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**PLACEMAKING
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT ASPECT IN PUBLIC
ART AND INCLUSION
SUPERKILEN CASE STUDY**

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PLACEMAKING

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT ASPECT IN PUBLIC ART AND INCLUSION

SUPERKILEN CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This research is based on placemaking as a participatory approach to the design of public space, with particular attention to its artistic declinations. Starting from a reflection on the role of public art in urban regeneration, the thesis investigates how creative interventions can contribute to building inclusive and socially sustainable places.

Through an interdisciplinary perspective combining urban planning, art, and social studies, the study focuses on the case of Superkilen, an urban park in Copenhagen's multicultural district of Nørrebro. Acclaimed for its symbolic installations and the representation of over 60 cultures, Superkilen is critically analysed to highlight the tensions between aesthetics and real participation. The analysis shows how, despite the inclusive intent, the project risks turning into an operation of urban branding, more oriented to visibility than to social co-creation.

The thesis uses a qualitative approach, based on field observations, documentary analysis, and study of secondary sources. The work was enriched by the internship experience at SIMKA, a multidisciplinary artistic practice based in Stockholm, whose creative method influenced the theoretical and methodological approach of the research. In particular, SIMKA's approach, based on flexibility, site-specificity, and community involvement, is discussed as a possible design alternative that is more attentive to the context and participatory processes.

Finally, the work proposes a reflection on the role of art in contemporary placemaking, underlining the need for practices capable of going beyond the symbolic dimension to generate truly shared and just spaces that are open to conflict and diversity.

Italian version

La presente ricerca si fonda sulla pratica del placemaking come approccio partecipativo alla progettazione dello spazio pubblico, con particolare attenzione alle sue declinazioni artistiche. Partendo da una riflessione sul ruolo dell'arte pubblica nella rigenerazione urbana, la tesi indaga come gli interventi creativi possano contribuire a costruire luoghi inclusivi e socialmente sostenibili.

Attraverso una prospettiva interdisciplinare che unisce urbanistica, arte e studi sociali, lo studio si concentra sul caso di Superkilen, un parco urbano situato nel quartiere multiculturale di Nørrebro, a Copenaghen. Acclamato per le sue installazioni simboliche e la rappresentazione di oltre 60 culture, Superkilen viene analizzato criticamente per mettere in luce le tensioni tra estetica e reale partecipazione. L'analisi mostra come, nonostante l'intento inclusivo, il progetto rischi di trasformarsi in un'operazione di branding urbano, più orientata alla visibilità che alla co-creazione sociale.

La tesi si avvale di un approccio qualitativo, basato su osservazioni sul campo, analisi documentale e studio di fonti secondarie. Il lavoro è stato arricchito dall'esperienza di tirocinio presso lo studio SIMKA, realtà artistica multidisciplinare con sede a Stoccolma, il cui metodo creativo ha influenzato l'impostazione teorica e metodologica della ricerca. In particolare, l'approccio di SIMKA, fondato su flessibilità, site-specificity e coinvolgimento comunitario viene discusso come possibile alternativa progettuale più attenta al contesto e ai processi partecipativi.

Il lavoro propone infine una riflessione sul ruolo dell'arte nel placemaking contemporaneo, sottolineando la necessità di pratiche capaci di andare oltre la dimensione simbolica per generare spazi realmente condivisi e migliore, aperti al conflitto e alla diversità.

PLATSSKAPANDE

ASPEKT AV SOCIALT ENGAGEMANG INOM OFFENTLIG KONST OCH INKLUDERING

FALLSTUDIE OM SUPERKILEN

ABSTRACT - *Swedish version*

Forskningen baseras på placemaking som ett deltagande tillvägagångssätt för utformningen av det offentliga rummet, med särskild uppmärksamhet på dess konstnärliga deklinationer. Med utgångspunkt i en reflektion över den offentliga konstens roll i stadsförnyelse undersöker avhandlingen hur kreativa interventioner kan bidra till att bygga inkluderande och socialt hållbara platser.

Genom ett tvärvetenskapligt perspektiv som kombinerar stadsplanering, konst och samhällsstudier fokuserar studien på Superkilen, en stadspark belägen i Köpenhamns mångkulturella stadsdel Nørrebro. Superkilen är hyllad för sina symboliska installationer och representationen av över 60 kulturer, och analyseras kritiskt för att belysa spänningarna mellan estetik och verkligt deltagande. Analysen visar hur projektet, trots den inkluderande avsikten, riskerar att förvandlas till en operation av urban branding, mer inriktad på synlighet än på socialt samskapande.

Avhandlingen använder ett kvalitativt tillvägagångssätt, baserat på fältobservationer, dokumentanalys och

studier av sekundära källor. Arbetet berikades av praktikupplevelsen på SIMKA, en multidisciplinär konstnärlig praktik baserad i Stockholm, vars kreativa metod påverkade forskningens teoretiska och metodologiska tillvägagångssätt. I synnerhet diskuteras SIMKA:s tillvägagångssätt - baserat på flexibilitet, platsspecifitet och samhällsengagemang - som ett möjligt designalternativ som är mer uppmärksam på sammanhanget och deltagandeprocesser.

