Finding The Welfare State

Social Vulnerability in Copenhagen

Diploma program
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Index

Finding The Welfare State

Summary

Denmark faces a challenge in providing adequate support for its most vulnerable citizens – people with complex vulnerability. The prevailing method of assistance from our welfare society often requires the individuals to navigate through a complex system, leading to gaps in care, missed opportunities for intervention, and, ultimately, a prolonged state of vulnerability[1]. This means that socially vulnerable people interact with the welfare system much more frequently than the rest of society; they encounter many different professionals, continuously facing strangers in often difficult situations.

In a recent 'Value Reform"[2], Rådet for Social Udsatte presents a vision of a structural reorganization based on a shift in how social vulnerability is approached and handled by the welfare state. They provide ten bullet points for how to accomplish this change, which is what this diploma projects seeks to unfold spatially (see later). Could one therefore imagine a contemporary architectural proposal to a societal ideology of providing adequate care for the most vulnerable citizens - a portal to help and support? Is it time that the state and its architecture represent and functionally support the most marginalized and vulnerable members of our society? These problematics raise the questions of symbolism of, iconography, and representational architecture in a modern welfare context of Copenhagen.

What also often characterizes the life of people in social vulnerability are issues of loneliness and the lack of a resourceful network. Though social community centers today do provide such support, it still is a separate field. With reference to existing support facilities, such as Kontakcentret Vesterbro (an existing community center), the importance of support, continuity and familiarity becomes very clear: "[...] *Then they come here because they know that they can get help. They don't, like other people, have an uncle or aunt they can go to.*"[3]

This diploma program thus suggests a network of Community Hubs and Professional Nuclei that act as focal points for comprehensive support and community and serve as the basis for a single entry to the welfare state. Beacons of welfare.

According to Rådet for Socialt Udsatte, it is also just as important to recognize the need for help to reach the individual citizen, as we know it from many aspects of elderly care. Furthermore, there also still seems to be an issue reaching those who might not know of the benefits of these community spaces, since they might not have a network providing that information.[4]

This suggests that the community hubs should also provide mobile outreach support in order to meet the citizens wherever they see fit and serve as mobile spaces of awareness and information. This thus raises questions of the spatial implications of encountering mobile welfare systems all throughout the city, as well as having locally anchored communities.

One might therefore begin to imagine if these places, both static and mobile, could have their own distinct architecture, embracing who they represent.

1 (Rådet for Socialt Udsatte 2024)
2 (Rådet for Socialt Udsatte 2024)
3 Interview with Tine Thaning, manager at Kontakcentret Vesterbro. Copenhagen 2024
4 Interview with Tine Thaning, manager at Kontakcentret Vesterbro. Copenhagen 2024

