



# MATTER OF IDENTITY

Celebrating Arctic Narratives through spatial interventions at Grønlandske Handels Plads

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Student number: 160306  
Supervisor: Ane Pilegaard  
MA Spatial Design

Master's thesis program  
Spring semester 2024



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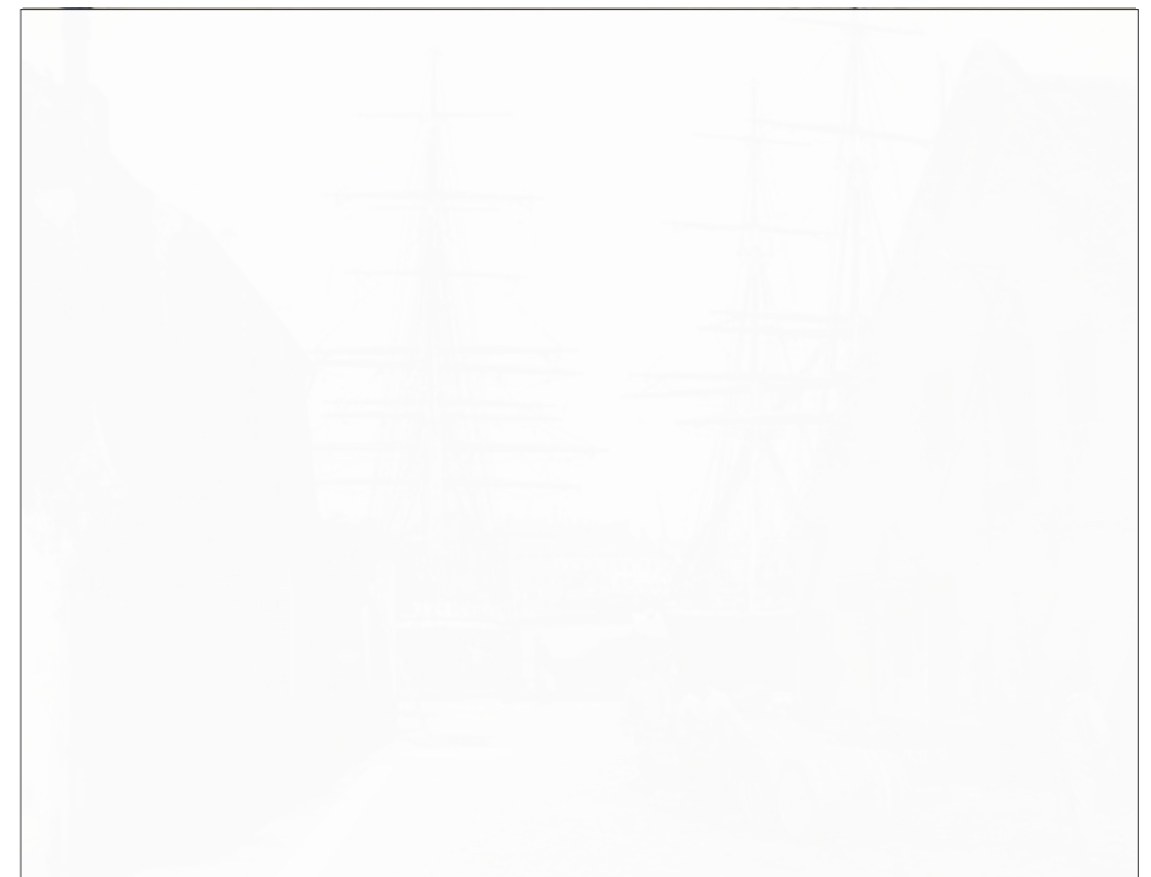
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*Fig1. "Den Østgrønlandske Ekspedition 1891-1892"*



*Fig2. Grønlandske Handelsplads in the 1900s*

## INTRODUCTION

Grønlandske Handelsplads is located by the waterfront at Christianshavn in Copenhagen. Surrounded by canals and the harbor, it served as a vital trade hub for Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands for over 200 years. The old warehouses, which symbolizes Denmark's colonial history, today houses cultural institutions and representation from the north arctic regions. Despite its historical significance, the area's identity has been gradually overshadowed by the developments around the dock.

The area connects to Holmen, Bodenhoffs Plads, and Nyhavn, by the Tran-gravsbroen and Inderhavnsbroen bridges. In 2016 the connection to Nyhavn was established, which has increased daily traffic of commuters, tourists, and bypassers. In recent years the plaza has become a lively place with a food market and ice rink.

The rise of upscale housing at Krøyers Plads, to the south, and Papirøen, to the north, has played a part in gentrifying the district, contributing to a shift in meaning and identity. Additionally, the street food market now dominates the entire plaza, blocking the cultural institutions at the opposite side of the dock.

In response to these changes, this project seeks to reorganize the programming at Grønlandske Handelsplads to create a bigger awareness of Denmark's colonial history and promote a cultural understanding of these regions. The project will focus on enhancing the visibility and accessibility of Nordatlantens Brygge and the Arctic Institute, which are key cultural landmarks in the area. By doing so, the project strives to offer a broader platform for North Arctic culture, while also reclaiming a central location within the city with pride and heightened visibility.

Fig. 3. Nordatlantens Brygge at Grønlandske Handelsplads, 2024



## PROJECT STATEMENT

The project seeks to communicate Grønlandske Handels Plads' rich cultural history to a broader audience by enhancing engagement and interest through architectural interventions. It aims to highlight the North Arctic cultural institutions and raise awareness about Denmark's colonial history. Through interactive architectural interventions, the project aims to honor the site's history while fostering engagement, curiosity, and enlightenment.

Additionally, it aims to reclaim and raise awareness about Denmark's relationship with the Arctic regions, contributing to the urban space at Grønlandske Handels Plads. It serves as a platform for both people connected to the North Arctic areas to feel a sense of pride in their heritage and for the general public to learn and engage with the diverse cultural narratives present at the site.

