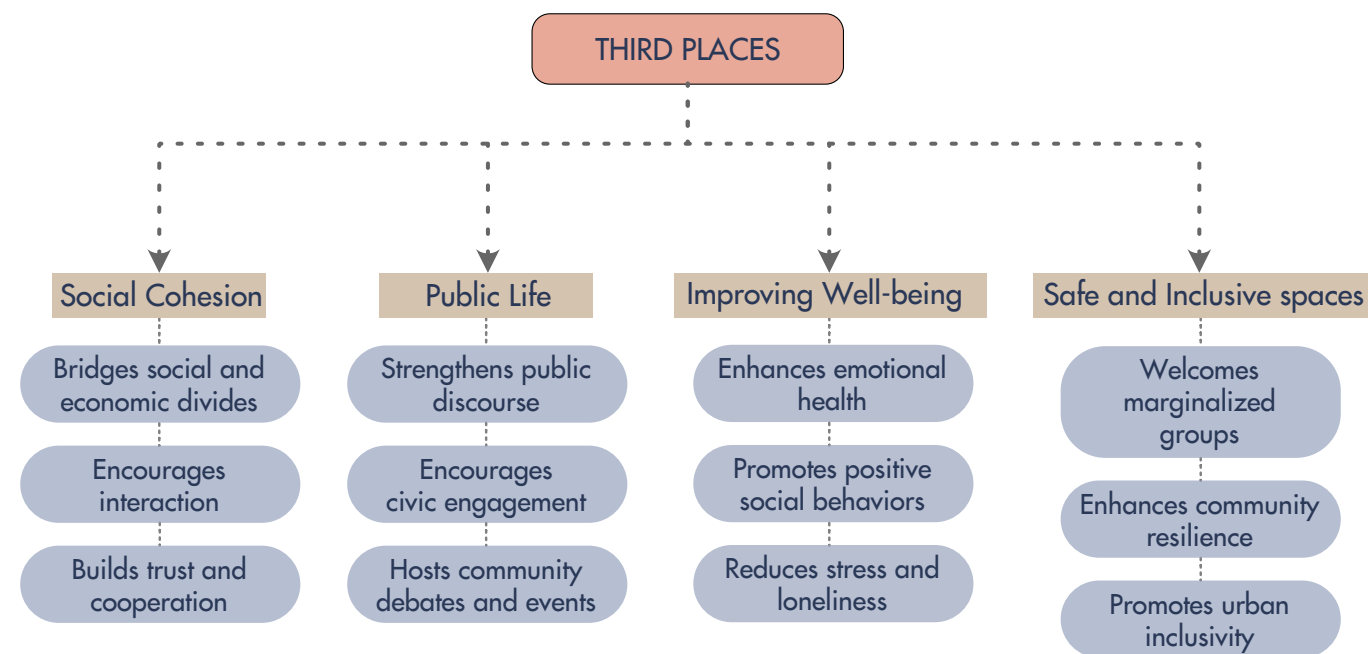
Relaxation and free-spirited environment: Third places are those gathering spots on which people visit to

spend leisure time without any obligations. These spaces create a cozy feeling with a playful nature where people can relax and be on their own.

Home away from home: Visiting regularly to third place creates a strong connection and attachment to the space, which provides comfort and sense of belonging. Example a community club where people meet daily to socialize and make friendships.

Oldenburg (1989), expresses that third places as extension of homes, developing a sense of identity. Above all, underlines the necessity of having third places for engagement in public life, social integration, and cultural growth. These places are fundamental for communal health; they are social networking and the venue for free social conversation cut out from the encumbrances and obligations of other contexts.

Contribution to social cohesion and urban life



Examples in Urban Contexts

Coffee Shops and Cafés: Open-ended, informal, or homely spaces such as coffee shops or cafes remain perhaps the most classic definitions of what a third place really is - a place where people come alone or with a group to spontaneously engage in conversation over a cup of coffee and a croissant.

Community Centers: Community centers within the neighborhoods fulfill an important role of a third place. Apart from being resourceful for holding events and workshops, these centers often serve as venues for displaying skills, engaging social interaction among people sharing similar interest.

Public Parks and Gardens: A study published in the “Journal of Environmental Psychology” has revealed that individuals who spend more time close to nature have more interpersonal closeness than those who spend most of their time in urban spaces, This makes nature parks one of the most important third space. Parks such as the Yoga Pavilion in Vasaparken (Stockholm), designed by Nyréns Arkitektkontor, are perfect examples of third places promoting natural environments with social interaction. They may be serve as spaces for yoga, group exercises, or just relaxing. Many people's lives in the city are centered around these public parks, thereby giving them an escape from the stressful city chores.

Libraries and Cultural Venues: Libraries have diversified from just a place of silent and private reading to a place where like-minded people can gather in small groups and share ideas. Modern libraries have group activity areas which forms the hubs for collaborations and information sharing. They are used to host events, lectures and social activities, all promoting social connectivity. Such third places can be found in cultural venues, such as art galleries or public museums. Spaces become third places because people together engage in cultural experiences and attachments.

Public Markets and Squares: Urban public markets and plazas have always been the go-to third place for a society as this is where one can find the essentials required for living. Their role is generally neutral and they simply offer space for people to shop, meet friends, or indulge in a special event or street performance. These places are not only precious in terms of commerce but also in defining a local identity or belonging as part of a culture.

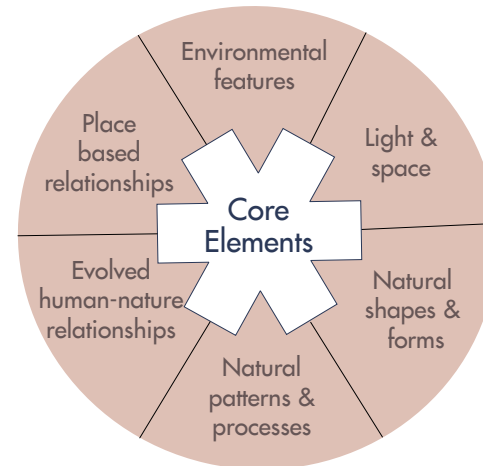
All the examples above describe how different places can serve as a community gathering centers. Hence, it is important to design them carefully so that it can be utilized to the maximum.



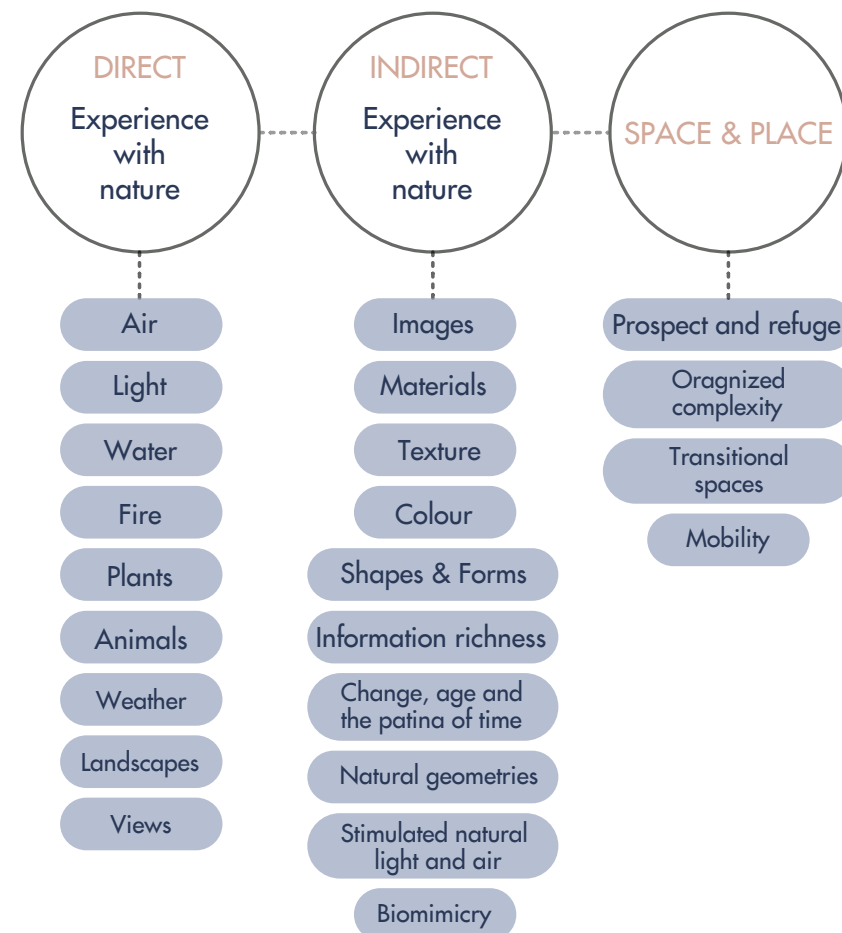
Fig 1. The gathering place in tula oklahoma

What is Biophilic Design?

Biophilic design is the practice of linking natural processes with built environments to encourage human health and connection to nature. With a background in the biophilia hypothesis, that is, the purported tendency of humans to seek connection with nature (Wilson, 1984), the design stresses the creation of spaces that induce comfort, relaxation, and general mental and physical health. This practice aims to create environments that bring in physical, mental, and behavioral benefits of being in nature (Kellert, 2018).



Patterns of Biophilic Design



Biophilic Design Framework - adapted from Kellert and Calabrese (2015, pp 6-20)

Biophilic Design Principles:

1. Direct experience of nature - Design of spaces with plant life, water features, and natural light, which evoke an impression of the outdoors (Kellert et al. 2008)
2. Indirect experience of nature - use of natural materials, colors, patterns, and images replicating landscapes (Browning et al. 2014).
3. Experience of space and place - Movement, dynamic lighting, and spatial complexity can be used for creating engaging stimulating environments.
4. Relationship between humans and nature - Interaction between people and the surrounding natural setting through green space, courtyards, and open-air environments.
5. Well-being and productivity- Nature inspired spaces result in better cognitive functioning, lesser stress levels, and well maintained air quality and thermal comfort (Terrapin bright green, 2014).

Importance of Nature in Community Well - being

The relationship between people and nature in urban areas has considerable advantages: psychological, social, and environmental. Studies demonstrate that when exposed to nature, the cortisol levels are reduced, which in turn improves mood, eliminates stress, improves attention and better performance (Ulrich et al.1991, Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

Increasing community gardens, pocket parks, and shared natural spaces would facilitate social interactions and stronger bonding. (Kuo 2015). On the physical health aspect, green outdoor spaces would encourage individuals to go out and abandon their sedentary lifestyle and the health risks that go with it (Pretty et al.2005).

Regulating urban microclimate by planting more trees and greenery improves air quality, provides shade, and moderates temperature, thus making cities more habitable (Beatley, 2016). Integrating biophilic principles in community planning will allow architecture to turn public spaces into healing environments.

Delimitations of Biophilic Influence

The following are delimitations as far as their scope of influence in urban community design is concerned:

- Economic feasibility - large-scale biophilic interventions can become quite costly, and there arise major investments for maintenance and for irrigation as well as structural modifications (Kellert, 2018).
- Climate and geographic constraints - certain species of plants and water features may not thrive under extreme climatic conditions, restricting the capacity of direct nature integration in sites that experience this limitation.
- Urban density and spatial availability: Very dense urban areas cannot easily accommodate extensive green areas without disrupting functionality or efficiency for the use of land (Newman, 2009).
- Cultural and social acceptance: biophilic spaces are effective chiefly through community involvement; many urbanites prefer functional spaces as opposed to aesthetically pleasing greenery (Kellert et al., 2008).
- Regulatory and zoning restrictions: City policies in planning, building codes, and land-use regulation maybe limited in promoting the integration of biophilic elements in new developments (Benedict & McMahon,2006). Thus, the biophilic design must always be applied with contextual consideration so that the economic, environmental, and social aspects can best maximize gains while maintaining the practicality of it.

Example of Biophilic Design

Garden by the bay - Singapore



Fig 2. Garden by the bay, Singapore

Gardens by the Bay in Singapore is unquestionably a prominent example of biophilic designs. An architectural and planning method in which nature can be incorporated into man-made surroundings. The 101-hectare nature park opened in the year 2012, pointing towards Singapore’s vision to become a “City in the Garden”, which happens to be a global destination for discerning sustainable urban landscapes.

Biophilic design features of the Gardens by the Bay:

1. Greeneries and Biodiversity: Bringing together different ecosystems, from tropical rainforests to Mediterranean gardens with over 1.5 million plants across continents, it is surely one of the most biodiverse-rich parks. Thematic gardens such as the Heritage gardens, Dragonfly Lake, and Kingfisher Lake help to further enrich the biodiversity while supporting native and migratory wildlife.

2. Iconic Supertree grove: The supertrees are outstanding examples, soaring from 25 to 50 meters in height, and they are vertical gardens hosting ferns, orchids, and bromeliads. In line with sustainability, the supertrees include photovoltaic cells to collect solar energy and function as air exhaust receptacles for the adjacent conservatories.

3. Climate-controlled conservatories -

a. Flower dome: A glasshouse with architecture styled to reflect the Mediterranean landscapes, with sustainable cooling technologies.

b. Cloud forest: An indoor waterfall and misting to recreate the experience of a cloud forest. Passive systems are used for cooling inside this conservatory, relying very little on conventional air conditioning.

4. Human-Nature interaction - This includes a network of well-designed trails, water bodies, and open spaces to enhance interaction with nature and relaxation. Sensory experiences are captured through night lighting on the supertrees as it appeals to human nature's interaction with nature.

Gardens by the Bay forms a model of suitable biophilic urbanism that bridges nature into large-scale urbanization projects and helps the human condition benefit from them. For the cities of the future that will surely be understood, it is an ongoing proof of living striving for a fair balance between urbanism and ecological harmony.

“In every walk with nature,
one receives far more than
he seeks — especially when
shared with others.”

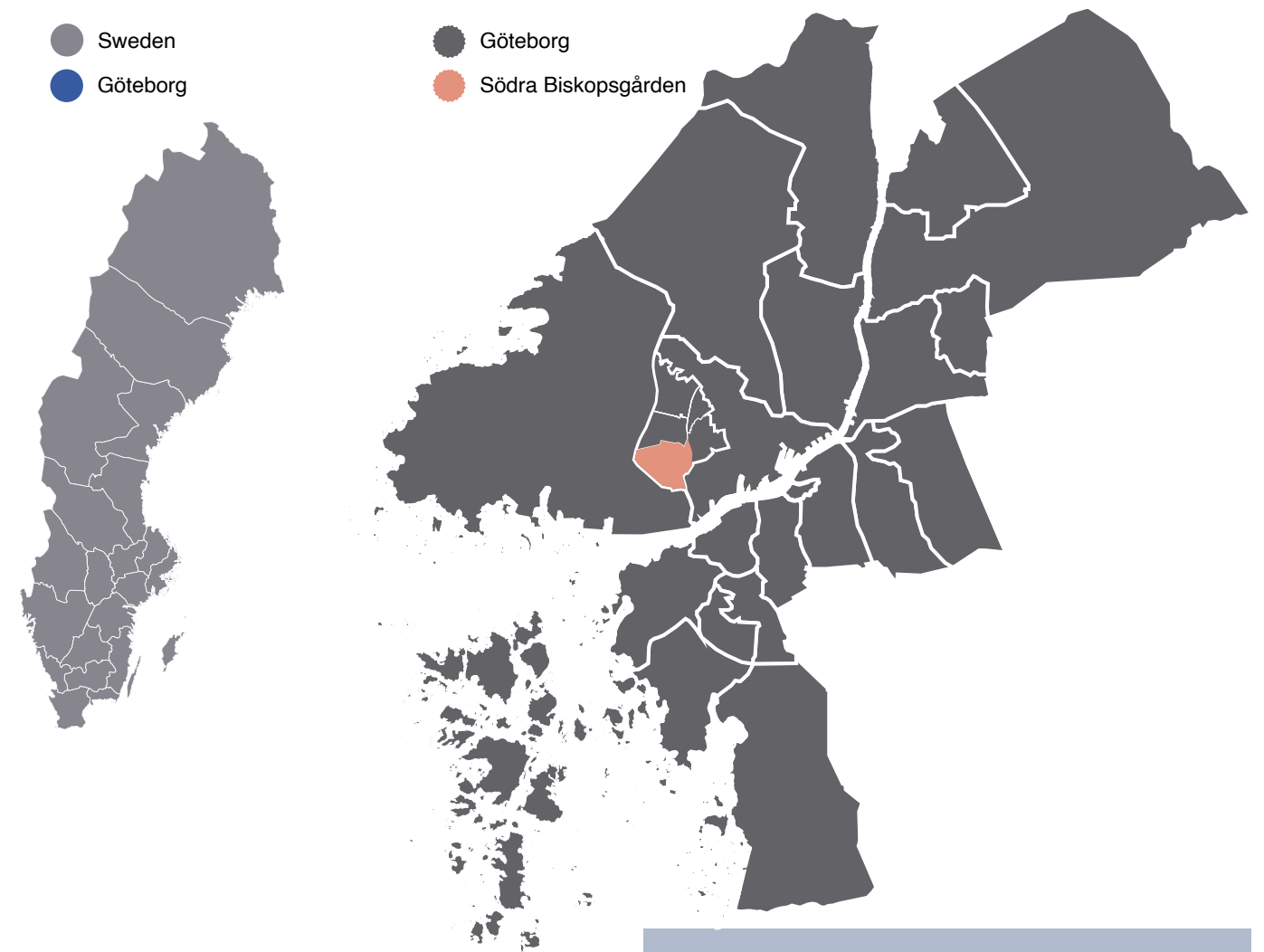
- John Muir

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

After a brief introduction of the theoretical frame in the previous chapter, this chapter delves into the geographical aspects and the community life of the target area.



