



## Place Making | Makers

### *Impact Case Study*

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Year of completion:	2019
Discipline/field:	Social Design
Type of Doctorate (e.g. PhD, DDes, ArtD)	PhD
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### *Abstract*

This PhD thesis was conducted in collaboration with the City and Development Department at Kolding Municipality and Design School Kolding. Kolding Municipality's motivation for entering into the project was founded on ambition for increased knowledge regarding social sustainable city development. Design School Kolding's interest in the project is rooted in the school's strategic focus area regarding Social Design, and the thesis will contribute to strengthening the school's already strong research focus on Social Design and 'research through design'. The thesis, therefore, contributes to both research and practice.

The PhD thesis is rooted in the growing challenges posed by segregation in the modern city. This issue is related to the increased economic disparities, but also to a heightened intolerance towards ethnic minorities, which makes segregated cities a serious social problem.

The subject matter of this thesis is 'public urban places on the edge between deprived housing neighbourhoods and the surrounding city' and aims to contribute with knowledge about pivotal design parameters for developing public urban places that support interaction between people and a coherent city.





The thesis contributes to research with knowledge about the underlying social phenomena's influence on the physical surroundings (public urban places) through an investigation and discussion of their mutual interaction and dependence. The investigation likewise contributes with a definition of 'social sustainable design of public urban places', aiming to highlight the need that public urban places be designed through an approach with an equal focus on the social phenomena and the physical objects.

The definition of 'social sustainable design of public urban places' includes a conceptual separation in terms of the aim of a potential design project and its position within the two research approaches – Social Design and Design for Social Innovation. The positioning within the two approaches and the definition of 'social sustainable design of public urban places' likewise includes an argumentation of the role of design as well as an approach to navigating within the complexity. These issues are discussed through the empirical studies which illustrate how social phenomena, such as power or 'place attachment', appear in public urban places, and how design, as interventions or artefacts, can strengthen the identification and the involvement of these issues in order for 'opportunity spaces' to arise.



The thesis contributes to practice through the development of a Matrix for Mapping Collaborative Places as a tool for structuring the mapping of public urban places with the aim to identify important actors that influence the place. This mapping of the public urban places is further developed through the use of the concept of Collaborative Urbanism, which contains four categories supporting an increased operationalisation of the interaction between the social phenomena and the physical surroundings.

The research approach is Research through Design, where I have used my competencies as an architect and a designer in the production of empirical material. The empirical studies were conducted at two locations in Denmark:

- The public urban park Superkilen in Copenhagen on the edge between the deprived housing neighbourhood Mjølnerparken and the surrounding city.
- The deprived housing neighbourhood Skovparken/Skovvejen in Kolding.



In Skovparken/Skovvejen the area around the local shopping centre was identified as the most important edge zone in the neighbourhood regarding potentials and challenges for interaction between citizens and a coherent city.

The two locations have acted as case studies within the thesis, supporting the investigation of social phenomena in a real-life context, where they appear when the line between the social phenomena and the context is less evident. Using case studies for my empirical investigation enables me to triangulate my investigations of the same locations and their immanent social phenomena.

The PhD thesis is positioned within 'Constructive Design Research', where something tangible is constructed to generate empirical data. The thesis has used design artefacts and design interventions, working as 'mediators for knowledge' between the respondents or the place and me. The last design intervention, Words Upon a Place, moved from 'Constructive Design Research' into 'Action Research', when the 'mediator for knowledge' (the interactive benches) was destroyed and a negotiation about the place began.

The research approach is 'grounded theory', where all knowledge is grounded on data from the field. The theoretical scaffolding has been built up during the entire PhD process based on findings from the field, and the empirical material has been revisited several times.

## *Summary of impact beyond academia*

The impact beyond academia divides into three directions; Scholar, practice, and residents.

The first direction goes into Scholar, where the PhD has played a significant role in building up the Master education Design for People, at DSKD. Dealing with social design is most often dealing with wicked problems, where there are no obvious solutions. One of the main agendas in the Master's education is to teach the design students to use their design skills already in the process of understanding and unwinding the causes behind the apparent challenge, in order to come up with stronger design solutions. The knowledge produced through the methodological approach in the PhD, has supported the knowledge foundation regarding the value of design interventions and artefacts as tools both for knowledge generation in general and for democratic participation.

The Second direction goes into Practice, where the knowledge produced through the PhD, has supported the Kolding Municipality's understanding and work, with



social sustainable city development. One example is the final design experiment Words upon a place, which was conducted as a collaboration between the researcher, Kolding Municipality, and the Company Alexandra Institute. We all learned from this experiment, both regarding using design artefacts as dialogue tools in democratic city development, and Alexandra Institute has used the prototype of the benches and developed them further into an interactive element in cityscapes for multiple purposes.

The Third impact happened likewise during the PhD last Experiment, where a group of young men, creating an atmosphere of unsafety, got enrolled into the experiment, through their destructive behaviour, and experienced how entering a dialogue, can lead to mutual understanding and tolerance. The impact of the experiment seems proven by the fact, that the benches they first destroyed are still present and working today 3 years after the experiment.

