

Safe Urban Spaces

A Nordic Approach and Toolbox

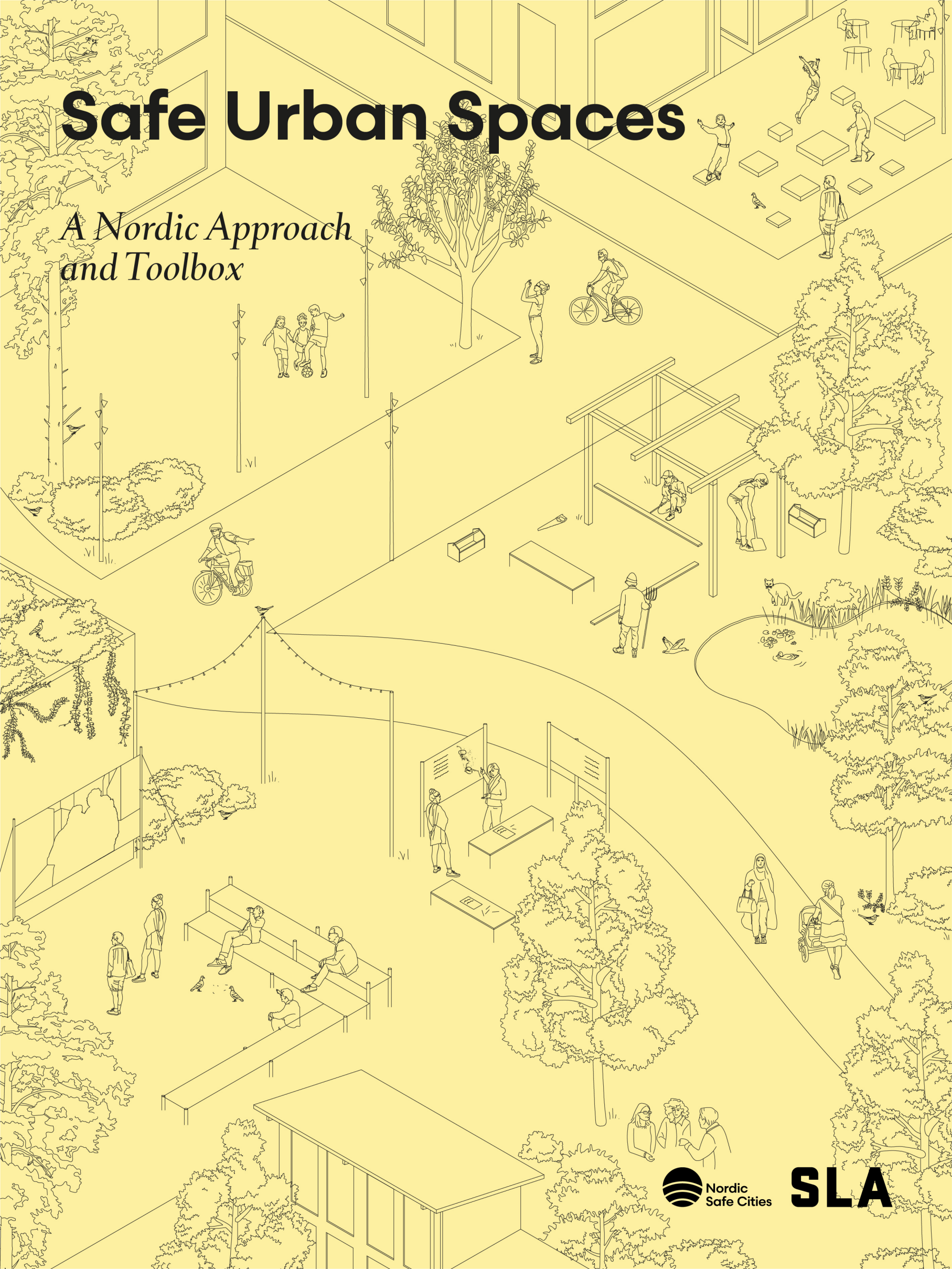


Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Foreword by Mayor Jan Vapaavuori</i> | <i>5</i> |
| <i>Introduction to the Safe Urban Spaces Publication</i> | <i>6</i> |
| <i>Our Safe Urban Spaces Principles</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>Chapter 1: Create local alliances</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Chapter 2: Start with the people</i> | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Chapter 3: Include rather than exclude</i> | <i>18</i> |
| <i>Chapter 4: Work site-specific</i> | <i>24</i> |
| <i>Chapter 5: Design for positive behaviour</i> | <i>30</i> |
| <i>Principles in Action: Nordic case examples</i> | <i>36</i> |
| <i>Karolinelund Park, Aalborg</i> | <i>38</i> |
| <i>Main Library, Kristiansand</i> | <i>42</i> |
| <i>Central Park, Stavanger</i> | <i>46</i> |

Nordic Safe Cities

Nordic Safe Cities is an alliance of 20 cities across five Nordic countries joined together to promote democratic values, community cohesion, and inclusion, and to safeguard citizens from hate and extremist violence. Nordic Safe Cities functions as a 'thinkcubator', which over the past four years has brought together cities, leading academics, politicians, practitioners, and civil society to share knowledge and develop new policies and practical solutions. In Nordic Safe Cities we believe that an essential element when creating safe cities is to ensure public spaces that are not only rallying points for citizenship, inclusion, and democratic engagement but are also secure from crime and extremist attacks.

Nordic Safe Cities is an independent non-profit organisation headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark.

SLA Architects

SLA is a Copenhagen-based landscape architecture office with branches in Oslo and Aarhus. The company works with living landscapes, sustainable urban design and city planning in a wide range of scales. We deliver landscape services in all sizes - from small scale lighting-, planting- and material design to large-scale master planning and urban design. From our offices, we design some of Scandinavia's most contemporary, climate-friendly, safe and inclusive urban landscapes and public spaces. We believe in a distinctly multidisciplinary approach to making safe, democratic and liveable cities. Together, we are more than 120 landscape designers, architects, urban planners, lighting designers, anthropologists, biologists, sociologists, planting specialists, R&D/PhDs and microclimate designers working together to enrich projects with specialist knowledge.

Foreword

by Mayor Jan Vapaavuori, City of Helsinki

Cities and their local governments are resourceful and pragmatic decision-makers that have a strong impact on the everyday lives of their citizens. This has been underlined by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shown that there is both the capacity and the need for cities to take a leadership role in tackling our most pressing societal problems. Climate change, refugee crises, and segregation are just a few of the challenges where agile and forward-looking cities are and will be setting the global agenda in the future.

In the City of Helsinki, our vision for the future is to be the world's most functional city, where all residents have equal opportunities to live a good life. We base this vision on three principles. First, we work to create a smart city whose services are grounded in digital technology and innovation. Second, we are committed to being a sustainable city, achieving carbon neutrality by 2035. And third, we work to be an inclusive city, in which community participation is at the centre of policymaking.

Being a functional city requires a certain level of stability and to be able to guarantee basic public services for everyone. It is a city where you have more time to do what you love rather than being jammed in traffic, waiting in lines or getting stuck with bureaucracy. But it further requires a high level of trust between people and city administrations, and for residents to be able to live, work, play, and express themselves in a safe, tolerant and inclusive environment.

Diversity, dialogue and well-designed structures are at the foundation of a safe Helsinki. We understood the dangers of detrimental segregation in residential areas early on and we have been successfully implementing social mixing in our housing policy for over 50 years. We believe that the trademark of a successful and versatile residential area is diversity. Diversity of people and diversity of homes that can accommodate different needs and people in every stage of their lives.

But to confront the increasing challenges of discrimination, inequality, and segregation in the future, we need even stronger local alliances and better cooperation between the different governmental, private, and civil actors within our cities. We need long-term, concrete and coordinated efforts to create safe, inclusive, and functional cities and public spaces for all citizens.

I, therefore, applaud this cooperation between Nordic Safe Cities and SLA Architects and the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force, which brings together cities to jointly tackle some of the greatest urban challenges in the Nordics. I strongly support the efforts to share knowledge across the Nordics and to engage practitioners across sectors and policymakers to rethink how they can create safe urban spaces through an interdisciplinary and holistic approach.



Introduction

SLA, Malmö Live Bridge and Urban Space (Malmö, Sweden).
Photo by Magnus Klitten, 2015.

The public space is the heart of urban life and has for millennia served as a rallying point for citizenship and democratic engagement. Because the urban public space has the capacity to integrate people. In the public space people can meet each other – high and low – and it is key to urban life that they can do so, safely. As urbanisation continues in the Nordic countries as well as the rest of the world, cities and their infrastructure gain political and economic importance. The higher density and demographic diversity in the growing cities also present greater risks of polarisation and conflict. This development has put city planning and urban spaces higher on the political agenda in recent years.