*Fig. 4. The old warehouses at Grønlandske Handelsplads*



GRØNLANDSKE HANDELS PLADS

HOLMEN

THE OPERA  
PARK

NYHAVN

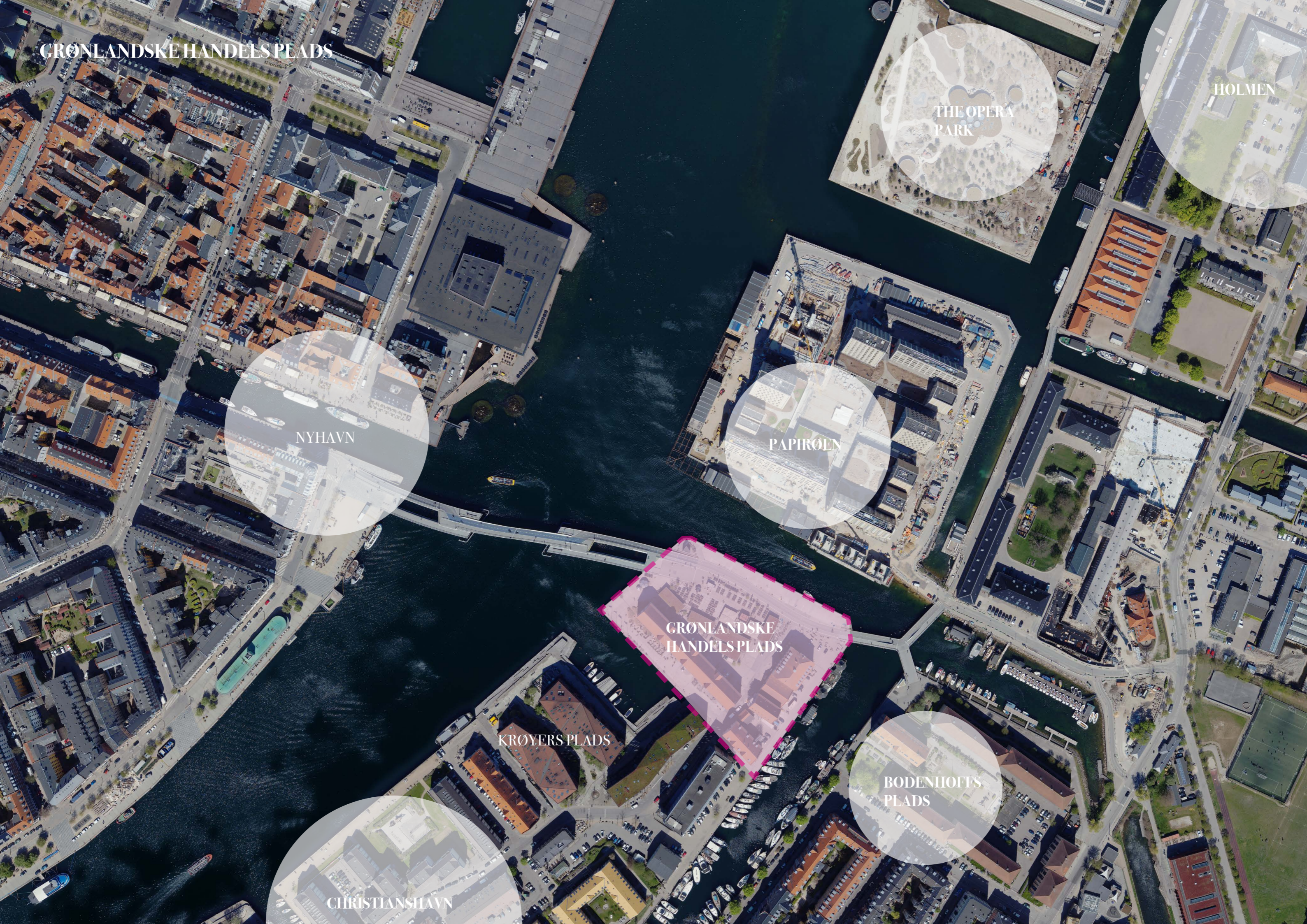
PAPIRØEN

GRØNLANDSKE  
HANDELS PLADS

KRØYERS PLADS

BODENHOFF'S  
PLADS

CHRISTIANSHAVN





FOOD MARKET  
/ ICE RINK

RESTAURANT BARR

NORDATLANTENS BRYGGE

ICELANDIC EMBASSY

ARKTISK INSTITUT

POPL BURGER

EDUCATIONAL  
CENTER

# ARKTISK INSTITUT

"The purpose of the Arctic Institute, with particular reference to Greenland, is to work for the promotion of Arctic research and the spread of knowledge of the Arctic regions, as well as to mediate the connection between Denmark and abroad in all areas related to the stated purposes."

- Stated in the institutes statutes, and signed by Fredrik 9th (Arktisk Institut)

Since 1993, the Arktisk Institut has been housed in the old warehouse from the 1700s, located at Strandgade 102. Adjacent to the warehouse is a smaller annex connected through an entrance structure. The institute operates as a non-profit organization, funded by both governmental and private sources.

Before World War II, the idea of establishing a Danish polar institute began to arise. In 1942, Eigil Knuth and Ejnar Mikkelsen discussed creating an institute focusing on Greenland and the Arctic. The idea resurfaced in 1952, leading to the formal establishment of the Arctic Institute in 1954, aimed at promoting Arctic research.

The programs within the institute consist of archives of photos, documents, and art which relates to the historic relationship between Denmark and Greenland. The archive is open to the public to access, where some of it is searchable through their online database.

The Arctic Institute primarily focuses on conveying the historical perspective of the North Atlantic region. Additionally, it provides research facilities and educational branches, including a library and an exhibition gallery. The gallery aims to showcase artifacts from the archive as well as curated exhibitions.



Fig.5 Arktisk Institute, front facade

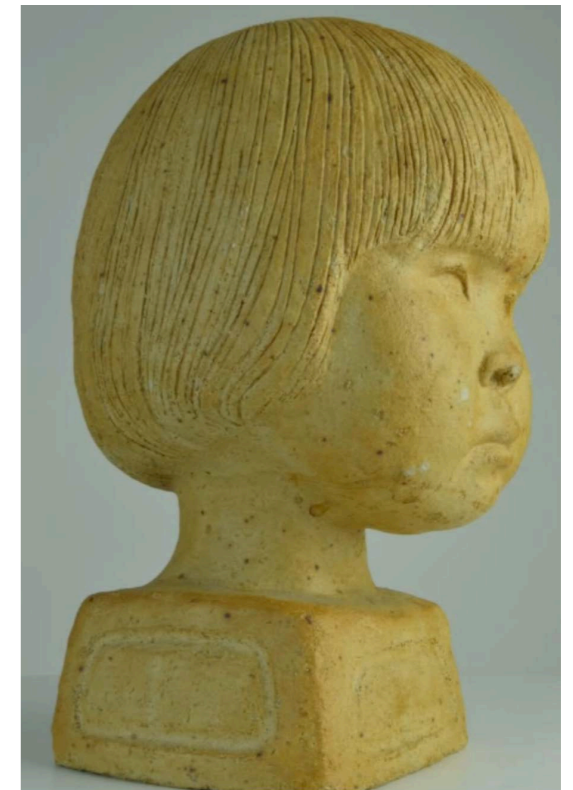


Fig 6 & 7. The institute has a large collection of art-and ethnographic collection, photographs and maps



## NORDATLANTENS BRYGGE

Since 2003 the building has housed official representation from the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland. It is also a cultural center open to the public with the aim to offer a wide range of arts and cultural experiences from the north arctic region. The center arranges art exhibitions, concerts, films, events, and lectures throughout the year from both established and emerging artists. They also offer educational programs for children and youth to learn about the art and cultures of the three North Atlantic countries, as well as meeting, conference and event spaces.

The almost 7000 sqm warehouse, built in 1766-67, is the biggest warehouse on the dock and now houses Nordatlantens Brygge. Up until the 1980s it was used as the main warehouse associated with Grønladske Handel (KGH).



*Fig. 8 Nordatlantens Brygge, south facade, seen from Krøyers plads*



*Fig. 9 Nordatlantens Brygge, the dock*

# THE PLAZA

Grønlandske Handels Plads, owned by the state and managed by Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, occupies 4,876 square meters near Inderhavnsbroen and Nordatlantens Brygge. The space is currently leased by Broens Gadekøkken, featuring a built, although non-permanent, area of 192 square meters. The program consists of food stalls, WC facilities, and seating arrangements. In the winter season, the area transforms into a skating rink, making the area active all year.

The current 3 year contract expires in march 2024, where a new decision regarding an extended lease will be taken. This opens up the possibility to propose alternative programs at the site.

With the current layout, the market takes up a lot of attention and space, making the remainder of the dock difficult to reach. The organization of the layout creates a distinct front and back, with the food market in the front and the old warehouses situated in the back. However, there lacks a natural pathway directing visitors toward the back of the area.

The project aims to reorganize the plaza, in order to enhance accessibility to the warehouses while maintaining a lively urban square.



