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The Sidewalk as an Urban Planning Strategy?

THE CONCEPT OF THE STREET AND SIDEWALK IN RELATION PUBLIC SPACE IN THE CURRENT ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE IN COPENHAGEN.

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Abstract

This paper seeks to understand the relation between infrastructure and public space in order to gain a deeper understanding of the current development and discourse of public space in Copenhagen. The contemporary discourse of public space often revolves around the image of the street and the close relation between infrastructure and public space. This can be seen in many ongoing and recent projects but can at the same time be traced back to the counter-rationalist ideas of urban planning in the 1960's. Due to the ideas of famous theorists such as Jan Gehl, Jane Jacobs, and Henri Lefebvre, modern urban planning is still characterized by a focus on terms such as the human scale, livability, and life in the street, notably the importance of the sidewalk in modern cities after WWII.

Building on these ideas COBE is used as an example of the current discourse around infrastructure, in particular the street, as an urban element and resource. Due to COBE's prominence in the urban development of Copenhagen, the project description of Papirøen is analyzed as an example of the current architectural discourse, before further investigating the plan layout of the future plaza. By comparing Papirøen to Christianshavns Torv, the concept of publicness is discussed, including literature challenging the term of the so-called 'livable city' and Copenhagenizing that Papirøen seeks to achieve. In this discussion, contemporary criticism of Gehl is used as well as theory revolving around the notion of publicness and equality as a critique of the livable city, arguing that the commercialization of public space might not promote true publicness.

The findings of the analysis and discussion indicate that the street as concept of livability, to a certain extent, is a part of a commercialized and idealized urban appearance. By understanding the concept of the sidewalk, Papirøen might be regarded as an extension of the commercialized sidewalk. It is further argued that this trend does not promote inclusiveness and diversity in public spaces, more so the opposite, reaching the conclusion that unprogrammed public space, such as that of Christianshavns Torv, is of great importance if true publicness is the aspiration.

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From Infrastructure to Public Space

The Street

Urban public space is a central element in the city and the life of its inhabitants and visitors. The discourse and understanding of public space have varied throughout time and continues to shape how we understand and live in our cities today. When referring to public space, one might, at a first glance, think of only squares, plazas, parks, or public institutions. In the current architectural discourse, however, public space is often seen as inseparable from spaces of infrastructure. But where does this notion come from, and how can this be seen in the way our cities are planned and built today? Furthermore, what is the perceived relation between infrastructure and public space and how does this perception influence the function and use thereof?

The street is often considered the basic part of infrastructure while also being the basic public space. This way of seeing the street began in the wake of the 60's, as both architects, sociologist and other scholars started to notice how cars and large-scale planning drastically changed our cities, displacing life on the streets, realizing that the streets and its life, are actual public space resources – where everyday life happens.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word 'public' means "*of ordinary people*", "*for everyone*", "*of government*", "*known to people in general*" and "*place where there are a lot of people who can see you*"¹. Though these terms might be somewhat vague in their relation to space, they do, however, provide some sort of idea of the term public being something that in theory involves everyone. The meaning of space, especially when using the term within the field of architecture, has many different meanings and connotations, but usually refers to a three-dimensional area, a volume, in which something can be, or something can happen. Infrastructure means "*the basic systems and services that are necessary for a country or an organization to run smoothly, for example buildings, transport and water and power supplies*"². This could also apply when looking at a city, understanding the basic elements critical to its existence.

Focusing on the city, one could initially describe the very essence of a city as consisting of the built, the unbuilt, and its inhabitants- be it human or non-human. This then means that a city provides the positive space through material, (the buildings), and the negative space, (the streets) – and all the life that then fluctuates in and between that. Since the streets provide the space enabling people to move from one place to another, they then become the most basic aspect of urban infrastructure – they are the space needed to move from one place to another; this in most modern cases refers to the sidewalk. This is off course a highly generalized definition of urban infrastructure, but in this paper the understanding of basic infrastructure is limited to this, focusing on the spatial and programmatical aspects of the street as both a concept of infrastructure and spatial potentials. To further understand the programmatical concept of the street, two other examples of public space are used as a tool to analyze how the street functions as public space – and as a sidewalk – and why it might, or might not, eventually differ from that of the classic public space.

¹ (Oxford University 2023)

² (Oxford University 2023)

The Importance of the Sidewalk – A Public Space

The rapid urbanization after WWII resulted in vast expansions of the city and particularly its suburbs. Part of this expansion was possible because of the increasing availability of privately owned cars which allowed for greater distances between amenities, home, and work. While doing so, many cities, including Copenhagen, also saw the old city centers adapting to the car-based reality thus changing the streets completely making the streets of particular interest in western, post-war urban planning theory. Since the streetscapes of the cities drastically changed with the use of the car, the sidewalk became particularly interesting to critiques of modernist urban planning.