CITY CONTEXT



Geographic Location

Värväderstorget is a southern part of Biskopsgården. This square has been designed to be part of the Miljonprogrammet housing scheme, which is a program started by the government to ensure availability of high quality and affordable housing for its citizen. It has largely active community and is a center of commerce and social interaction. Over the years, however, its role in this has shrunk because of urban planning problems, dwindling activities related to commerce, and social segregation.

Climate and Topographic Conditions

The climate of this area is temperate oceanic climate. The winters are mild and cold. The area receives rain and snowfall fairly evenly and since the area is mostly flat, there is no problem of water logging. This encourages the development of small public hubs and activity areas like cycling paths.

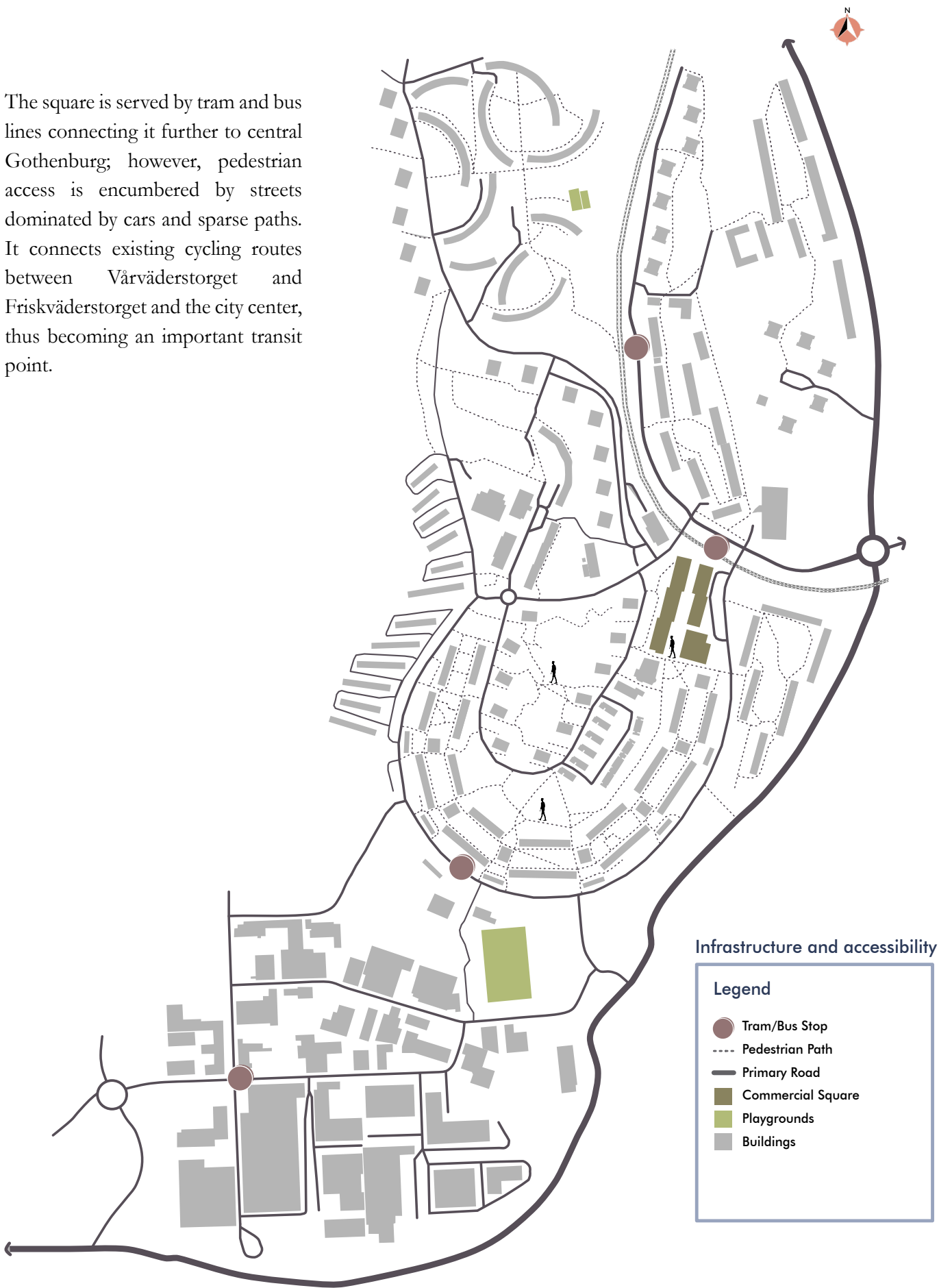
Selection Criteria

This site poses a lot of challenges. Its spatial disconnection, high population density and a need to provide social hubs makes it a perfect space for interventions and design public spaces using the principles of biophilic designs and third place theory.

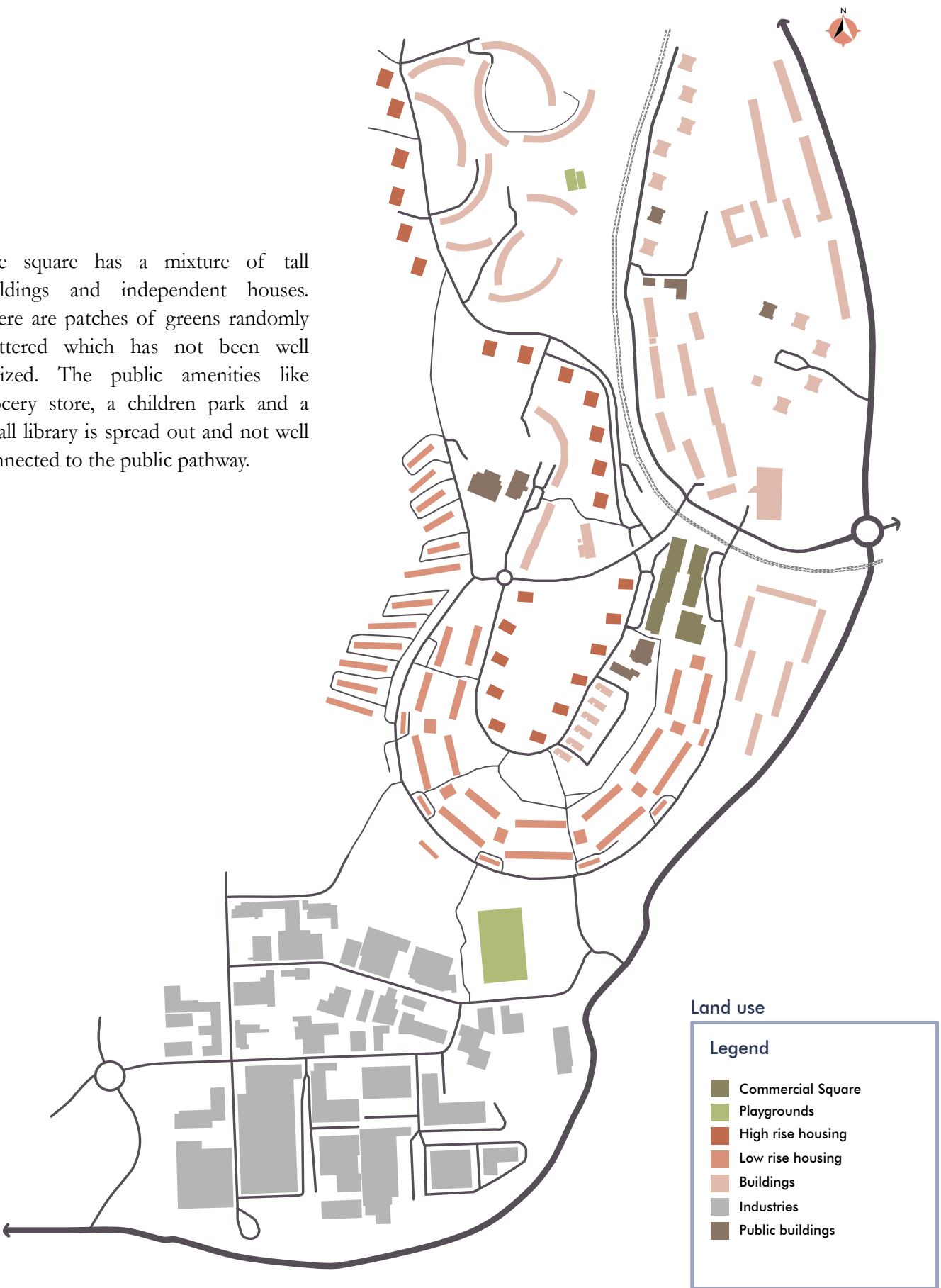
Demographics & Community Characteristics

The area has a diverse and multicultural population. South of biskopsgården accommodates a large population of young people from various countries. However, the area is plagued with unemployment, low education and a sense of insecurity. The Swedish police has labelled the biskopsgården area as a risk area.

The square is served by tram and bus lines connecting it further to central Gothenburg; however, pedestrian access is encumbered by streets dominated by cars and sparse paths. It connects existing cycling routes between Värvåderstorget and Friskvåderstorget and the city center, thus becoming an important transit point.



The square has a mixture of tall buildings and independent houses. There are patches of greens randomly scattered which has not been well utilized. The public amenities like grocery store, a children park and a small library is spread out and not well connected to the public pathway.



LIFE AT VÅRVÄDERSTORGET

The area is connected to the main city by buses and public trams. However, there are patches of green spots which has not been utilized and it stands out from the urban fabric of the area. Due to roads snaking in and out, there is a problem of traffic congestion. Entrances and pathways are uninviting and lacks visibility.

Greenery

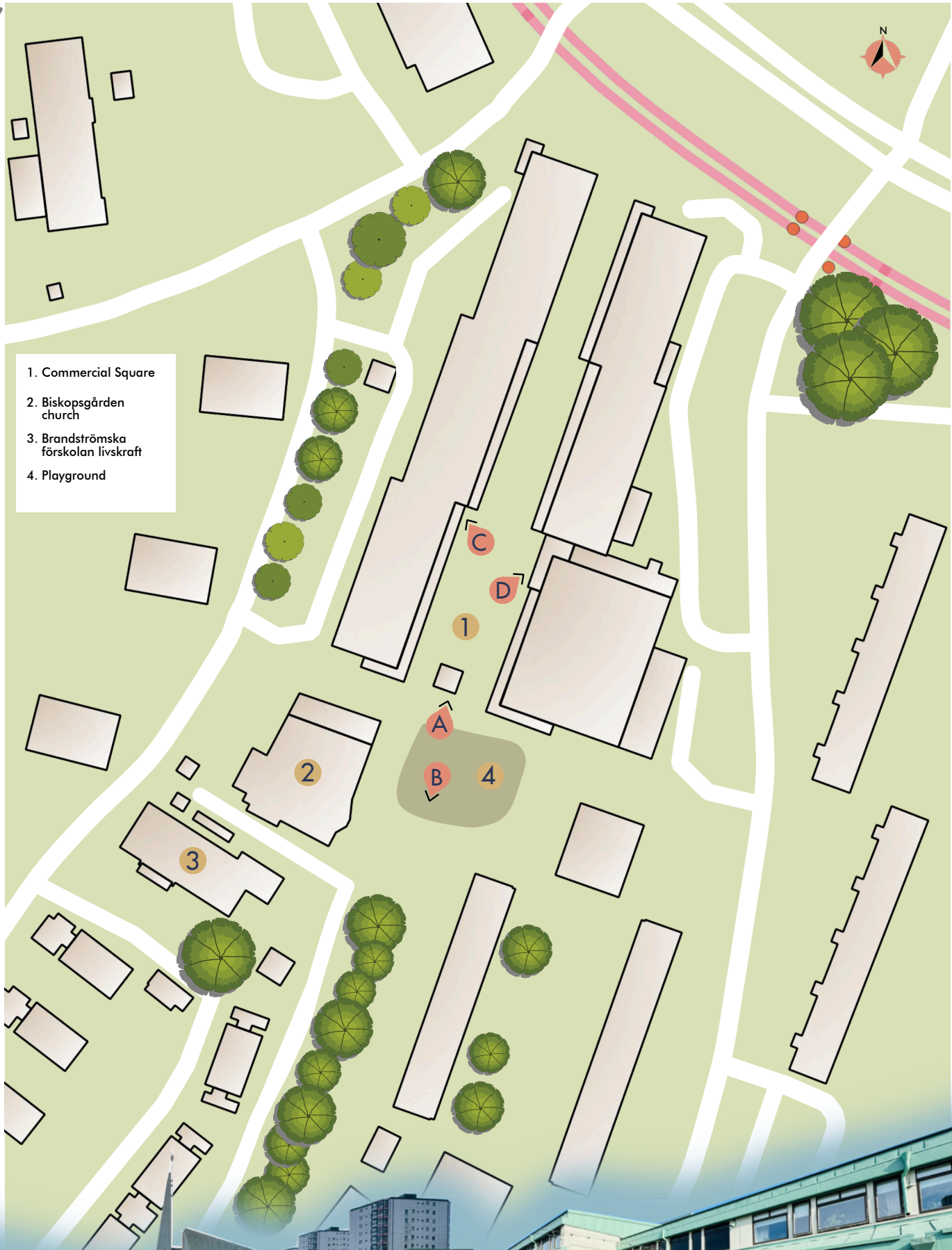
Legend

Primary Road

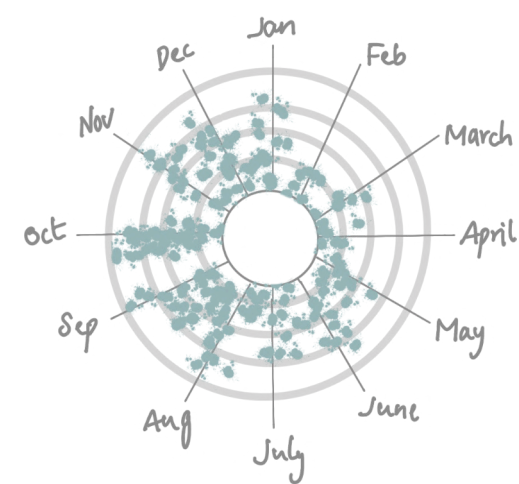
Commercial Square

Playgrounds

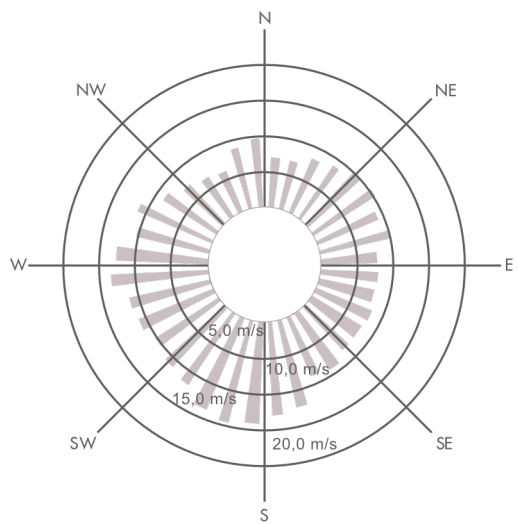
Buildings



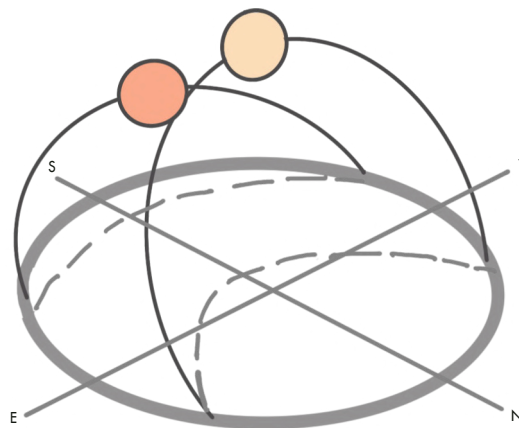
Climate Data



Precipitation
 Gothenburg receives fairly regular precipitation for the most part throughout the year and some seasonal changes. The period with the greatest rainfalls is usually between autumn and winter during the months of early spring, which are the months with relatively less heaviness of rainy period.