Where do I go?
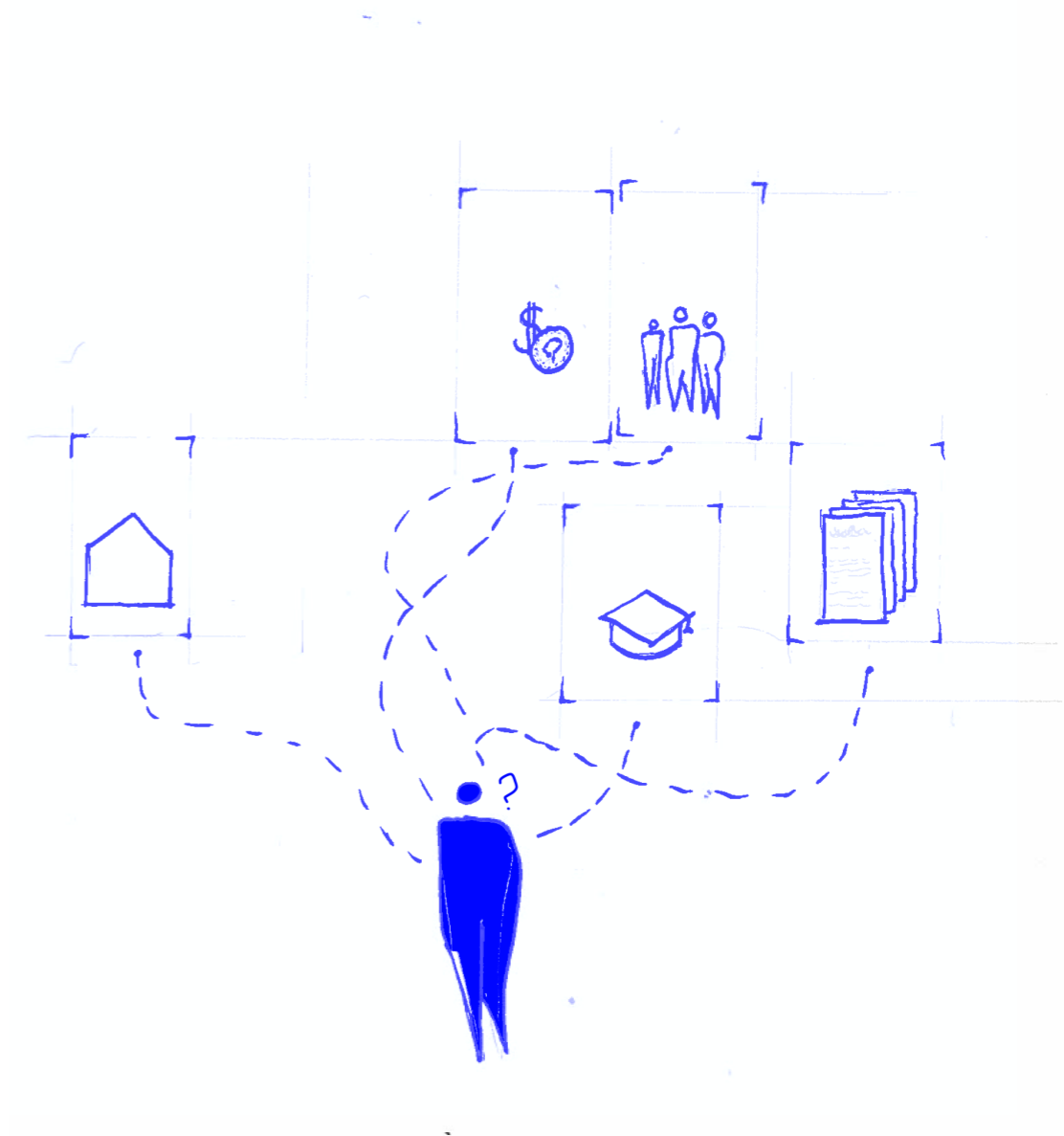
1 Societal Theme

Social Vulnerability in Copenhagen

Social Vulnerability

The issue revolves around the structural ineffi-ciencies in the existing social support systems for individuals struggling with complex vulner-ability. Being in a situation of complex vulner-ability often implies having to consult many different professionals across various fields of economic and social support, somatic and psychiatric health, or job activation programs.[1] This can become burdensome for people who already struggle to live up societal norms or 'standards'; the system seems too complex and diverse for some to navigate.

What this means is that many do not receive adequate support to their complex situations, often facing a dead end[2]; in order to receive help for one aspect, another has to be taken care of.

The digital aspect of the welfare state is also seemingly an issue for many people within this group. Struggling with mental illness, home-lessness or substance abuse, it can be difficult to keep track of the digital system, making it even more difficult to jump between different sectors.[3]

This issue is treated in the Value Reform by Rådet for Socialt Udsatte. The Value Reform advocates for a single entry to whatever help one might seek. It is based on the ACT-meth-od (Assertive Community Treatment), which is "an evidence-based support and treatment approach that provides citizens with complex vulnerabilities with a comprehensive, special-ized, and proactive intervention."[4]

The Value Reform emphasizes the importance of being able to meet the socially vulnerable individual wherever that person feels safe and most comfortable doing so - for all the appointments and consultations they might have. This is a main concept of the ACT-method. This is a well-known practice within other fields such as elderly care and has generally been seen as the ideal way of pro-viding care for elderly by letting the 'patient' be the person in charge of the situation, maintain-ing a certain authority towards getting help[5]. This is also seen as part of de-institutionalizing the somatic health system, keeping help in the house.

Today, however, this way of providing care is to a large extent limited to somatic health issues – much less loneliness, psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, domestic violence, etc. When people with complex vulnerability struggle with many aspects of daily life, it is not always pos-sible to grasp the complexity of the social sys-tems, much less to actively seek specific help. This is why Rådet for Socialt Udsatte suggests that the welfare state can come to you, not al-ways the other way around; providing presence of help and support throughout the city.

What many people within this group of society also struggle with are questions of loneliness, lack of meaning with life, and feeling outside of society. This emphasizes the importance of community as they often are places with familiar faces and, most impor-tantly, places where "there are other people"[6]

Who?

"Socially vulnerable adults include individuals over 18 years old with social problems or at risk of experiencing them. This includes, for exam-ple, homelessness, substance abuse, mental disorders, prostitution, or intimate partner violence […]"[7]

Figur 2:
Andelen af respondenter med specifikke sociale og helbredsmæssige problemer. Procent.

Statistics comparing loneliness and feeling of exclusion between socially vulnerable people and the majority of society. (Rådet for Socialt Udsatte 2021)

Being in social vulnerabil-ity often implies feeling lonely and outside society. Could architecture sug-gest possible solutions to target these issues?

Being socially vulnerable is categorized in eight different groups, with group seven and eight including people with complex vulner-ability.

Group 8 is defined as citizens with both a mental disorder (mod-erate or severe) and substance abuse problems, along with the simultaneous presence of other signs of high complexity such as homelessness, incarceration, and/or serious substance abuse-re-lated physical health issues.

Group 7 is defined as citizens who are not diagnosed with a psy-chiatric disorder but otherwise have the same characteristics as Group 8

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1 (Rådet for Socialt Udsatte 2024)
2 Interview with Lene Sørensen, Social Worker at a protected housing facility. Copenhagen 2024
3 Interview with Lene Sørensen, Social Worker at a protected housing facility. Copenhagen 2024
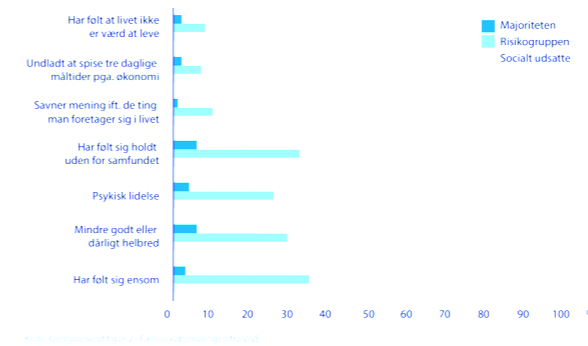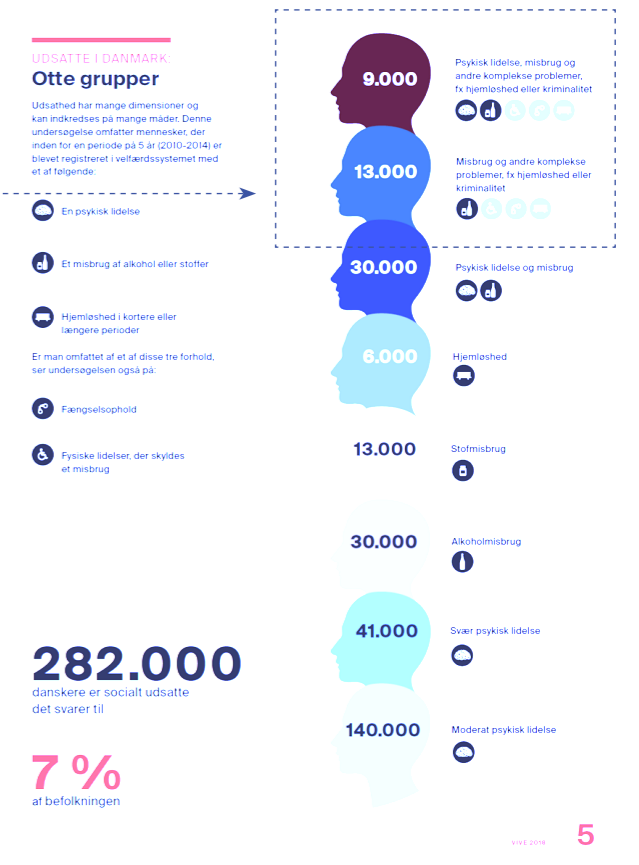4 (Rådet for Socialt Udsatte 2024)