Slutligen föreslår arbetet en reflektion över konstens roll i samtida platsskapande, vilket understryker behovet av metoder som kan gå utöver den symboliska dimensionen för att skapa verkligt delade och rättvisa utrymmen, öppna för konflikt och mångfald.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public space plays a fundamental role in shaping urban life, not merely as a physical setting but as a dynamic arena for interaction, cultural expression, and community building. However, many public spaces today suffer from neglect, underuse, or exclusionary design, often reinforcing social divides instead of promoting cohesion. In response to these challenges, placemaking has emerged as a transformative practice that integrates artistic, ecological, and participatory elements to reimagine urban environments.

This chapter lays the foundation for the research by exploring the motivations behind this study and thus, the key questions that have already been addressed in the theoretical and practical context in which it is situated. It also introduces my personal internship experience with SIMKA, a design studio that has an interdisciplinary and community-driven approach that has directly shaped the research perspective, through the lens of the Superkilen case study, which is in Copenhagen, a multicultural urban project acclaimed for its symbolic and aesthetic interventions. This study investigates the tensions and potentials of creative placemaking as a tool for inclusive and socially sustainable city-making.

1.1. Problem Statement

Public spaces are often neglected or underutilized, hindering social cohesion and inclusivity. Placemaking has emerged as a strategy to address these challenges by integrating artistic and participatory approaches to urban renewal. However, ensuring meaningful and equitable participation remains a critical issue, as disparities in representation can lead to exclusion, reinforcing rather than alleviating social divisions.

Furthermore, while placemaking aims to foster identity and community ownership, the relationship between artistic interventions, urban functionality, and long-term social sustainability is often overlooked. This gap raises concerns about how creative and participatory urban projects contribute to or hinder inclusive development.

This research critically examines these issues through the Superkilen project in Copenhagen, a public space designed to celebrate multicultural diversity through artistic installations and social engagement through a method of participation. While Superkilen is praised for its symbolic representation of over 60 national cultures from the many foreign inhabitants, its effectiveness in fostering deep social inclusion and community ownership remains debated. Some scholars argue that the project primarily serves as an aestheticised urban branding strategy, potentially contributing to gentrification and social displacement rather than genuine integration.

The transformation process involved direct engagement between the administrative bodies and the citizens of the Nørrebro district in Copenhagen, Denmark, incorporating an inclusive design approach that takes into account the diverse nationalities, traditions, and forms of expression of the residents. The Superkilen project serves as a case study that embodies these elements and is analyzed in the subsequent sections. By analysing the successes and limitations of Superkilen, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of placemaking's role in creating socially sustainable and truly inclusive urban environments.

1.2. Motivation of the Research

The motivation for this research arises from a deep interest in understanding how neglected urban spaces can be transformed into vibrant and meaningful places through creative and participatory processes. Public spaces are more than physical infrastructures; they are dynamic arenas for social interaction, cultural expression, and collective identity. Observing how communities contribute to reimagining these spaces by integrating their needs and creativity into urban design has always been a personal fascination.

The interplay of unconventional urban elements, such as colourful facades, street art, or repurposed installations, serves as a testament to the potential of creativity to redefine the identity of urban environments. The case of Superkilen, with its artistic and participatory approach, exemplifies this potential.

This research aims to explore how such interventions contribute to placemaking, fostering inclusivity, and enhancing the social fabric of neighborhoods.

My academic background in landscape planning, coupled with a long-standing personal engagement with art, fuels this motivation. I see this research as an opportunity to bridge the disciplines of urban planning and art, contributing to a deeper understanding of how creative processes can shape equitable and engaging public spaces.

1.3. Aim of the Research

This research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on more effective approaches to placemaking by assessing the effectiveness and limitations of artistic and participatory interventions in creating equitable, inclusive, and identity-rich urban spaces. Through the case study of the Superkilen project in Copenhagen, the study critically reflects on how placemaking can respond to the complexities of multicultural environments while exploring the potential of the SIMKA strategy as a comparative framework.

To support this aim, the study sets out to:

- Investigate how artistic interventions in Superkilen contribute to placemaking processes and the regeneration of public space.
- Evaluate the project's capacity to foster social sustainability and meaningful community engagement.
- Examine the challenges and opportunities of participatory design in a multicultural urban context.
- Compare Superkilen's original approach with the SIMKA strategy to assess the latter's relevance in guiding future placemaking practices.

The following research questions guide the inquiry:

1. *How do the artistic interventions in Superkilen contribute to the placemaking process along a regenerative neighborhood project and the creation of an inclusive public space?*
2. *In what ways does Superkilen foster or challenge social sustainability within the local community?*
3. *How can the SIMKA approach be applied to similar placemaking projects to achieve a more effective balance between cultural representation, social cohesion, and artistic expression?*

1.4. Internship with SIMKA and Its Influence

During the development of my thesis, I had the opportunity to undertake an internship with SIMKA, between September 2024 and January 2025, in Stockholm, Sweden. SIMKA is a multidisciplinary studio founded by Karin Lind, an artist and scenographer, and Simon Häggblom, a landscape architect and artist. Both founders share a background in architecture. Their expertise lies in blending creativity with urban and social themes. After initial contact, we exchanged ideas about a potential collaboration, which ultimately shaped the direction of my thesis.