Wind Velocity and Direction
 The southwest winds predominate across the air flow, and this is the climatic conditioning of the city regarding urban planning. Therefore, orientation and site planning should be such as to mitigate the strong winds and allow adequate natural ventilation.



Sun Path and Solar Radiation:
 There are great seasonal differences between solar radiation and the sunpath in Gothenburg. For summer, the long daylight hours and high absorption of solar energy create opportunity for good daylight utilization. During winter, there is very little radiation and extremely short day light lengths, so careful planning is necessary to align daylighting strategies with urban and architectural design. The notable seasonal differences in the sun's path needs a clear planning to increase daylighting throughout the year.

Current Activities in Biskopsgården

Type	Place	Activity
Community & Outdoors	Community Garden	Urban farming and local events space.
	Outdoor Activity Zone (Blidvädergatan)	Gym, obstacle course, dance stage, running tracks (open 24/7).
Social & Cultural	Friskvåderstorget Library	Books and events for the local community.
	Vårvåderstorget Library	Language cafés, cultural events.
	Biskopsgårdens Church	Community meetups and fika.
Arts & Community	Moving Queens	Feminist dance and mental health workshops.
	Orkanen Cultural Centre	Film screenings and creative workshops.
Annual Events	Biskopsgården Food Festival	Held in September; celebrates world cuisine and local culture.
Parks & Recreation	Biskopsgården Park	Green space with playgrounds and areas for picnics.
	Svarte Mosse	Natural area under development into a major city park.

SWOT Analysis

S

Central Site - Important local focal point for South Biskopsgården.
Good Connectivity - Well-strung tram and buses.
Strong Community Ties - Its challenges notwithstanding, it retains a sense of community.
Historical Importance - Functionalist Design Would Have Scope for Different Usage.
Space for Revamping - New cultural spaces and green spaces are possible.

O

Urban renewal: Better public spaces, more greenery, and better lighting.
Community involvement - Animating the square through events and markets.
Improved connections, pedestrian access barriers reduced.
Mixed Use Development - Housing combined with commercial and cultural spaces.
Collaboration With Associations - Spaces for meetings of local communities.

W

Lack of Public Spaces - An inviting public gathering space or public areas for activities.
Underutilized Structures - Poorly maintained structures, which do not attract most residents to use them.
Safety Concerns - Most people do not feel safe, particularly at night.
Traffic and pedestrian disconnection - Well-being with the functionalist design denies walkability.
Depression of Commerce - used to be very lively, but now business has shrunk.

T

Further Neglect - Matriculated decline could persist if no investment is made.
Gentrification Risks - Aspiring might displace the other existing residents.
Ongoing Safety Issues - Ongoing crime might to lesser or not deter the use of the public space.
Lack of Support - Halts delays and ineffective development as a result of a lack of political and financial backing.

Key findings - studies, interviews and surveys

Remissvar– Planprogram för Biskopsgården

The survey data for Södra Biskopsgården reveals several key points regarding meeting places and community needs:

High Demand for Meeting Places: Respondents consistently expressed a strong need for more places to meet and socialize in Södra Biskopsgården. This was among the most frequently mentioned needs in the survey responses .

Lack of Public Squares and Gathering Spaces: There is currently no well-defined public square in Södra Biskopsgården, which limits opportunities for spontaneous encounters and larger gatherings. Residents specifically pointed out the absence of such a central communal area .

Feelings of Isolation and Insecurity: The lack of social infrastructure contributes to feelings of insecurity and isolation. Respondents noted that the area’s built environment does not support community cohesion or provide safe, inviting places for interaction .

Support for Social Infrastructure in Urban Design: The survey findings advocate for urban design interventions that foster social interaction, such as creating a main square or improving existing public spaces with clear functions and social amenities .

Hur förbättrar vi levnadsvillkoren i Biskopsgården

The group interview data for Södra Biskopsgården reveals several key points regarding meeting places and community needs:

High Demand for Meeting Places: Respondents consistently emphasized the need for accessible public spaces where people can meet.

Lack of Functional Community Squares: Residents pointed out that while Vårväderstorget exists, it does not serve the function of a true communal square. It feels segregated, underused, and unattractive due to the presence of a large parking lot and limited social infrastructure.

Need to Develop Fruktlunden: Fruktlunden, a green area near Vårväderstorget, was transformed into a temporary social hub when 10 park benches were added during the summer. Residents clearly saw this as a model for a permanent public meeting place and further developments for this area is encouraged.

Strong Support for Social and Intergenerational Infrastructure: Interviewees proposed new spaces for culture, exercise, and generational exchange—such as boule courts for seniors, combined student/senior housing, and a cultural center to foster neighborhood identity and reduce alienation.

Site Photos for Design Interventions



MODULE
-
I



MODULE
-
II



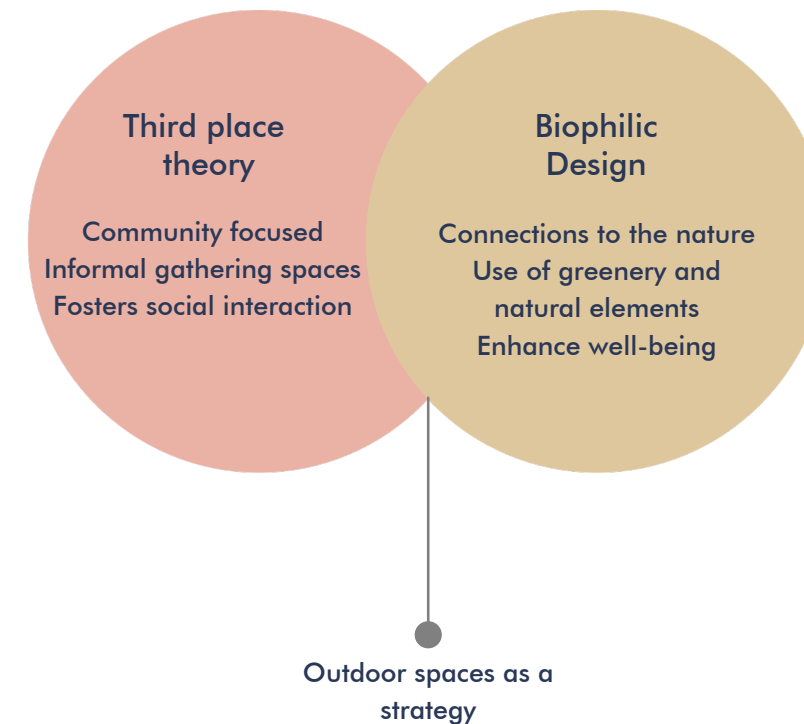
MODULE
-
III

"We can meet people from different cultures, backgrounds and life experiences, which encourages us to empathize with people of different identities."
- *Madeleine Roberts*

DESIGN STRATEGY

This chapter outlines strategies that investigate how design can be informed and guided by research.

Goals for community engagement and sustainability



The design must itself interact human beings with nature and the associated nature forms and patterns.

Forms & Patterns: Interpreting forms and patterns representing nature in order to create a soothing environment for our minds.

Materials & Textures: Sustainable and locally sourced materials are to be used to create warmth within the interior spaces with the contrast in texture.

Natural Light & Wind: The building shall encourage the adoption of passive solar lighting for comfort and natural ventilation for energy efficiency as well as outdoor spaces.

Natural Elements: Aesthetic beauty and ecological biodiversity would be increased by providing plants and water features in the landscape.

The third place refers to the social congregation space outside of the workplace (second place) and inside the home (first place):

Social Connectivity: A shade from the sun under which relationships and community life is enabled.

Flexibility: Adaptable configurations for use for purposes like markets, performances, and workshops will be available.

Local Identities: Design elements that express the cultural heritage and value system of the local community.

Multifunctionality: An active setting can accommodate everything from work to leisurely interaction.

The delivery of ecologically sustainable features such as energy conservation, rainwater harvesting and management of solid waste is made available.

Integrate education in sustainable practices with other themes that will include workshops and green infrastructure.

Last but not least, materials of permanent impact and low cost would be used with low environmental impact and longevity as viable perspectives.

Implementation Strategies

Community Engagement: Involve local stakeholders, artists, and designers in the planning.

Zoning & Layout: Arrange zones according to function while establishing circulation between zones that are unobstructed.

Technology Integration: Smart lighting for buildings, responsive in design to climate, and interactive installations.

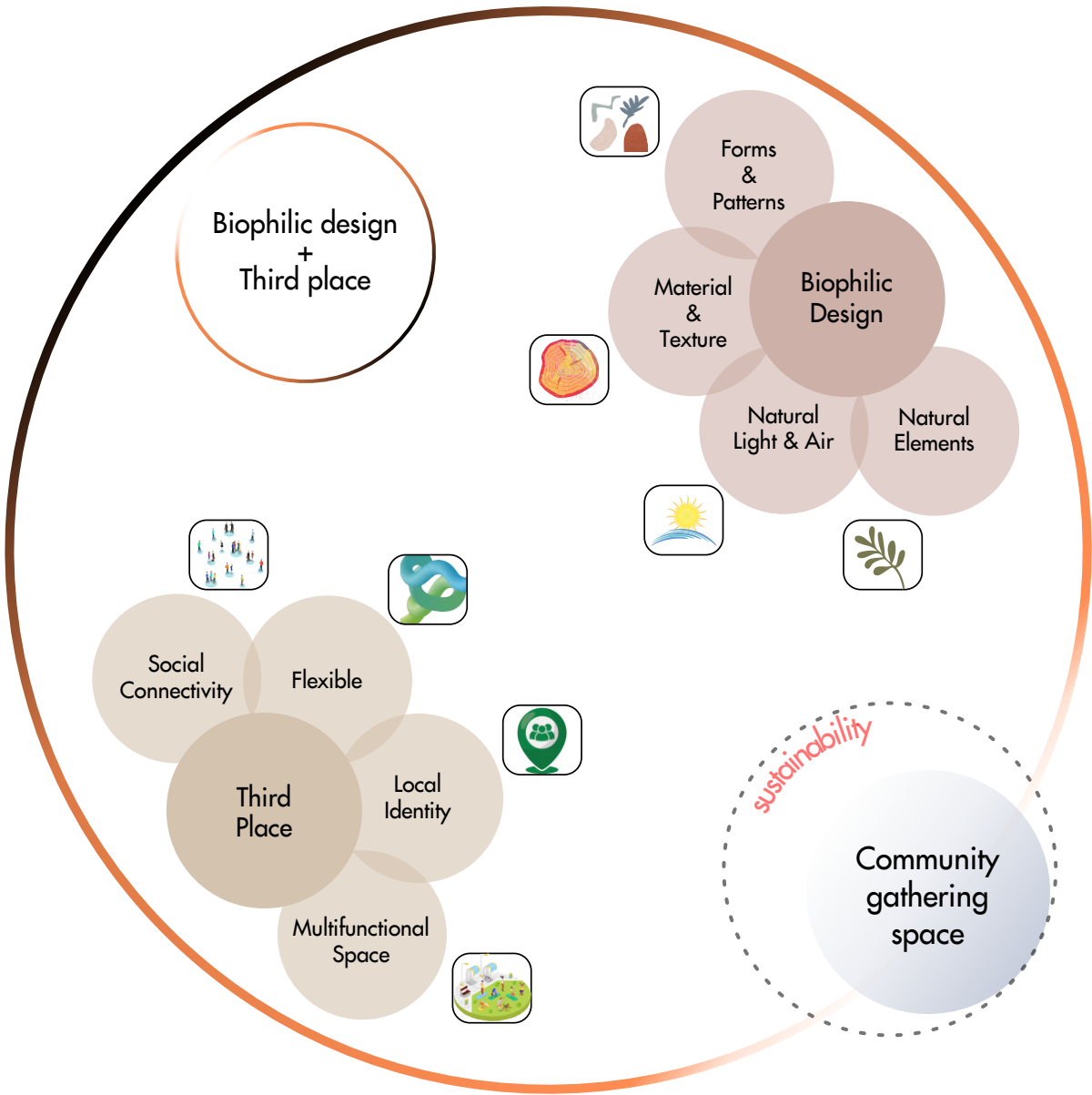
Long-Term Maintenance: Encourage operational and maintenance plans from the community, with periodic interventions.

The Community gathering space will turn out to be inclusive, biophilic, sustainable, and also lay the foundation for the development of social relationships, conservation of local cultural heritage, and well-being of all.

Analysing Design Framework from Theories

Humans are co-creators of a built environment with that environment; it constantly changes. It is not only made physically but emotionally and socially as well. First, humans perceive their environment; they also interpret it, thereby creating lived experiences that over time include cumulatively a cognitive understanding of space in three dimensions. Second, space is to be lived in or engaged in; often, it brings about community engagement for building an esprit de corps. That is to say, each of these conduits emphasizes an interaction between physical form, social institution, and perception human beings make about an environment rich in meaning. This diagram,

therefore, can be taken holistically to mean designing spaces for community gathering with Third Place, Biophilic Design, and sustainability in view. All the Third Place shows is about adaptable multi-function microcosms allowing convivial social interaction and adaptation to local identity. Biophilic Design would communicate natural elements, daylight, and organic material patterns, and nature for well-being and sensory richness. The intersectionalities give one of the community gathering spaces-both vibrant socially, resilient to the environment, and adaptable to life through strong community bonds for sustainability in the long haul.



Understanding the relation between people and space

This illustration provides an understanding of the dynamics of a two-way relationship between people and space; the environments are not only physically constructed but are also socially and experientially shaped. On the one hand, human beings perceive their environment and interpret it, thereby creating lived experiences that over time produce a cognitive understanding of space in three dimensions. On the other hand, space is there to be inhabited and engaged with, often facilitating community engagement for fostering a spirit of togetherness. Thus, each of these pathways gives prominence to the interaction of the physical form, social relationships, and human perception into an environment rich in meaning.

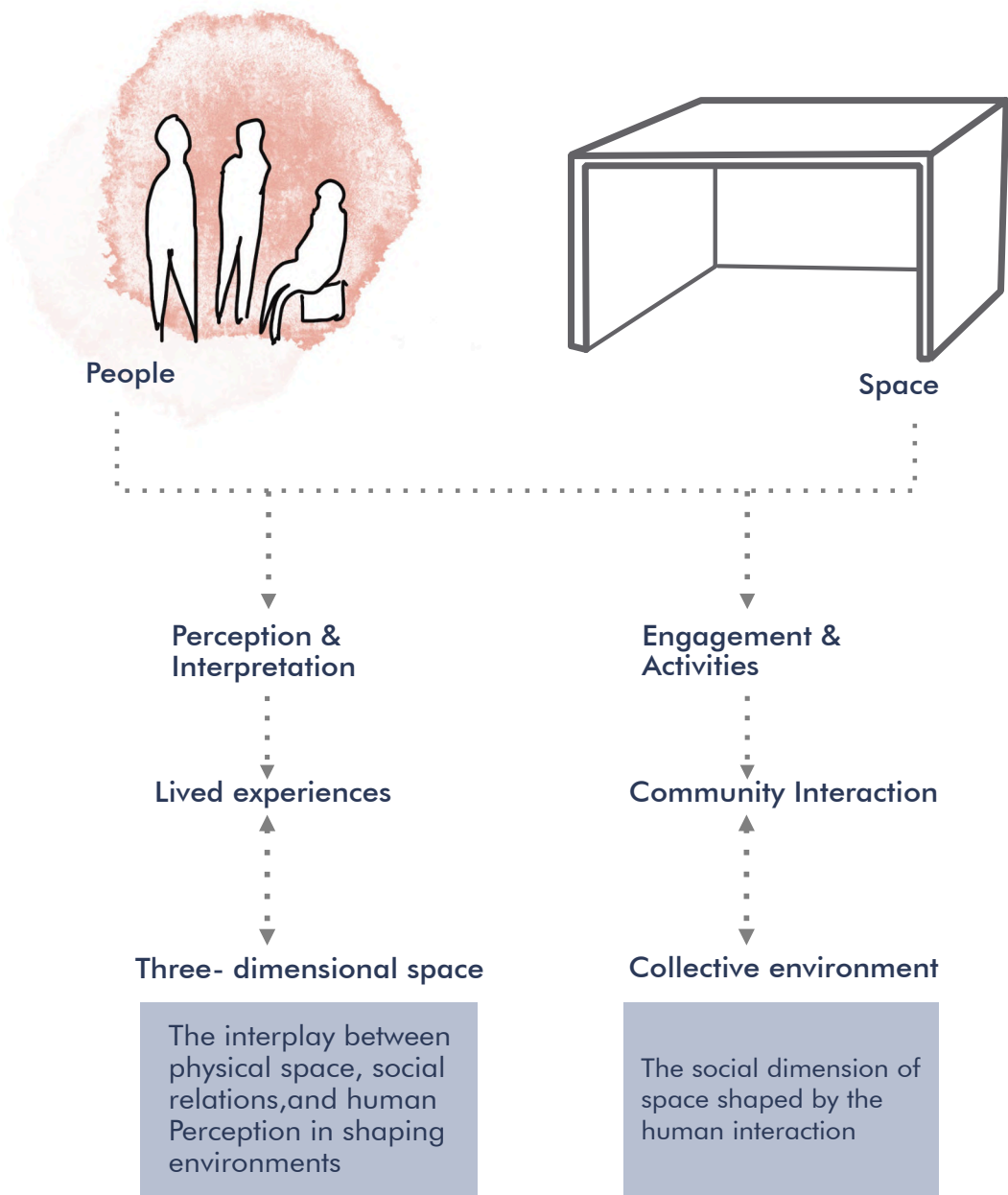


Fig 3. Programmatic Translation of the Third Space Theory - adapted from Edward Soja

Planning activities for Interventions

Activities like these below are vital things that feed community well-being and social cohesion. All build bonds that nurture mental and physical health and engender feelings of belonging. Whether sharing some food, sweating it out, or partying under the stars, these moments build much-needed connection that bathe urban life in meaning and support holistic well-being.