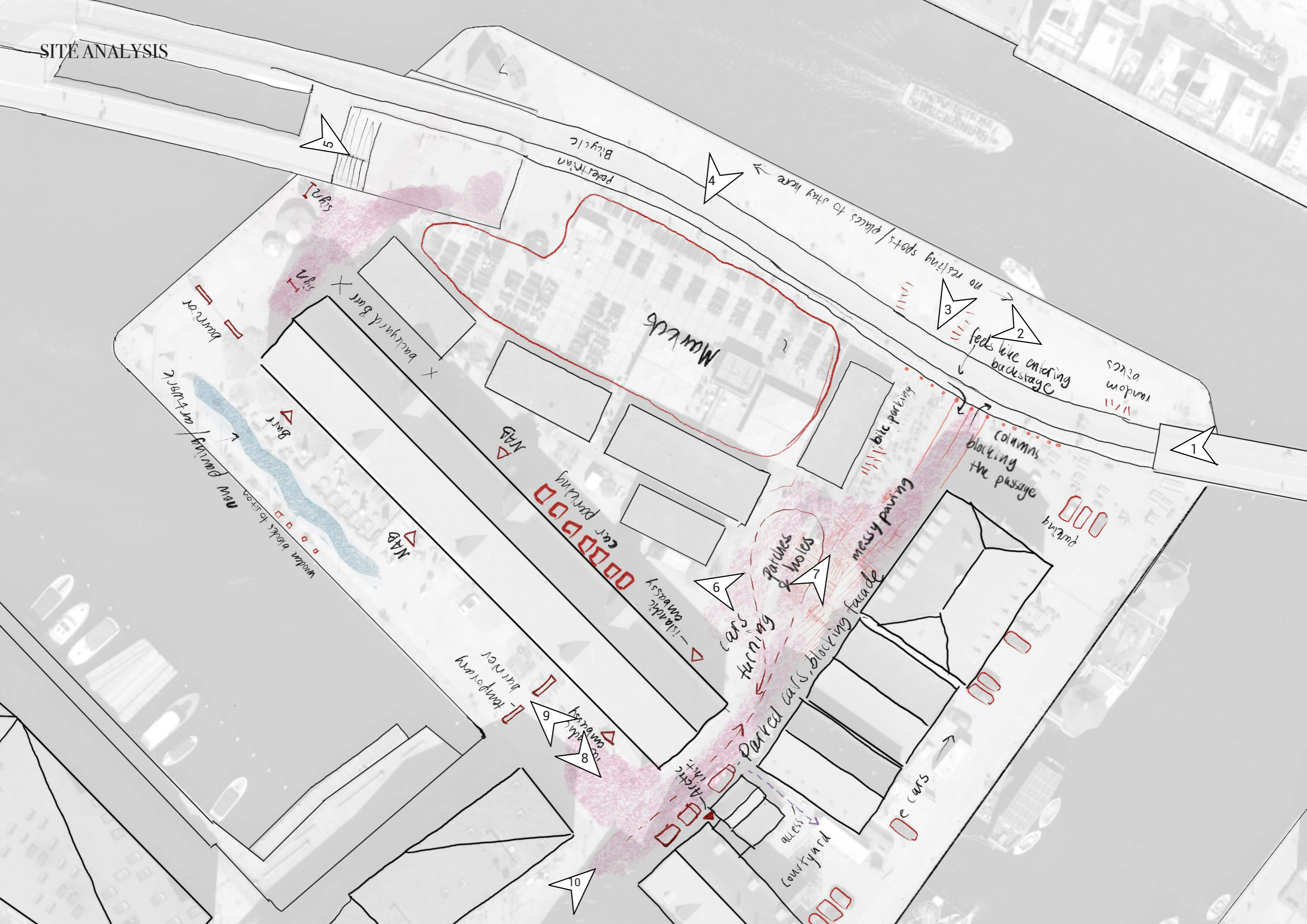
Fig.10 Plan of Broens Gadekøkken during summer season



Fig.11, site overview

Back   
Front 

SITE ANALYSIS



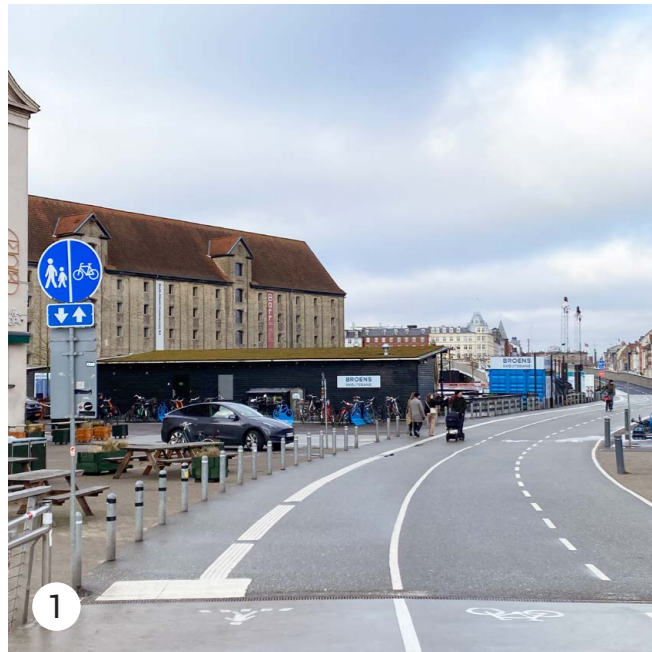
As you move across the site there are clear hierarchies of where one would naturally move and which areas feel accessible and inviting. The main event as you enter is the market. The surrounding pathways are filled up with bicycle and car parking and there is no natural or obvious way leading to the warehouses.



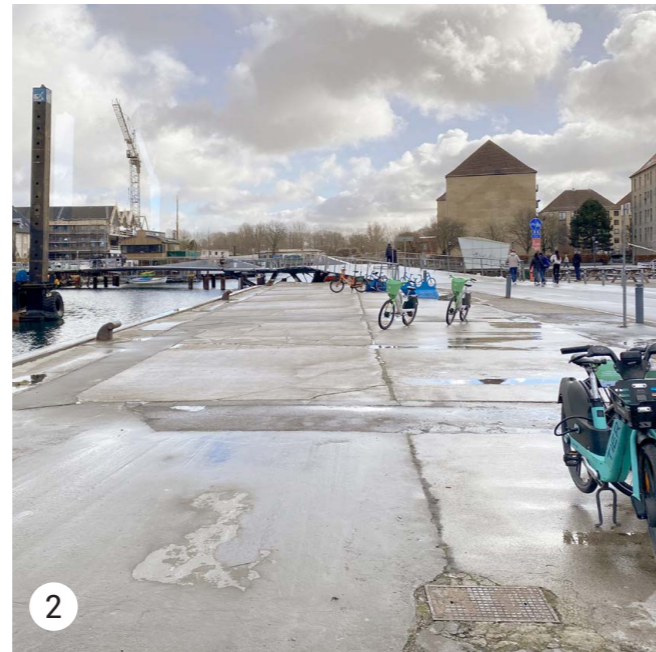
View from Inderhavnsbroen



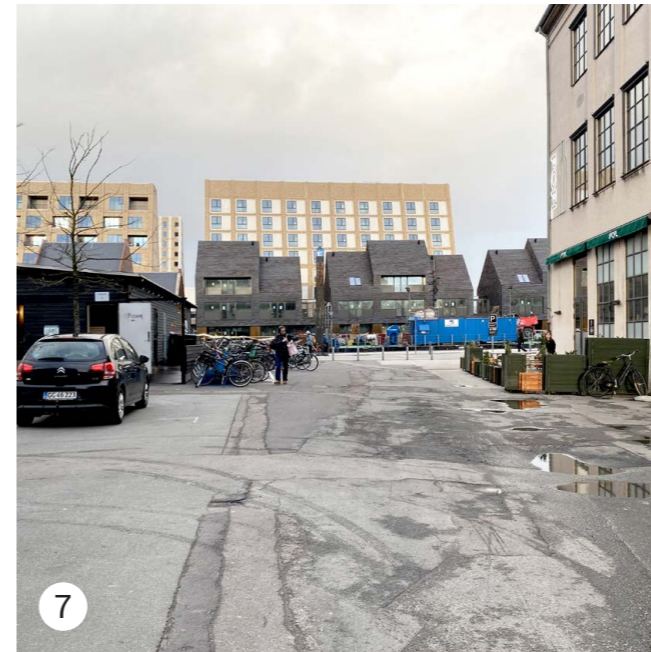
Behind food market, parking lot and broken asphalt