Increasing physical security in urban space can be done by installing surveillance measures and setting up protective bollards and barricades, but this does not necessarily improve everyday urban life nor increase the perceived feeling of safety. It may, on the contrary, decrease the functionality and openness of the space and evoke feelings of discomfort and fear in the city. These negative consequences, however, can be limited by working with security and safety in a site-specific way that considers the physical and social context of the space and the people using it. Creating a safe and secure urban space is a task filled with dilemmas that require many conflict-ridden considerations, interdisciplinary work, and a careful balance between social, physical, and organisational interventions.

Safe Urban Spaces Task Force

To support urban development and help cities cultivate secure and safe spaces, Nordic Safe Cities (NSC) and SLA Architects (SLA) launched a collaboration in 2020. The point of departure for the collaboration was a holistic, human-centred, and site-specific approach to security and safety. NSC and SLA created the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force: A group of experts, working with security and safety in various ways, who were to transform knowledge into practice by inviting a number of Nordic municipalities to rethink how they work with safety and urban spaces in their cities. The task force focused its work on local, existing projects selected by the participating municipalities. Through a series of workshops, researchers and professionals across disciplines were invited in to support the development of the cities' projects together with the task force.

A Nordic Publication

This publication is a collection of the learnings from the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force and the practical tools employed to support the cities' decisions and interventions to create safe urban spaces. Although the Nordic cities each have their unique histories, traits, and challenges, they also have significant similarities and shared values, such as a pronounced dedication to the quality of urban public space and life. This publication provides a Nordic approach and toolbox to creating safe urban spaces.

Toolbox for Practitioners and Policymakers

This publication is broadly aimed at professionals working with safety and security in urban spaces, including outdoor areas and buildings. Whether it is from a social, physical, or organisational perspective in civil society, city administration, or policymaking. We hope that the principles presented in this publication will inspire practitioners when initiating and planning projects and provide supportive guidelines throughout the process of creating safer urban spaces with concrete tools and examples. We further hope that the publication can inspire and inform policymakers in their strategic prioritisation and allocations of resources to take effective action to create safer, more inclusive, and functional cities.

Reading guide

The publication presents five 'Safe Urban Spaces Principles'. Five chapters describe each principle along with concrete tools that can support practitioners in the process to create safer urban spaces. The sixth chapter presents these principles in action, with three Nordic cases exemplifying how these principles and tools are being used in practice.

Our Safe Urban Spaces Principles

In collaboration between the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force and the Nordic municipalities, five principles have been developed that have shown to be useful and inspirational in driving the cities' efforts to create safe urban spaces.

We believe in local and site-specific solutions. Therefore, rather than providing a universal step-by-step template to creating safe urban spaces, the five principles presented in this publication offer direction for practitioners and policymakers to ask key questions. Along with each principle are a number of concrete tools to serve as inspiration for how to practically get started with a given project.

The principles focus on organisational, physical, and social aspects of working with security and safety. These aspects as well as the principles are interlinked, but the relevance and priority of each of the principles may differ depending on local context, specific challenges, project stage, and available resources.

These are the five principles:



CREATE LOCAL ALLIANCES

To ensure ownership and support from all partners.

Cities should ensure cooperation and knowledge sharing between different departments and actors within the city and strong ownership on all levels, from policymakers to local organisations. Creating safe and inclusive public spaces cannot be done in a vacuum.

START WITH THE PEOPLE

To understand social dynamics and peoples' perception of safety.

Cities should understand who does or does not use the space, and what or who affect their perception of safety. To create spaces that feel safe, cities must focus on the people in those spaces and on their behaviours and experiences.



INCLUDE RATHER THAN EXCLUDE

To support social cohesion and create inclusive cities for all.

Cities must listen to and engage diverse user groups (even, or maybe especially, groups that may seem problematic). Urban spaces should provide room for different people with different needs and problems.

WORK SITE-SPECIFIC

To avoid 'one size fits all' thinking.

Cities must understand the local context and develop initiatives based on geographic location, physical layout, demographic composition, community values, and local resources and constraints.



DESIGN FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

To create attractive, well-functioning urban spaces.

Cities must focus on positive behaviour instead of negative. Physical design and built environment should inspire and support positive behaviour. Happy people and attractive urban spaces can easily overcome and vanquish crime and feelings of unsafety.



*Dronning Louises Bro (Copenhagen, Denmark).
(Unsplash)*

Chapter 1: Create local alliances

To ensure ownership and support from all partners



Tingbjerg (Copenhagen, Denmark).
Photo by Charlotte Brøndum.

Creating safe cities and public spaces is a task filled with dilemmas that require many opposing considerations, interdisciplinary work, and a proper balance of social, physical, and organisational interventions.

SET A UNITING VISION

Before initiating actions, cities should set a clear and concrete vision for creating safer public spaces. Why are you doing this, and for whom? These are the two questions that need to be answered in the vision.

By clearly communicating the vision early on in the process, cities can engage and assemble all stakeholders towards a common goal and ambition for the urban space that aligns the priorities of different actors. This further creates ownership at different levels from policymakers to local businesses, civil society, and residents. Engaging the political level is essential for the project or issue to gain support, prioritisation, and receive necessary resources. But it is equally important to ensure a bottom-up approach and include the perspectives of the local community.

WORK ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND PROFESSIONS

Securing an urban space is in itself a rather complicated task, but ensuring that the space simultaneously is functional, attractive, and inclusive is the real challenge.

Bringing in an architectural perspective may ensure more aesthetic qualities and considerations of how security installations can be integrated into the environment. Adding

an anthropological or sociological perspective may provide an understanding of local needs and users, and how security initiatives can add to and support these. In other words, creating spaces that are both secure, functional, and feel safe is a task that requires collaboration across disciplines, professions, and actors. By looking at a problem and discussing it from different professional perspectives it can bring forth new and alternative solutions and potentials.

BREAK DEPARTMENTAL SILOS

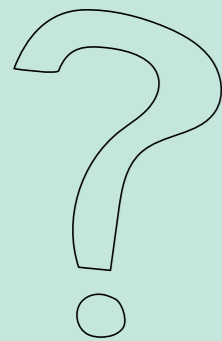
In cities, different departments often work within their organisational silos and have separate financial allocations and priorities. This structure is a barrier to effective cooperation and knowledge sharing across the municipal sector. And it is a challenge when working to develop safe public spaces because it requires multiagency cooperation to tackle social and physical issues at the same time. It could be the reconstruction of a park where the use of narcotics is a problem. This would require collaboration between departments. Creating alliances across the city administration will help cities to ensure a more comprehensive approach to develop safe spaces.

Continuous dialogue between social and cultural departments and urban planning departments allows for more effective cooperation and inclusion of different perspectives early in the development process. This will enable cities to combine physical design solutions with social interventions that consider the use and behaviour of the people in the space. It will also ensure that small scale projects are thought into larger city strategies across departments – and vice versa.

Tools

1. ASK YOURSELF THREE BURNING QUESTIONS

- *What is our overall vision? Why are we doing this, what impact are we are striving for, and for who?*
- *Do we have a clear overview of the organisation around the project, including all stakeholders and their interests?*
- *What is the relation to larger strategies and plans?*