5 (Bendsen, et al. 2017), p. 207
6 Conversation with a user at Kontakcentret Vesterbro, describing why they visit the community center. Copenhagen 2024

7 Definition according to The Ministry of Social Affairs, Housing, and Senior Citizens.

1 From Systems to People
A value reform by Rådet for Socialt Udsatte

Rådet for Socialt Udsatte

Value Reform

The Council for Socially Vulnerable People has made a series of recommendations based on a desire to reform the current ideology and view on people experiencing complex social vulnerability; a Value Reform.[8]
The main idea is to focus on the individual rather than one universal idea of a solution, as well as the concept is based on the ACT-method. The Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) method provides intensive, personalized support for individuals experiencing complex vulnerability, directly within their communities or comfort zones. It involves a cross-disciplinary team of various professionals focusing on holistic care, crisis intervention and prevention, and promoting community integration with the citizen.
The the professionals for helping and support within social vulnerability include housing support worker, substance abuse counselor, psychiatrist/psychiatric nurse, somatic nurse, employment counselor, authority advisor, and additional specialists.

"We must dare to remove system barriers and break down silos. We must confront systems that do not prioritize people and do not communicate across sectors, and instead provide comprehensive efforts focused on what each individual needs and desires for their own life."[9]

Based on this reform, this diploma projects seeks to spatially unfold these ideas, as a way of embodying and integrating these qualities to the existing urban context. Therefore, the comments in *blue* are interpretations of each of the ten bullet points, and how they could offer spatial potential.

"

From systems to people.
People's needs and desires, dreams, and hopes should be the basis and focus of the effort - not the system's boxes, economics, sector-, municipality- and professional boundaries, and rigid rules and guidelines.
A non-universal, human-centered approach. Human-scaled spaces and places.

From fragmented to coherent.
The citizen should receive a comprehensive and coherent effort with social and practical support, health, psychiatry, substance abuse treatment, income, education/employment, housing, etc., with one unified allocation, regardless of municipal borders and for as long as needed.
Cross-disciplinarity and ubiquitous support. Architecture embracing all aspects of help?

From many closed doors to one open door.
The citizen should not be responsible for navigating the system and risking encountering dead ends. Citizens with complex support needs should instead have one entry point, and it is the system that is responsible for providing the citizen with comprehensive help.
Simplicity, guidance, and openness. Physical anchorage of omni-present social support? Portals out of vulnerability?

From meetings at the municipality to meetings with the citizen.
The citizen should be met where she is and feels safe - in her own home, on the street, on the bench, in the park, or at "social hot-spots" such as shelters, community centers, warming rooms, cafes, and other communities - and in collaboration with people the citizen trusts.
Support reaching individuals. Welfare facilities operating at the individual needs across the city?

From demands and sanctions to unconditional assistance.
The citizen should not be sanctioned or discharged due to missed appointments, documentation, responses in e-boxes, etc., but should retain their effort and income without counterclaims and be supported to receive help in a way that works and makes sense for the individual.
Persistence and continuity.

From a singular focus on employment to a focus on wholeness.
Most people want to contribute and be part of a work community, but for people with complex problems, social, psychological, and health problems stand in the way. Therefore, the focus of the effort should be on working with what the citizen wants help with, including participation in work communities, in a way that makes sense for the individual and is tailored to their situation.
Holistic help.

From institution to inclusion.
Vulnerable people should not stay permanently or for extended periods in institutions and vulnerable environments, where they risk being trapped in and exacerbating their vulnerable and marginalized situation. Instead, they should be helped out of vulnerability and into good and safe communities that they want to be part of and are ready to join - whether in residential areas, social offers, music, or sports, voluntary or paid work, and in close relationships.
Generative help out of vulnerability. Places of community and skill-supporting. De-institutionalized atmosphere and feeling? Integrated and included into the 'everyday' life, not excluded from the rest of society.

From acute efforts to lasting change.
Acute and harm-reducing efforts are precisely that, acute. Drug consumption rooms, emergency rooms, night warming rooms, social vans, and shelters are important, often life-saving efforts that must always be present as the bottom safety net for the most vulnerable people - but it should only be for a short period because it does not help one out of vulnerability. Lasting change out of vulnerability is created with sufficient social support and treatment.
Continuous social support. Stepping stone or portal out of vulnerability.

From projects to stability and anchoring.
Efforts for the most vulnerable are characterized by temporariness and projects. A reform should create lasting and anchored changes for the most vulnerable by being based on new legislation and lasting financing.
Structural perseverance.