One of the first and most important theorists critically analyzing this development was the American journalist and author Jane Jacobs. Her work includes the well-known book “The Death and Life of Great American Cities” in which she presents her views on how large-scale and car-centered urban planning removed safety, and social life in the streets, and on the importance of accidental human interactions taking place on the sidewalk. She claims that “*Streets and their sidewalks, the main public places of a city, are its most vital organs*”³, thus providing a basic understanding of the sidewalk as a fundamental urban element. She further argues that the sidewalk is a key factor regarding the safety of the cities⁴ and that the sidewalks become a place of accidental social meetings because “*The point of [...] the sidewalks is precisely that they are public.*”⁵

Contemporaneously in a Danish context, one of the most well-known, post-war urban theorists is arguably Jan Gehl. As Jacobs, he is a strong critique of modernist urban planning which he regards as detrimental to a thriving city full of human life.⁶ Gehl, and his office, still today plays a vital role in urban development and design, and has done so since the 1970's. His initial book “Life Between Buildings” from 1971 presents his studies of the use of public space and streets, and the importance of human-centered and human-scaled development as opposed to car-centric, large-scale urban planning. He presented ideas such as a maximum height for buildings in order for people to still be able to read facial mimics on the street, and thoughts on the human senses and speed as an architectural guideline and planning tool.⁷ In most urban setting the sidewalk is inevitably extremely important since it is the very space of the human mobility in the city.

This importance of the sidewalk is later supported by other theorists such as Michel de Certeau. He was a French scholar and priest who, in the wake of the counterculture movements of the 1960's, presented his thoughts on the everyday life covering various fields ranging from social sciences and history to philosophy, religion, and psychoanalysis. In his book “The Practice of Everyday Life” in the chapter “Spatial Practices: Walking in the City”, he investigates the very human experience of living in the city, seeking to understand how the city revolves around structural societal dynamics.⁸ What is also evident in his unfolding of the sidewalk as a concept is the importance of how humans, through the act of walking, interpret the urban fabric; walking “[...] is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian[...].”⁹ This, in most urban situations, requires a sidewalk to do so thus emphasizing its significance in cities, claiming that “*The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered.*”¹⁰ “[...] “It thus seems possible to give a preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation”¹¹, he argues, reaching the

³ (Jacobs 1961, 29)

⁴ (Jacobs 1961, 29-54)

⁵ (Jacobs 1961, 55)

⁶ (Matan and Newman 2016, 2)

⁷ (Gehl 2010)

⁸ (Certeau 1984)

⁹ (Certeau 1984, 97)

¹⁰ (Certeau 1984, 97)

¹¹ (Certeau 1984, 98)

conclusion that the act of walking is the invisible glue to the spaces of the urban fabric; walking is the most basic spatial practice performed in the city. Certeau argues that walking in the city is the pedestrian's urban language, describing and proscribing the city and the way it works by actually using it: "[...] if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities [...] and interdictions [...], then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities."¹² This could further be interpreted as understanding the spaces of human movement, the negative space that are the streets, as the most basic form of public space – it is where movement and human expression is possible.

The human expression in relation to public space is also clearly argued by Henri Lefebvre. Henri Lefebvre was a French Marxist Philosopher and sociologist who is best known for his work "The Right to the City". In that book, he unfolds an understanding of urban space in the city as a highly political space and an essential part of a democratic life, "[...] a focal point for the workings of social power and hierarchy [...]"¹³, as described by Edward Soja. Lefebvre argues that the city and its spaces need to be understood as a political space and therefore a place that should be equally accessible to all. He argues that it is a right, as a citizen, to be a part of creating spaces and places that meet the needs of the citizens, as a contrary to capitalist urban planning that favors profit over the wellbeing of its inhabitants; urban spaces are both produced and producing.¹⁴

This initial discourse of the sidewalk, born through the 60's, is important to understand in relation to the time that these ideas were first produced. Suddenly new areas, or even new cities, were planned and built with infrastructure encouraging motorized transportation and not walking (a reference example maybe?). This meant an entirely new city structure, not just in terms of aesthetics but also with regards to function the basic systems necessary for the city to function were then, to a certain extent, only functioning using a car. The same applies to largescale planning (incl. high-rises) – it removes the human scale and the possibilities of human connections, which are what the cities should consist of, according to Gehl and Jacobs. Jane Jacobs introduced her views on the city in 1961, as a critic of the rationalist architects and planners at the time, arguing that large scale urban planning and car-centric cityscapes would ruin American cities, since such methods would fail to consider the social aspects such as safety and human relations. These points of view can also clearly be seen in the work of Jan Gehl in 1971¹⁵, arguing that the city should be human-centered, based on the human senses at a human scale and not towards the large car-centered scale.¹⁶ The work of Gehl has been, and continues to be, of great importance in the development of Copenhagen by providing data-based research and empirical evidence for both other architects, but also for politicians to make decisions based on studies.¹⁷

The concept of the importance of the sidewalk is thus to be seen in relation to the largescale car-centered urban expansion taking place after WWII. However, this mindset based on the 60's critique of its time is still very much alive in the current architectural practice. This becomes evident when looking at how prominent firms still refer to both Gehl and Jacobs, continuously building upon their work and theories when it comes to public space and urban planning. The idea of the life on the streets initially described, and proscribed, in the 60's, has produced a discourse of the ideal city as one with lively, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly streets.

To unfold contemporary aspects and discourse, this paper examines COBE as an example

¹² (Certeau 1984, 98)

¹³ (Soja 2010, 96)

¹⁴ (Soja 2010, 97)

¹⁵ (Gehl, *Life Between Buildings : Using Public Space* 2011)

¹⁶ (Gehl, *Cities for People* 2010)

¹⁷ (Gehl, *Cities for People* 2010)

thereof, notably due to COBE's renown and prominence in Copenhagen, and how this can be seen as a continuation of the postwar critical theories.