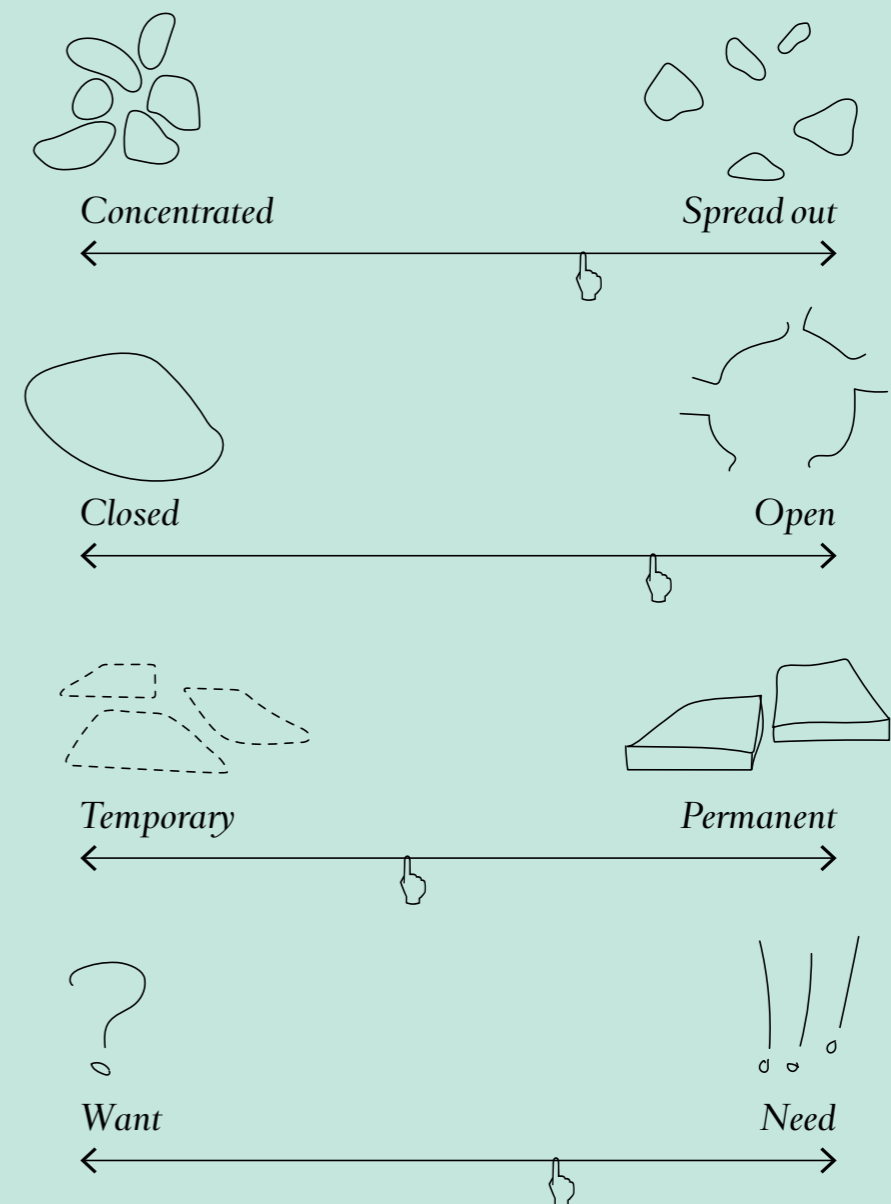


2. DILEMMA AS A METHOD

Identifying the most relevant dilemmas at the beginning of a project can help you prioritise your initiatives and focus your efforts. The dilemmas can be both physical – for example how open or closed should an urban space be, or they can be of a more social character – should an initiative be temporary or permanent?

Create a dilemma diagram and use it as a discussion tool in a multidisciplinary forum and collaborate to set the ambitions using the expertise of the forum. The outcome might be that the dilemmas are not opposing priorities if you can succeed in rethinking the possibilities of double use and combined initiatives.

The listed dilemmas are not exhaustive but examples. Each project will have its inherent dilemmas and they can become important guidelines for the project development.



Chapter 2:

Start with the people

To understand social dynamics and peoples' perception of safety



To create spaces that feel safe and are inclusive and inviting, cities must understand the lives of local citizens and the use of the actual urban space.

We cannot guess how, where and, why people feel safe or unsafe from our desks. We have to go out in the world and start by talking to the local people.

UNDERSTAND PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

We like to differentiate between security and safety: The level of security is related to statistics of actual risk (e.g., 0.1% of residents in a given neighbourhood have experienced home robbery). Safety, on the other hand, is about people, their perceptions, and feelings (e.g., 45% of the residents are afraid of home robbery). Feelings of unsafety are thus connected to social and cultural factors. This means that people can feel unsafe in a place that is statistically rather secure. If cities not only want to increase the statistical security but also increase the feeling of safety, they must get to know the people and social dynamics of a place. Including why and where people feel (un)safe.

TAKE A USER-CENTRED APPROACH

Investigating the social dynamics of urban space is related to and can be part of a user involvement process. However, where traditional involvement processes tend to focus on design solutions, an investigation into the social dynamics of space must involve users in the analysis of the space and ask about their experiences and needs. Measures that intend to promote safety and security may end up not

having any effect or even having a negative effect if the social dynamics of the space and specific needs of different user groups are not considered in urban planning.

People generally want to take part in designing their future, after all, who better understand the needs of the people than the people themselves. Taking a user-centred approach and asking the people how they feel and what they need, can however be easier said than done. Cities need to reach the people and create effective dialogue. Here urban planners and designers would benefit from working with local grassroots organisations and civil society networks, and draw on their capacities to identify, reach, create trusting communication and engage many different people across the city.

BALANCE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS

Solutions to feelings of unsafety in urban spaces are not always best solved through physical interventions such as lighting and improved visibility. Certain behaviours and uses can unintentionally cause feelings of unsafety in other user groups, and while these could be mitigated through physical spatial interventions, social efforts could prove equally effective. Understanding users' behaviours and experiences will help identify the best strategies to increase feelings of safety, and these may often involve other city department and agencies. An early understanding of the social dynamics of space can thus help identify key collaborators that can provide valuable knowledge and resources.

Tools

1. ASK YOURSELF THREE BURNING QUESTIONS

- *Do we know how people feel about (un)safety in our urban space?*
- *Do we have any actual data on this? Data on usage, experience, needs, potentials, and challenges.*
- *Have we mapped out the when, where, and why?*



2. 24-HOUR ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

To get an initial understanding of who uses a space and how, when, and where, a 24-hour anthropological study at the beginning of your project is a great tool. You do not have to be present for all 24 hours of the day. Instead, choose different times across the day that combined will give you a nuanced impression of the space's use - for example, a couple of hours in the morning, an hour during rush hour, a couple of hours during the afternoon and one at night. During your fieldwork, register how many people use the space, and for what. Create a short questionnaire of 2-4 questions that are relevant to your project and interview people using the space.

An initial 24-hour anthropological study will give you the insights you and your team need to further investigate the social dynamics of the space. You will get an overview of important user groups and which topics to further explore and discuss with users.



Chapter 3: Include rather than exclude

To support social cohesion and create inclusive cities for all



Photo Unsplash.

Populations in cities are becoming increasingly diverse with differing lifestyles, political standpoints, religions, preferences, and needs. To create inclusive and functional spaces that support social cohesion and coexistence, cities must listen to and engage diverse user groups, and collaboratively develop spaces that provide optionality and meet their differing needs.

SOCIAL MIXING

Despite the general high standards of living in the Nordics, rapid urbanisation, unequal economic growth, and recent crises have exacerbated discrimination, inequality, and segregation within cities. To counteract this development, cities can benefit from prioritising social integration and social mixing within public spaces and residential areas. Social mixing can help cities avoid certain areas of the city becoming particularly vulnerable, unstable, or unsafe.

Connecting vulnerable areas or neighbourhoods with the surrounding city by placing key institutions and workplaces in the area creates better employment, education, and recreational opportunities, and attracts people of diverse backgrounds. Using social mixing in residential areas can further diversify the demographic by placing different types of homes in the same area that meet different needs for price and functionality.

Attracting more people to the space and thereby having more eyes on the streets further creates a natural form of surveillance and can lead to an enhanced feeling of safety. This perception of

safety does not necessarily depend on knowing who the other people in the space are, but rather that there are different groups of people present whom you feel safe around, and who may intervene if something criminal, unsafe or disruptive takes place.

INCLUDE VULNERABLE GROUPS

Creating a city or public space that is safe, functional, and inclusive for all, requires city planners to involve different groups in the development and design process. Including groups that are at times overlooked or problematised, such as unhoused persons, individuals with substance abuse issues, certain minorities, and socioeconomically disenfranchised groups. While the presence and behaviour of these groups can sometimes cause feelings of unsafety in other more vocal and resourceful user groups, it is important not to automatically resort to a safety strategy that only benefits this latter group. Vulnerable groups are, as the term implies, the most vulnerable to exclusion, discrimination, harassment, and violence.

Cities need to speak to, rather than about, vulnerable groups and incorporate their needs on equal footing with other user groups in the city.

Getting to know these groups, their needs, and perspectives can create valuable insight as to how a space can be designed to accommodate different uses and users.

An inclusive approach is not only a central democratic ideal but also an essential strategic tool to create safer urban spaces.

Diverse groups become more familiar and accustomed to each other when they see each other and know each other's lifestyles. Rather than dislocating certain groups and behaviours to other places, integrating their use and needs in the space's design will strengthen social cohesion and community resilience, and help solve social conflict and reduce feelings of unsafety.

CITY AS A FACILITATOR OF DIALOGUE

Feelings of unsafety in the urban space are often a result of misconceptions between and lack of knowledge of other user groups. E.g., youth groups, their aesthetics and behaviours, can be hard to read and can seem threatening to older people, or beer drinkers can cause unease in parents or children. This often happens without any group meaning to scare or threaten other users. City administrations and professionals

working in the local communities are well-positioned to act as facilitators of dialogue and to create opportunities and spaces for different groups to meet and interact. This can be done in the physical design or through social events. Cities can additionally clarify misunderstandings and mediate conflicts over the function and use of the urban space.

OPTIONALITY IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

Creating socially diverse public spaces does not necessarily mean that all types of uses should be accommodated in the same location. Rather, different uses should be able to exist peacefully side by side. In other words, different spaces that cater to different groups and clearly invite for certain urban expressions and activities will overall help support peaceful coexistence. For example, between skateboarders and petanque players or between revellers and residents. By including different local voices and accommodating the needs and wishes of diverse groups in developing the design and functionality of a space, it can encourage the people using the space to take ownership of it and responsibility to maintain it in good condition.



SLA, Sønder Boulevard (Copenhagen, Denmark).
Photo by Magnus Klitten, 2015.