View from the Trangravsbroen



The north part of bike lane is empty, with temporary bicycle stands



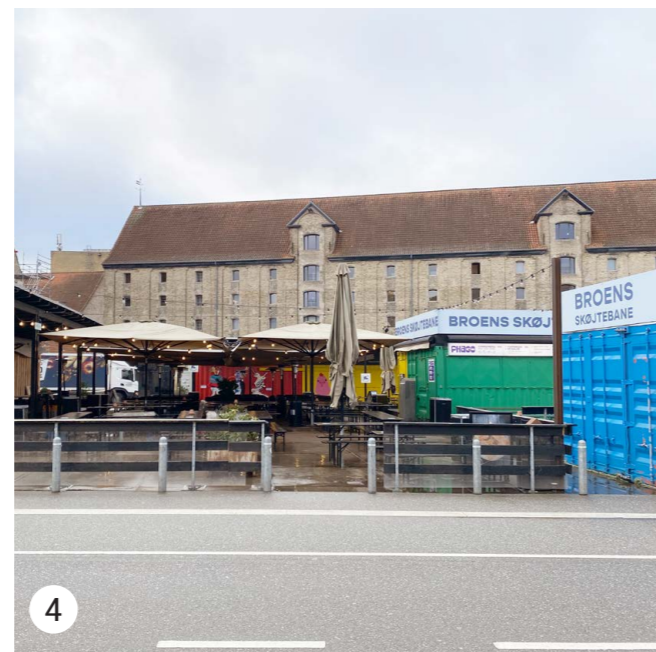
Standing in the pathway looking north



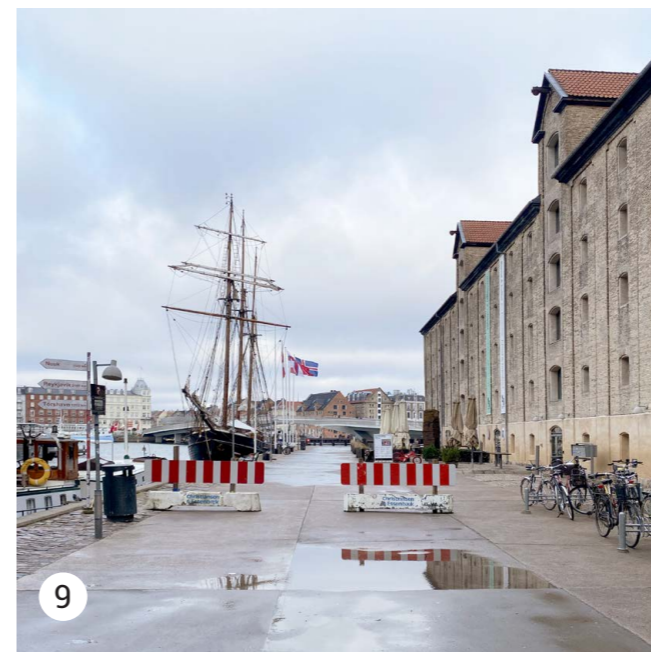
The Arctic Institute. Cars blocking the entrance



Pathway to Arktisk Institut from north. Pillars and bikes



Food market covers Nordatlantens Brygge



Temporary road blocks as you face the south entrance of Nordatlantens Brygge



Entering Grønlandske Handel Plads from Christianshavn

## PROJECT FRAMING

With the opening of Inderhavsbroen in 2016, Grønlandske Handelsplads has become increasingly populated with tourists, bicycle commuters and bypassers. It has become an active urban space with the introduction of food markets and restaurants, which program now overshadows the rest of the activity at the dock.

This project will focus on developing the public space at Grønlandske Handels Plads, to enhance the visibility and access to the North Arctic cultural institutions, as well as highlight the cultural history of the area.

This will be accomplished by reconfiguring the flow and accessibility around the dock and establishing new active zones within the area. Permanent interventions will be created alongside space for changeable programs, such as markets and temporary events.

(1:100) Organize: I will rearrange the space that today houses Broens Gadekøkken, to keep its function of being a lively urban space, with the aim to integrate it into Grønlandske Handelsplads identity and historical significance. It could become an integrated part of Nordatlantens Brygge, as a public space that ties into the cultural activity and theme of the institute.

(1:50) Accessibility and visibility: I will aim to redirect the flow at the area, to enhance the access and direct attention to the activities at Nordatlantens Brygge and Arktisk Institut. This will be done through interventions such as paving and resting spots.

(1:20) Exhibit and invite: In order to mediate and integrate the cultural activities, there will be spaces for exhibition, to allow for interaction and curiosity. There will be room for changeable programs and stakeholders in order to create a dynamic and including space.

# STAKEHOLDERS



## Copenhagen Municipality

The land and plaza is owned by the municipality. They are currently allowing Broens Gadekøkken to rent the area temporarily.



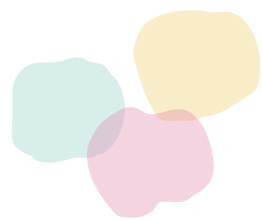
## Nordatlantens brygge

The main cultural institution in the area. The proposed project will partly be an expansion of its activities, using the plaza.



## Arktisk Institut

Representatives from Arktisk Institut, whom I have spoken with, have expressed a wish for enhanced visibility and accessibility. The project will aim to enhance their presence and visibility in the area.



## Temporary programs

Room will be left at the plaza for temporary and changeable projects. That could be markets, outdoor activities, and other events.



## Grønlandske Handels Plads



## GRØNLANDSKE HANDEL PLADS THROUGH TIME AND CHANGE

Grønlandske Handelsplads (Greenlandic Trading Dock), along with its neighbor Krøyer's Plads, used to be a bustling trade center for the Faroe Islands, Finmarken, Iceland, and especially Greenland. For over 200 years, goods were unloaded, stored, and sold here, serving as the first stop for many travelers from Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark. Established in the mid-1700s by merchant Andreas Bjørn, it evolved into a hub of shipyards, workshops, warehouses, and residences.

Managed by various trade entities, including the Royal Greenland Trading Company (KGH), which had a monopoly on trade with Greenland, Grønlandske Handelsplads played a significant role in commerce. However, by the early 1970s, operations shifted to Aalborg.

Several old warehouses at the site are today listed buildings due to their historical and architectural significance. In the 1980s, redevelopment efforts began. Krøyer's Warehouse was built some time in the early 18th century and underwent restoration in 1992 and later became the home of the Arctic Institute.

In 1766, the large warehouse, which now accommodates Nordatlantens Brygge, was built. Originally named the Icelandic Warehouse, it was later renamed the Greenlandic Warehouse. Nordatlantens Brygge opened its doors in 2003.

Tranhuset, constructed in 1781 as a warehouse for storing four large whale oil tanks, now belongs to Nordatlantens Brygge. It was recently renovated and transformed into an educational center. Over time, the smaller buildings have been demolished.



Fig. 13 Grønlandske Handelsplads, 1948



Fig. 14 Grønlandske Handelsplads, 1960

## FROM TRADE HUB TO CULTURAL CENTER

In the original proposal for Grønlandske Handelsplads, the large warehouse (now Nordatlantens Brygge) was designated solely for a culture and experience center, while other representations would be housed in separate buildings. Additionally, plans included a restaurant featuring North Atlantic cuisine, which ultimately evolved into Noma. There were several concepts to establish an experience center at the square, but they were eventually abandoned, and the space now accommodates Broens Gadekøkken.

The vision was to create "a vibrant environment with the North Atlantic as its main theme...", Morten Melgaard, the director of Danish Polar Center, wrote in 1996. "The old Grønlandske Handels Plads may become a window to Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the polar regions, through which information and experiences can be conveyed to the Danish public and foreign visitors". (p.53 Envisioning the North Atlantic)

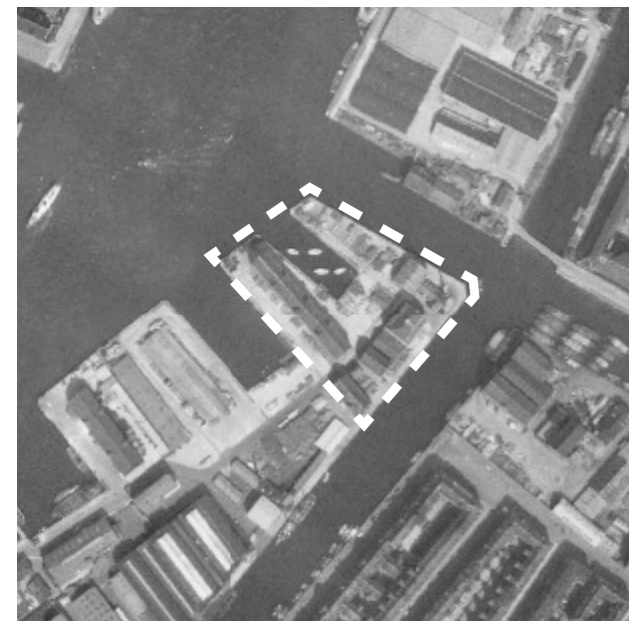
The intention with this project is to direct a development of the area that more align with this initial vision.