## *Underpinning research, context and summary of methodology*

This PhD takes its point of departure in the increased segregation of bigger cities in Denmark. Historical, segregated cities are as such nothing new. In cities in the Middle Ages the wealthiest and most powerful, such as the merchants or the aristocracy, lived in the most attractive places in the city (the city centre); the craftsmen lived along the main streets, and the poorest citizens lived in the outskirts of the society, sometimes even banished to live outside the city walls. A sociographic segregation of residents is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. It depends on whether it is related to preference-borne or exclusive segregations. However, increasingly, economic differences in society together with less tolerance towards ethnic minorities, as we see it today, mean that segregated cities become a more serious matter (Andersen and Larsen, 2011). In Denmark, segregation is particularly present in the cities such as Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg that experience the largest growth, and here segregation has been increasing for the last 40 years (Bech-Danielsen and Christensen, 2017).

Current recommendations regarding the development of deprived housing neighbourhoods argue in favour of a connection between the physical and the social efforts (Bech-Danielsen and Christensen, 2017; Bech-Danielsen and Stender, 2017; Bjørn og Holek, 2014). To position the research within current practice, The PhD investigated 20 development projects/reference cases in Denmark to investigate the role, connection and appearance of the social elements within these projects. I divided the social elements which I found in the projects into two categories: social efforts (mostly presented through initiatives within the Comprehensive Social Plan) and social involvement and interaction.



Social efforts are placed under the Comprehensive Social Plan (Den Sociale Helhedsplan). Projects under the plan focus on public health and enhanced competencies among the residents. They support both adults and children within the neighbourhood in improving their living conditions.

Social involvement and interaction cover all the physical efforts such as urban gardening or events in community centres where residents meet and socialise. This category also covers all the development projects where residents are involved in different participatory workshops, discussing activities and functions within the development project of new outdoor places, or where residents themselves are involved as producers/ builders of the outdoor places.

However, as I studied the projects, I identified yet another category within the social category as an underlying phenomenon that had not received much attention, which I name 'social frictions'. It was not an acknowledged category, yet several of the reference projects within this study reveal examples of a failure to integrate different kinds of social frictions into the development project that later has weakened the project aim.

Through the methodological approach of Research through Design and 'Constructive Design Research', where something tangible is constructed to generate empirical data. The thesis has used design artefacts and design interventions, as an approach to generate knowledge regarding the values of using design to integrate social frictions into future city development processes. Both design interventions in the PhD reveals extended knowledge about how the social parameters and the physical configuration of a place are affecting the perception, use, users, and identity of a place and how design can support democratic involvement in city development projects.

## *References produced by researcher from/during doctoral research*

### **Publications**

[Sociale friktioner](#), Corlin, A., 15 Jun 2021, Improvisasjon: Byliv mellom plan og planløshet. Pløger, J., Førde, A. & Sand, A-L. (eds.). [Scandinavian Academic Press](#), p. 105-128 24 p.

[Words upon a place](#): Highlights from a Design Experiment on Sharing/Using/Experiencing Urban Places, Corlin, A. & Akoglu, C., 14 Apr 2018.

[The role and future of social housing](#) - Three PhD projects approaching the challenges: A place called...., Corlin, A., Melgaard, B. & Bach, J. S., Aug 2017.



[Urban Songlines as Mediator](#): An analysis of the The Urban Songline Book as a mediating tool for mapping the experienced space in the social housing neighborhood, Skovparken /Skovvejen, Corlin, A., 24 Nov 2016, 9 p.

### **Artefact**

Two interactive story telling benches in the city scape of Kolding.

### *Details of impact*

The benches developed for the third design interventions, Words upon a place, became prototypes for Alexandra Institute's further development of interactive storytelling benches, which are used in several Danish Cities, as a tools for telling stories, which can create communities among citizens in a city. [Den levende bæk - Alexandra Instituttet](#)

The PhD played a fundamental role in developing the now 3 year old Master's education Design for People. The education was developed by the researcher simultaneously with finishing the PhD, and in collaboration with the research and teaching staff at Design School Kolding.

In 2021 the students at the master program Design for People, nominated the educating and teaching staff for the prize of Teaching of the year, which is a competition that goes across the three Architecture and Design Schools in Denmark. [Design for People | Designskolen Kolding](#)

The researcher was recently contacted by Kolding Municipality, who is in the beginning of a big developing project in the social housing neighbourhood of Skovparken (the main case in the PhD). The Municipality wish to use knowledge generated from the PhD into the development project.

The Design intervention Words upon a place located on a collective square in front of the local shopping centre in the neighbourhood Skovparken. The place was heavy dominated by a group of young men, who through their behaviour created an unsafe environment, preventing other residents from using the square. There was no interest in renovating the square, due to their heavy impact and an expectation that they would demolish anything new. The design process of the interactive benches, opened up for a conversation about the square as a collective place and resulted in the boys allowing the benches in the square, not demolished, giving the other residents and opportunity to take stay.



This Case Study is an outcome of the D.Doc Project, funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

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