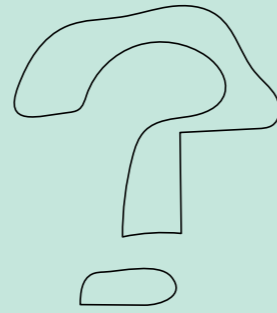


SLA, Gallerup Urban Park (Aarhus, Denmark).
Photo by SLA, 2017.

Tools

1. ASK YOURSELF THREE BURNING QUESTIONS

- *Which groups of people do we have in our urban space today? And what do they do?*
- *Are there groups of people in the surrounding city that we would like to attract?*
- *How can we accommodate these groups? Make them co-exist and potentially meet?*



2. CREATE ZONES AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE

To create a space where different groups can co-exist, it can be useful to create different zones intended and designed with different uses and user groups in mind. Being mindful of how these zones are placed in relation to each other can further support peaceful co-existence, as will including 'neutral' buffer zones in between.

Creating zones and including buffers in the design will create freedom of choice for users. This is especially relevant when designing how people should move through the space. Uses that can cause unease in others can be placed in a 'safe' distance to for example the main pathway, so passers-by do not have to come into close contact with these activities unless they want to.

3. INVOLVE AND ACTIVATE 'CONTROVERSIAL' USER GROUPS

Youths, beer drinkers, and vulnerable groups such as unhoused people and substance abusers can sometimes cause unease or feelings of unsafety in others (however, the opposite can just as often be true). Involving the groups that cause unease in others is an effective tool to create solutions that will increase the general feeling of safety in a space.

Users who spend much or all their time on the streets often know the city better than anyone else. For some, the urban space is their living room. Involving their perspectives will often provide you with unique insights into the local urban areas.

By co-creating spaces that are considerate of their needs – such as a youth area with a skate park, graffiti wall or football field, or an area with benches, shelter, and public toilets - it will encourage maintenance and ownership of the space. As these facilities can benefit others as well, it will additionally communicate to the surroundings that the presence and uses of these groups are welcome, intended and beneficial to all.

4. CREATE EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET

City administrations and professionals working in the local communities are well-positioned to act as facilitators of dialogue between groups in direct or indirect conflict. People tend to feel unsafe around people and uses with which that they are not familiar, and so initiatives to increase familiarity between different user groups can support safe urban spaces. Simple meetings or larger festive events that bring people together can be initiated and hosted by the city as part of an overall safety strategy.



Chapter 4: Work site-specific

To avoid 'one size fits all' thinking



SLA, Naturkraft (Ringkøbing, Denmark).
Photo by SLA, 2017.

Cities must understand the local context and develop initiatives based on geographic location, physical layout, demographic composition, community values, local resources and constraints. Increasing security by using security measures that are not site-specific can seem intrusive, provocative, or intimidating and can affect feelings of safety and the functionality of the space.

WORK WITHIN THE LOCAL CONTEXT

To work site-specific requires analysing, understanding, and developing the space with a focus on its unique qualities and its relation to the surrounding city. A site-specific initiative is developed, designed, or selected for that specific site. Site-specific initiatives are adapted to the given time and place and respond to the physical and social context - location, project framework, resources and building restrictions - as well as values, wants, and needs of the users and aspirations of decision-makers

Security and safety are only things people think about when they are not there or are not functioning. On an everyday basis, people should not think about security and safety, it should be a given.

Therefore, initiatives made to develop safer urban spaces should not attract negative attention - they should just be there and do their job. This can be done by integrating initiatives in the local context and being site-specific.

REVISIT YOUR PUBLIC SPACE

Temporary solutions may be necessary due to specific urgent needs or restrictions, but these can be revisited and updated. E.g., surveillance cameras may work as a quick fix to avoid certain criminal behaviour or concrete blocks may be a swift solution if there is a risk of vehicle terrorist attacks. These measures may seem like effective ways to increase immediate security but they carry negative consequences for the functionality of the space and the public perception of safety. Cities should therefore revisit their urban spaces, when possible, and reconsider the use of security measures: Are they in accordance with the current risks? Do they support the current everyday life? Should they be removed? Or improved?

PRIORITISE IN URBAN PLANNING

As it is not possible to make safety initiatives in all urban spaces, it is therefore key to prioritise with which urban spaces to work. Are there spaces that play a vital role in setting the neighbourhood's identity, tone, and feel? Are there spaces that have severe problems that overshadow the good qualities of the neighbourhood? Prioritising can both be done by focusing on unsafe and insecure places that need to be turned around, but prioritising can also be done by focusing on how certain very-well functioning places in the city can "lift" their surroundings. Prioritising can also be based on functionality and use: Are there vital functions in the area where many people come during a day? Are there roads where people walk more frequently at night?

Finally, prioritising can also be based on user groups. While it can have a positive effect to favour some user groups over others in certain public spaces, it is important to be aware of whether these groups are often favoured, and whether favouring other groups instead could positively contribute to the overall diversity and social cohesion of a neighbourhood.

In this way, cities must be able to prioritise based on a thorough understanding of the individual space, its context, and its role in the overall public life of the city.



SLA, The Forest Bath (Aarhus, Denmark).
Photo by Tina Stephansen, 2018.



SLA, Copenhill (Copenhagen, Denmark).
Photo by SLA, 2020.

Tools

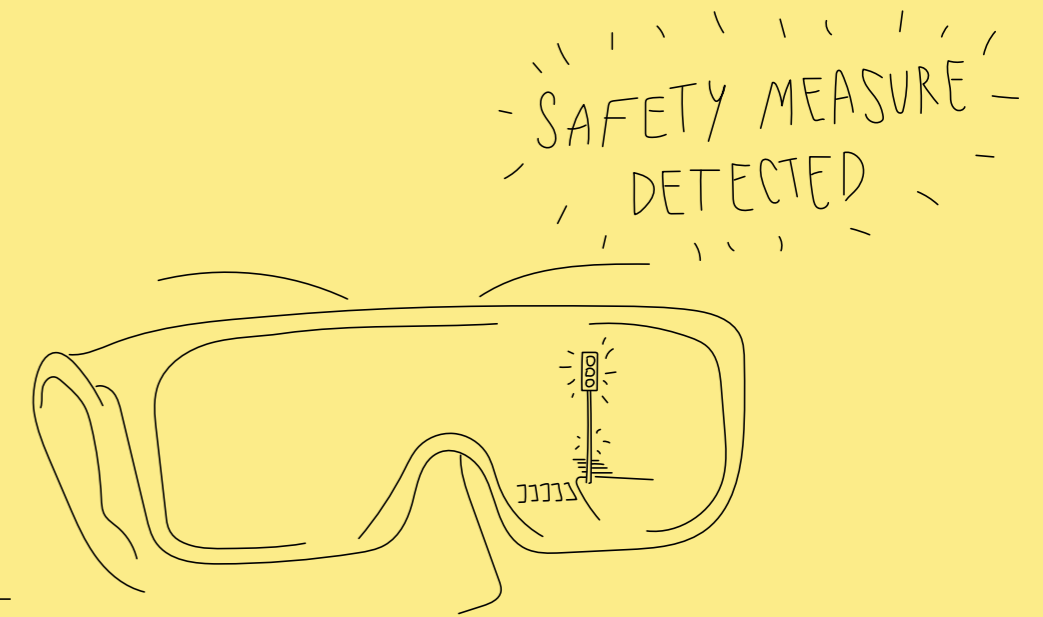
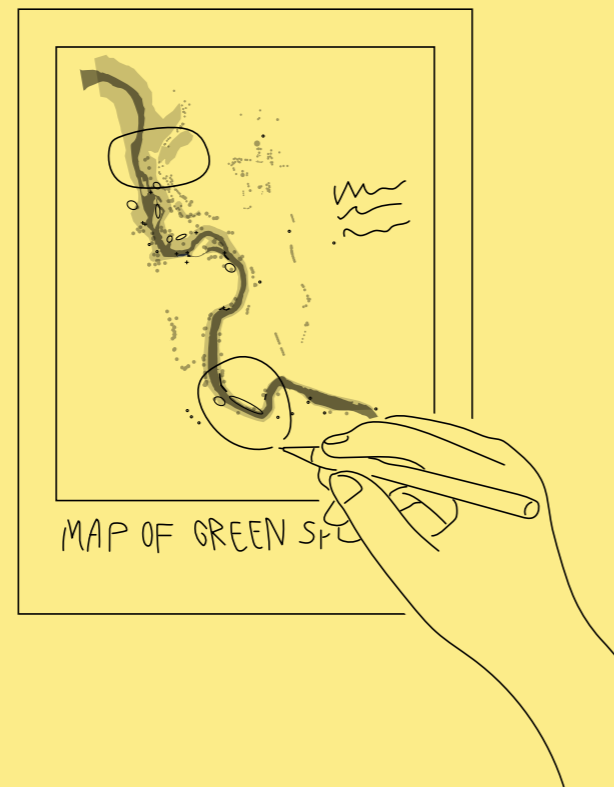
1. ASK YOURSELF THREE BURNING QUESTIONS

- *What is the context of our project?*
- *How can security and safety initiatives be made site-specific to our urban space?*
- *Why should this urban space be prioritised over others?*



2. MAP THE CONTEXT

Look at map (e.g. on Google) and outline the context of your urban space. This could be followed up by a walk in the surrounding neighbourhoods. What characterises the context? Physically? Socially? Culturally? What qualities and challenges are there in the surrounding city? And how does your project fit into this context?



