Community plaza in Storhaug
Investigating a public space in a privatized context

Censor’s Booklet
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WHAT IS THE WOODEN TOWN

The wooden town is a term that describes the continuous cityscape of 8000 small houses that make up large parts of the city, both the city center and the nearby neighborhoods. Gradually, since the early 1800s, the settlement has expanded out of the city center like growth rings on a tree. Today, Stavanger is considered the largest wooden town in Europe. In 1989, the Wooden Town was protected as a whole. The municipality of Stavanger is convinced that the wooden town of Stavanger ensures a unique identity and therefore a future value in a world where globalization and more international architecture lead to more generic and characterless cities, losing their distinctive historical characteristics.

The wooden town contributes to Stavanger’s identity, but it also limits development of urban culture and sustainable solutions.

RURALITY VS URBANITY

The tradition of building small scale, private detached houses and semi-detached houses has remained virtually unchanged in Stavanger for 200 years. The way of living in Stavanger, except in and near the city center, involves disposing of a lot of private space, preferably with a private garden, a car, and parking space. 60% of all the housing in the city are detached houses. Only 16% of the population lives in apartments. This characterizes Stavanger’s urban culture, its forms, ways and preferences, which are still more rural than urban, and more individualistic than collective.

In the most central housing areas the density is much higher, people have less personal space, as each wooden house is divided into several apartments. One would think that these dense housing areas would compensate by having more and better public spaces and activities on street level, but they are just as private as the rest of Stavanger. This contributes to Bergeland (in Storhaug) being one of the areas with the worst living conditions in Stavanger.

THESIS

The project will investigate how introducing a new public provision in a single-use 19th century housing zone can add qualities of richness and diversity into the urban fabric, and act as a symbiosis between old and new.

As the city council currently are searching for development, sustainability and urbanity in Stavanger, I find it interesting to study the possibilities for new ways of preservation in the present Wooden town. My opinion is that the urban potential in the Wooden town itself isn’t discussed enough. Despite the relatively high density of people, there is today a lack of urban qualities, such as public spaces.

The task will be to design a community house. A public building in the middle of the dense, historical neighbourhood, that offers space for random meetings, occasions, diversity, urbanity. The intention is to design it as a gathering place that invites and supports a sense of community in Storhaug, and offers urban qualities into the highly privatized context.

APPROACH

Intervention in a historical context

The importance of awareness of the relationship between the project and its historical context. Consciousness to scale, materiality, building volume, and general expression of the project will be an important factor.

A building as a public space

My intent is to work on the project as a public space, a part of the public cityscape. How can this idea manifest itself in physical form? The relation to the street and the interior circulation/communication are examples of relevant issues. I will research this through the design process.

Wood build

This project is a great opportunity to work with wood as primary construction material. How can the ever-lasting tradition of building in wood be interpreted in a contemporary project?

Mix of use - Planning for diversity

The composition of the program and the relationship between different activities will be interesting to work with in this project. What programs can be mixed together? What must be next to, apart from or on top of each other?

REPETITION PRE DIPLOMA

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METHOD AND PROCESS

The full process is described in the Process booklet, where I have written a weekly update on my work.

I have studied reference projects, buildings that seek to act as a public space in their respective context. Two of the Projects I have gotten most inspired by does this in two different ways.

Towada community plaza

Horizontal

This project is a one story building, interesting to study in plan. The building’s volume is a simple rectangular shape with a homogenous facade, that from the outside is perceived as one building. Inside the volume the different programme is divided into irregular rooms leaving the hallways and circulation as street like passages inbetween the rooms, that all meets in the central “plaza”.

Shibaura House

Vertical

This project is a multistory building in Tokyo, That deals with the public space in section, the relation between the floors.

As the idea is to bring the pedestrians from the street, into and up in the building, all the floors has big openings to the upper and lower level, resulting in great visual and physical contact, transparancy and perception of a continous flow of space from the street to the top floor.

I have used model studies parallell to solving program, size of the project, and qualities and challenges of the site.