Fig. 15. Drawing of Morten Melgaard's original plan for the redevelopment of Grønlandske Handelsplads from the 1990s



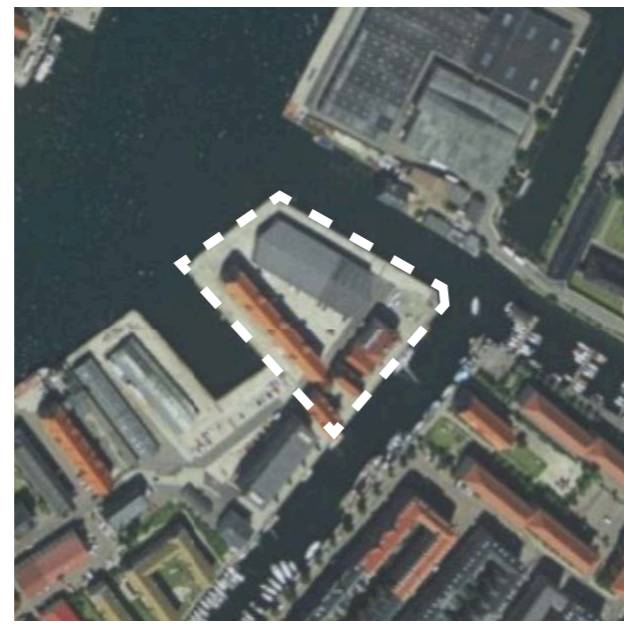


# SITE DEVELOPMENT



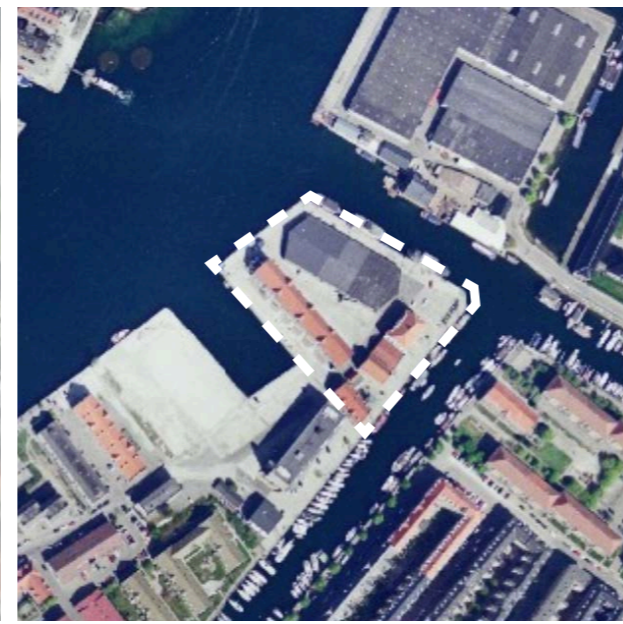
1954

Grønlandske Handelsplads in the 1950s. The dock was an active trade harbour during this time.



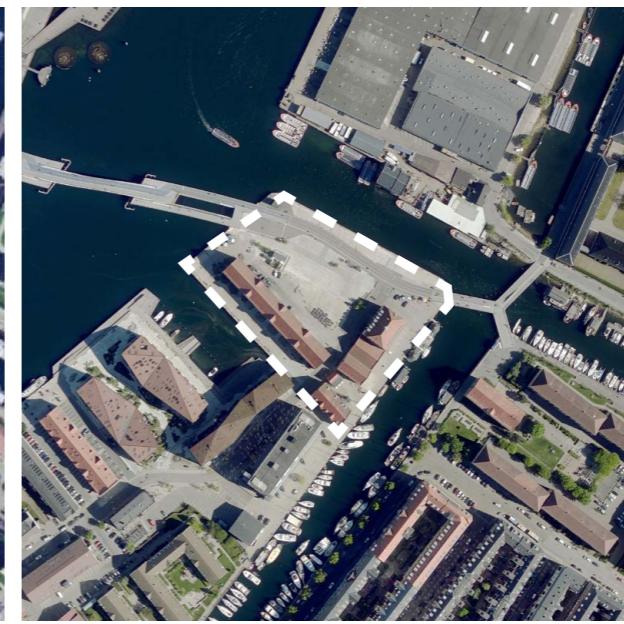
1996

The trading operations had by the 1990s moved to Aalborg and the dock was going through redevelopments. Arctic institute moved in to its current location in the warehouse at Strandgade 102, but the dock is still quite inaccessible and post-industrial.



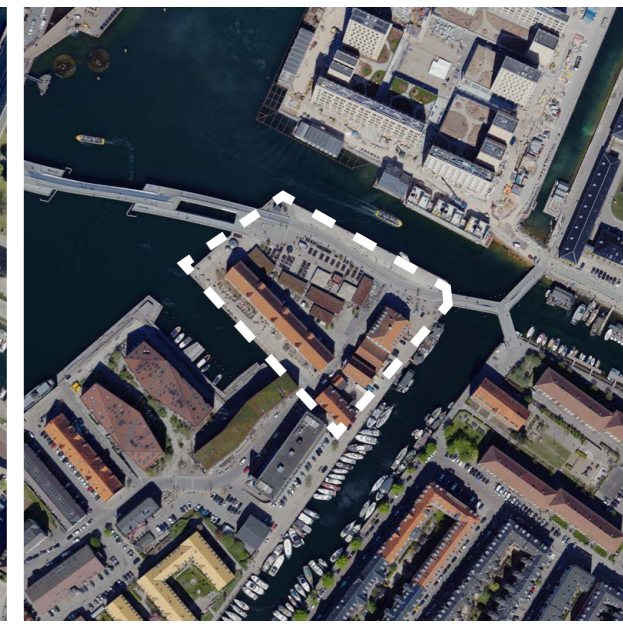
2006

The area undergoes further development. The large warehouse buildings at Krøyers Plads are being demolished to give space for new housing and commercial building blocks. Nordatlantens brygge opened in 2003.