3. PUT ON YOUR SAFETY GLASSES

We move around in the city where we work and live every day. Therefore, we can tend to think that we know it inside out. But we encourage you to plan a 1-2 hour walk around the city, visiting selected urban spaces. On this walk, you should imagine that you have put on a pair of "safety glasses" – meaning, you look at everything from a safety perspective. Are there any security measures which you have never noticed before? How do they function? What signals do they send? Are there places where there ought to be some type of security measure? Or are there some measures that could be removed?

Chapter 5:

Design for positive behaviour

To create attractive, well-functioning urban spaces



SLA, Gellerup Urban Park (Aarhus, Denmark),
Photo by Rasmus Hjortshøj, 2019.

Cities must focus on positive behaviour instead of negative.

Physical design and built environment should inspire and support positive behaviour. Happy people and attractive urban spaces can easily overcome and vanquish crime and feelings of unsafety.

So how do we inspire positive behaviour through physical design? The physical design can both increase and decrease the feeling of safety: Light can create darkness, eyes on the street can lead to negative feelings of surveillance, graffiti can both be art and vandalism, and green elements can detract rather than add to the quality of the space if not maintained right. Cities must therefore make intentional strategic choices when using physical elements, natural and artificial, to design the built environment in a manner that inspires and supports positive activities and behaviours.

SHOW THAT YOU CARE

To encourage positive behaviour in a space and to strengthen the feeling of safety, city planners must show that they care about the space and the people in it. Part of this is to design good quality spaces that are attractive to locals to be and move around in. Make people feel prioritised. This includes strategic use of lighting, green and water elements, art and sculptures to make the space look and feel more pleasant, and developing spaces for common activities such as playgrounds, sports areas, and meeting places with benches and tables.

ENSURE MAINTENANCE BUT SUPPORT LOCAL CREATIVITY

Cities must ensure the cleaning and maintenance of urban spaces and the physical environment by removing waste, vandalism, and other visible indicators that may evoke feelings of neglect and unsafety. Graffiti, guerrilla gardening, and other forms of local initiatives and street art are often perceived as forms of vandalism that cities work to eliminate. As with many other physical elements, if not maintained right graffiti can lead to feelings of insecurity and make a space look abandoned and unsafe. But it can also be used intentionally to embrace an urban expression and local identity, support creativity and engage street artists and youth to take ownership of a space.

Cities and private building owners can work with local street artists and youth to create motives that beautify, inspire and revive rather than destroy a neighbourhood, public space or a building. If done deliberately and maintained, embracing street art can be a way to foster a better relationship between local businesses and the community, and provide cities with a low-cost solution to make public spaces more interesting and unique.

CREATE VISIBILITY

Visibility or surveillance is often used to crowd out crime under the understanding that if people can see you, then you are less likely to do something illegal, violent, or disruptive. Surveillance, however, is not only security guards, police officers, and cameras, ordinary people's "eyes on the street" also provide surveillance. That is a more pleasant and less intimidating type of surveillance, which we prefer to call visibility. Visibility is about people seeing each other and acknowledging each other. This not only prevents crime but knowing that someone else is there also provides people with a feeling of safety. Residential areas can for instance be designed in a way that allows people to see each other from windows and balconies, with visibility between buildings and from homes onto nearby shared or public spaces.

Although green elements often add quality to a space and carry many positive effects, dense planting can also obstruct visibility. Overgrown shrubs, bushes, and trees can create dark spots and hiding areas for illegal activity and make a space feel neglected and abandoned. Cities should therefore work strategically with visibility - which places should be visible from all angles? And what areas should provide people with a certain degree of privacy and peace? It is key to avoid a feeling of constant surveillance and lack of privacy everywhere, as this will also discourage positive uses of public spaces.

PUT (A) LIGHT ON LIFE

An essential factor in how public space is perceived and used is light - especially at night when there is a lack thereof. Light plays a key role in the visibility, functionality, security, and feeling of safety in a space. The way a space is designed to incorporate light, natural and artificial, can influence when, how, and by whom a space is used. Different amounts, types and colours of light can further evoke certain atmospheres, experiences, feelings, and perceptions of the space.

Light is a powerful tool to discourage illegal or disruptive activities, both because light creates visibility but also because light can encourage positive uses and behaviours that will vanquish the negative.

If employed intentionally and strategically, cities can use light to create more attractive, secure, and safe spaces and expand the opportunities for public life during the day and night. Remember, however, that light should also be site-specific and well-integrated. Like other security measures, the lighting should not attract attention towards security issues - it should just be there and do its job. Exaggerated light can almost scream "here is a very insecure place, that's why we put up all this light." Lighting should therefore be integrated, attractive, fun, pretty, sustainable and so forth to provide people with positive feelings in the dark.



AVOID USELESS BARRIERS

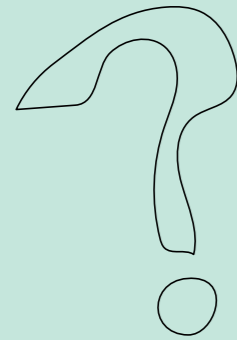
In certain cases, it can be decided to take rather extreme security measures, e.g., around an embassy, government building, or company domicile. A very high level of security, however, does not overrule the principles we have listed above. Making site-specific solutions that allow openness, positive behaviour, and support everyday local life just require even more consideration. Physically, one can work with alternative materials in security measures. Both

water, planting, light, and terrain can be used as part of an integrated security design and at the same time add value to the experience of the urban space. A water mirror or a high bed of flowers and trees are not instantly related to security and may to a lesser extent evoke negative associations with crime, terror, or such. It will most of the time be received as a welcoming nice element in the city. The same can be said about art pieces, benches, or other useful and aesthetic elements.

Tools

1. ASK YOURSELF THREE BURNING QUESTIONS

- *What type of behaviour do the physical elements of our urban space encourage or allow?*
- *How can we show that we care?*
- *How will the urban space look if we focus particularly on visibility and light?*



2. WHAT NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR ARE YOU TRYING TO PREVENT?

Though our overall focus is on positive behaviour, we also have to consider what types of negative or illegal activities we try to prevent with our physical design. Therefore, make a risk assessment. You can do this yourself or have professionals do it. You should consider:

- What are the threats to this urban space?
- What makes the space vulnerable?
- And what is the consequence of this happening?

This could be regarding petty crime, terrorism, or something else. Based on the risk assessment, you can decide how to go about it physically and how much to invest in various solutions. If you are trying to prevent ordinary crime such as pickpocketing, burglary or bodily violence, visibility, light, and encouraging positive behaviour can work well. While, if you are trying to prevent a terrorist attack, e.g., carried out by the use of vehicles or explosives, different types of barriers can work well. In other words, different measures prevent different crimes. While an assault or a hold-up is unlikely to happen on a sunny day in an urban space full of happy people, it may be more likely that pickpocketing or terrorism happens. And vice versa, in a dark desolate street at night.

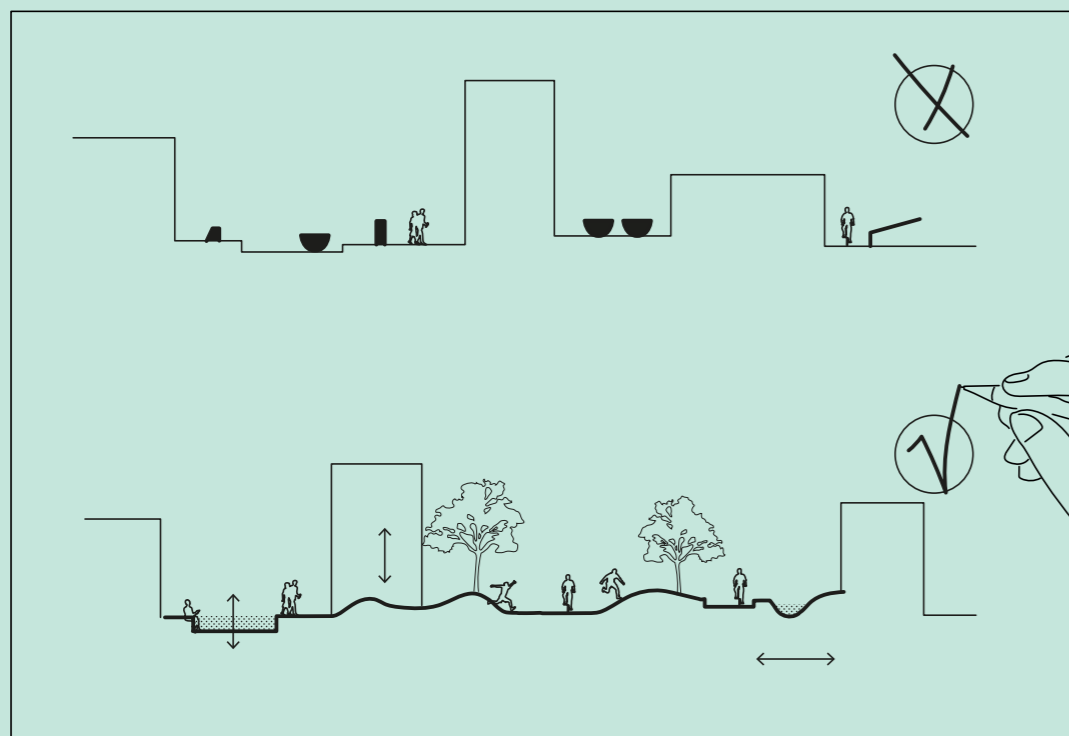
3. WHAT POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR ARE YOU TRYING TO ENCOURAGE?