Eating together



Gardening together



Social gathering



Cooking together



Gym and Training



Swap meet

Table of Functions and Programs with Integrated Theories

This table outlines the integration of Third Place Theory and Biophilic Design Principles within three key community spaces: the Yoga/Exercise Platform, Outdoor Kitchen, and Swap Box Area. Each space is designed not only for its primary function but also to support alternative community-driven uses, fostering social connection, inclusivity, and environmental harmony. The interventions aim to promote informal gathering, shared activities, and a deeper connection to nature, enriching the everyday experience of community living.

SPACE TYPE	THIRD PLACE THEORY	BIOPHILIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES
Yoga/Exercise Platform (Alternative use) ↓ Art and Mentorship Workshop space	Community wellness, shared mindfulness practices	Natural wooden flooring, and structure, with openings to connect nature surrounded by green
Outdoor Kitchen (Alternative use) ↓ Cultural meeting space	Collaborative cooking, social exchange, communal meals	Open layout with garden view, sensory engagement through smell, texture and taste
Swap Box Area (Alternative use) ↓ Community - storage space	Informal exchange hub, casual interaction, gifting culture	Use of natural materials, wooden seating box, shelves and racks.

REFERENCE PROJECTS

Yoga pavilion - Norrmalm, Sweden

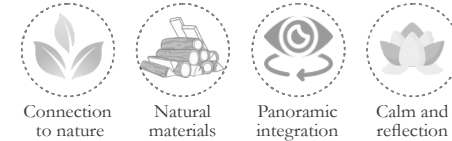


Fig 4. Yoga pavilion - Norrmalm, Sweden

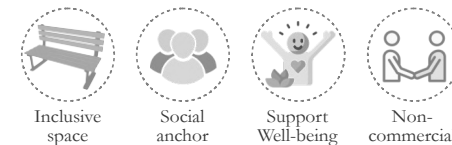
A timber structure atop a hill in Vasaparken, designed for mindfulness and yoga. The pavilion balances openness and shelter through its rotating wooden screens and elevated design, offering panoramic views while preserving the park's landscape. Built using traditional joinery and biophilic principles, it fosters reflection and calm. Created from citizen's initiative, it merges public use with architectural elegance, earning recognition as a peaceful urban retreat.

Key takeaways

Biophilic Design Aspects



Third Place Theory Aspects



Story pod - Toronto, Canada

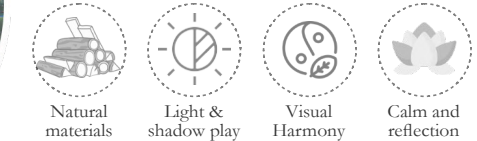


Fig 6. Story pod - Toronto, Canada

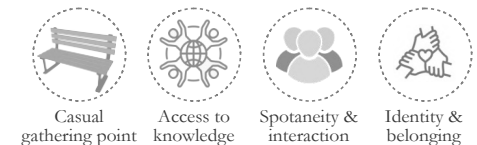
Sculptural in its compactness, this pavilion serves as free book-lending library and meeting place in Newmarket, Toronto. It is clad in slatted wood; the pod opens during the day to welcome readers while closing securely at night, creating a glowing jewel. Designed with inclusion in mind, the pavilion fosters literacy, spontaneous interaction, and public engagement through architecture. Its minimalist form melded with multiple functions is what makes this space a cherished micro-hub of culture and connection.

Key takeaways

Biophilic Design Aspects



Third Place Theory Aspects



Tillsammanskök - Gothenburg, Sweden

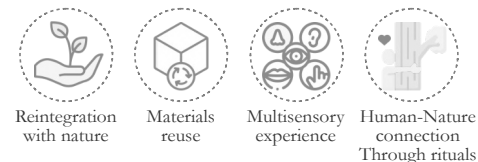


Fig 5. Tillsammanskök - Gothenburg, Sweden

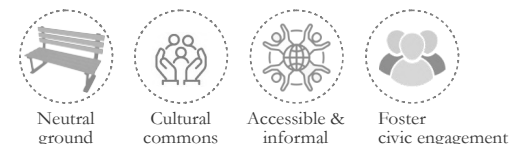
The outdoors kitchen for the community in Brunnsbo, Gothenburg, with a co-designed and co-built community using participatory and shared place workshops, to be further constructed in 2023 with recycled materials, is to be co-enduring spaces where neighbors will come to cook together and eat on the streets to celebrate the plurality of food cultures in the locality. Truly, these tell stories on sustainable designs and community of networks turning an asphalt lot into rendezvous and cultural exchange.

Key takeaways

Biophilic Design Aspects



Third Place Theory Aspects



Superkillen - Copenhagen, Denmark

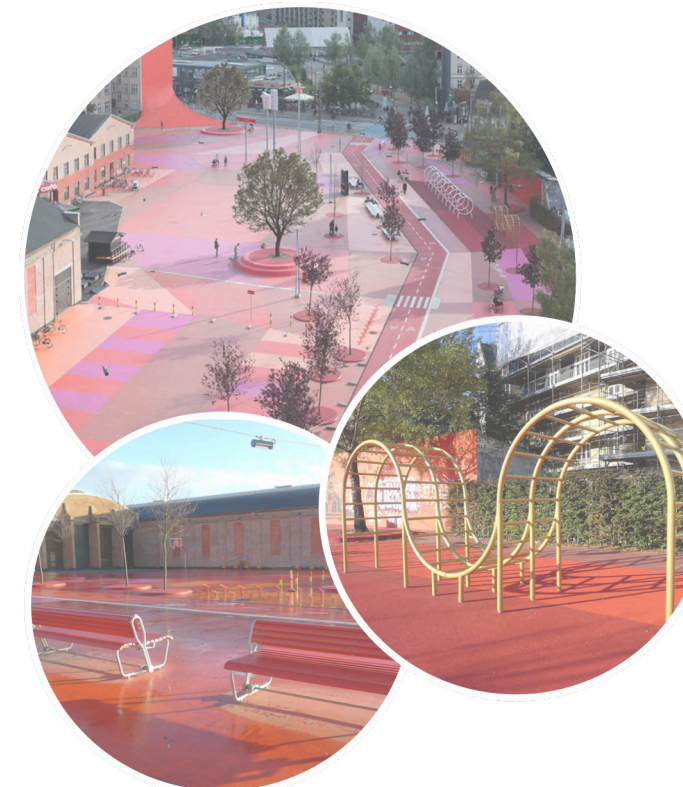
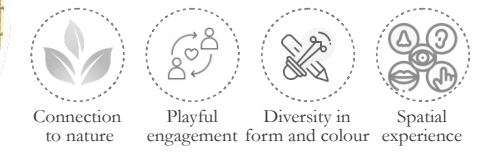


Fig 7. Superkillen - Copenhagen, Denmark

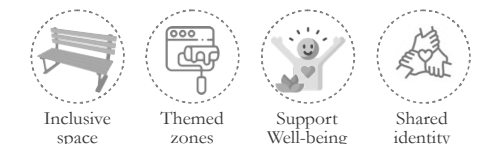
Transforming a very dull green park into a rich, vibrant, multicultural public space, Superkillen draws through the fantastic township of Nørrebro as an urban park, celebrating diversity through design. Divided into three themed zones: Red, Black, and Green, which house the everyday objects of more than 60 nationalities to make a reflection of the global roots of the neighborhood. It merges art, landscape, and urban life to become playful, which is inclusive. Redefines community space through shared identity and creative expression.

Key takeaways

Biophilic Design Aspects



Third Place Theory Aspects



MODULE - I

Module I : Yoga Platform

This semi-open structure is meant to instill a profound sense of peace and connection-with nature and among persons because it is built of natural wood and is fully open to sunlight and the breeze. It is a calming space that somehow just invites you to relax and perhaps do some yoga, meditation, or simply think quietly. Equally, it is a place for the informal life rests or afternoon meeting where people can come together and slow down in reconnecting with an artistic balanced life.

MODULE - II

Module II : Outdoor Kitchen (Inspired by 'Fika')

Considered as a fusion of an outdoor kitchen with a social twist, 'Fika' culture is all about ensuring hospitality and bringing people into food and conversation. A kitchen made of wood acts as an informal space where community members, from all walks of life-come, cook, eat, and celebrate together in an open association that embraces common social value. Celebrating diverse culture and the culture of the ordinary day, the kitchen forms space in the spirit of togetherness and hospitality.

MODULE - III

Module III : The Swap Box

The Swap Box is an adaptable open wooden structure that wants to make sustainable living both enjoyable and purposeful. It encourages parents and their children to freely trade such things as toys, books, and presents-without money being involved anywhere, if such ability in the exchange is even possible, so it promotes the concept of a circular economy. Just in making reuse and sharing a normal day activity, The Swap Box, from early years, instills the practice of generosity, environmental consciousness, and the spirit of community in children.

"We are an open mixing place for the general public, but we are strongly committed to bringing together people who may not normally spend time together in the hope that they will become friends, seeking deeper relationships with each other and with the community."

- Ray oldenburg

DESIGN PROPOSAL

This chapter presents the design proposal, highlighting the iterative process through which the ideas were developed, tested, and refined.



MASTER PLAN

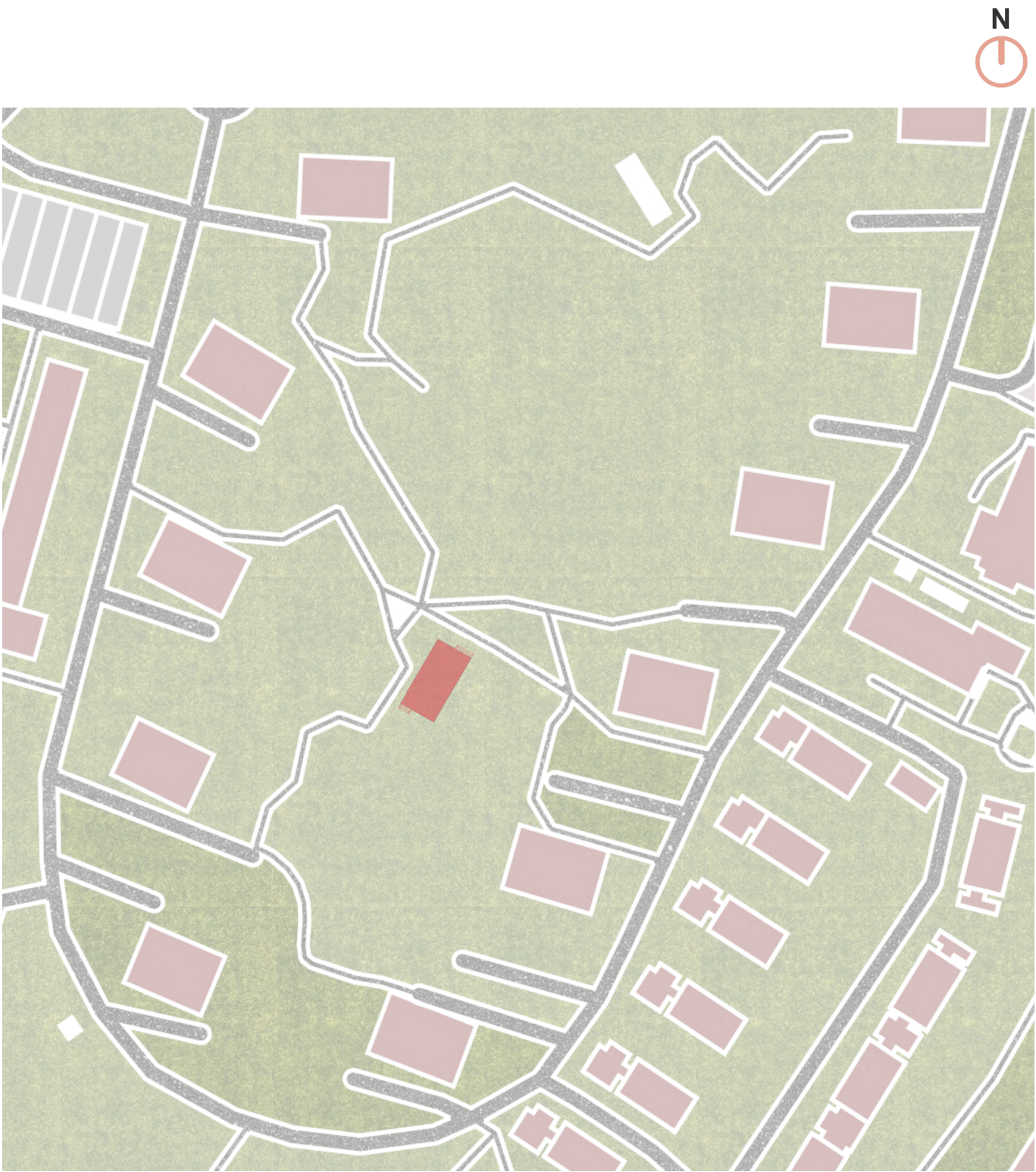


SÖDRA BISKOPSGÅRDEN

Placement of Design Modules

- 1. Module I - Yoga Platform
- 2. Module II - Outdoor Kitchen
- 3. Module III - Swap Box

SITE PLAN - MODULE I

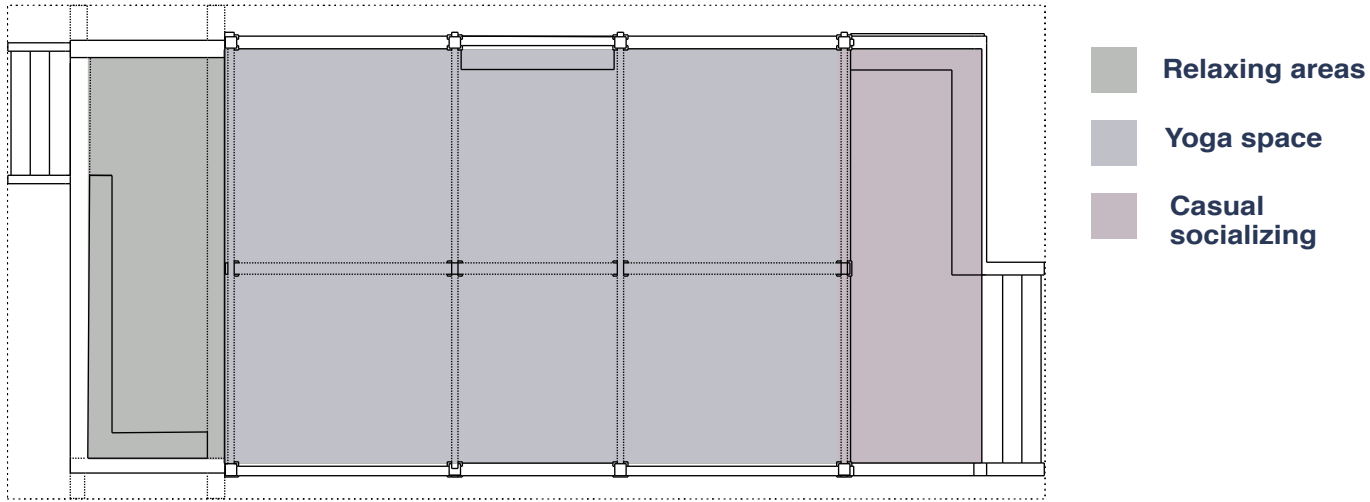


SCALE - 1:1000

Module I - Yoga platform - is situated in an underused green space between residential buildings to activate the area and foster meaningful community interaction. It is a serene and natural setting for biophilic integration with an emphasis on wellness through air, sun, and green. The yoga platform takes a generic patch of grass and transforms it into a space for mindfulness and informal gathering, thus supporting well-being and social interconnection in the neighborhood.