Contemporary Copenhagen

The Urban Living Room

Cobe is arguably one of the most prominent architecture firms in contemporary Copenhagen. With projects such as Nørreport, Israels Plads, all of Nordhavn, Papirøen and much more, the firm has a significant impact on the urban fabric of the city; almost every Copenhagener or visitor has come across one of their projects in one way or another. This is of course due to the quantity of their projects, but one of COBE's main fields of work is the relation between architecture, infrastructure, and public space. This means that their projects not only come in large numbers, but also that the programming allows for a large number of users, e.g., everyone changing modes of transport at Nørreport, parking their car at Israels Plads' underground parking, or riding a harbor bus looking at Papirøen, Nordhavn, and the Operaparken.

The notion of infrastructure as being inseparable from public space derives from COBE's understanding of what the city and its spaces should provide for its inhabitants and visitors. They often refer to this term as "The Urban Living Room" which they thoroughly describe in their book of the same name. In this book they explain their view of how the streets, stations, squares, and bike lanes are all an extension to our private homes and should therefore be treated with such respect to provide social livability and urban democracy.¹⁸ Since our lives take place in both our home and in our city, the spaces of infrastructure are a public resource, both in terms of mobility and spatial qualities.

In a conversation with Jan Gehl, Dan Stubbegaard, the founder of COBE, explains what is "striking" about Copenhagen, arguing that what people, and especially tourists, want, is to "[...] *return and experience the life and atmosphere of the city. It's not just one structure that's iconic or the main attraction of Copenhagen, it's the city as a whole.*"¹⁹ Jan Gehl continues saying that Copenhagen has become a role model for other cities to the point where "*Many other major cities talk about Copenhagenizing themselves, even if many won't admit it.*"²⁰

COBE argues that this is exactly what makes Copenhagen such an attractive and 'livable' city, being that the *special* and *characteristic* part of Copenhagen is not specific monuments or events, but rather how the city is constantly weaved together by the streets and squares of urban life, full of inhabitants and visitors – this is why infrastructure should not be considered separate from public space in urban contexts, COBE implies. This, in its essence, means that every street and bike lane cannot be regarded solely as spaces of mobility, they also play a vital part in how the city is both perceived and animated. This relates back to both Jacobs description of the importance of unplanned meetings in the street and Lefebvre's theory of urban space as both a produced space. But as might arguably be the evident case of Copenhagen, the space also produces: Public space produces the life, atmosphere, and 'vibe' that then is considered the essence of the city; its livability.

¹⁸ (COBE 2016)

¹⁹ (COBE 2016, 116) Dan Stubbegaard, transcribed interview

²⁰ (COBE 2016, 116) Jan Gehl, transcribed interview

Papirøen

Discourse of the Intentions

One of COBE'S ongoing, and arguably most prestigious, projects is the renewal and development of Papirøen – The Paper Island. The Island has a long history dating back to 1696 when it was first constructed as a shipyard. The island has since served many different purposes, such as war hospital, canon storage, salt and coal storage, steam machine production, and from the 1950's it served as paper storage for Copenhagen – hence its name. From 2014 it became a temporary street food market quickly gaining popularity both from citizens and visitors. With Eksperimentarium and Copenhagen Contemporary joining it became an important part of the cultural, public life in the city²¹. Though still under construction, this project can be used as an example of the current architectural discourse used in the description of larger urban projects in Copenhagen; the use of words reveals values and intentions of the project, reflecting the wishes of society. The next era of the island has yet to open but the intentions are clear:

*"Our vision for the island's future is to create a place that celebrates the city's culture and the Copenhagen way of life. It was important for us that Paper Island also in future will be a first class example of Copenhagen's generous urban living that can attract tourists and visitors at the same time has a strong local presence."*²²

COBE's, together with the developers', description of Papirøen is characterized by a strong emphasis on food culture and the island's relation to the rest of Copenhagen. The relation described is not at all limited to the physical – the very identity and character of the island relates strongly to the *image* of Copenhagen. Through the highlighting of Papirøen as "[...] a mix of culture, food concepts, and recreational activities [...]"²³ they argue that "[...] Papirøen will become the new urban breathing place of Copenhagen, surrounded by water – at the best location of the inner harbor."²⁴ Papirøen is further described as an "urban refugium with a gastro universe"²⁵ with the ground floor of the new buildings consisting of "halls" providing spaces for cafes, restaurants, and cultural event spaces, continuing the atmosphere of the former temporary Papirøen street-food island.²⁶

This is a clear example of how the importance of public space is seen in relation to an 'idea' of life and particular activities that tap into the impression of the modern 'livable' way of life that Copenhagen is known for. This description is a prime example of COBE's ideas of views of how the city of Copenhagen should appear: mixed-use indoor activities influencing the outside public space cumulating in the ideal urban life of Copenhagen. This is exactly what Gehl also argues, that something happens on the ground level for the public space, the sidewalk, to be activated. ²⁷

²¹ (Papirøen 2020)

²² (COBE 2023)

²³ (Papirøen 2020)

²⁴ (Papirøen 2020), translated by author.

²⁵ (Papirøen 2020), translated by author.