Making too many risk assessments inevitable gives you a negative, scared view of city life. How to counter this? Try to make the opposite - a positively minded risk assessment. A chance assessment. What positive things can happen in this urban space? What makes precisely this space a good place for them to happen? And what are the consequences of this happening? This could be regarding fun activities, spontaneous meetings, people cleaning up after themselves, people relaxing etc. Based on the chance assessment, you can decide how to go about it physically and how much to invest in various physical solutions that will enhance the chances of these things happening.

4. CREATING DISTANCE WITHOUT CREATING BARRIERS

If you are in a situation where you need a very high level of security, the easiest choice can be to build walls, hire guards, and install bollards and surveillance cameras. But please just wait a minute and ask yourself, if you in any way can create the needed security and distance without creating barriers and hostility? Instead of setting up walls and bollards find ways to use the terrain and create slopes to sit on, create aesthetic and playful water features, use the elements in the urban space such as light, trees, benches and bike parking to integrate the security measures.

URBAN SAFETY MEASURES



Principles in Action: Nordic Case Examples

SLA, Brattøra (Trondheim, Norway).
Photo by SLA 2016.

Over a 1-year period, the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force collaboration between Nordic Safe Cities and SLA Architects brought together Nordic cities, practitioners and experts from a range of fields to rethink how we can create safer, more open and inclusive urban spaces.

Despite the dedication and high ambitions from the Nordic cities, the urban development projects in the task force were slowed down due to the rapid spread of the coronavirus in 2020. The projects are therefore still in progress.

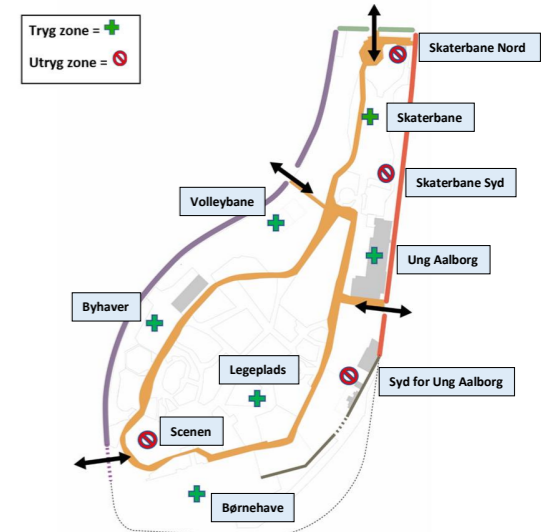
The following cases exemplify how the five principles are currently guiding urban development projects in three Nordic cities, Aalborg, Kristiansand and Stavanger, and can hopefully serve as inspiration for how you can use the principles and concrete tools presented in this publication in your own city.

Aalborg



FACT BOX

City: Aalborg
Location: Northwestern Denmark
Population: 217 000
Case area: Karolinelund Park
Ambition: To enhance the public feeling of safety both during and after the transformation of the park. By creating an inclusive park that invites for multiple usage and is the preferred route to travel when walking to cultural hotspots in the city, independent of the time of day.



CITY PORTRAIT

Aalborg is situated by the narrowest point of the Limfjord, an area that historically attracted a thriving Viking community. The city of Aalborg is around 1100 years old and is currently transitioning from a strong industrial area to a more knowledge-driven city with an important cultural hub. The city is in constant growth and is focused on developing as “The tough little big city” with an international metropolitan pulse.

Aalborg is now the fourth largest and third most densely populated city in Denmark. The city has a relatively young population with inhabitants under the age of 50 making up just under 70%. Inhabitants enjoy a generally high quality of life, and the city provides spacious and safe places to live and many green areas and parks. Although the majority of the population feel safe in their neighbourhoods, certain park areas suffer from a low perception of public safety and usage. This is particularly an issue in Karolinelund, the second oldest park located in central Aalborg.

CASE

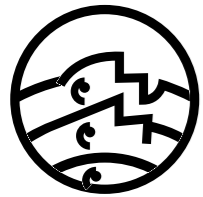
Karolinelund functioned as a Tivoli (amusement) park from 1946 up until it was closed by the city in 2010. Karolinelund park is now open to the public but there are issues with a low perception of safety in particular areas and low usage by certain groups. The Park has many different areas and is home to various events and activities – from people playing petanque to people skating, making graffiti art, playing music, exercising or relaxing in the sun. But the spaces are not well defined or very cohesive and, in addition, certain areas of the park are not well-maintained or well-lit. This creates dark and hidden spaces that attract criminal behaviours and create feelings of insecurity for the users. Instead of actively using or spending time in the park, the park is either used as a transit route or avoided by certain user groups.



CREATE LOCAL ALLIANCES

To set a unifying local vision and enhance internal process efficiency and transparency, Aalborg is working to:

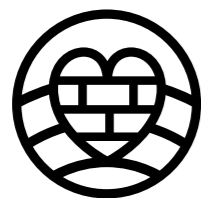
- **Continuously strengthening multiagency cooperation:** From previously working more in departmental silos, Aalborg now cooperates closely across agencies and has involved representatives from the municipality, schools, police, sociology students, urban planning, landscape architecture and light engineering in the Karolinelund project.
- **Reach a collective vision:** The city has previously drawn upon local opinions and wishes in the development process. Local inputs were gathered through I.A. workshops in the park, comments on Facebook (there were 1200 bids) and information stands in various shopping centres in the city.



START WITH THE PEOPLE

To most effectively increase usage and the public perception of safety in the park, Aalborg is working to:

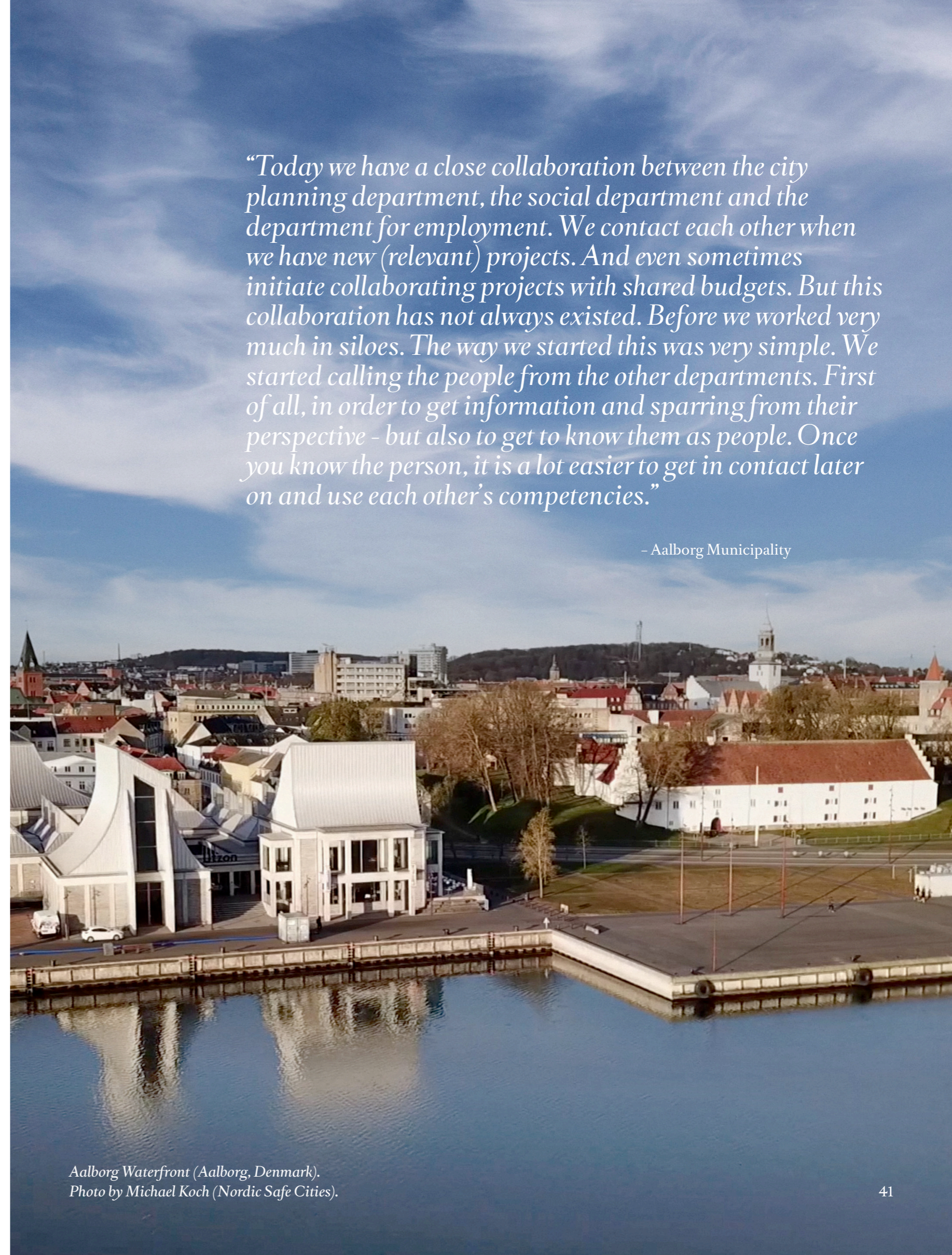
- **Understand user behaviour and experiences:** During a 24-hour anthropological study Aalborg carried out 480 observations and 84 interviews over a weekday and a Saturday, surveying by whom and how the park is used.
- **Understand and map people's perception of safety:** Interviews carried out during the 24-hour anthropological study of the Karolinelund park asked people if, why, where and due to whom they might feel unsafe, to gain an understanding of the social context and map safe and unsafe zones.