Although the thesis topic was finalised after the internship began, SIMKA's work on integrating artistic expression, community engagement, and urban planning directly influenced the framing of my research. The shared interest in exploring themes of placemaking and social involvement provided a foundation for collaboration and inspired me to focus on the intersection of art, urban spaces, and landscape design.

SIMKA's influence on the decision-making and writing of this thesis has been notable. Their experience and reputation in their fields, coupled with their innovative approach to community-driven projects, have provided critical insights. Specifically, their exploration of creative approaches to urban spaces aligns

closely with my academic background in Landscape and Environmental Planning and Design, as well as my professional qualification as an Agricultural Technician. For these reasons, the case study choice is on the “Superkilen project” in Copenhagen. A project that can be defined as a placemaking action including social engagement, art, and green urbanism as main focus points.

My interest in contacting SIMKA stemmed from a desire to deepen my understanding of the interplay between social environments, landscapes, urban planning, and art. This interest reflects my personal and academic journey, which has always been shaped by creativity. From my childhood experiences in art to my exposure to land art, floral compositions, and artistic installations. During my studies and professional life, I have cultivated a multidisciplinary perspective. SIMKA's work resonated with these interests, particularly their travelling project on creativity and learning disabilities, a theme that has personal relevance to my own experiences.

Collaborating with SIMKA has provided a practical and theoretical framework to explore these themes in greater depth, enriching both the scope of this thesis and my personal growth as a researcher.

1.5. Limitations of the Study

To conduct a focused and manageable investigation within the constraints of time and resources, this research adopts certain limitations. Data collection does not include direct interviews with the current users of Superkilen but relies on secondary sources, such as prior studies, project documentation, and stakeholder statements. Although this may restrict direct engagement with community voices, this limitation is addressed through an extensive analysis of pre-existing documented interview data and publicly available materials, as discussed in later sections of this thesis.

Fieldwork was limited to a four-day observational visit to the site, conducted during various times of the day but within a single season. This temporal limitation may impact the authenticity of observations related to seasonal variations and long-term usage patterns.

Additionally, while efforts were made to conduct interviews with key stakeholders, direct responses were not obtained. However, as elaborated in Chapter 4, this study incorporates indirectly collected interviews from archival sources, which feature insights from these key actors. These documented interviews, although not conducted firsthand, provide valuable perspectives on the project's intentions, participatory processes, and broader social implications.

Furthermore, this research compensates for the absence of direct interviews by employing a robust document analysis approach, which includes the examination of project reports, academic studies, and stakeholder reflections. This methodological strategy, detailed in the case study chapter, ensures a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of Superkilen's impact by integrating observational data with secondary interview insights and media sources.

Despite these constraints, the study provides a structured analysis that can inform future research and practice. By acknowledging these limitations while reinforcing the depth of secondary data utilized, this research maintains methodological rigor and contributes meaningful insights into the complexities of placemaking and urban inclusivity.

1.6. Benefit to the fields of Urban planning and Art

The research contributes to the interdisciplinary field of urban planning and public art by offering insights into the role of artistic interventions in placemaking. It seeks to deepen the understanding of how art can activate public spaces, foster social cohesion, and encourage inclusive participation. By analyzing a contemporary and unique case study such as Superkilen, the research provides practical and theoretical knowledge that can guide future initiatives in creating socially sustainable urban environments.

The findings aim to inspire further studies on the intersection of public art, placemaking, and social sustainability, emphasizing the importance of creativity and community engagement in shaping equitable urban spaces.

1.7. The thesis structure

This thesis unfolds progressively across nine chapters, each of which plays a specific role in supporting the research journey and deepening the reflection on placemaking, public art, and social inclusion.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork by presenting the research problem, personal motivations, and academic context. This chapter introduces the key questions that guide the inquiry and outlines the purpose and significance of the study. It also includes a reflection on the author's internship experience at SIMKA, which proved pivotal in shaping the research direction. Additionally, this chapter addresses the methodological limitations and frames the relevance of the chosen case study.

Chapter 2 delves deeper into the internship experience. It presents a more personal and reflective narrative, describing how the time spent at SIMKA influenced the development of ideas around participatory urbanism and artistic interventions. It includes observations from collaborative processes, visits to installations, and the author's own contributions within the studio. This chapter bridges practice and theory, showing how direct engagement with professionals can enrich academic investigation.

Chapter 3: The theoretical framework is established. This section presents key academic perspectives on placemaking, public art, and social sustainability, exploring their intersections and tensions. It brings together urban theory, critical cultural studies, and planning discourses to provide a foundation for interpreting the case study and supporting the broader argument.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach used in the thesis. It explains why a qualitative case study was selected and describes the tools and sources that were used to gather and analyze data. The chapter also discusses how secondary material and field observations were used in the absence of direct stakeholder interviews, ensuring that the analysis remains rich and well-supported.