From what we believe works - to what we know works.
Efforts for the most vulnerable are characterized by a lack of systematicity and professional quality and by too much randomness and diversity. There is evidence that an integrated, holistic approach (ACT) works; it is detailed, can be calculated, implemented, and scaled, and can ensure the structure and quality of the effort needed.
Knowledge and systematicity.

"

8 (Rådet for Socialt Udsatte 2024)
9 Kira West, President for Rådet for Socialt Udsatte. 2024

1 Welfare Architecture

Contemporary mobile welfare

The Extent of the Modern Welfare

Representation in architecture has always been central to the field, often reflecting power, prosperity, and societal ideologies. This is evident in the Danish welfare state, manifested in schools, hospitals, and city halls built after WWII.[10] These structures still endure, continuing to symbolize universal welfare and political ideologies.

Besides the built environment, the extent of the welfare state evolved into specific mobile units. In home care, this is driven by the ideology letting the recipient stay as long in their own home as possible[11], based on the concepts of dignity and autonomy which the welfare state then should support, not counteract. Other examples include the Library Bus offering books to areas far from a library; The Mobile Injection Van providing hyper local injections facilities; or emergency vehicles responding to acute medical or psychiatric needs. Furthermore, one could regard the digitalization of many welfare offers as a way of even further extending the reach and possibilities of welfare support.

Though these elements could easily be disregarded in the field of architecture, they are representative of our welfare state and alter the physical space they engage with, even if mobile. This means that they serve functional purposes as well as aesthetic ones, thus bringing back the question of the role of the architect; could one imagine a architectural proposal that integrates the mobile and static aspect of welfare for the most socially vulnerable?

MOBILE

Medical Helicopter

Digitalization

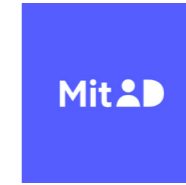
Den Blå Bus, Local Police

Fixelancen

Elderly Home Care

Mobile Blood Bank

Ambulance

Home Assistance

Library Bus

Sociolance

STATIC

University
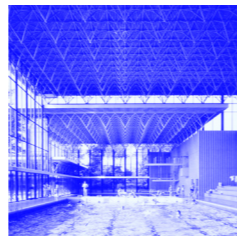
City Hall

Library

City Hall

Sports Hall

Borgerservice

Swimming Pool

Hospital
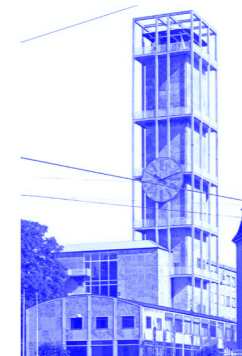
School
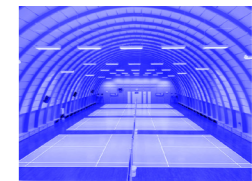
Elderly Care

jobcenter

10 (Bendsen, et al. 2017), p. 7-22
11 (Bendsen, et al. 2017), p. 208

2 Site
Amagerbro Torv Analysis

Amagerbro Torv

Looking at existing welfare institutions and offers for socially vulnerable people throughout Copenhagen, it can be seen how the area around Amagerbro shows as an important programmatic center. This might mainly be due to Sundholm, a previous detention center and psychiatric institution that today offers multiple services to socially vulnerable people, including shelter, activities and psychiatric help.[12] The area does therefore have an array of existing social support.

What Amagerbro Torv then offers, however, are the qualities of being an infrastructural node and both a commercial, residential, and geographic center point of Amager. This is an important aspect of this program, since visibility, inclusion, and awareness are essential qualities. How can Amagerbro Torv serve as a beacon of welfare and social support, mixing with the existing city?
This might then offer a site for a proposal, that situates itself within and amongst the existing urban context, not excluded from it. Functionally, the site well connected to public infrastructure. This makes it accessible to most people, providing easy and equal access to help, support and community.

Tension

Amagerbro Torv itself is a pedestrianized area that ties together the space between the apartment buildings, the metro entrance/exit, and Amagercenteret. The square is furthermore used by a variety of socially vulnerable groups[13], mostly being around the entrance to the metro and using the benches on the square.

The site offers interesting programmatic tension, as people meet between using the metro, going shopping, or using the square as a place of urban rest. This has previously caused conflicts with other residents[14], which might then call for a discussion of how architecture and planning could be part of offering a solution to these aspects of living in a place of mixed interests. Some aspects of the problematics around Amagerbro Torv include questions of safety, alcohol consumption, urination and noisy behavior.[15] This brings along discussions of stigmatization, spatial appropriation, and other socio-spatial facets of being in a city with mixed interests and needs.[16]
As this diploma program seeks to investigate the importance of social inclusiveness and visibility, Amagerbro Torv provides exactly some of these points of friction.
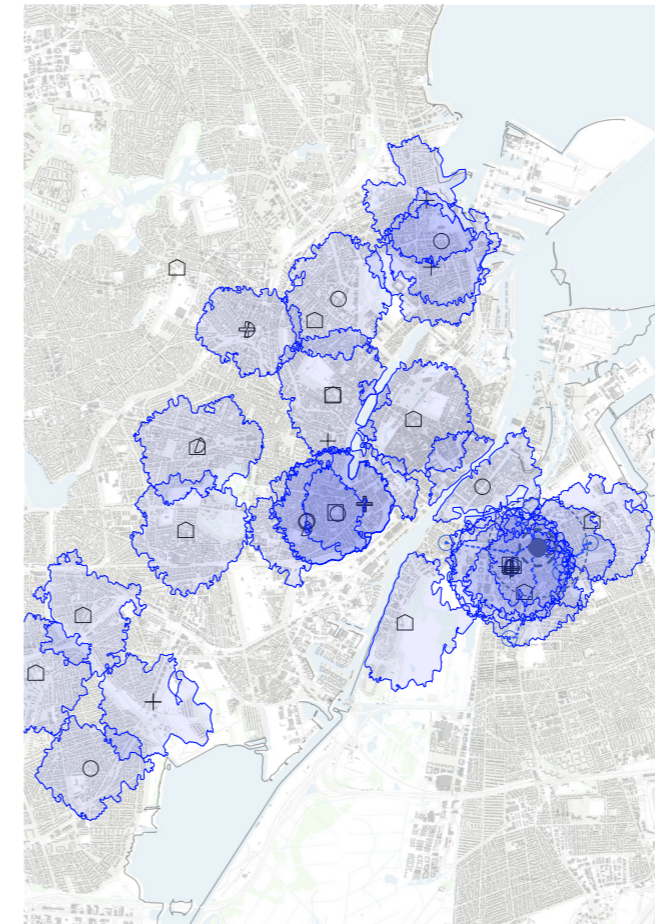
Relation to Existing Social Offers