DESIGN FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

To create an attractive physical urban space that encourages ownership and positive behaviours, Aalborg is working to:

- **Embrace local urban expressions:** Involve local street artists, youths, and other physical expressions in an intentional manner to create a more vibrant and inclusive urban space.
- **Nudge for positive behaviour:** By increasing the city's role in keeping the spaces clean and maintained, the city hopes to inspire and encourage users to help keep the areas nice and welcoming.
- **Optimise light sources:** Based on a mapping of light conditions in the park, Aalborg is working to optimise natural light sources and implement different types of artificial light to encourage positive behaviours and enhance feelings of safety.



“Today we have a close collaboration between the city planning department, the social department and the department for employment. We contact each other when we have new (relevant) projects. And even sometimes initiate collaborating projects with shared budgets. But this collaboration has not always existed. Before we worked very much in siloes. The way we started this was very simple. We started calling the people from the other departments. First of all, in order to get information and sparring from their perspective - but also to get to know them as people. Once you know the person, it is a lot easier to get in contact later on and use each other's competencies.”

- Aalborg Municipality

Aalborg Waterfront (Aalborg, Denmark).
Photo by Michael Koch (Nordic Safe Cities).

Kristiansand



✕ FACT BOX

City: Kristiansand
Location: Southern Norway
Population: 112 000
Case area: Main Library (Folkebiblioteket)
Ambition: To improve the joint use of the main library and the public space surrounding the library. By developing diverse activities to make the space and library feel safe and attractive for multiple user groups.

CITY PORTRAIT

Surrounded by fjords, inland waters and mountains, the city of Kristiansand was founded in 1641 under Danish rule due to its resources and strategic placement for international trade. Kristiansand is now the capital of Southern Norway and the fifth largest city in Norway with very diverse inhabitants originating from 144 nations around the world.

Although Kristiansand offers a generally high standard of living and many opportunities within business, education, culture and recreation, the city also has challenges related to unequal socioeconomic conditions and social mobility between certain population groups. A higher proportion of people working under uncertain employment conditions and low wages, who have been hit hard by the Covid-19 crisis, and more young people being out of work has exacerbated substance abuse problems in Kristiansand. The substance abuse environment is particularly concentrated around Wergeland park and Bjørnboe square leading down to the main library in the city centre.

CASE

Kristiansand's library from 1979 was rebuilt in 2017 and is connected to the surrounding urban space. The library has had problems with the different user groups in the areas, particularly the meeting between people selling or using narcotics and children and youth.

The main library in Kristiansand has two entrances, one at the front and one at the back of the building. The entrance at the back faces Gyldenløvesgate and Bjørnboe Square, where there is an established environment and a strong presence of people using or selling illegal substances. The back entrance to the library attracts drug activities, selling, buying and using, both in the entrance but sometimes also in the children and youth sections on the first floor of the library. In addition, there is active recruitment of young people into the substance abuse environment taking place outside the library.

The outdoor area by the entrance facing Gyldenløvesgate was recently renewed, and a transformed Bjørnboe Square was just opened in 2020. But the substance abuse challenges and illegal activities in the areas have not disappeared.



INCLUDE RATHER THAN EXCLUDE

To solve the issues around and in the library rather than just move a user group, Kristiansand is working to:

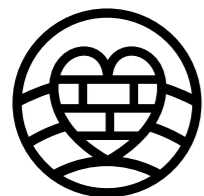
- **Engage overlooked user groups:** Strengthen dialogue with persons engaged in the drug environment around the library. Provide municipal help where needed and collectively find or develop spaces that are more suitable and better meet their needs.
- **Create inclusive activities:** Create more activities in the library and the surrounding public areas that cater to and bring different user groups together, including the socially vulnerable groups. This can also help strengthen social cohesion and reduce the perception of unsafety between user groups.



WORK SITE-SPECIFIC

To understand the effects of the previous urban development of the area and make the library a more attractive element in the city, Kristiansand is working to:

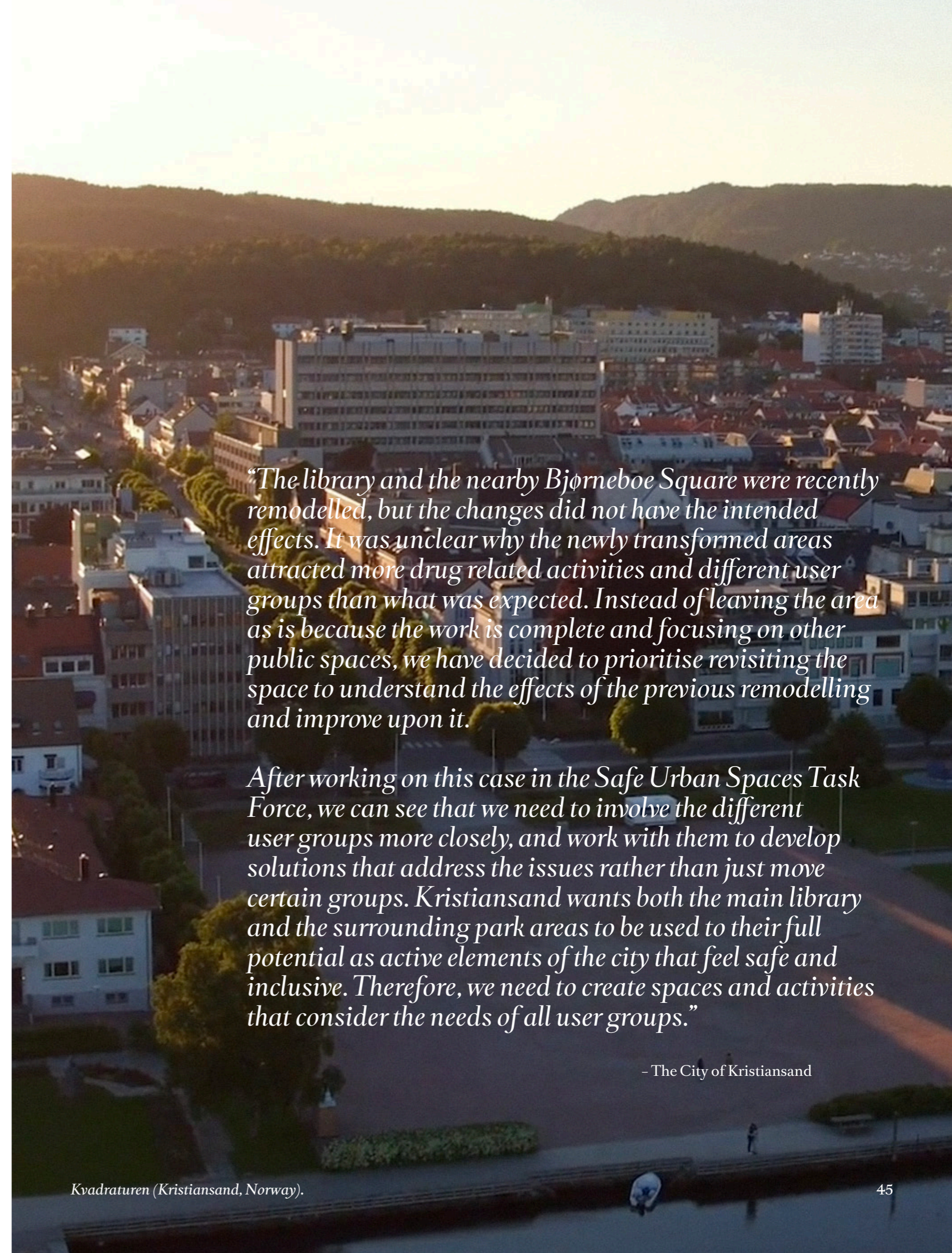
- **Understand the local context:** Explore why the previous transformation of the library entrance and the surrounding Bjørneboe Square have not attracted the intended user groups, and why it has negatively affected the public feeling of safety.
- **Revisit the space:** Allocate time and resources to work with the user groups to improve the library, despite that the development of the space is complete. Kristiansand wants to make the library a safe, inclusive and attractive part of the city.
- **Utilise the good local forces:** Involve and clarify the roles of local service providers and actors around the area and strengthen their involvement in making the library a safer and more attractive space for different user groups.