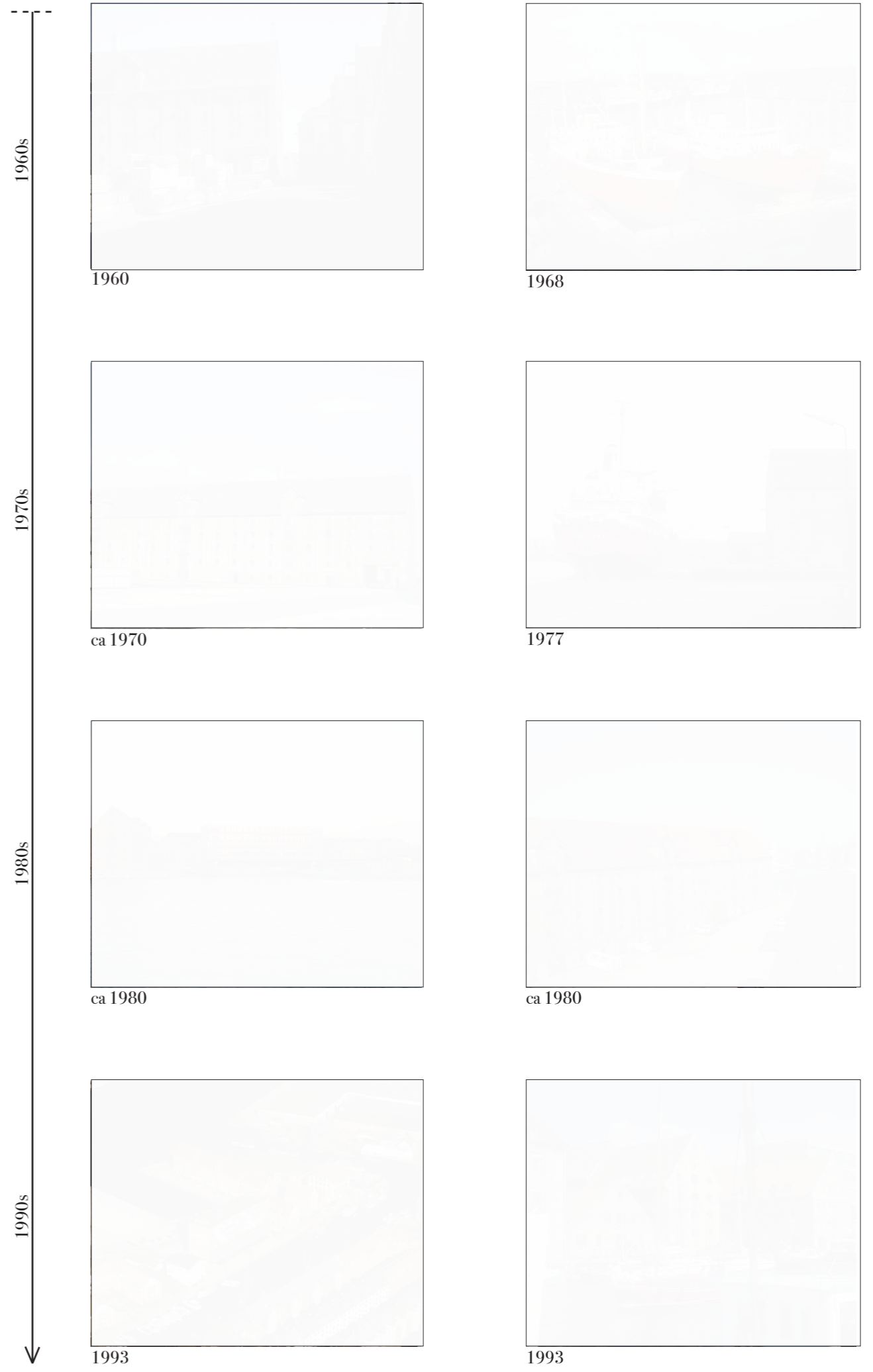
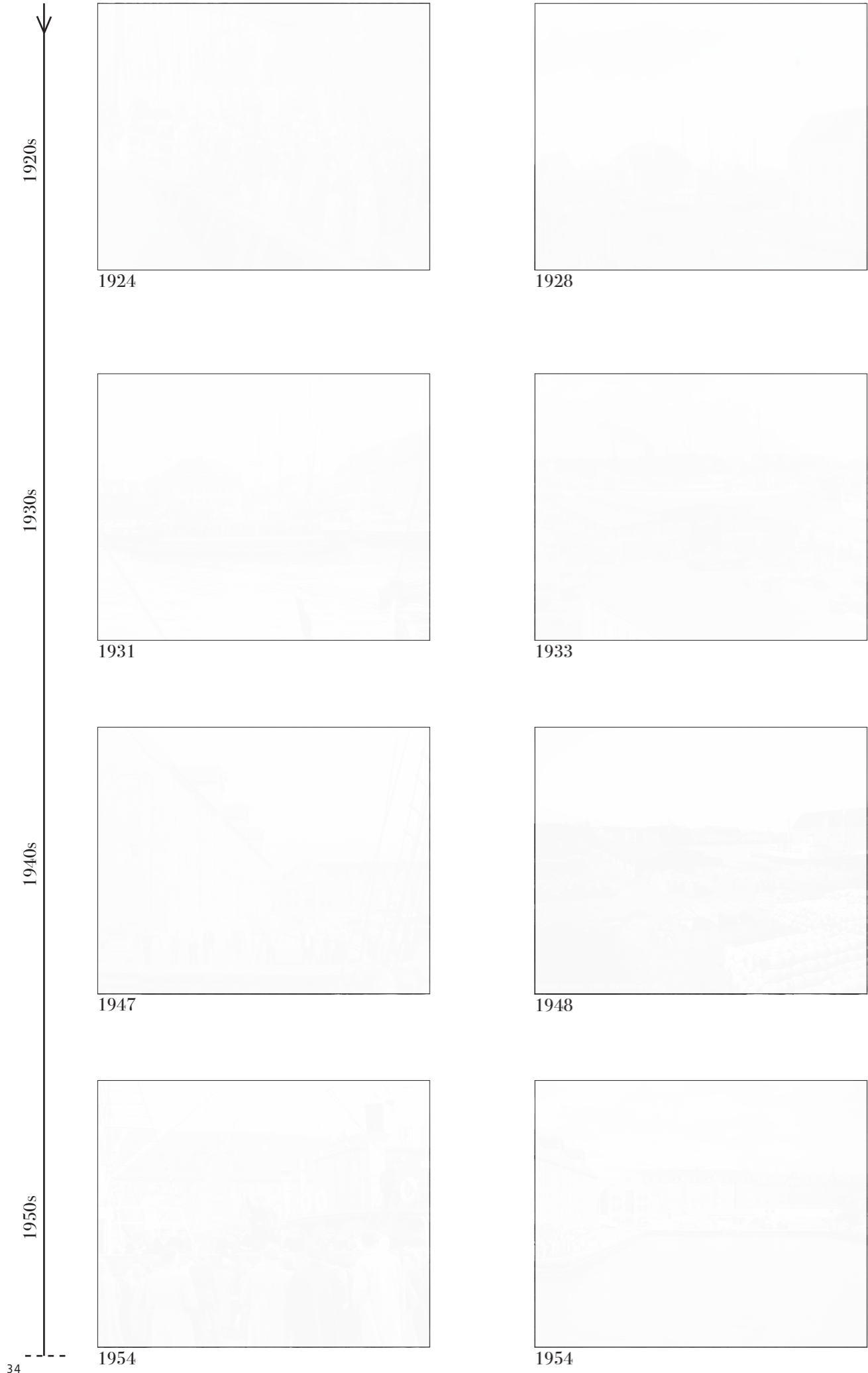
2017

The dock is being connected to Christianshavn, Nyhavn and Christianshavn through bridges built in 2016. The pedestrian and bike traffic is heavily increased. New luxury apartment blocks are built at Krøyers Plads, forming a new city district. The area is becoming increasingly busy and moves further away from its former industrial past.



2023

Broens Gadekøkken opens in 2018. The street food market operates all year round and takes up most of the space along the biking lane, in front of Nordatlantens Brygge.



## RELEVANCE

The relationship between the North Atlantic regions and Denmark is complex and nuanced. Both Greenland and the Faroe Islands are autonomous territories within the Kingdom of Denmark. Iceland, while historically connected to Denmark, is now an independent nation with its own government and autonomy.

While Greenland and the Faroe Islands remain integral parts of the Danish kingdom, their presence is often marginalized in the broader Danish context. Grønlandske Handelsplads stands as a unique and central site in Copenhagen, serving as a representation of these nations as well as the darker colonial history it shares with Denmark. There has been a growing movement for greater independence in Greenland, although the degree and timing of any potential independence are subjects of ongoing debate. The statue of Hans Egede, the Dano-Norwegian missionary, has several times been subject to vandalism in an appeal to decolonize Greenland. The colonial traces are still present to this day, which can be seen both in culture, cityscape and politics.

This project aims to establish a cultural platform for the North Atlantic region, fostering interest, curiosity, and awareness among both locals and tourists. It also seeks to raise awareness about past and ongoing discussions concerning these nations and to give a larger platform for these voices.