Chapter 5 presents the heart of the empirical research: the Superkilen project in Copenhagen. This chapter explores its spatial and symbolic components, its artistic installations, and its social objectives. The analysis considers both the strengths and the critiques of the project, particularly in terms of participation, identity representation, and long-term inclusivity.

Chapter 6 represents the Superkilen analysis, consulting, and comparing the data and materials selected and described in Chapter 4. All materials collected during the analysis process are used to better understand how and what the Superkilen project has been built, and around which kind of atmosphere and common feelings. An analysis is divided into three main subchapters to better define the research topics.

Chapter 7, the focus shifts to broader reflections. Here, the thesis looks beyond the specific case to consider the implications for urban planning, art practice, and policy-making. It highlights key tensions identified throughout the study and offers insights into how creative practices might be harnessed to promote spatial justice and inclusive urban transformation.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by reporting the main findings and contributions of the work. It includes a short answer to the research questions to facilitate understanding the results. It reflects on the limitations of the study and offers suggestions for future research or practices in the field of creative placemaking and socially engaged design, also proposing ways of approaching further placemaking projects.

Finally, **Chapter 9** contains the complete bibliography. All sources cited throughout the thesis, books, articles, reports, and online references are listed here according to the Chicago Notes and Bibliography style.

The Appendix is the last part of the thesis, and it reports the first analysis steps, including more detailed material analysis, useful to then develop the actual Chapter 6.



2. INRETNESHIP IMPACT AND PERSONAL INSIGHTS

This section introduces the internship experience, focusing on SIMKA's approach and how it shaped my understanding of placemaking and interdisciplinary artistic interventions. Here I would like to give a reading view of the internship, reflecting on my role in the studio, the skills I developed, and how the experience shaped my perspective on placemaking. A way of exploring SIMKA's methodology, emphasizing their adaptive, interdisciplinary approach and the participatory nature of their projects, to have an idea of their influences on their artistic projects, and to connect with the placemaking action.

2.1. SIMKA studio

SIMKA, the collaborative project of visual artists Karin Lind and Simon Häggblom, operates at the intersection of visual art, set design, landscape architecture, and public installation (<https://www.simka.se/about>). Practices that they also work with individually. With this collaboration, Karin Lind and Simon Häggblom meet on art, sharing knowledge and ideas from two different points of view to create a unique common proposal. Since 2003, they have combined their expertise to create dynamic, site-specific artworks that encourage human interaction and reimagine the relationship between urbanity and nature. They can perform as a duo in many variable project contexts, from small to large scale and from inside to outside locations. SIMKA's way of working does not follow a standard way every time they process a project. It is a more experimental and playful way of approaching every work. An approach that allows them to fully feel connected with the ongoing work and connect deeply to the various typologies and contexts shaping them. In this way, Karin Lind and Simon Häggblom use the project period as a moment to discover how to develop it and involve themselves in it. I would define it as an open process of metamorphosis.

Their multiapproach many times involves the participation of other figures, such as different professionals and citizen participation. This last one gives the possibility to be socially involved, listening to the residents' population, and examining social phenomena. SIMKA focuses on creating and investigating spaces that encourage human interaction, often in overlooked or transitional places, such as "gaps" and isolated spots within urban or natural settings. Checking their works, I would say that they are particularly interested in exploring the dynamic tension between urbanity and nature and between the fictional worlds they create and the habitual, everyday reality of those who encounter their work.

The installations and artworks produced by SIMKA could be permanent, semi-permanent, or temporarily designed to adapt to or disrupt their specific contexts over time. They utilise public and private spaces, transforming them into immersive environments that invite viewers to experience familiar locations in new ways. This approach emphasises a sensitivity to both the physical characteristics and the social dynamics of each site. Regarding the attention they give to the space and physical details. Also, the materials they choose to create their work are not only for the structure and the aesthetic, but it is mainly connected with meaning and a sense of connection with places and sociality.

In addition to installations, SIMKA creates films documenting performances staged in natural settings. These films capture temporary interactions with the landscape, merging performance art with site-specific visual storytelling. Through these documented performances, SIMKA extends their exploration of space and human engagement into the realm of cinema, bringing a layered perspective to their investigation of space, interaction, and the relationship between people and the environment.

In urban planning, activating neglected or "in-between" spaces is essential for fostering more inclusive and dynamic cities. SIMKA's installations in the "gaps, solitary or disintegrated spaces" resonate with urban planners' goals to create environments that are safe, welcoming, and engaging. By turning these underused areas into artistic sites, they provide a framework for reimagining how such spaces can contribute to community life and city vibrancy.

Creative placemaking seeks to transform spaces into interactive hubs where people can gather, experience, and interact. SIMKA's installations are specifically designed to promote human interaction, aligning with this aspect of creative placemaking. By providing immersive environments in public or private spaces, they encourage community members to connect with each other and their surroundings in ways that stimulate both social interaction and individual reflection.