How can Amagerbro Torv be a visible beacon of welfare, providing visibility and awareness within the existing social network?

⌂ Protected Housing

◯ Crisis Center

✛ Shelter

◗ Night Café

✚ Health Facilityy

☁ 15 Minutes Walk Zone

Infrastructure & Surroundings

Sundholm

Surrounding infrastructure and green area. How does Amagerbro Torv relate these other urban features?

▨ Green Areas

● Station/Stop

----- Bus

—— Metro

13 (Amager Øst Lokaludvalg 2015)
14 (Amager Øst Lokaludvalg 2015)
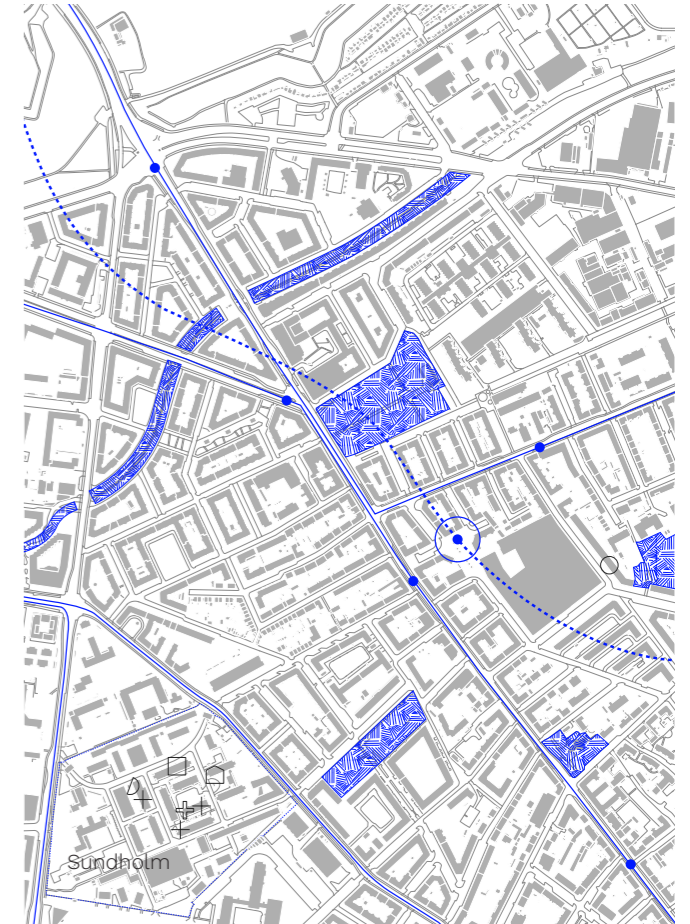15 (Amager Øst Lokaludvalg 2015)
16 Theoretics like Henri Lefebvre, Jürgen Habermas ,or contemporary critical theorists Miodrag Mitrašinović and Vikas Mehta provide discussions of publicness and spatial appropration.

12 (Hovedstadens Historie; 2024)

2 Amagerbro Torv

Existing Qualities and Potentials

Site qualities and potentials

The area Amagerbro is a densely populated neighborhood characterized by apartment buildings, mainly from the beginning of the 20th century.

The buildings surrounding the square are typical apartment buildings as well as Amagercenteret. This two-story building used to be an old robe-factory, but was transformed into a shopping center in 1975. After having undergone a recent renovation, the center remains a key spot for local residents with its commercial activity.

This is arguably the center of Amagerbro, being characterized by a variety of people using the metro station as well as people shopping in the center (also grocery shopping, restaurants, and bars).

Metro Station. Infra-structural node

Pølsevogn. Gathering around food

Semi-pedestrianized streets

Mural. Adding art to the public space.