The warehouses and trading dock hold symbolic significance as reminders of exploitation and colonialism, deserving increased visibility. Through this recognition, the project seeks to redefine the site's significance and reclaim it as a space for Arctic culture. This presents an opportunity to engage a diverse audience by establishing a visible presence in a bustling area of activity.



*Fig. 16 The statue of Hans Egede in Nuuk, after being vandalized by activists in 2020*



*Fig. 17 Vor Frelser Kirke in Nuuk, 1956. It was built in 1848-49, the statue of Hans Egede was established in 1921 in connection to the church.*

Growing up with a Chinese-Swedish background, I understand the complexities of navigating between different cultural identities. Seeing Grønlandske Handelsplads change over time, losing touch with its history and towards a landscape dominated by luxury developments, reminds me of the feeling of having parts of me suppressed and the struggle of embracing different parts of my identity.

The situation at Grønlandske Handelsplads reflects the difficulties of blending into a new culture while holding onto your own. The fact that Copenhagen University stands as the only institution in the world to offer advanced education in Greenlandic language, underscores the challenges and complexities of cultural assimilation and representation. A Greenlander who lost their language has to return to the very source of why it was lost in the first place.

While I may not share the exact experiences of those affected by Denmark's past with its former colonies, I empathize with the feeling of not quite belonging. This project aims to provide Greenlandic and Arctic cultures within Denmark the opportunity to proudly affirm their presence and amplify diverse voices in the city.

The goal of the project is to establish a platform for celebrating and recognizing the diverse cultural identities within Denmark, fostering an inclusive urban environment, and promoting a sense of pride and visibility for historically suppressed voices. Additionally, it seeks to establish a sense of connection and compensation for Greenlanders in Copenhagen, many of whom have, for various reasons, distanced themselves from their cultural heritage. This initiative will serve as a testament to their culture's right to exist and be visible within the cityscape.



*Fig. 18 Ammassater with child, from the Danish photographer, Jette Bang's, travels to Greenland in 1961*

*Jette Bang (1914-1964) was a photographer who is most known for her numerous documentary films and photo series about Greenland. In the 1930s and 40s, Jette Bang captured a Greenland on the brink of disappearing due to modernization and Europeanization. Bang mainly focused on women and children and to capture the everyday life. Her extensive collection of around 16,000 negatives, prints, and a subject index is housed at the Arctic Institute.*



*"Gudrun with her daughter and two other women, 1961"*



*"Boy, 1961"*



*"Woman and child, 1961"*



*"Kayak is being sewn, 1961"*

# METHOD

## Historical Research

Understanding the history of Grønlandske Handelsplads and its role in the Arctic-Denmark relationship is a crucial part in starting and developing this project. I will trace and map the development of the site and the significant buildings at the site. This historical exploration will shape the site's story and guide my proposal. I'll document findings with photos, maps, and diagrams.

## Anthropological Study

I'll observe how the area is used throughout the day, interviewing users and stakeholders to understand their perspectives. By observing activities at different times, I aim to understand how people interact with the space. Documentation will include flow diagrams, photos, and sketches to capture daily activities. Based on these insights, I'll design a concept and strategy for my proposal that resonates with the area's needs and behaviors.

## Tectonics and Material Exploration

I will sketch in model and drawing in both small and large scale to find the larger scale strategy as well as the smaller scale details. I will further focus on developing certain areas of the project in more detail. Here I will conduct model experimentation in a larger scale. Exploring materials and structure will ensure the project's practicality and vision.

Fig. 19 Entering Grønlandske Handels Plads from Christianshavn, february 2024



## **Phase 1, concept & context:**

The first phase will mainly include developing the program. The focus will be on researching and analyzing the history and current program of the site. Outlines of the intervention will be proposed. This phase leads up to crit 1.

## **Phase 2, develop & direct:**

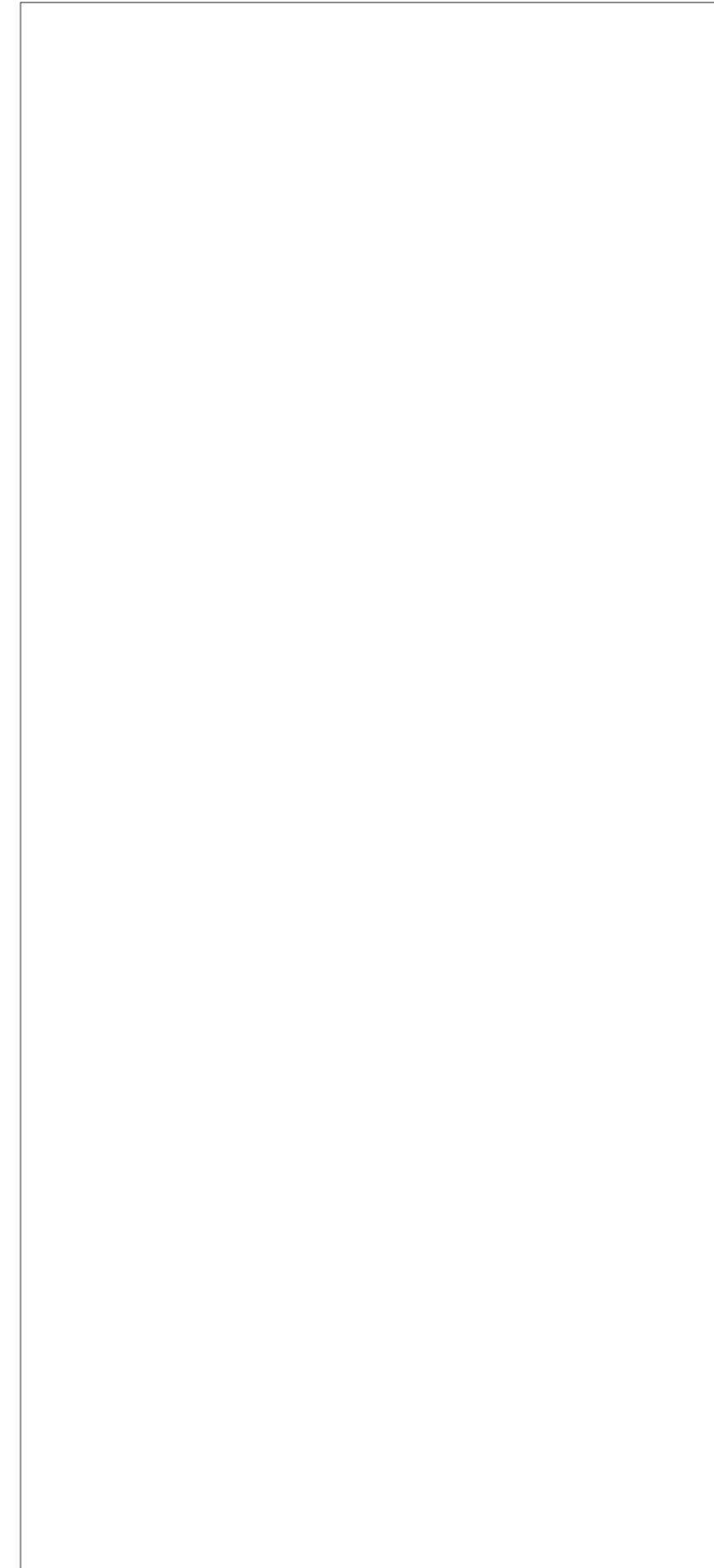
In the second phase, I will begin developing and further defining the design proposal. Simultaneously, I will work on reorganizing the plaza and flow of my proposal, as well as delving into detail with the main elements of the proposal. I will test ideas, volumes, and materials to create drawings and communicate the overall vision and relevance of the project. Additionally, I will argue why my proposal is an answer to the project's needs. This phase leads up to crit 2.

## **Phase 3, define & detail:**

Phase 3 involves further defining the proposal, delving deeper into materiality and design, and making decisions based on sketches and material studies. The objective is to create models, drawings, and coherence to effectively communicate the project. This phase leads up to crit 3.