SIMKA's exploration of "tensions between urbanity and nature" mirrors the objectives of urban planning and landscape architecture, which often aim to integrate green spaces and ecological thinking within urban environments. Their work highlights the value of bringing natural elements into city spaces or blurring the lines between urban and natural landscapes, underscoring the importance of ecological design in urban planning. This approach encourages cities to adopt designs that incorporate nature into urban areas, thereby promoting sustainable living practices.

In between the permanent, semi-permanent, and temporary SIMKA's pieces, there are many characterized by the possibility of replicating and being replaced in different spaces and situations. These characteristics give a flexible and site-sensitive approach that aligns well with adaptable urban spaces. An approach that can serve as a model for urban planners and place-makers looking to introduce art installations that respond to the social and environmental dynamics of their locations.

SIMKA's filmed performances in natural settings add a narrative dimension to their work, a method increasingly valued in creative placemaking, where storytelling is used to connect people with places. These documented performances can serve as a form of site-specific storytelling, allowing audiences to experience the artwork and its context in a meaningful way, either in person or through film. This multimedia approach can inform urban planning by illustrating how performance art and storytelling can be used to deepen community connection to specific locations.

The soul of SIMKA's work lies in creating encounters between people and places through art that is sensitive to context, immersive, and participatory. Whether transforming a highway entry or filling a gallery with a vivid installation, SIMKA's goal is to make art accessible and impactful, inviting viewers to pause, reflect, and connect with their environment in a way that deepens their experience of both art and place. Their portfolio is not just a series of projects; it is a lifelong exploration of the ways art can transform our relationship to space, merging the fictional with the familiar, and bringing new perspectives to the everyday world around us.

2.2. SIMKA: Vision and Collaborative Approach

At the core of SIMKA's practice is a dynamic and non-linear creative process that prioritizes experimentation, collaboration, and adaptability. Rather than following a standardized method, each project is approached as an evolving dialogue with the site, its materials, and its social and environmental contexts. This approach ensures that the outcome is deeply integrated into the landscape or urban setting, resonating with both the space and its users.

One of the most inspiring aspects of SIMKA's vision is its commitment to creating installations that encourage human interaction and engagement. Their projects blur the lines between urban and natural landscapes, challenging the rigid boundaries of city planning while incorporating ecological awareness.

SIMKA's design process is deeply rooted in site-specificity and community engagement. They begin by immersing themselves in the chosen location, studying its physical characteristics, historical context, and social dynamics. This thorough understanding informs the conceptual development of their projects, ensuring that each installation resonates with its environment and inhabitants.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of their practice. By working closely with other professionals such as architects, landscape designers, and local artisans, and involving community members, SIMKA ensures its projects are multifaceted and inclusive. This collaborative approach not only enriches the creative process but also fosters a sense of ownership and connection among participants and audiences.

Material selection is another critical aspect of their methodology. SIMKA chooses materials that are not only functional and aesthetically pleasing but also imbued with meaning and relevance to the site. This thoughtful selection enhances the narrative potential of their installations, allowing them to convey complex ideas and emotions through tangible forms.

Throughout the design and implementation phases, SIMKA remains adaptable, allowing projects to evolve in response to unforeseen challenges or opportunities. This flexibility ensures that their installations remain dynamic and responsive, capable of engaging audiences in meaningful and unexpected ways.

Through my internship, I was involved in researching and analyzing past notable projects and their contributions to placemaking, including:

CORNERS (2016):

As part of the “Corners of Europe” initiative, SIMKA participated in connecting regions on the peripheries of Europe through artistic collaboration. The project aimed to bring attention to areas outside the political, cultural, and economic mainstreams by creating artworks that resonate with local communities. SIMKA’s involvement included developing site-specific installations that transformed underutilized public spaces into interactive environments, fostering social engagement and highlighting shared cultural narratives.



Figure 1 - Pictures reporting activities along the project Corners of Europe. Project website - <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/j2yspt591no5u4recjr5k/SoAM-Haninge.pdf?rlkey=5hgiihfdvg4z4w1aqwxvbwvej0&e=1&dl=0>

OPEN ART- ÖREBRO (2015):

During the OpenART biennial in Örebro, Sweden, SIMKA presented an installation featuring three floating islands and buoys with living trees on the Svartån River near the castle. The islands represented elements such as an iceberg, a colossal potato, and the Isle of the Dead, all adorned with lush trees. This installation explored the concept of the Anthropocene, inviting the public to reflect on humanity’s impact on the planet and engage in a dialogue about our place on Earth and in the universe.



Figure 2 - Pictures by Sofie Isaksson showing the results of the Open Art project in Örebro, 2015. SIMKA website - <https://www.simka.se/projects/open-art>

OMUREN (2013):

Located at Henriksdahls preschool in Nacka Municipality, Sweden, “Omuren” (The Circular Wall) is an installation that creates a space for children and adults to enjoy and inhabit. The structure consists of rings of varying sizes, some large enough for play and climbing, others closed off for vegetation, and soft nets that allow children to retreat and find solace. Made of concrete with painted inner surfaces and artificial turf, the installation harmonizes with the surrounding architecture and provides a multifunctional space that encourages interaction, play, and contemplation.