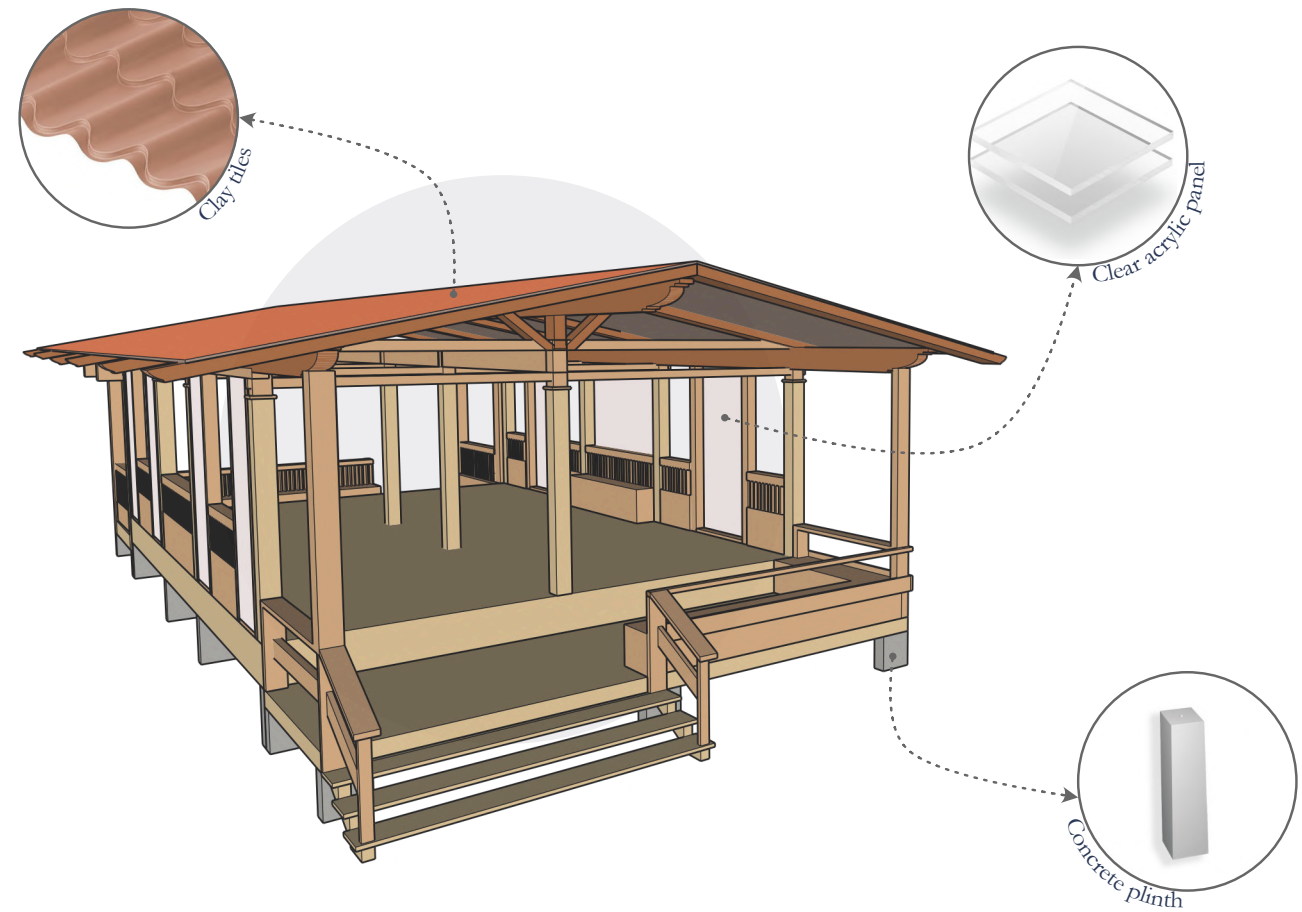
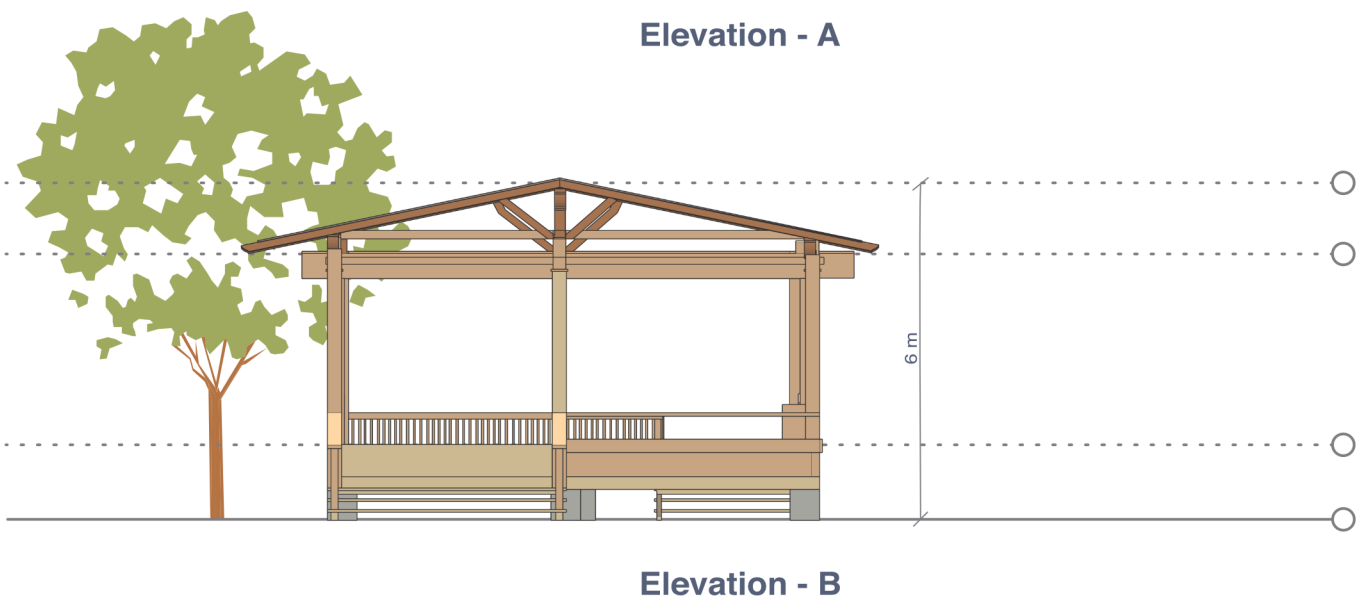
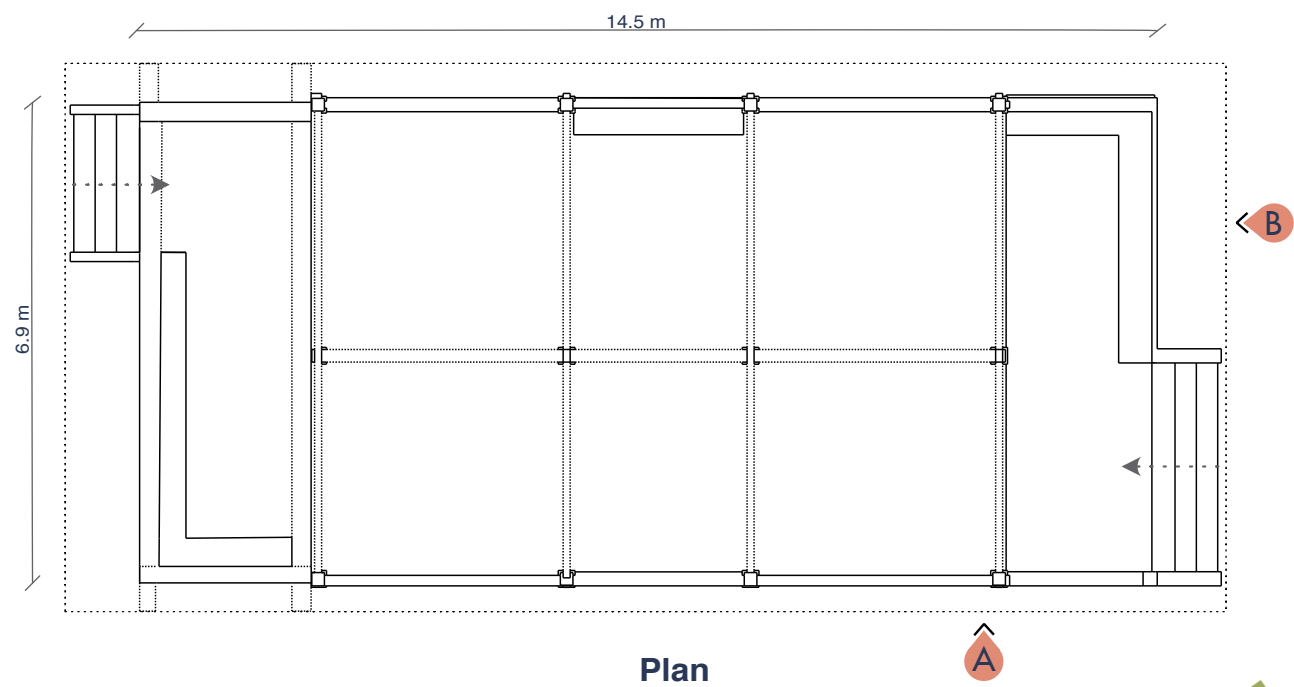
FUNCTIONAL LAYOUT

YOGA PLATFORM

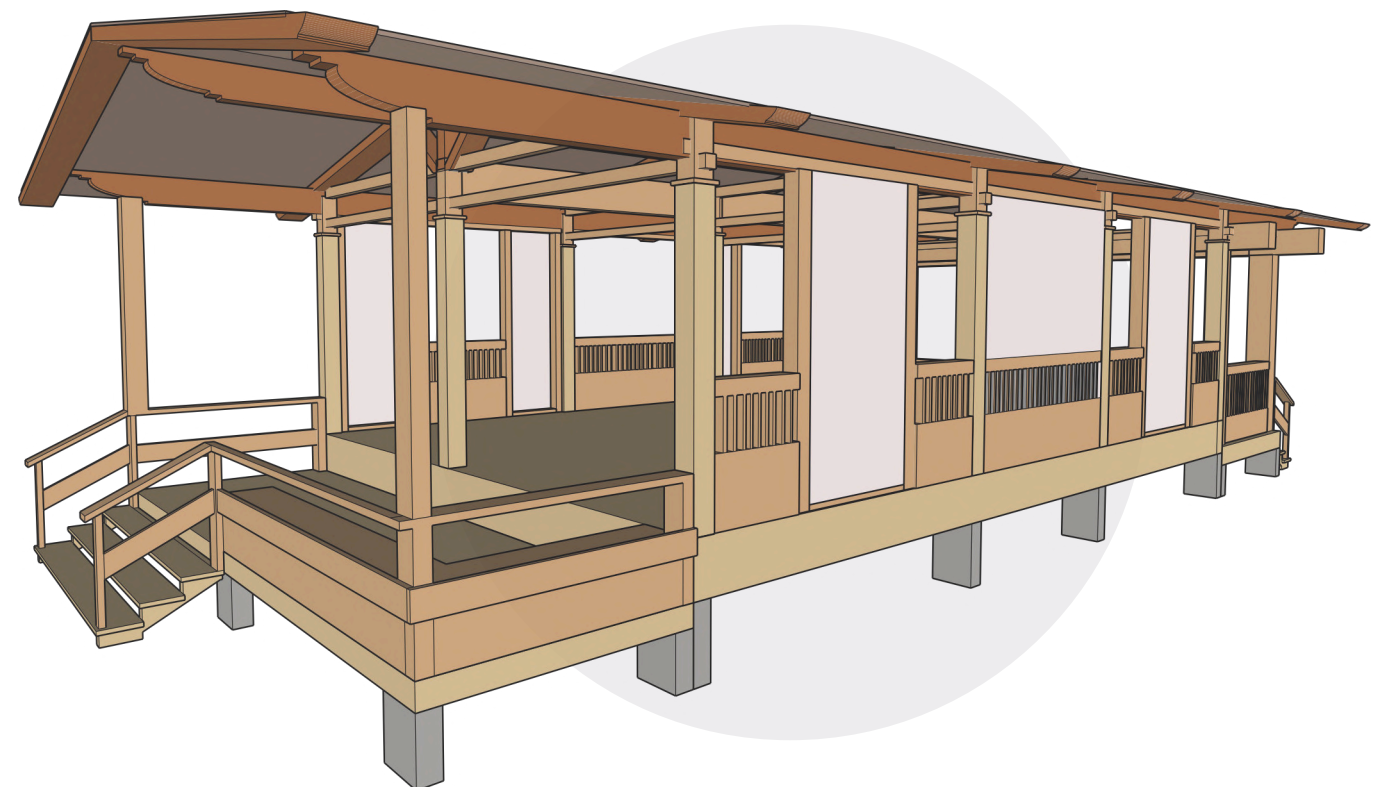


Activity	Space per Person	Total Space for 15 People (sqm)	Design Requirements
General Seating - Meeting	1.4–1.9 sqm	21–28 sqm	- Comfortable seating -cushions - Adequate circulation space - Natural lighting and ventilation - Shaded or covered areas to protect from sun or rain
Yoga/Exercise Space	3.4–4.6 sqm	51–69 sqm	- Flat, smooth flooring (wood, decking, or grass) - Open, unobstructed space for movement - Soft, non-slip surface if required
Casual Socializing/Standing	0.9–1.4 sqm	14–21 sqm	- Casual seating -benches, standing areas - Interactive, open layout - Flexible design for mingling and easy movement
Relaxing Areas	2.3–2.8 sqm	34–42 sqm	- Secluded spaces for quiet or small group discussions - Wooden partitions or plants for privacy - Comfortable seating and natural elements for relaxation

YOGA PLATFORM



The Yoga Platform that connects people to nature and each other. By using natural materials like wood creates a peaceful environment for yoga and mindfulness. The open structure allows for a fresh air and sunlight to pass through. This informal gathering space for community members becomes a practice for a lifestyle change.