Diagram showing ideas about the organization of the building

Pictures from the 1:50 study. Showing relation between rooms and circulation inbetween

Conceptual sketch
The final proposal is one building volume that follows the outer line of the site. The public space unfolds both inside and outside within the structure.
1) The neighbourhood of Storhaug (Here illustrated with a section of Bergeland with my site in the middle) is a picturesque and unique townscape, consisting of an enormous amount of small scale wooden houses placed tight together in a grid plan.

3) In the book "The Great Good Place", Ray Oldenburg describes the "Third Place" which is a place in addition to your home and work/study place, where you feel welcome and can hang out together with your friends and community.

Oldenburg uses a list of attributes to describe a good "third place":
- Free or inexpensive
- Food and drink
- Highlly accessible
- Involves regulars
- Welcoming and comfortable
- Both new friends and old should be found there

2) The intention of the Community Plaza is to give a place for the inhabitants (for example a person living in Privatgata 9) to stay in their free time except their own home.

Although it is a beautiful and listed neighbourhood, the 1900-century townscape is extremely privatized today. Houses, fences, hedges, garages and private parking lots fills out most of the quarters, restricting the pedestrians to the pavement.

With the exception of a park with a football field, religious buildings, schools, hairdressers, eldery centers and graveyard, there are almost no places the inhabitants can visit in their own community.

4) The concept of the final programme is that the community plaza will work as a continuation of the home, by facilitating for everyday activities in a common place, a shared space for the community.

The programme was first of all based on the actual inhabitants of Storhaugs wishes for their own neighbourhood. A list I received from a Public Health Advisor listed popular wishes such as:
- Parcel Gardens
- Local Café
- Local Pub
- Outdoor Barbecue Area
- Outdoor Lounge
- Micro Library
In Storhaug and in the wooden town in general, most of the houses were built relatively cheap from pre-fabricated building kits. The more central in the city, the tighter the spaces inbetween.

Throughout history, the inhabitants has built custom additions in between the houses, such as terraces, staircases, garages and annexes. This unplanned evolvement has resulted in countless interesting, complex, and I think really beautiful spaces inbetween the original houses.

I think a contemporary public project could be inspired by these spaces, as the project should wake the curiosity of the visitors to explore and walk around, move around not only on ground level but on top of and inbetween the different activities in the building aswell.

The uniqueness and differences in these spaces also imprires the circulation of my project, in the sense that some spaces are narrow, some are wide, some are have visual contact, some are more closed in.

Following is a collection of 18 “spaces in between”, all found in the nearby context of my own site.

The location of the collected locations + The site

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SPATIAL CONCEPT
The illustrations are four examples of situations describing the flow of circulation and "spaces in between" through the building.
Plan Description

Ground Floor
1: Foyer
2: Cafè
3: Work + Reading Space
4: HC/WC
5: Nursing Room
6: WC
7: Bar
8: Exterior Staircase to Roof
9: Kitchen Zone
10: Play Zone
11: Storage + Technical
12: Auditorium
13: Elevator

The movement of the existing uphill staircase to Storhaug continues upwards via the exterior atrium to the Roof Top Terrace in the building.
Plan Description

First Floor
14: Flexible Space
15: Multipurpose Room 1
16: Multipurpose Room 2
17: Multipurpose Room 3
18: Multipurpose Room 4
19: WC + HCWC
20: Slide Leading to Play Zone
21: Exterior Atrium
22: Exterior Staircase Leading to Roof
23: Storage
24: Elevator

Plan Description

Second Floor / Roof
25: Multipurpose Room 5
26: Multipurpose Room 6
27: Parcel Garden
28: Green House
29: Exterior Stairs leading to Roof
30: Elevator

Roof Top Terrace
31: Barbecue Zone + View
32: Elevator
33: Storage / Technical

The foyer inside the main entrance gives the visitor an immediate overview.

The Parcel Garden Space has visual contact with the underlying floors.

Some of the many routes through the building.

The Parcel Garden Space has visual contact with the underlying floors.
Plan showing the angled lines of beams, following the directions of the site. The intention has been to develop a general constructional system, that can be used as a tool that gives both possibilities and limitations in terms of designing the spaces.

Illustration showing each column, wall and beam on each level.