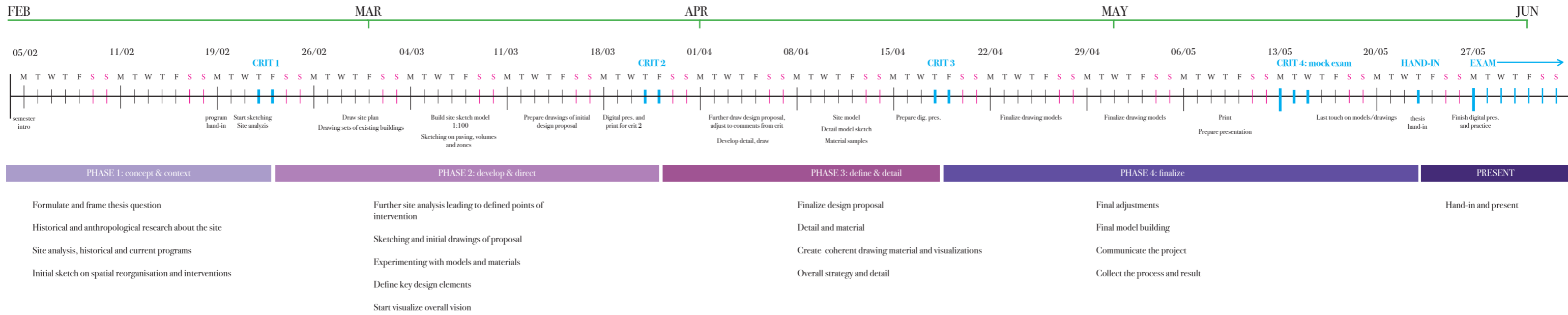
## **Phase 4, Finalize:**

This phase is about finalizing the project by creating the final drawings and models and gathering all necessary materials to effectively communicate the project. It involves connecting the dots between the several phases and consolidating the process, leading up to the final exam.



*Fig.20 & 21 Inspiring examples of strategy and detail drawing techniques*

# PROVISIONAL SCHEDULE



# PROVISIONAL DELIVERABLES

CRIT 1 feb. 22 & 23	CRIT 2 mar. 21 & 22	CRIT 3 apr. 18 & 19	CRIT 4 (mock exam) may 13, 14, 15	HAND IN May 23	EXAM May 27
Programme	Site analysis	Site plan 1:200/1:500	Finished interventions	Drawings and models are done	Digital presentation
Antropological research	Frame and develop interventions	Develop drawings of interventions (plan/section) 1:50/1:20	Drawing sets	- continue working on digital presentation	Practice has been practiced
Historic and theoretical research	Sketch models, photos	Sketch visualisatons of scenarios	Initial digital presentation		Print programme
Site registrations and context	Concept sketches, collages	Site model 1:200	Axonometric inhabited drawing		
Initial diagrams of flow and zones	Site sketch model 1:500	Process models 1:50/1:20	Draft storytelling		
Outline interventions and vision	Site plan drawing 1:500	Present potential case study for exhibition?	Site model 1:200		
Initial presentation strategy	Initial plan(s) 1:50		- continue on illustration visualisations		
	Initial section(s) 1:50		- cont. work on models 1:20/1:10		



# PROVISIONAL PRESENTATION PLAN

Background & Process boards

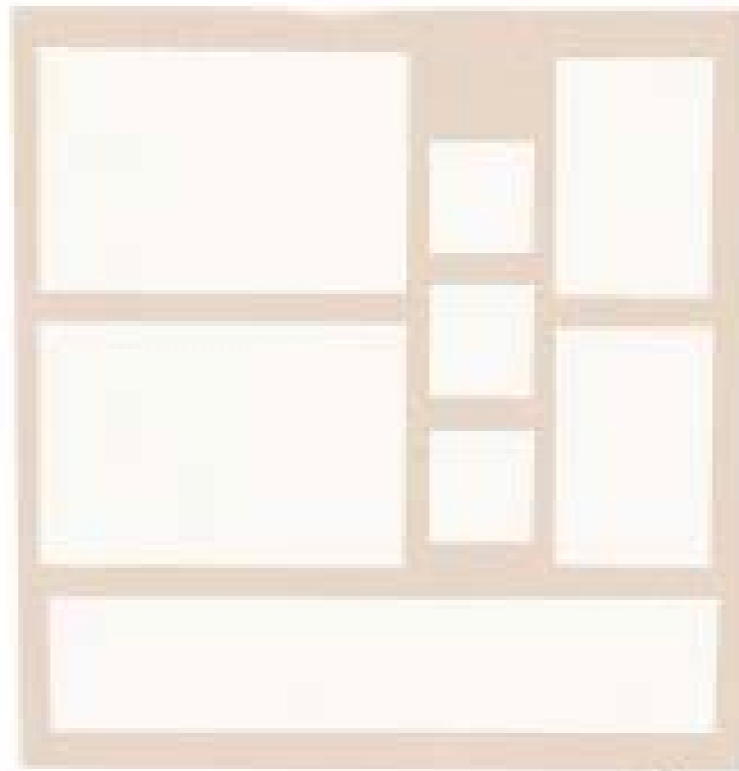
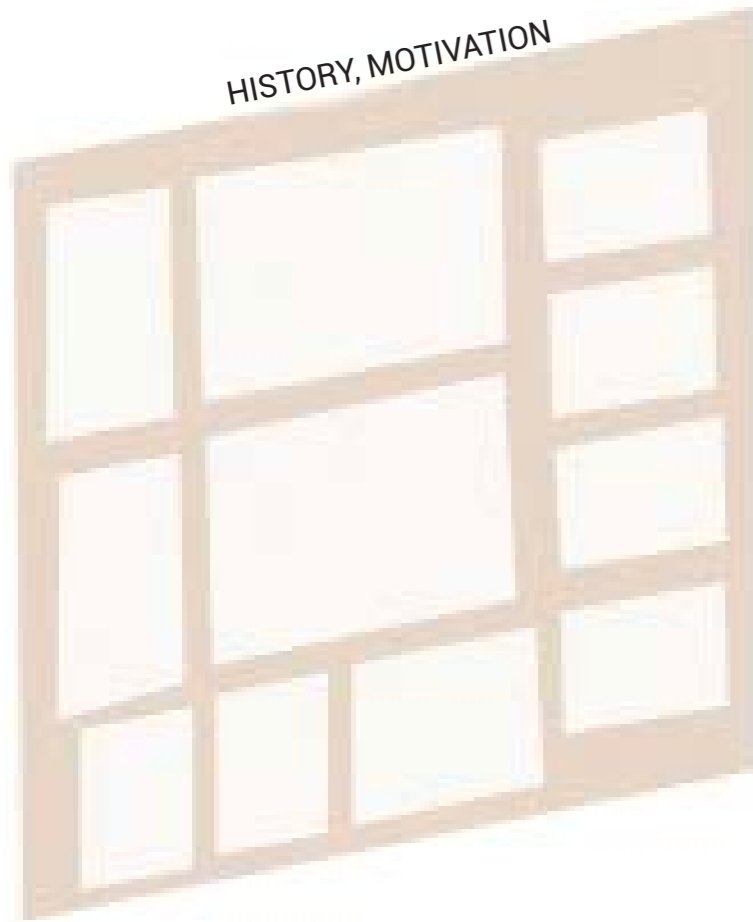
Proposal boards

HISTORY, MOTIVATION

SITE REGISTRATION, DIAGRAMS  
SKETCH / PROCESS

PROJECT DRAWING SETS,  
MATERIALS

VISUALISATIONS, DETAILS,  
PERSPECTIVE VIEWS



PROCESS, SKETCH MODELS AND DRAWINGS



SITE MODEL 1:200



DETAILED MODEL 1:20 / 1:10

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Peter Boier (22.06. 2020) *Dansker-statue overmalet og udsat for hærværk i Grønland: Flere vil have den revet ned*, DR. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/dansker-statue-overmalet-og-udsat-haervaerk-i-groeland-flere-vil-have-den-revet-ned>

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