YOGA PLATFORM



Interior View - Yoga Platform



Exterior View

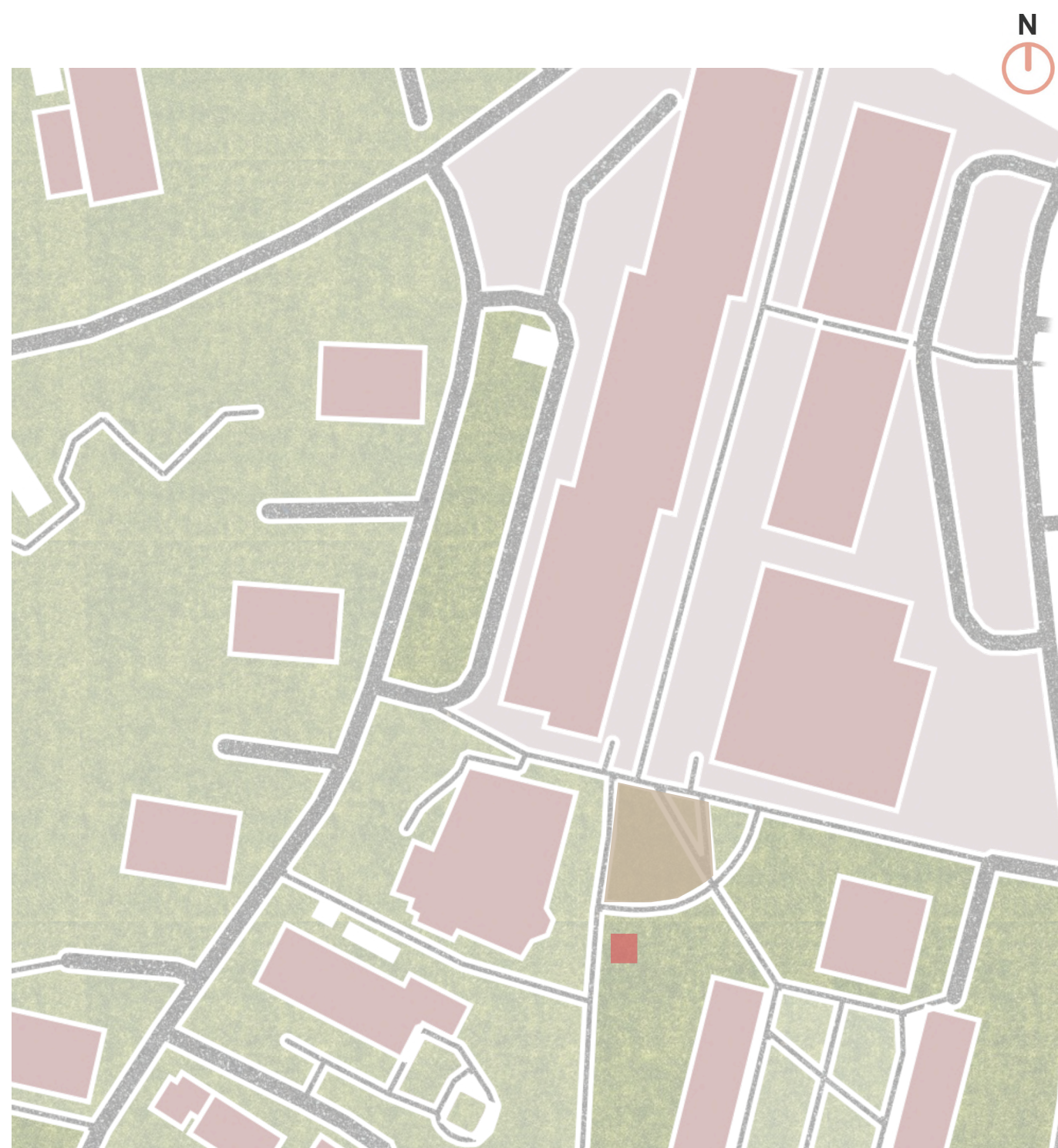


Interior View - Yoga Platform



Exterior View

SITE PLAN - MODULE II

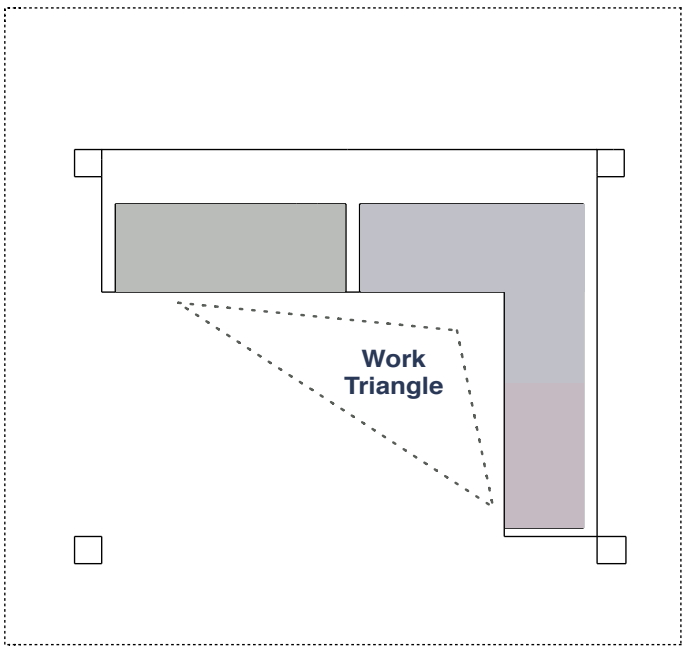


SCALE - 1:1000

Module II - The Outdoor Kitchen- is located near the square to take advantage of existing water and electrical infrastructure and to enhance the social energy of the surrounding park and public space. The location enables the kitchen to act as a community hub, inviting people to cook, eat, and socialize in a shared, public setting. Inspired by the Swedish practice of fika, where food and conversation bring people together, the kitchen celebrates cultural difference and shared experience.

FUNCTIONAL LAYOUT

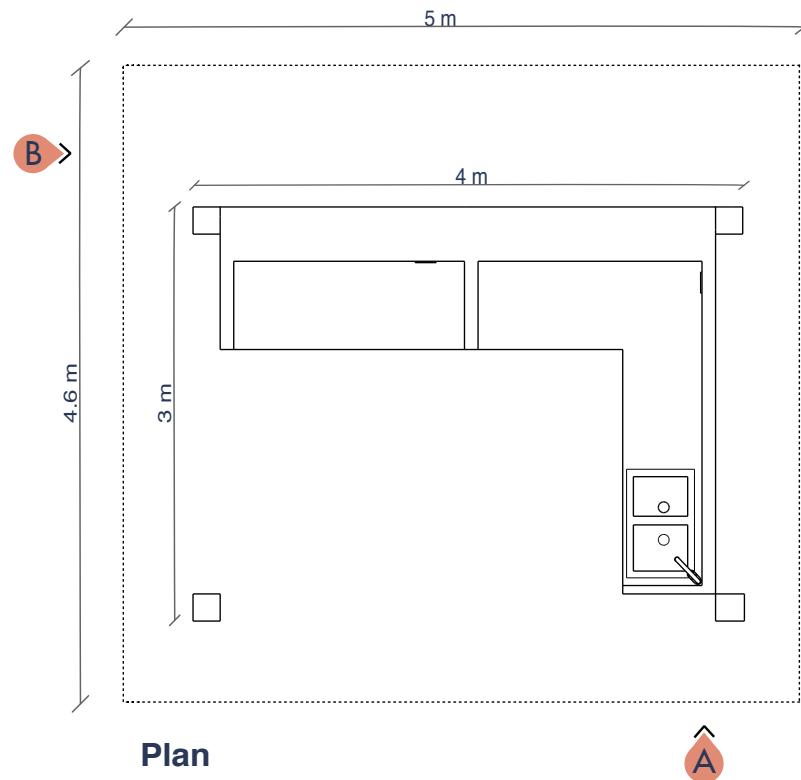
OUTDOOR KITCHEN



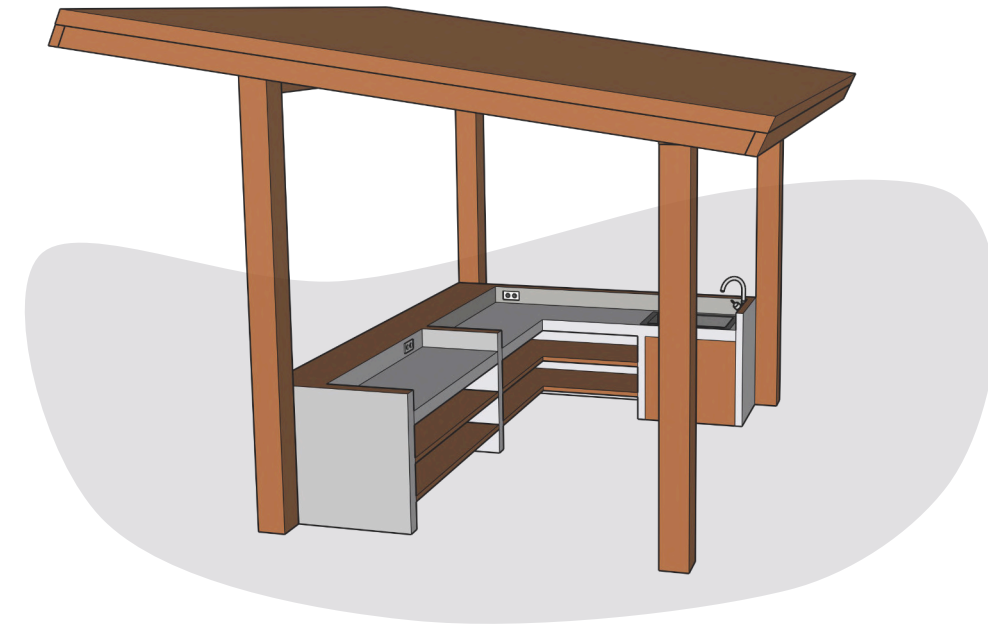
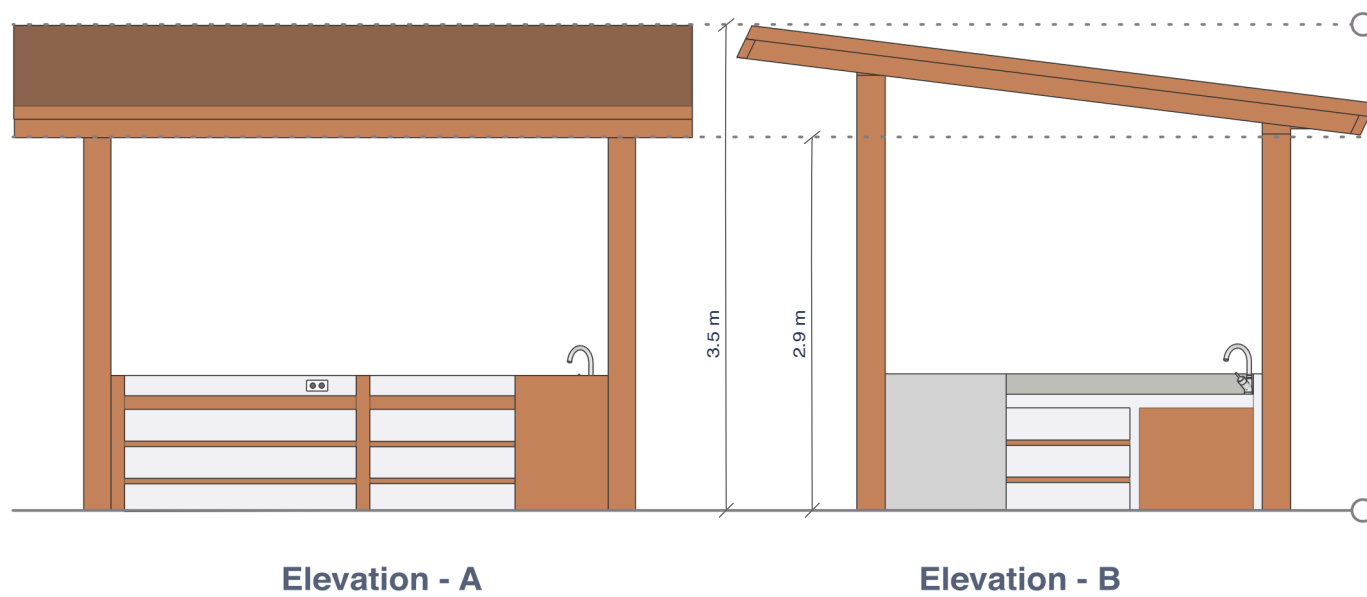
- Hot Zone
- Cold zone
- Wet zone

Activity	Space per Person	Total Space for 10 People (sqm)	Design Requirements
Cooking Area	1.2 sqm	12 sqm	- Large countertop for food prep - Stove, oven, or BBQ area - Storage for utensils, tools, and ingredients - Proper ventilation
Serving Area	2.3 sqm		- Space for plating and serving food - Countertops or tables for placing dishes - Easy access to cooking area and seating - Possibly a beverage or dessert station
Storage & Pantry		15 sqm	- Cabinets or shelves for storing dry goods, tools, and cooking utensils - Fridge/ freezer for perishables - Trash and recycling bins with easy access

OUTDOOR KITCHEN

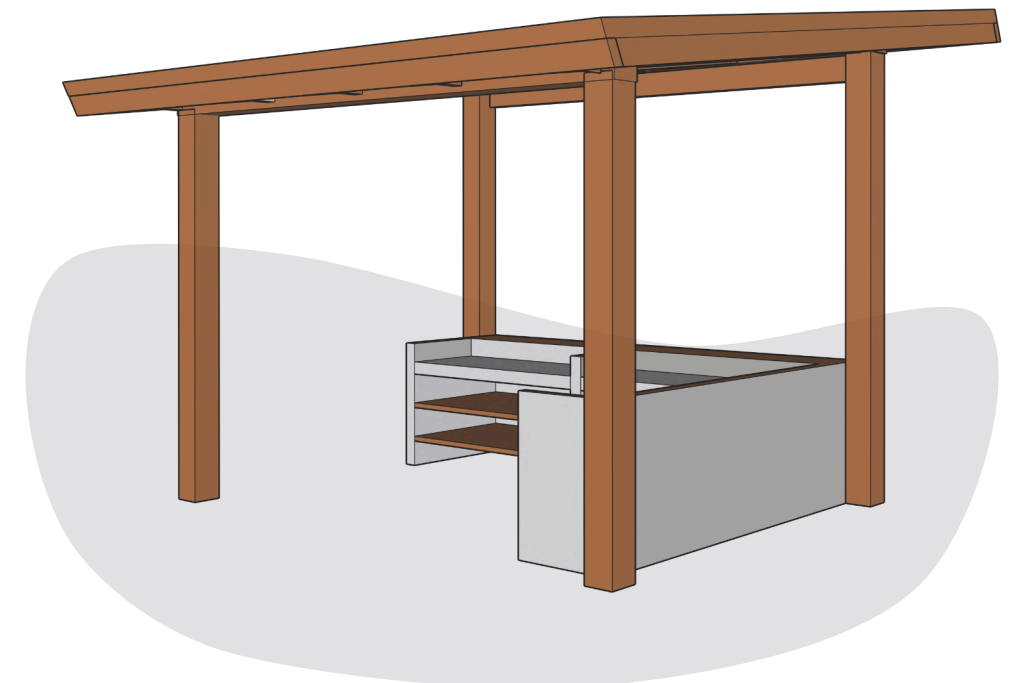


This module offers both connection to nature and community interactions. The concept of Swedish fika - improves socializing, and food connects with diverse culture. The kitchen, situated close to the square, is highly visible and accessible, encouraging spontaneous use and emphasizing the equality and community values at the core of Swedish social life.



In terms of social life, sweden values equality, inclusivity which is seen in sharing food in neutral grounds. The culture celebrates a deep sense of community and welcoming every new people to the area.

The structure is made out of wood and access to nature. This idea of a deep connection to nature promotes moderation and contenment, avoding excess and encouraging a balanced approach to work, life and lesiure.