²⁶ See Figure 1

²⁷ (Gehl, Kaefer and Reigstad 2006)

The Plan

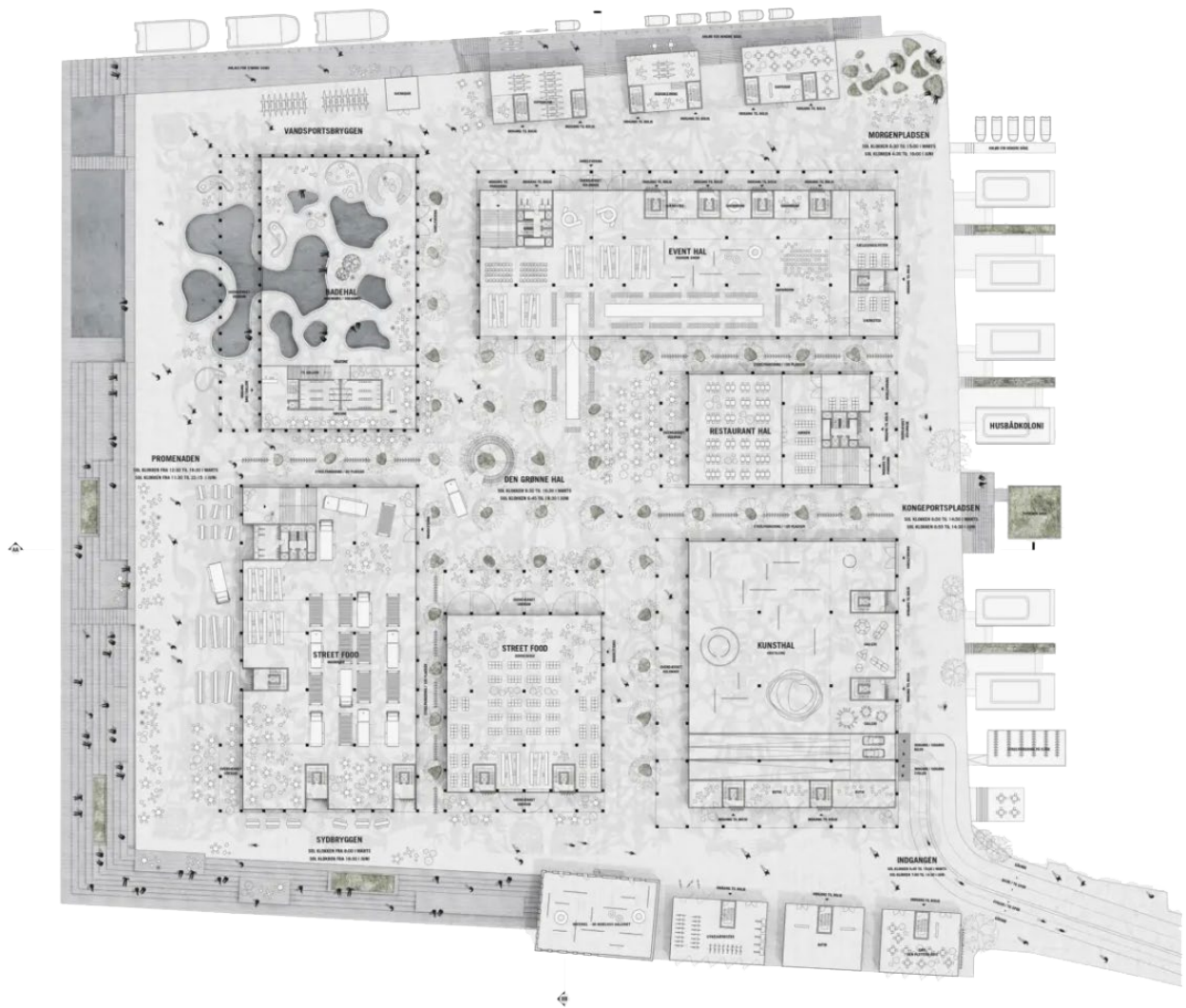


Figure 1. Ground level plan for Papirøen, showing the subtle distinction between inside and outside. Credit: COBE

Looking at the plan of Papirøen, one notices that the plaza itself is most likely predestined to accommodate the beforementioned activities. The outdoor space of the plaza is dominated by café tables in what seems to be related to the respective restaurants and street food shops. There is one bench, not directly connected to any of the surrounding establishments.