DESIGN FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

To support positive behaviours in and around the library and make the area a more active part of the city, Kristiansand is working to:

- **Add quality to the space:** Explore how the city can create more traffic outside the library and attract more and more diverse people into the library. With coffee carts, food truck, free books or book swaps, play areas, art etc.



“The library and the nearby Bjørneboe Square were recently remodelled, but the changes did not have the intended effects. It was unclear why the newly transformed areas attracted more drug related activities and different user groups than what was expected. Instead of leaving the area as is because the work is complete and focusing on other public spaces, we have decided to prioritise revisiting the space to understand the effects of the previous remodelling and improve upon it.”

After working on this case in the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force, we can see that we need to involve the different user groups more closely, and work with them to develop solutions that address the issues rather than just move certain groups. Kristiansand wants both the main library and the surrounding park areas to be used to their full potential as active elements of the city that feel safe and inclusive. Therefore, we need to create spaces and activities that consider the needs of all user groups.”

– The City of Kristiansand

Stavanger



✕ FACT BOX

City: Stavanger
Location: Southwestern Norway
Population: 135 000
Case area: Central Park (Byparken)
Ambition: To enhance the public feeling of safety in the central park – also called the Heart of Stavanger – and transform the park into an attractive space for different user groups to enjoy.

CITY PORTRAIT

Founded in 1125, Stavanger is one of the oldest cities in Norway. Historically Stavanger was a small fishing village until the early 1800s when the city developed into a main shipping hub. Stavanger experienced further population growth due to the booming oil industry in the 1900s and now serves as a strong engine in the Norwegian economy.

Today Stavanger is the fourth largest city in Norway and the most densely populated with 135.000 inhabitants. On average the inhabitants enjoy a high standard of living, but the continuous growth has exacerbated socio-economic inequalities as well. Stavanger is seeing more disparities and insecure urban areas that attract criminal activity, violence and behaviours that are perceived as unsafe. This is particularly evident in and around the central park and the central station.

CASE

Residents and visitors arriving at Stavanger central station, rush through the park to get to the city centre. The central park is used as a transit area and regarded as a rather unsafe space by the public. Particularly the eastern part of the park has issues with poor lighting and “hidden spaces” within the park that make users feel unsafe when walking through the area. The surrounding area of the park is home to several drop-in centres for vulnerable groups and individuals with substance abuse issues, whose behaviours and personal expressions can, at times, despite not necessarily posing an actual danger, create feelings of insecurity or unsafety in other user groups. In addition, the park is a historically protected area, the city must therefore abide by several urban planning restrictions and cannot change much of the physical structures.

Stavanger’s ambition is to create a more attractive and inclusive urban space that meets the needs of the different user groups.



CREATE LOCAL ALLIANCES

To strengthen local ownership of the central park and commitment from actors at different levels within the city, Stavanger is working to:

- **Set a clear united vision:** A vision for the project that unites all departments and stakeholders – *“In the Heart of Stavanger there is room for everyone.”*
- **Strengthen collaboration and co-creation:** The social and urban planning departments are now working closely together on one project towards a common ambition, rather than on two separate projects within each their own departmental siloes.
- **Involve local businesses and civil society:** Create more events with civil society and work with local businesses by, for example, bringing refreshments and dining options to the park.



INCLUDE RATHER THAN EXCLUDE

To create an inclusive park that feels safe and is actively used by different groups, Stavanger is working to:

- **Create optionality in the space:** Create different zones in the park that cater to different user groups and encourage different activities. Such as play areas, picnic areas, food trucks, opportunities to store belongings and to borrow sports equipment.
- **Involve vulnerable groups:** Involve the unhoused persons and groups with substance abuse issues that currently spend time around the park. Use the user group’s knowledge of the city and park area to develop spaces that meet their own needs and fit into the larger social context of the space.



DESIGN FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

To create more attractive and active spaces that improve the perception of safety, Stavanger is working to:

- **Make the park interactive:** The heart (water element) in the park is protected, but sculptures, play elements, floating benches and such can be integrated into the water to make the park more interactive and attractive for different users to enjoy.
- **Implement a new sustainable light strategy:** Use light in different areas of the park to enhance the feeling of safety and encourage different activities. The historical lanterns will also be upgraded to provide an evocative atmosphere.
- **Encourage public transport:** Upgrade the walking path to lead people safely from the central station, through the park and to the city centre. To encourage more people to use public transport, it is important that it feels safe to walk to and from the central station.

“One of our main lessons from working in the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force has been to be willing to turn our ideas upside down. At first, we wanted to separate different user groups to increase the feeling of safety. After having dialogues with experts in the network in Nordic Safe Cities, we now have a different entry to the project. We want to attract different users to the park; families, children, elderly, young adults – and include and welcome those who have challenges with alcohol and drugs. We want to turn their presence into something positive. I remember one of the experts from the network saying that some of those who are challenged use the city as their living room – for us this was an eye-opener. We have a responsibility to include everyone into the heart of Stavanger.”

– Stavanger Municipality



Breiavatnet
Photo by Vlad Kiselev (Unsplash)

PUBLISHERS

Nordic Safe Cities
SLA

CONTRIBUTORS

Mayor Jan Vapaavuori, Helsinki
Bjarne Jensen, Aalborg
Jepp Urban, Aalborg
Karen Luise Høgsbro, Aalborg
Bodil Henningsen, Aalborg
Rikke Marie Aaskov, Aalborg
Unni Sjølyst-Kverneland, Stavanger
Else Dybkjær, Stavanger
Claus Sigurd Petersen, Stavanger
Johanne Benitez Nilsen, Kristiansand
Terje Lilletvedt, Kristiansand
Aase Hørdsdal, Kristiansand
Anne Kristin Undlien, Kristiansand

EDITORIAL TEAM

Lotte Fast Carlsen, Nordic Safe Cities
Zina Matouk, Nordic Safe Cities
Louise Fiil Hansen, SLA
Cecilie Jessen, SLA
Stine Ilum, SLA
Bui Quy Son, SLA
Ine Kjelgård, SLA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you for supporting the work in the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force:
Kenneth A. Balfelt
Klaus Rix
Bente Ulrikke Weinreich
E.C. Forfang
Monica Rodriguez

GRAPHIC DESIGN

SLA
Assembly.design

COVER DESIGN

SLA

PRINT

Dystan og Rosenberg

ISBN

978-87-973223-0-7

Published 2021.

For any information pertaining to this publication, please contact us:
info@nordicsafecities.org

The material is offered free of charge for personal and non-commercial use, provided the source is acknowledged. In no case may this material be sold, altered or rented.

Copyright © Nordic Safe Cities & SLA
www.nordicsafecities.org
www.sla.dk

The public space is the heart of urban life and has for millennia served as a rallying point for citizenship and democratic engagement. In the public space people can meet each other – high and low – and it is key to urban life and social cohesion that they can continue do so, safely.

But increasing physical security in an urban space by installing surveillance measures or setting up protective bollards and barricades does not necessarily improve everyday urban life, nor increase the perceived feeling of safety. Creating safe and secure urban space is a task filled with dilemmas that requires many conflict-ridden considerations, interdisciplinary work, and a careful balance between social, physical, and organisational interventions.

To support urban life, Nordic Safe Cities and SLA Architects initiated the Safe Urban Spaces Task Force in 2020. Over a 1-year period, the taskforce brought together Nordic cities, practitioners and experts from a range of fields to rethink how we can create safer, more open and inclusive urban spaces.

This publication is a collection of the learnings from the taskforce. It presents five ‘Safe Urban Spaces Principles’ along with concrete tools that can support practitioners in the process to create safer urban spaces. The final chapter presents these principles in action, with three Nordic cases exemplifying how these principles and tools are currently being used in practice.