The Built

Flow potentials

Current walking surface
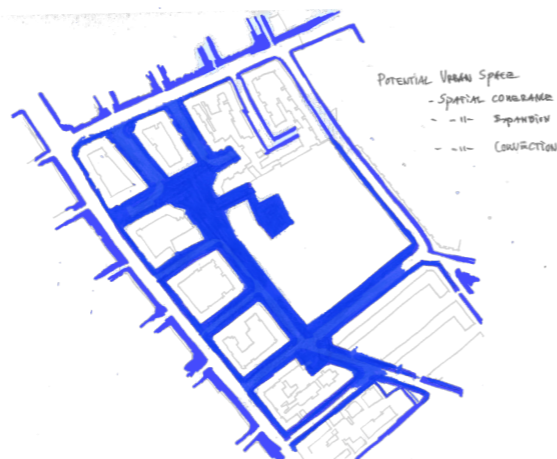
Potential surface for expansion
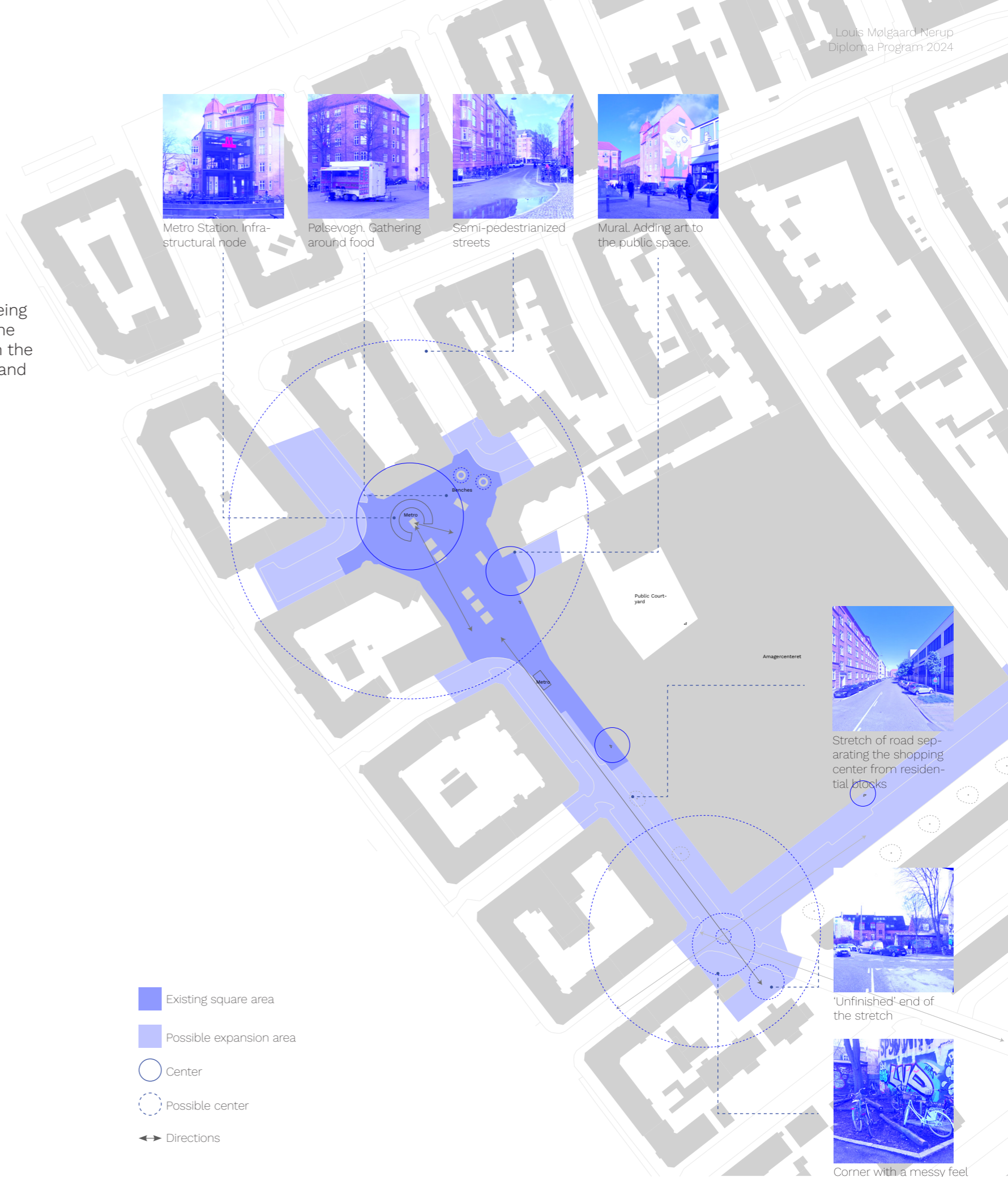
Stretch of road separating the shopping center from residential blocks

'Unfinished' end of the stretch

Corner with a messy feel

Existing square area

Possible expansion area

Center

Possible center

Directions

3 Program
Hubs & Outreach Units

A New Welfare Typology?

Based on these problematics within social vulnerability, this diploma project seeks to investigate a new welfare typology.

First is the idea of a single entrance to the welfare system for vulnerable individuals seeking help and comfort; a place that facilitates, expresses, and celebrates cross-disciplinarity, togetherness and a sense of community. These will act like mother-ships of social inclusivity – focal points for comprehensive support – being a clear and visible architectural intervention throughout the city. These hubs should also include common spaces, meeting places, and social activities, facilitating cooperation among professionals from various fields as well as creating a feeling of belonging, participation, and welcoming. As many of these individuals face mental illness, loneliness, substance abuse, or homelessness, it is important that these hubs can provide a safe and calm environment, mainly due to the fact that "there are people". [17]

At the same time, the hubs should also enable the needed social infrastructure to reach further into the city – providing help in every individual's comfort zone, if wanted. This could call for a 'fleet' of outreach units that are able to go to exactly where the meeting is taking place.

The basis of this help is of course the professionals, but how could architecture be a part of facilitating this help? Whenever a person is having a meeting with a social professional, a part of the fleet would then be a present element in the specific place in the city. From this, the meeting might take place in complete privacy, but the architectural element, the mobile welfare, will still then be present offering

both a possible site for information about help and support as well as creating awareness and destigmatization.

The main focus of the project therefore seeks to investigate and challenge the status quo of the existing welfare architecture and its extent and presence in Copenhagen. Could one imagine that an architectural proposal could be a way embodying the care for the most vulnerable citizens by integrating care across both the static and mobile spaces ?

This program thus focuses on the relation between how architecture acts as a symbol of representation as well as a functional tool to target the issues around complex vulnerability in Copenhagen. This is done through two main concepts: A central hub and the Outreach Units.
This fleet of Outreach Units should also be incorporated in the design of the hub as a way of investigating the difference between static and mobile, and public and private architecture.