OUTDOOR KITCHEN



Interior View - Outdoor Kitchen



Exterior View

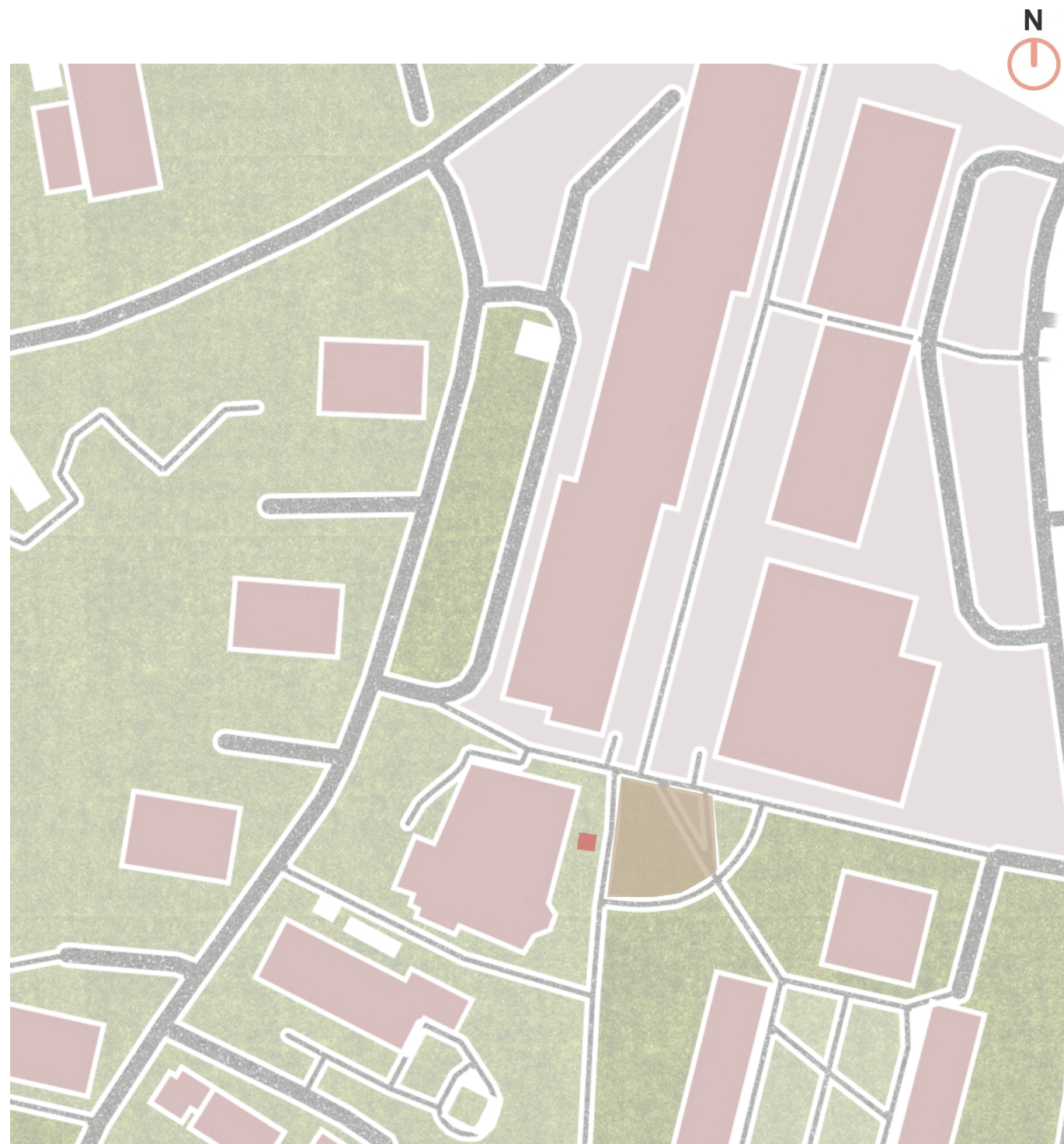


Interior View - Outdoor Kitchen



Exterior View

SITE PLAN - MODULE III

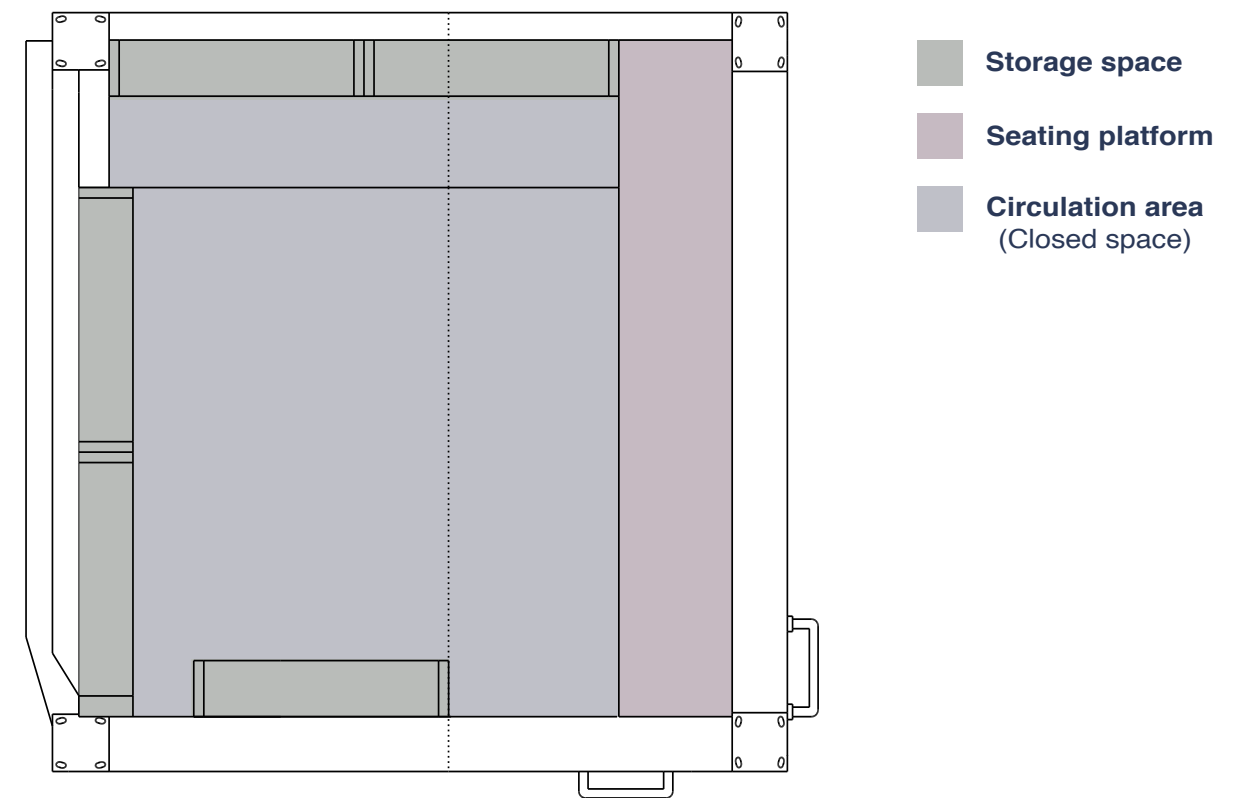


SCALE - 1:1000

Module III - Swap Box - is positioned in a busy, community-oriented spot in the neighborhood to maximize usage and informal contact. Its location close to walking routes and community areas enables it to be extremely accessible to families and children, further establishing it as a lively exchange site. As a dynamic structure, the Swap Box promotes residents to live in a circular economy by sharing and reusing common household items like toys, books, and gifts. Puts it in the community not only promotes environmental consciousness but also enhances a culture of sharing and building community- sustainability in a tangible, everyday living practice.

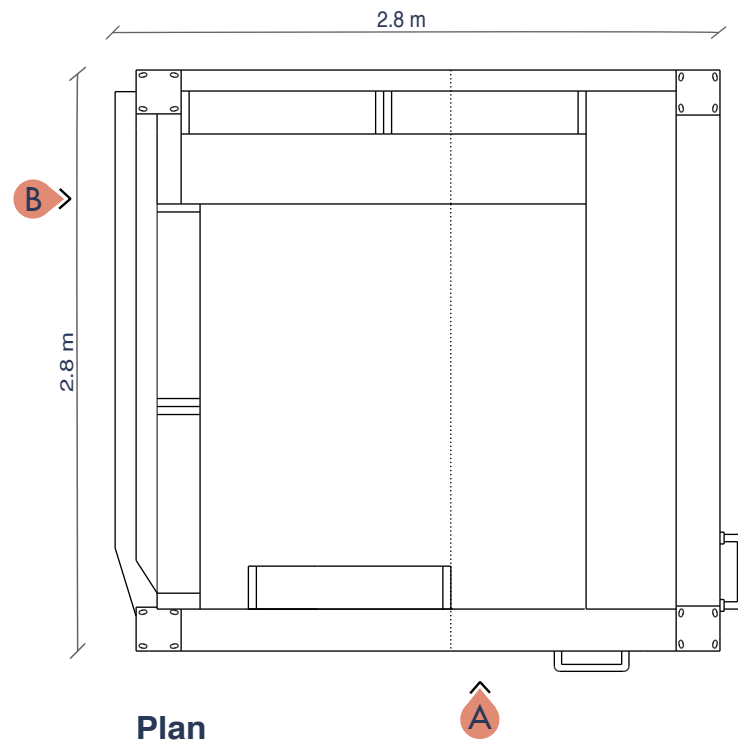
FUNCTIONAL LAYOUT

SWAP BOX



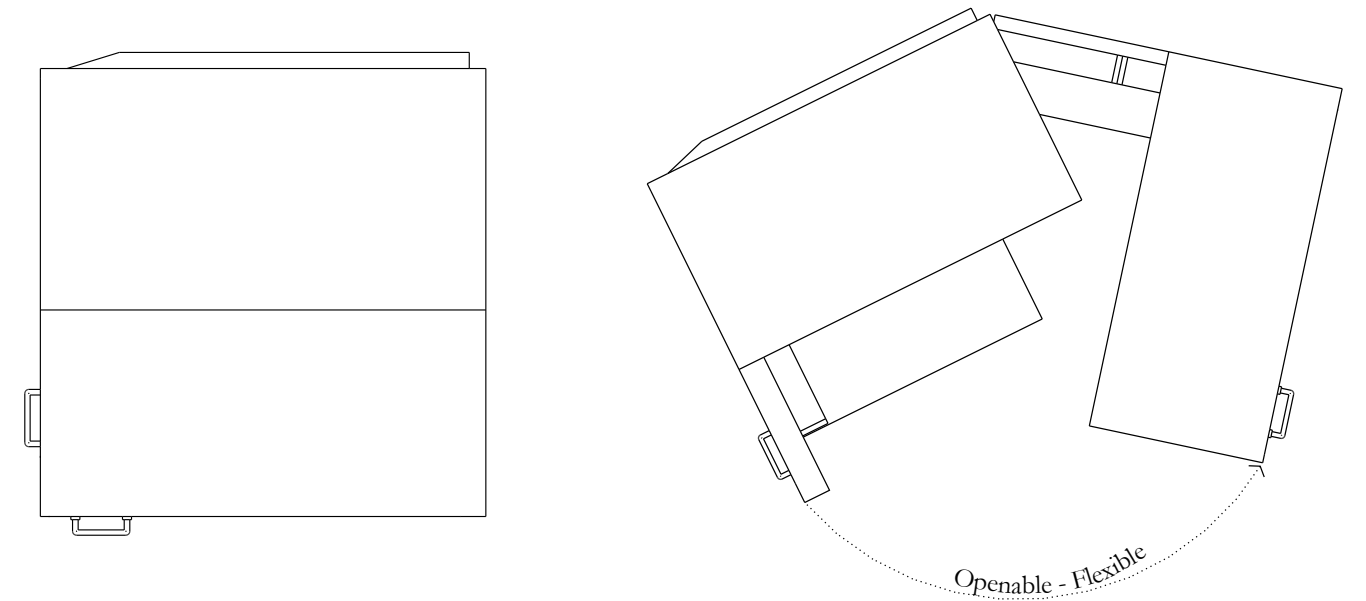
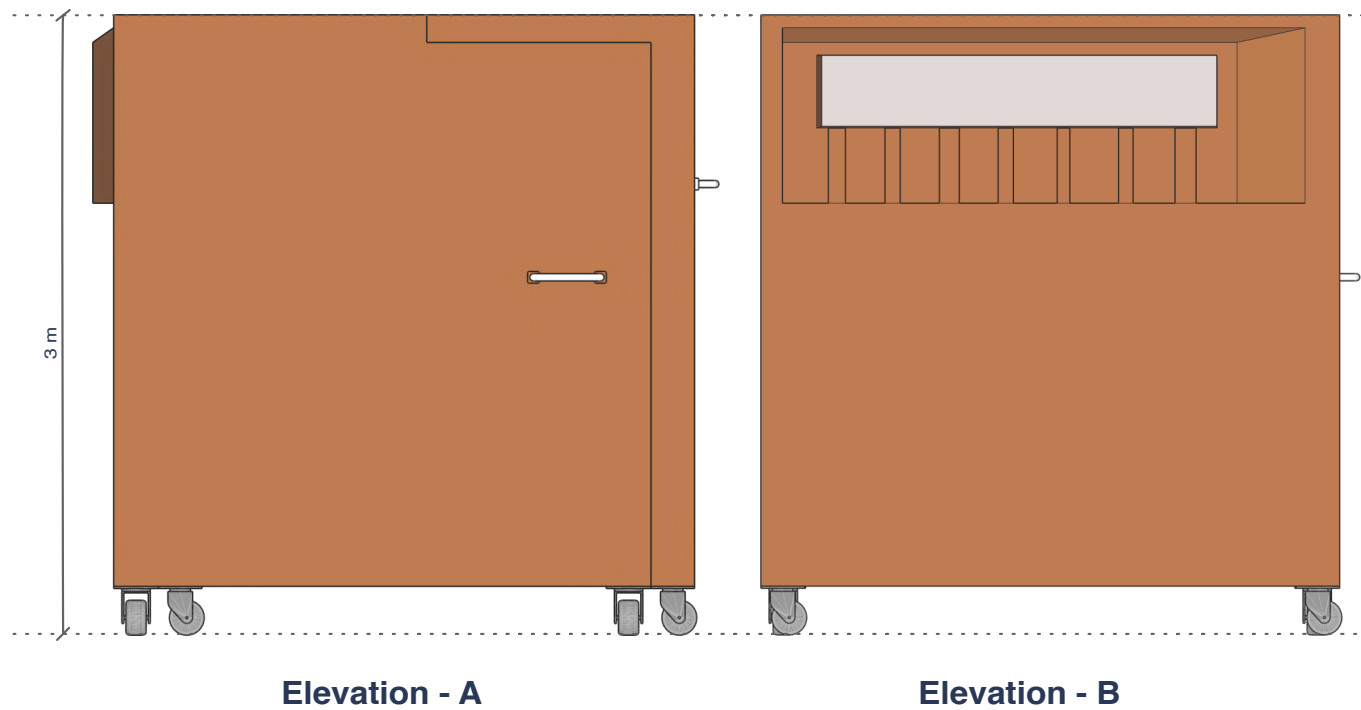
Activity	Space per Person	Total Space for 10 People (sqm)	Design Requirements
Toys swapping	1.4 sqm	14 sqm	- Shelf spaces to store toys and books - Weather resistant materials for shelving - Comfortable seating
Circulation Area	1.5 sqm	15 sqm	- Space for 10 people to go around comfortably
Outdoor Shelter/Protection			- Roof to protect from sun and rain - Use of durable, weather resistant materials like wood, metal, or fabric - Open, inviting design with natural materials

SWAP BOX



This module is a flexible, openable unit and sustainable structure for the community. The purpose of this design to recycle materials from one home to other home in a playful participation.

Intstead of discarding outgrown or unused toys, books or any gift items- children and families are encouraged to leave them for others and take something new in return without paying.



This Circular economy model not only extends the life cycle of toys or any gift articles but also instills values of sharing, resourcefulness & environmental awareness from an early age which becomes a practice for lifetime.

By incorporating natural materials, it fosters a connection to nature while offering a flexible space for social interaction as a third place, where people of all ages can exchange and engage in conversation, which builds a sense of community, that nurtures both environmental sustainability and social well-being



SWAP BOX



Interior View - Swap Box



Exterior View - Closed Structure



Interior View - Swap Box



Exterior View - Open Structure

POTENTIAL OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

To ensure these spaces remain active, maintained, and community-centered, the question of ownership is crucial.

Two potential models emerged during my stakeholder discussions:

Bostadsbolaget, the local housing company, is another key actor. As a property owner and manager, they can help maintain the physical infrastructure and ensure long-term sustainability of the interventions. Their involvement would also help embed the project within existing housing strategies.

Non-governmental organizations like Meeting Plays can play a vital role in programming and managing the spaces. Their experience in organizing community events and working with youth makes them ideal for fostering ongoing engagement.

Ideally, a collaborative model-where the municipality, Bostadsbolaget, and local NGOs share responsibility-would allow the spaces to remain adaptive, inclusive, and rooted in the community's evolving needs.

“Built in Happiness” is about more than just design- it's about long-term social impact. By creating modest, flexible, nature-integrated interventions, and ensuring they are owned and cared for by organizations like Meeting Plays and Bostadsbolaget, we can build vibrant, self-sustaining hubs of community life.

These third places show how thoughtful, inclusive urban design can become a real tool for well-being, resilience, and belonging.

"All architecture has a public nature,
I believe, so I would like to make a
public space."

- Tadao Ando

REFLECTION & REFERENCES

This chapter contains the lessons learned from the design process and potential future iterations, social and environmental impact.