Figure 3 - Model of the project proposal and the completed project in Nacka, Stockholm. SIMKA Website - <https://www.simka.se/projects/omuren>.

STEGEN (2018):

STEGEN is a local landmark reminiscent of the Slottsholmen boatyard and the history of the castle, later the ruin. The work STEGEN is a sculpted boat supported by feet and shoes from different eras. It expresses the patience and hardship of the people and highlights several points of view in history. A cut divides the boat and describes a building that is both torn down and patched together. An ongoing process with no clear end. It can be seen as a metaphor for a common human condition. The feet go in different directions, carrying their protection and their struggle in history. The sculpture also contains embossed text fragments.

The ladder is sculpted clay, cast in aluminium, and brushed with elements of polished surfaces.

The glass-brick room symbolises new times and a bridge in history from past to present, day and night, summer and winter, with a circular pink rubber-asphalt floor in the centre. An association with the bricks removed after the fall of the castle that built up the new Västervik. This creates a reference to the Stegsholm castle on Slottsholmen and its history.



Figure 4 - Images of the Stegen project and its installation. SIMKA Website - <https://www.simka.se/projects/stegen-vastervik>.

UNDER ÖGONLOCKET (2024):

A solo exhibition by Karin Lind at Galleri Duerr, “Under Ögonlocket,” delved into themes of perception and the subconscious. Through a series of immersive installations, the exhibition invited viewers to explore the interplay between internal and external realities, blurring the boundaries between the seen and the unseen. This work aligns with SIMKA’s broader vision of creating spaces that encourage introspection and a deeper connection to one’s environment.



Figure 5 - Installations and paintings of the Under Ögonlocket exhibition of Karin Lind in Stockholm, 2024. SIMKA Website - <https://www.simka.se/blog/karin-lind--under-ogonlocket-galleri-duerr-22-august---28-september-2024>

HARVEST (2024):

Filmed on the island of Björkö in the Åland archipelago, “HARVEST” is a video project that documents a temporary performance within the natural landscape. The work captures the ephemeral interactions between the performers and their environment, merging performance art with site-specific visual storytelling. This project extends SIMKA’s exploration of space and human engagement into the realm of cinema, offering a layered perspective on the relationship between people and the natural world.



Figure 6 - Poster of the Harvest film, 2024. SIMKA Website (Possible to watch from the link over the picture)

BALTIC SEA - FLOATING TRUNKS (2014):

This project involved the installation of 21 living trees placed in lifebuoys, floating on rivers in three Baltic Sea cities: Umeå (Sweden), Riga (Latvia), and Pori (Finland). The floating trees served as a metaphor for migration across the Baltic Sea and the aspiration for a different life. The installations remained in place for 3-4 months, offering a unique commentary on movement and transformation



Figure 7 - Pictures reporting the process and final result of the "Baltic Sea - Floating Trunks" project in 2014. SIMKA Website - <https://www.simka.se/projects/floating-trunks>.

2.3. Learning from working together

My internship at SIMKA Studio provided me with experience in understanding the intersection of visual art, set design, landscape architecture, and public installations. SIMKA fosters an experimental and open-ended approach to creating site-specific art interventions. Their work often challenges conventional urban planning perspectives by revitalizing overlooked or transitional spaces, transforming them into interactive and immersive environments.

During my time at the studio, I was actively involved in research, conceptual discussions, and some hands-on aspects of project development. Working within SIMKA's interdisciplinary framework allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of how art can serve as an instrument for urban transformation. I contributed to preparing papers about the project's details, analysing materials and their meaning, and documenting the projects for work calls.

Moreover, along the internship period I had the pleasure to visit Karin Lind's exhibition in Stockholm

“UNDER ÖGONLOCKET (2024)“, to explore a Simon Häggblom’s garden project “ENGDAHL INGARÖ” in an area out of Stockholm city and to meet both of them in Rome during their 2 months Art residence experience. The lovely city where I attended my bachelor studies and where art is present in every corner.

“UNDER ÖGONLOCKET (2024)“ and “ENGDAHL INGARÖ” are projects that I had the opportunity to be closer to, thanks to the period we were in Stockholm and the connection with these two sites, and, of course, because of SIMKA shared time. All along our collaboration, which was nice and helpful, we had various conversations and discussions about the meaning of the projects and, most of all, acknowledged project process details that foster SIMKA creativity and action decisions. Processes that differ for each project.

The experience also broadened my perspective on placemaking. I observed how SIMKA’s projects demonstrate that art is not merely an aesthetic addition to urban or natural spaces but a tool that can reconfigure relationships between people and their environments. The participatory nature of their work, especially when involving local communities, showed me the power of art in fostering inclusive and dynamic public spaces.

Through SIMKA’s multi-disciplinary practice, I engaged in both conceptual and practical aspects of site-sensitive design, gaining insights into how art can shape public spaces to foster community engagement, social interaction, public needs communication, and ecological awareness.

My internship at SIMKA reinforced my belief in the transformative potential of art within urban planning and placemaking. Through their experimental, immersive, and context-sensitive approach, SIMKA continues to challenge traditional perceptions of space and interaction, making their practice a crucial reference for anyone interested in sustainable, socially engaged artistic interventions. This experience has not only influenced my academic research but has also shaped my professional aspirations towards interdisciplinary and socially impactful design practices.