The main scale of the project therefore is the design of one specific hub, but could secondly be seen as a prototype for a larger strategy for the rest of Copenhagen.

"Should this connection [between architects and society] be reestablished and architects once again become active co-creators in the development of society, it will thus be through a critical stance towards how architecture can provide answers to some of our time's greatest challenges by directly engaging with them in the midst of the dirty, complex, and contradictory context from which they arise."[18]

The Central Hubs - Beacons of Welfare Help

A place that facilitates and expresses cross-disciplinarity, togetherness, and community. Mother ships of welfare for socially vulnerable people; portals to getting the needed help from professionals. These hubs will also have a representative responsibility in providing guidance to the ones who need it the most.

The functional program of the hub will be office space for the ACT-professionals as well as a safe haven for people who have nowhere else to go - a place where people can find social quality and seek help handling whatever issues they might face with taxes, laundry, financial support, etc. This haven will also include the immediate surroundings, looking at how urban spaces of the city could interact and connect with this type of program.
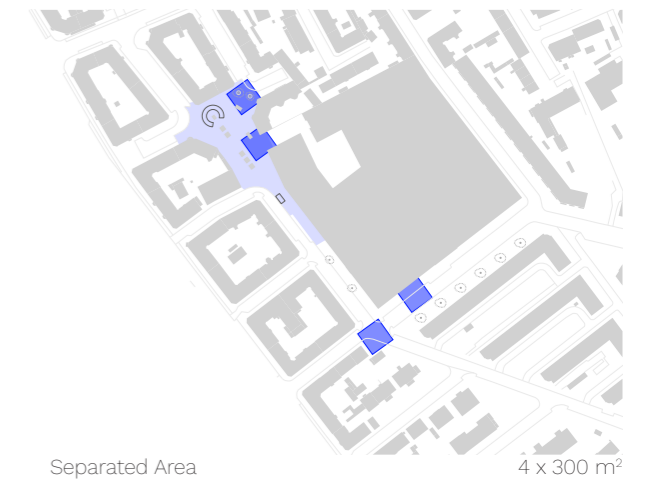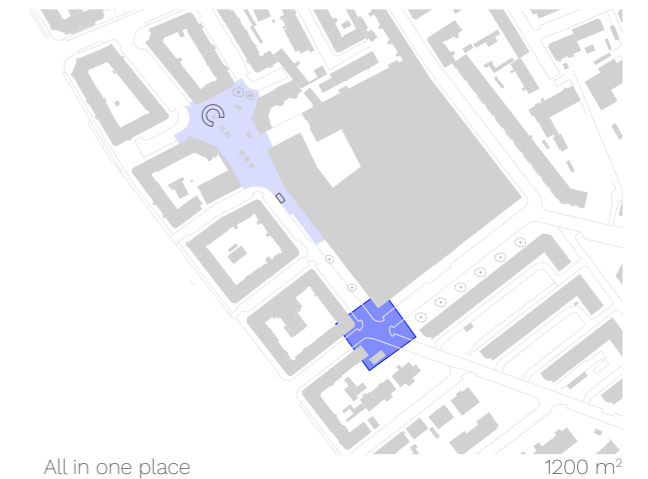
An approximate distribution could be[19]:

Office space:	280 m²
Meeting rooms:	100 m²
Common space:	100 m²
Other:	100 m²
Haven:	600 m²
Total: approx.	1200 m²

This will also include thorough work on how it becomes a part of the existing urban fabric and public space, integrating into parts of the everyday life and working with the notions of publicness, spatial appropriation, and inclusivity.

Plan disposition possibilities

All in one place   1200 m²

Separated Area   4 x 300 m²

Dispersed, non-central disposition   16 x 75 m²

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17 Conversation with a user at Kontakcentret Vestrbo, describing the most important aspect of the community center. Copenhagen 2024

18 (Bendsen, et al. 2017), p. 38, translated by author.

19 Based on numbers from the value reform. There are currently about 2216 people with complex vulnerability. Since a team of 12 employees can manage about 80 citizens, this results in about 32 employees per hub, if every of the ten Copenhagen neighborhoods had one each.

3 Program
Outreach Units and a larger strategy

### Outreach Units - Help where it is needed.

In order for help to be able to reach individuals all throughout the city, mobile facilities are needed as part of the ACT-method. Though the specific meeting between an individual and a professional might as well take place in private, could these outreach units be a way of spreading safety and awareness throughout the city?

As they detach from the central hubs, they start to bind together, interweave the city, expanding the reach of the social help and support. What do these outreach facilities look like and how do they operate? The change of perceived scale between being mobile and sometimes static?

An approximation might be that a full team, based on the ACT-methode (6-7 people), could work from one such Outreach Unite. That could then programmatically result in:

- Teams of 6 mobile Outreach Units
- Mobile meeting room space
- Informative qualities
- Visibility qualities
- Flexible qualities