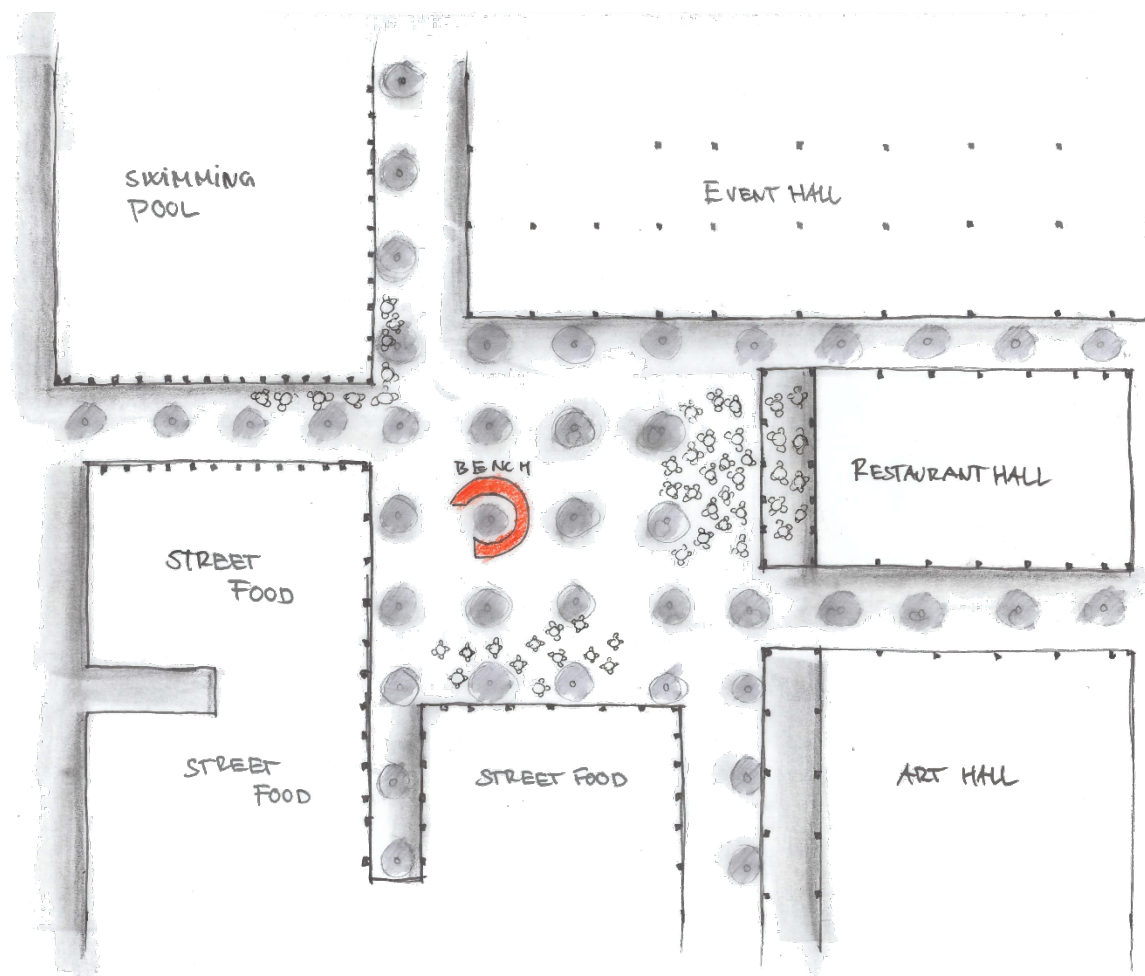


Figure 2. Planned condition at the central plaza of Papirøen. The public benches are marked in red. In comparison to Christianshavns Torv, one can see how the square is surrounded by food and cultural spaces whose chairs and tables intake the plaza. Judging from COBE's plan (see figure 1) there is a single permanent bench.

Having tables and chairs only as part of a shopping experience forges exactly the commercialized street life – while being surrounded and governed exclusively by commercial, high-end programs, the character of the plaza will inevitably be a direct product thereof. With a very limited space for unprogrammed activities, the space thus becomes commercialized. Though physically available to everyone “[...] the way that a space functions for a public is evaluated comparatively with other public spaces. [...] although any given space may not always be open or accessible, the right to its use as others use it is a significant part of full societal participation.”²⁸. Therefore, one might ask: Do all people have the same access to this space, if it is highly commercialized and to a very high degree accommodates a lifestyle of going to restaurants, cultural events, or watching the sunset by the harbor? Who's living room is this an extension of?

Looking at surrounding qualities, referring to Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl, one might argue that the space itself has a lot of the desired qualities: no cars, lively and outgoing, human scaled spaces, etc., but topped with luxurious apartments and private roof top gardens, this ‘public’ square is arguably very preprogrammed, not allowing for much freedom in its use. Street food spaces and restaurants are not cheap, less so free, and since they occupy the ground floor, they will most likely engulf the

²⁸ (Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrengeucht 2009, 7)

space of the plaza, questioning if it in its essence is indeed public when only aiming at a certain group of people.

This means that Papirøen to some extent might be considered as part of an extraction of the ideal city – a ‘public’ space, the sidewalk, in which the visitor can enjoy the idea of Copenhagen life by being a part of the commercialized space or, this could imply, the cultural elite – with little room for out-of-the-ordinary activities.

Christianshavns Torv

Following this analysis, Christianshavns Torv might be used as an example of a different approach and notion of public space. Christianshavns Torv is, as Papirøen will be, a square in the neighborhood of Christianshavn. This makes for an interesting comparison since it is situated within the same city council as Papirøen. As previously argued, Papirøen could be considered public, but it might lack some essential elements when talking about concepts such as inclusiveness and diversity. This is arguably not the case with Christianshavns Torv.

Christianshavns Torv square appears architecturally diverse, due to its long history. One also notices the busy road of Torvegade, connecting Christianshavn to both the City Center and Amager meaning that there is heavy traffic, both in terms of bikes, cars, and buses as well as a metro station. It also serves as the commercial center of Christianshavn – however with much more diverse programming than Papirøen: A supermarket, bakeries, bodegas, canal side wine bars, Normal store, 7-eleven, and a typical Copenhagen hot dog cart on the square.