3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In line with the analytical approach of this research, it is crucial to establish a solid theoretical foundation to validate and support the development of the study. This analysis aims to assess the actual practice of placemaking and its influences in the urban context, particularly in terms of urban sustainability, which will be relevant for the subsequent study of the Superkilen project, a placemaking initiative related to the research's focus themes. This framework examines in more detail the interaction between placemaking, public art, and social sustainability, emphasizing their interconnection rather than treating them as separate topics. The choice of focus areas is clearly aligned with the purpose of the thesis and seeks to highlight key elements present in the Superkilen project, which is discussed in a dedicated section in the next chapter to outline its characteristics.

As a prelude to the following reading, it is important to note the connections between the three themes presented here with the project itself. A placemaking project designed to rehabilitate a deteriorated neighbourhood, enhancing the needs of citizens and the contemporary context. This theoretical exploration delves into the relational dynamics of placemaking and public art as mechanisms for social sustainability, particularly in the context of contemporary urban challenges such as urban neoliberalism, gentrification, and the privatization of public space (Madanipour, 2019). The next three sub-chapters report thoughts, theories, and studies about the placemaking approaches over the years and the influences on urban environment, social engagement, and the socio-economic aspect that directly touch the liveability of neighborhoods with the use of some examples of projects in different cities.

3.1. Theories on Placemaking

According to numerous scholars such as Markusen & Gadwa (2010) and Keidar et al. (2023), Placemaking is a concept that refers to a bottom-up, resource-based, and people-centered process, introduced in the context of urban planning in the 1970s to counteract infrastructure-oriented and top-down approaches. By prioritizing collaboration, social inclusivity, and active resident engagement, placemaking seeks to enhance the livability of cities as a response to the increasing recognition that communities play a critical role in shaping the built environment. Key figures such as urban activist Jane Jacobs, sociologist William H. Whyte, Project for Public Spaces (PPS) founder Fred Kent, and Danish architect Jan Gehl have been active as pioneers of this counter-approach. They emphasized the importance of diversity, public meeting spaces, and walkability, calling for urbanism that centres democratic processes and human-scale city planning (Perrault et. al., 2020). Their perspectives laid the groundwork for placemaking as a participatory practice that values community needs over purely functional urban development.

The notion of urban connectivity plays a fundamental role in placemaking, particularly in contemporary cities that prioritize sustainable mobility and public space accessibility. Jane Jacobs (1961), with her concept of “eyes on the street”, underscores the importance of constant human presence in public spaces, which enhances both security and social interaction. Jan Gehl (2010) expands on this idea through the theory of “human-scale cities”, arguing that urban spaces should be designed to promote walkability and cycling, thereby improving both livability and environmental sustainability.

Additionally, the link between placemaking and green infrastructure is essential for ensuring environmental quality and psychological well-being. Timothy Beatley (2011) introduces the concept of “green urbanism”, emphasizing that public space design must integrate natural elements to enhance urban microclimates and biodiversity. However, while theories advocate for green integration, on-the-ground observations indicate that the actual amount of green space often falls short of stated objectives.

The need to define a new term for such changing actions arose because even non-professionals in the field sought to be involved in the creation of successful public spaces. The desire to transform degraded areas or create new and common spaces often comes from the citizens who live in such realities.

As defined by the Project for Public Spaces, Placemaking has emerged as a growing movement in which citizens participate in the creation and transformation of the spaces where they live, with the goal of *‘strengthening the connection between people and the places they share’* (Placemaking Booklet Preamble, 2016), highlighting the direct correlation between spatial quality and social cohesion. Con-

sequently, it is easy to distinguish placemaking planning, which, as emphasized by Keidar et al. (2023), is not necessarily the domain of professionals, as traditional planning tends to be. Placemaking can take the form of an informal intervention led by activists; moreover, it refers to the distinctive process of shaping gathering places, which represents a component of the broader field of urban planning. Unlike traditional urban planning, which has often been a top-down process dominated by professionals, placemaking democratizes spatial production by empowering citizens as co-creators of their environment (Keidar et al., 2023). This shift acknowledges the social fabric of urban areas, recognizing public spaces as not just physical infrastructures but as dynamic arenas where relationships, cultures, and identities intersect (Madanipour, 2019).

An important dimension of placemaking is the balance between temporary and permanent interventions. Temporary actions, such as pop-up events and tactical urbanism projects, offer a flexible and low-risk way to experiment with new ideas and gather community feedback before committing to permanent developments (Perrault et. al., 2020). This approach not only activates underused spaces rapidly. It also helps build momentum for long-term transformations by demonstrating a place's potential and attracting broader support. The strategic use of temporary interventions can serve as a catalyst for more permanent urban improvements, ensuring that placemaking remains responsive to evolving community needs and challenges (Perrault et. al., 2020). However, while the rhetoric of placemaking often emphasizes grassroots participation, its implementation can be shaped by external constraints, leading to a gap between participatory ideals and actual influence over urban transformation.