Though these are merely probable qualities, they provide basis for further investigation. Are the Outreach Units vehicles? Pop-up pavilions? Are they ever changing or do they have a permanence? Do they change place quickly or do they slowly move around?
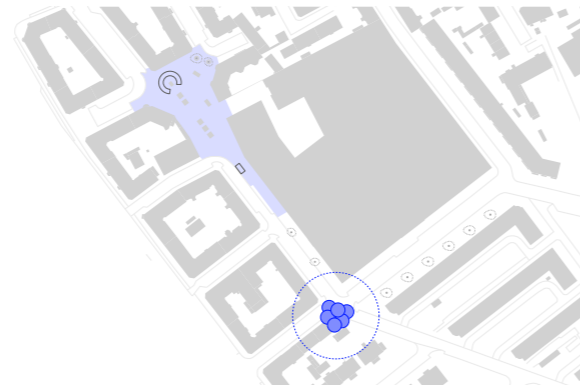
Example 1 of possible 'docking' constellation and area.
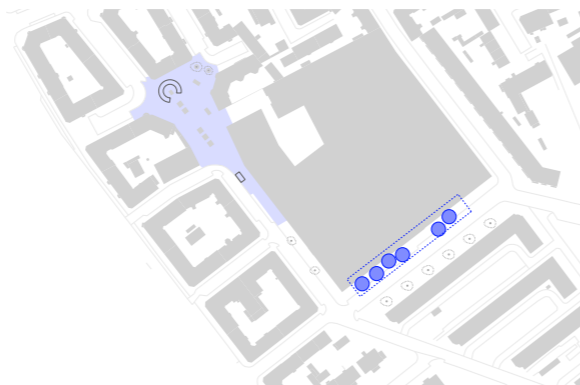
Example 2 of possible 'docking' constellation and area.
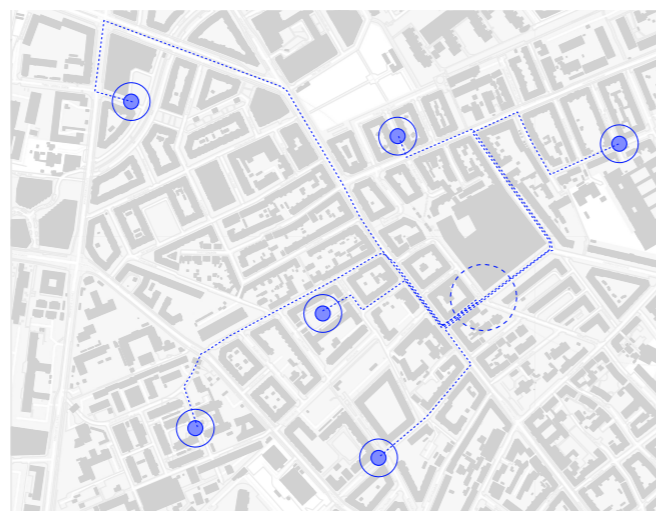
Example of the Outreach Units 'at work' in the neighborhood.

● Outreach Unit

Prototype for a larger strategy?

Could this project be a seen at a larger scale that looks at a possible strategy for the whole of Copenhagen. The strategy could establish a network of hubs, that can provide the adequate care and support for the most vulnerable citizens all throughout the city.

"It's about creating safety and trust in the fact that you can come here and get help. Because you know the ones who work here – it's the same people every day"

"What's the thing about all people is that we like that there is something pretty. Something usable. Then we also maintain it."

"We celebrate all that can be ceelbrated."

Quotes by Tina Thaning, manager a Kontaktcentret Vesterbro, in a conversation about the importance of human values that transcends all groups of society.

Deliverables

Bibliography

CV

Scales and Deliverables

This diploma projects aims to elaborate and investigate the spatial potential of implying the ACT-method within social vulnerability:

1. 1:1000/1:500
Exploration of concepts, integration into urban context, and preliminary studies.

Main scales:
2. 1:200
Designing the central hub, incl e, community center, and integration of the surrounding urban space. This will be explored through site modeling at approximately 1:1000 scale, as well as drawings at 1:500/1:200 scale. Visualizations will also investigate the representational and iconographic features of architecture.

3. 1:50 vs. 1:500
Investigation of the Outreach Units, considering their functionality in both active/inactive and working/docked states. This will involve a smaller scale of 1:100/1:50 compared to a neighborhood scale of 1:1000/1:500.

Secondary scale
4. 1:10000
Exploration of how the project could serve as a prototype for broader implementation in Copenhagen, suggesting urban planning strategies and design principles for a larger scale intervention.

These revisions aim to provide clarity and detail to each point of the diploma project outline.

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Stud. Cand. Arch. MAA

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Skills

Software

Revit (incl. BIM)
Rhino
AutoCAD
Adobe
Laser cutting
AI, MidJourney and
  Firefly
SketchUp + Vray
3ds MAX + Vray
Enscape
Microsoft Office
QGIS

Languages

Danish, native
English, fluent
French, C1

Education

2022-	**Master's at The Royal Academy, Architecture Design and Conservation** *Program of Urbanism and Societal Change*
2018-2021	**Bachelor's at The Royal Academy, Architecture Design and Conservation** *Institute of Architecture, Urbanism & Landscape*
2017-2018	**VERA, School of Art and Design** *Architecture & Design*
2012-2015	**Aurehøj High School** *Music, Mathematics & French*

Masters' Projects

2023-2024	**Life Cycle Living** *Intergenerational housing and sensory garden. Transformation of Roskilde Hospital.*
2023	**The Sidewalk as a Planning Strategy** *A discourse analysis and discussion of the notion of publicness in Copenhagen planning.*
2023	**Reusing the Urban Grids of the Copenhagen Suburb** *A densification strategy of sustainable development*
2022-2023	**Spaces of Food Production** *Redefining the landscape through future understandings of food production.*

Work Experience

2023	**Model Builder, Sweco Architects** *Presentation and sketch models*
2022	**Entrance Pavillions at Avalon, Roskilde Festival** *Design and on-site construction of six entrance pavilions. Structural and concept development.*
2021-2022	**JJW Arkitekter** *Conceptual design, manufacturing drawings, BIM, and competition projects. Public schools, municipal facilities, and office buildings.*
2018-2020	**Nordisk Film Biografer, Imperial and Dagmar** *Part time floor manager*
2017-2018	**Sonny** *Barista, kitchen assistant, assistant manager*
2015-2016	**Cojean Paris** *Food production*