Looking at the plan of Christianshavns Torv, one can see how the square is comprised of many different elements, in particular a variety of benches. This seemingly simple architectural element provides an aspect to public space, that Papirøen does not – unowned resting facilities for humans. Christianshavns Torv differs from Papirøen exactly by having this significant area of unprogrammed space in which the benches are situated. Though surrounded by various shops, the square has not been captured by café chairs or restaurant tables – it remains an ‘open’ space. What this then brings to the square is the possibility for different groups of people to inhabit and use this space on their terms, not limited to the ones drinking cappuccinos or eating street food. This includes socially vulnerable groups, people grocery shopping, people going to bars, or someone waiting to meet with a friend. By maintaining it so, Christianshavns Torv might be the extension of the citizens living room, exactly because of the freedom to use the space as needed.

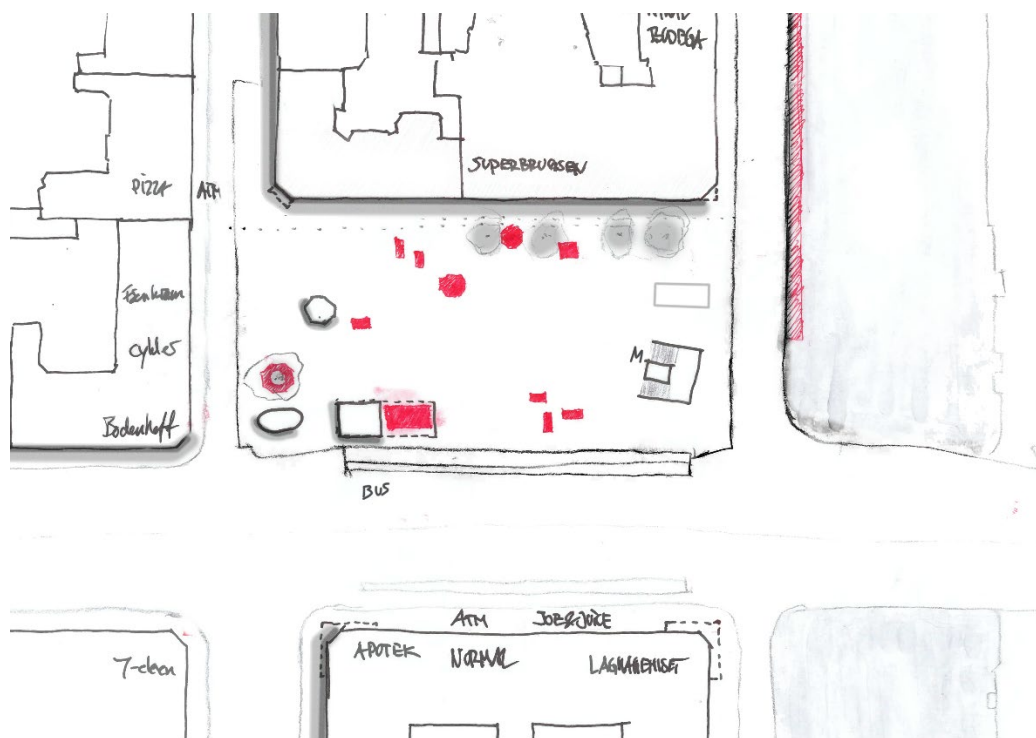


Figure 3. Sketch of the current situation at Christianshavns Torv. All public benches are marked in red, showing a variety of sitting options. One can also see that the diverse interior programs do not engulf the square, leaving undesigned space left.

Christianshavn Torv as a somewhat more inclusive space can also be seen when looking at the local city council's proposed neighborhood plan²⁹; a suggested future development of Christianshavn. The document describes a general trajectory wished for the whole of the neighborhood but also includes a vision of the square. In the description of the vision, the importance of keeping the square a space for all people is emphasized. The description states that the square should provide toilets and facilities that meet the requirements of how it is used as well as emphasizing the notion of a square by reducing through-traffic and private cars.³⁰ This also includes significantly more benches and sitting places. Furthermore, it is described how varied retail options would be beneficial in supporting the everyday life of the citizens and the users of the square. Though it might initially be counterintuitive to imagine more commercialized space as part of a more inclusive square, supermarkets, however, cater to a much broader user group providing a wide array of everyday products for a broad range of people thus creating a more inclusive space. This is to some extent how it is today, which is exactly what the local council seeks to further elaborate. Furthermore, in a meeting report as a response to a local citizen complaint about the consumption of alcohol and marijuana, public disturbance, theft, overnight staying, and more, the council replied that the square "[...] should be for all, also those who have been less lucky throughout life [which also includes] mutual respect"³¹, indicating that purpose and atmosphere of Christianshavns Torv should remain an inclusive space.

²⁹ (Christianshavns Lokaludvalg 2023)

³⁰ (Christianshavns Lokaludvalg 2023)

³¹ (Københavns Kommune 2021)

Since there are no direct commercial requirements to stay on the square, the life evolving here is arguably more diverse. The square is characterized by socially vulnerable groups, occupying parts of the square, in particular its benches. Though one could argue against such ‘behavior’ taking place in a public space, one could also argue that not allowing this does not mean that it does not happen – it will just take place somewhere else. Secondly, one could ask if it might not be part of having a diverse city, and a result of a public space that actually lives up to its definition of being ‘public’ – available to all.