Insights from:

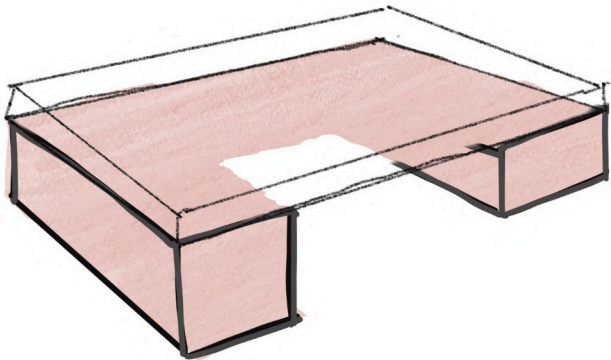
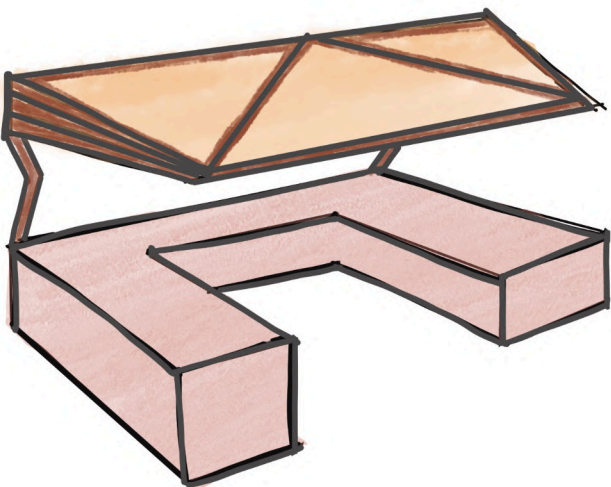
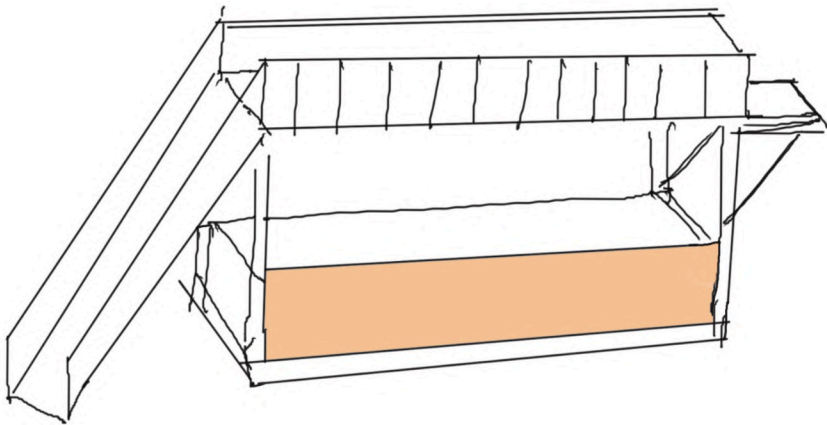
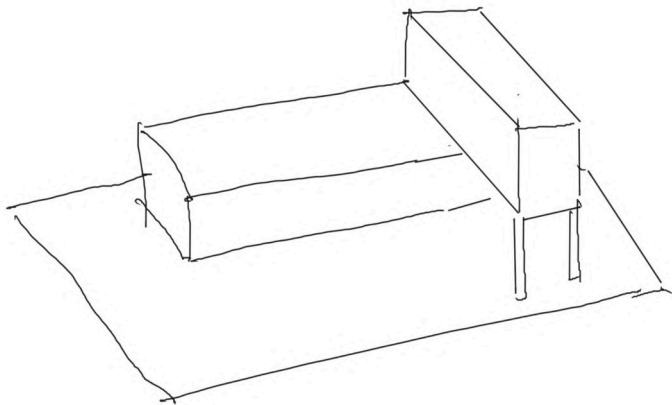
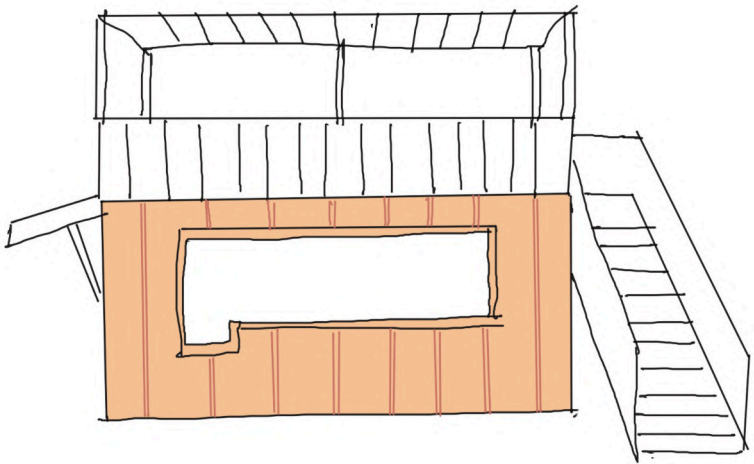
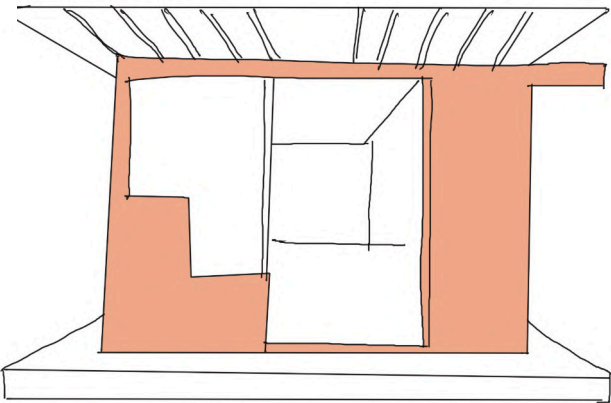
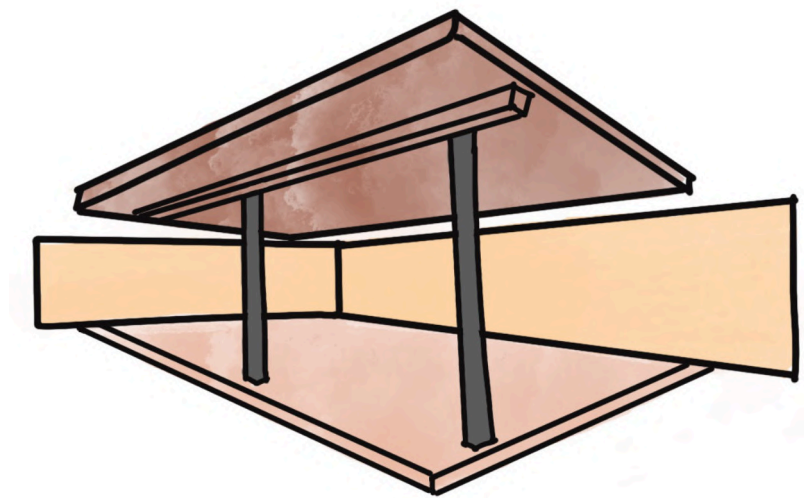
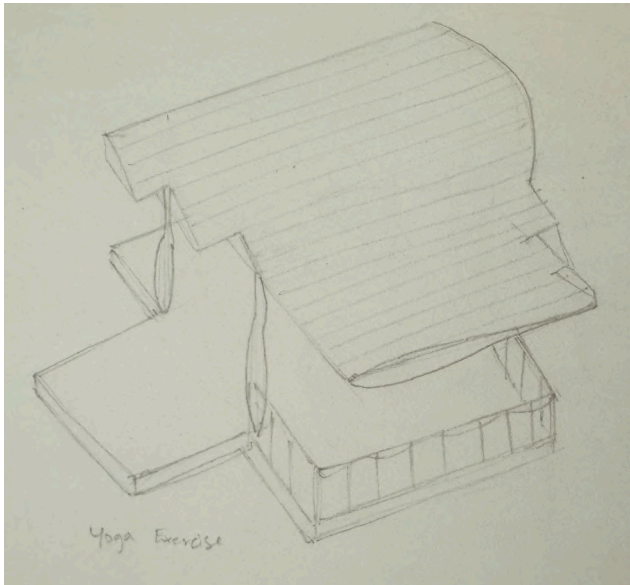
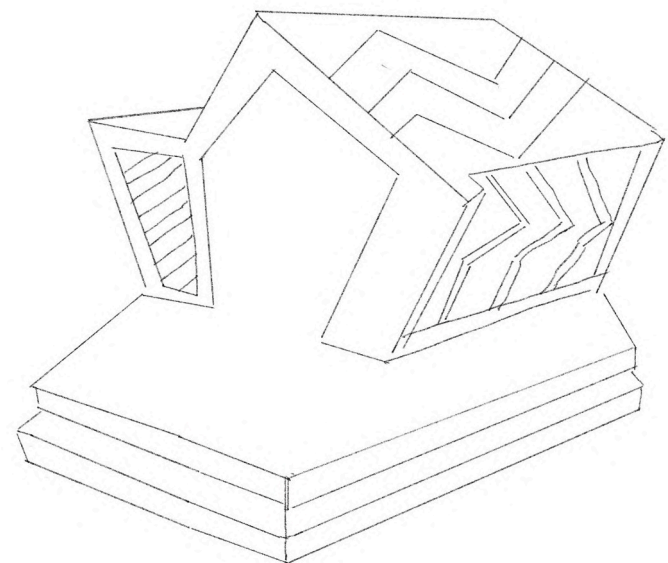
Tillsammanskök Brunnsbo

It began on 1st January, 2022, and they are now in the fourth year. It is a collaborative effort of three organizations-Boost, Stena, and the third one-where they will develop a community center both inside and outside. Central to their work are a set of principles, among them trust, trust in oneself, others, and the future and an attempt to create this trust through open, participatory processes. A great deal of the initiative is co-created collaboratively with the local residents and other involved participants. A toy library and multilingual book collection (Arabic, Indian languages, and Swedish writers) were established to encourage accessibility and multiculturalism. Initially, the initiative was all about bottom-up engagement, collecting ideas from the town's residents in the square of the town hall about what they would like: Swedish learning possibilities, access to work, festival events, and cooking together. This meant having activities such as food festivals, self-defense training, and support for work, including a job coach named Amina-who began as a volunteer but eventually found her first-ever work in Sweden through the program.

The community center has also organized celebratory activities in the form of winter parades with sculptures made of light, circus performances, and career fairs. Volunteer engagement has been a point of strength, with members of various backgrounds-Swedish, Kurdish, and Somali-engaging in everything from managing the toy library to organizing cultural activities. The stakeholder pinpointed the need to create spaces for single parents and families to go and work through activities and workshops as their children are being cared for. One of the notable outcomes was a woman who, having been in Sweden for just three months, opened her own catering business after participating in a local food event.

One of the most influential physical interventions was the building of an outdoor kitchen, which was planned through participatory food festivals. Kids and adults helped determine its design and construction using recycled materials. The kitchen turned into a spot of cooking, dining, and socializing very soon. Youth and children particularly took ownership-a boy went so far as to defiantly declare, "I built this kitchen." Through this activity, strong emotional connections were established with the place. In spite of weather interruptions, year-round activities have been maintained, such as fairy tale reading, baking, pizza parties, and holiday celebrations like Diwali, celebrating the multicultural nature of the neighborhood. In short, the project illustrates how collaborative, trust-oriented community development- based on food, shared space, and celebration of cultures, can bring neglected areas back to life as strong, meaningful third places.

Initial Sketches - Yoga platform, Outdoor Kitchen and Swap box



In history, urbanization has been thought of as a transformative phenomenon, ushering in better infrastructure, offering increased economic opportunities, and bringing into existence a closely knit global society. Cities are bound to be perceived as agents of progress, with density acting as a stimulant for innovation and diversity for growth. However, my thesis research, drawing me more and more into subtler aspects that are often overlooked, especially the built environment and its effects on well-being at the individual and collective level.

Urbanization does not unite people; it fastens the pace of life. As fast-growing urban centers put emphasis on productivity, mobility, and spatial efficiency, every new high-rise, metro line, or commercial center marks end-to-end acceleration of the life tempo, and allowing spaces where people could slow down are locked away farther apart. Amidst all this rushing, something worthy is being lost: human pauses for nourishment, for community, for connection-a place to tie to one another and nature. This quiet erosion of well-being struck me as a grave concern, yet it rarely finds its way into any interrogation.

That concern leads to a central question: How can we envision neglected or undervalued urban spaces as social and mental restoration opportunities, rather than planning leftover spaces? In fact, this was an architectural question but also a cultural and emotional one. I get clearer and clearer about how frequently our urban spaces fail to provide opportunities for human beings to come into unstructured, spontaneous, and inclusive interactions-the kind of opportunities needed for flourishing.

Grounding that inquiry in place provided a regional angle on that concern: Using Biskopsgården in Gothenburg as a case study. Biskopsgården is, like many neighborhoods shaped by midcentury

planning ideals, imbued with a strong community identity yet riddled with spatial and social problems. The just a position of field visits, community dialogue, and the analysis of policy documents and literature sharpened the view: There are fewer than desirable welcoming, flexible public spaces. Many people from my interviews described an experience of social dissociation-from not lacking people in their surroundings, but from lacking spaces to meet, hang out subconsciously, relax in the now, or simply be in public without the social expectations to spend money or perform an activity.

This is a phenomenon duplicated in the majority of contemporary cities. In cities full of high demand for land and economic yield as a valuation measure, spaces dedicated to recreation, introspection, or relaxed congregation are the first to be eliminated. These are, however, the same spaces that make individuals feel rooted, seen, and less alone. The research clearly indicated that it would be achievable to unleash tremendous potential for people's social bonding and everyday happiness if these "in-between" spaces were reconfigured.

The comforting aspect is that transformation might not necessarily require spectacular plans. Sometimes, though, what is called for is a mind change- one in which social worth is imagined as integral, rather than afterthought, to city planning. My own response as a designer focused on small, intentional interventions that could potentially seep into ordinary community life. I explored spatial modules like a courtyard kitchen, a yoga pavilion, and a swap box- each offering a specific purpose but being open-ended enough to invite relaxed use and improvisation.

The swap box, specifically, is an icon of community selflessness and compassion. A simple container where people can leave or take books, toys, seeds, or items for the household, it promotes sharing and instant exchange. Simple as it is, it creates a channel of micro-interaction that creates a sense of trust and belonging. They were designed not as independent features, but as part of an integrated system of community living, affording people places to gather, rest, cook, learn, or simply be.

Two theoretical frameworks guided this process: biophilic design and third places. Biophilic design emphasizes our biological connection to nature and seeks to bring natural elements into the built environment- through materiality, plant life, views, and sensory experience. The third place, which was defined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, is the casual social space outside of home (the first place) and work (the second place)- such as a park, a community garden, or a café - where people build relationships and feel belonging. Both of these models provided both a philosophical framework and an operational strategy for designing well-being environments.

What this project finally taught me is that urban design does not have to be something that's diametrically opposed to function. It's not a choice between functionally efficient cities and personally supportive ones- it's about finding balance. A well-designed place should move toward physical requirements and emotional truths equally. When design is built on empathy and sensitivity to human patterns, what's created is not just habitable but richly nourishing.

This research journey also altered my perception of typical city life. I discovered that the area between buildings- the leftover corners, the unused green strips, the quiet plazas- are not on the fringe. They are full of possibility for connection and creativity. Even small changes- addition of natural materials,

provision of seating or a place to eat, or encouragement of physical activity in a natural setting-can significantly impact how people feel and interact with their world.

Lastly, it's not simply a question of building more "beautiful" or "green" cities, but more about human oriented spaces for well-being in consideration. Cities should be places where one does not just exist, but feels a sense of control, belonging, and emotional security. Perfection is not the target, but possibility - cities that welcome the unexpected, value variation, and support all of human endeavor.

Overall, this project has reminded me of just how profoundly space influences behavior, mood, and social interaction. It also reminded me of my trust that architecture, when applied wisely, is a gentle but powerful tool of healing. The job now and the challenge, is to translate these discoveries into real policy and practice, so that city design becomes a medium for more than mere development, but for well-being, inclusivity, and happiness.

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IMAGE REFERENCES

All the images and illustrations are created by the author if nothing is mentioned.

Fig 1- The gathering place in tulsa oklahoma - <https://www.archpaper.com/2019/11/tulsa-gathering-place-feature/>

Fig 2- Garden by the bay - <https://www.nodestinations.com/blog/singapore-gardens-by-the-bay>

Fig 3- Programmatic Translation of the Third Space Theory - <https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/architectural-community/a10494-third-spaces-in-architecture-edward-soja/>

Fig 4- Yoga pavillion, Norrmalm, Sweden - <https://www.archdaily.com/982551/yoga-pavilion-nyrens-arkitektkontor>

Fig 5- Tillsammanskök - Gothenburg, Sweden - <https://tjorn.egnahemsfabriken.se/projekt/tillsammanskok-brunnsbo/>

Fig 6- Story pod - Toronto, Canada - <https://www.dwell.com/article/torontos-story-pod-doubles-as-a-lending-library-and-community-hub-7d6af6b6>

Fig 7- Superkillen - Copenhagen, Denmark - <https://www.archdaily.com/286223/superkilen-topotek-1-big-architects-superflex>



CHALMERS
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Sukanya Srinivasan
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Chalmers University of Technology
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
Profile: Urban and Rural Design and Planning
MPDSD: Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability
Supervisor: John Helmfridsson Examiner: Lars Marcus