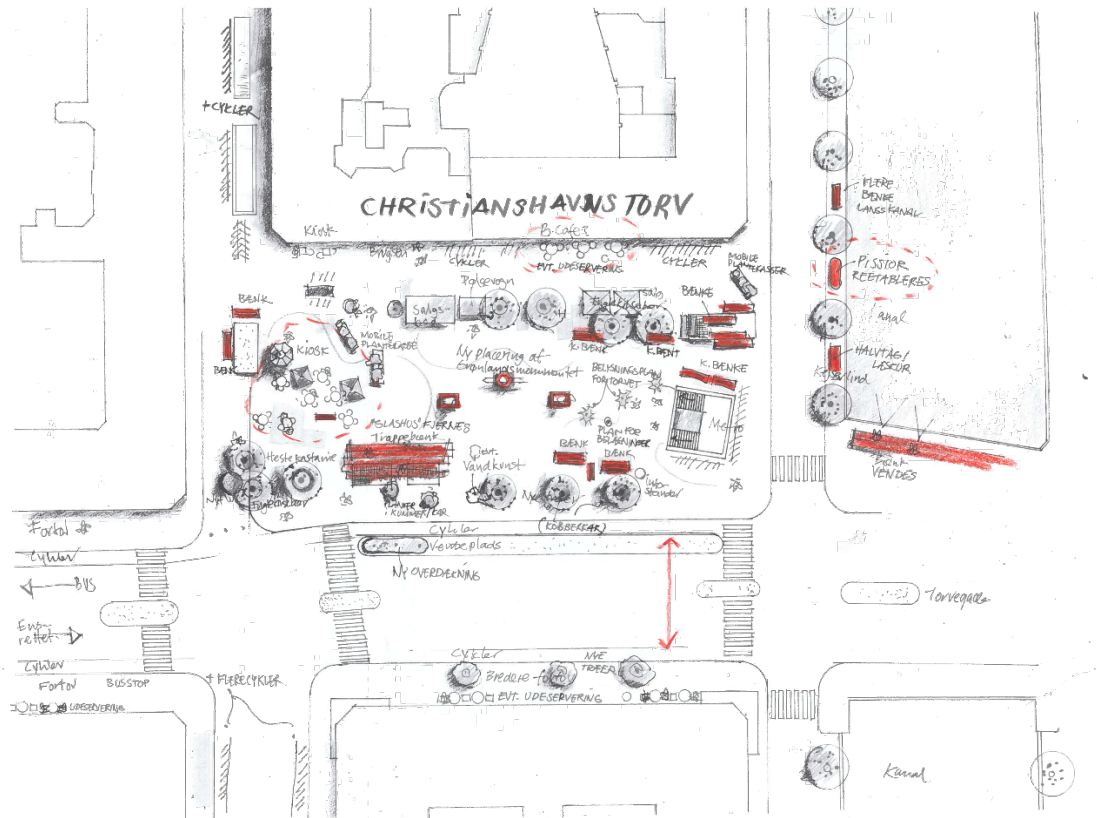


Figure 4. The proposed plan by the Christianshavns City Council with all publicly available benches are marked in red (by author). Compared to the current situation, it can be seen that the local council seeks to underscore the current inherent qualities by adding significantly more benches and trees. Credit: Christianshavns Lokaludvalg.

Contemporary Notion of True Publicness

Produced and Producing the Livable City

Though many of the 60's theorists argued for the importance of the sidewalk as a public space, contemporary critiques begin to question the actual publicness of the urban elements, looking towards a deeper understanding of inclusiveness in the public realm in a modern context. These theories begin to embrace theoretical aspects such as the neoliberal economic and social impact on commercialized public spaces. This includes the idea that public space loses its quality as truly public because of hyper-commercialization.

As Maroš Krivý and Leonard Ma argue, as a critique of the commercialized urban space, “[...] *the enlisting of Homo sapiens in the service of urbanism constitute a hegemonic “grid of intelligibility” through which urban subjects are produced*”³², what both Lefebvre and Certeau also point to: public space is not just a produced space – it also produces. The quote is a comment to a public talk by Gehl, in which he stated that it would be bizarre to just sit in a public space, doing nothing – we need a cappuccino as a tool, or sign, of having a good time in the city³³. This translates to the fact that commercial activity is a prerequisite for the livable city; for the public space to function desirably. This is, it seems, true in the case of Papirøen, where the main activity is set to be commercial. This is further argued when saying that *“The “immaterial” labor of animating urban atmospheres [...] has been brought forth by the livable city [...]”*³⁴, meaning that in order to function as the ideal livable city, people need to take part in the commercialized cappuccino culture – because that is itself is the essence of the contemporary function of public space in the ‘livable’ city of Copenhagen.

This could, one might argue, be the reason for why Christianshavns Torv allows for such diverse use – it has not yet been polished, (over-) gentrified, or hyper-commercialized. As Maroš Krivý and Leonard Ma also argue: *“Sustained by the rhetorical capacity to offload any and all urban problems onto a putative image of aberrant modernity, the livable city casts aside the history of diverse struggles for social equality in favor of a universalizing image of urban street “life.”*³⁵, which in the case of Christianshavns Torv is still visible, even constituting the public image of the square.

In summary, the ‘Copenhagenizing’ promotes the image of Copenhagen as a livable city. It is sustained through the commercialized street-life, continuing to reproduce an image of the good life, neglecting, and not exposing other aspects of the life produced in the city, which Christianshavns Torv might still do. When COBE explains how Papirøen will be a place that *“can attract tourists and visitors at the same time has a strong local presence.”*³⁶, one might wonder who the island is for, and if the image of the place is more important than the square as a public space.

³² (Krivý and Ma 2018)

³³ (Gehl, *Livable Cities for the 21st Century* 2017)

³⁴ (Krivý and Ma 2018)

³⁵ (Krivý and Ma 2018)

³⁶ (COBE 2023)

An Extension of the Sidewalk

The quality of the sidewalk is the constant negotiation of inside and outside. This, however, brings along the problematic aspect of predefined space, which one might argue, removes the notion of true publicness if applied to all public spaces. The characteristics of the central plaza of Papirøen share many of the qualities of the commercialized sidewalk. As said by sociologist Lyn H. Lofland³⁷, cited in Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrengucht: *“For this reason [the close relation between buildings and the sidewalk, and property owners being responsible for maintaining the sidewalks], sidewalks are simultaneously public and parochial – open to all and yet a space over which a group feels ownership (Lofland 1998).”*³⁸ This is referred to when describing the self-contradictory aspect of the sidewalk as almost always being a place of ambiguity and negotiation between the ones using and the ones governing the space, resulting in a preprogrammed ‘public space’ that allows only for predestined activities, not being completely free. A critique of how COBE works and interprets public space could consequently be that the spaces often become too polished and generic, also in terms of design, but especially in its programming – which is often also the case for the sidewalk. Further, this critique could extend to Jan Gehl, being that the new urban space spaces are highly commercialized and that the constant dialogue between inside and outside (such as COBE describes the plaza at Papirøen, or the idealized idea of the sidewalk) might remove the opportunity for the square to have no fixed program, thus being free for the public to overtake. Following this argument, one could claim that the plaza of Papirøen is a mere extension of the commercialized sidewalk, whereas Christianshavns Torv, though also heavily influenced by infrastructure and various shops, however, maintains the vital qualities of public space – genuinely unprogrammed space freely available to *all*.

The theory of the 60’s had a strong emphasis on the architectural and spatial qualities of public space, whereas modern theory of publicness begins to expand the concept, exploring the idea that a truly *“democratic public sphere has to be based in the process of social differentiation through which previous marginalized, subaltern, multiple publics ought to take part in the production of public sphere and public space alike.”*³⁹ . Following this idea, one might ask: What kind of public space would have been created if a supervised injection site or a Borgerservice headquarters had been placed as an integral part of the identity of Papirøen? Such programs arguably do not fit the polished, exportable, view of the livable city of Copenhagen. It is, however, also a true aspect of the Copenhagen life, and might provide a much more diverse social user group of Papirøen, thus getting a step closer to a more inclusive, less commercialized public space.

³⁷ (Lofland 1998)

³⁸ (Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrengucht 2009, 6)

³⁹ (Mitrašinović and Vikas 2021, 59)

Conclusion

Good street life equals livability. With the ideas of the sidewalk as an important urban element, emphasized through the critical theories of the 1960's, the streets were described as the most basic and important public space of the city.

This can be seen as we today plan Copenhagen as a city where the street life, or the image thereof, is the most important aspect of the city. To a large extent this relies on the qualities of the sidewalk as an urban element, where inside and outside blend together, and where people walking or biking coincides with people sitting at a café or shopping. COBE extends this to the concept of the urban living room; that the entire city, including its streets, is a part of our home (but also a space for visitors). This means that public space is everywhere, and we should treat it as part of our private homes. This can clearly be seen in COBE's projects and looking at the example of Papirøen, one can see how they seek to create an island where the modern street life of coffee drinking, eating, people watching, etc. thrives.

However, critically one could argue that by idealizing the quality of the street, e.g., the constant negotiation between inside and outside, one loses the unprogrammed, uncommercialized public space of the city. This then reflects to the discussion of the importance of public space as readily available to all. Though Papirøen physically can be 'used' by everyone, it more resembles the commercialized sidewalk. Simultaneously it is dictated by luxury apartments and little diversity in shops, apartments, neither culturally nor socially.

This is why it is interesting to look at Christianshavns Torv: It still has the unprogrammed space, much more diversity and still is part of the vital infrastructure. The diversity is largely cherished by the locals, and by allowing for unprogrammed space, it actually allows for people to use it as they want – or as they needed. Unprogrammed space exposes the needs of the city – this is what makes it truly public, the inhabitants and users are part of programming according to their needs – not the surrounding shops or cultural institutions. Copenhagen sells itself with the idea that the cityscape itself is an attraction thus making the infrastructure a vital part of urban life. Whether you walk, bike, or even drive, you are a *part* of the city, not just going from one place to another, hence activating the infrastructure as part of the idea – illusion maybe – of public space. But if you extend the notion of the commercialized sidewalk to every aspect of the city, you might lose important aspects of true public space, where inclusiveness and diversity reveal multiple facets of the city and its inhabitants.

Further Research

The understanding of the livable city and the role of commercialized streets could lead to further analysis of public space as a democratic resource and the role of said space in a modern society. One could also imagine a project that examines the architectural relation between inside and outside, going deeper into the more classical aspects of architectural elements on the sidewalk/public space. How can one imagine public space that embraces a more modern understanding of publicness and equality in the public realm? Can we plan the unplanned (unprogrammed)? Though this paper seeks to unfold the perceived relation between infrastructure and public space and thus how that influences the function and use thereof, further studies on the topic could begin to elaborate on other theoretical approaches.

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