Despite its growing popularity, the concept of placemaking is not without controversy. The concept of placemaking has evolved into a complex and often contested field within urban planning. While, as said till now, originally positioned as a bottom-up and community-centered approach to counteract infrastructure-oriented and top-down planning (Keidar et al., 2023), contemporary interpretations of placemaking reveal a range of conflicting perspectives. On one hand, proponents highlight its potential to foster social inclusivity and empower citizens as co-creators of public spaces (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). On the other hand, critics argue that placemaking can be co-opted by economic interests, serving as a tool for urban branding and gentrification rather than genuine community empowerment (Madanipour, 2019).

Gentrification in the context of placemaking is seen as a byproduct of reinvestment in urban areas that were previously neglected, where the enhancement of public spaces and infrastructure often leads to rising property values and rents. This effect has been described by the Urban Displacement Project (2019) as: *"A process of neighborhood change that includes economic change in a historically disinvested neighborhood by means of real estate investment and new higher-income residents moving in, as well as demographic change, not only in terms of income level, but also in terms of changes in the education level or racial make-up of residents."* (Komarek-Meyer, 2019 -p.37). Thus, the evolution of placemaking reflects a broader struggle over the role of public spaces in fostering genuine community empowerment versus serving economic and political agendas.

Another significant critique of placemaking is its use as a tool for urban branding. According to Greg Richards in *From Place Branding to Placemaking: The Role of Events*: *"Such developments created an appreciation of the importance of giving events and the spaces they create not just an attractive physical dimension, but also an image or brand that would be attractive."* (2017-p.5). Richards further emphasizes that for placemaking to be meaningful, it must go beyond branding and incorporate local narratives and identities: *"To have a placemaking effect, events also need to add to the meaning of the location, and creativity needs to be employed to ensure that the meanings developed are embedded in place and appropriate to the needs and capacities of the city or region."* (2017-p.19). This critique aligns with the concerns raised by Toolis (2017) about the risks of placemaking being subsumed under neoliberal urban agendas, where public spaces are designed more for consumption and spectacle than for genuine community engagement and spatial justice.

Furthermore, the debate on placemaking is enriched by considering the agonistic approach proposed by Chantal Mouffe (2013) and critically developed by Claire Bishop (2012), as expanded upon by Hjørdis Brandrup Kortbek (2018). The agonistic approach, which views conflict as an inevitable and productive element of democracy, suggests that public spaces should facilitate the expression and

negotiation of diverse interests (Mouffe, 2013). Contrary to the tendency to emphasize consensus and social harmony, Mouffe argues that social conflicts should not be avoided but rather managed within a democratic framework that transforms antagonistic relations into agonistic ones (Mouffe, 2013). In her analysis, Kortbek (2018) extends this perspective by highlighting how placemaking should not merely focus on creating aesthetically pleasing or economically profitable spaces but should openly address the tensions and social inequalities embedded in the urban fabric. According to an agonistic approach to placemaking, as discussed by Kortbek (2018), thus implies recognizing and valuing dissent as a fundamental component of inclusive public spaces, challenging the neoliberal co-optation of participatory initiatives that often disguise processes of gentrification and privatization under the rhetoric of bottom-up participation (Kortbek, 2018; Mouffe, 2013; Bishop, 2012).

This critical perspective, as articulated by Kortbek (2018), fits into the broader debate on the use and meaning of public spaces, suggesting that true inclusivity in placemaking lies not only in citizen participation but also in their ability to express conflicts, negotiate meanings, and collectively redefine the logic of urban development (Kortbek, 2018; Mouffe, 2013; Bishop, 2012).

In response to these critiques, critical placemaking, as discussed by Toolis (2017), advocates for a more reflective and inclusive approach that emphasizes spatial justice. This perspective challenges traditional placemaking by arguing for an approach that confronts historical inequalities and addresses the needs of marginalized communities. Rather than prioritizing economic gains or brand image, critical placemaking seeks to empower local residents by involving them directly in decision-making processes related to their environments.

The debate over placemaking also involves the privatization of public spaces. It inevitably affects all areas connected to decision-making faculties that influence the development or transformation of urban spaces, particularly public ones. The ongoing debate between public bodies, private entities, and citizens is well-known because of the increasing production and management of urban spaces by private agents for private use (Madanipour, 2019). Over the years, various methods of action for placemaking have emerged, with the fundamental goal of resisting the privatization of public spaces. The privatization of public spaces is addressed differently depending on the historical period in question, but it remains a highly relevant issue. Erin E. Toolis discusses this issue clearly and emblematically in 'Theorizing Critical Placemaking as a Tool for Reclaiming Public Space' (2017), underscoring the significant role of privatization. This role is seen as primarily negative, if not destructive, to the efforts to eliminate inequality and social injustice, contributing to widening the socioeconomic divide and fostering racism by creating exclusive, segregated spaces.

Keidar et al. (2023) also agree on the influence of privatization and the public-private relationships in the urban environment and on the citizens themselves. In their explanation, they refer to specific historical and economic frames or phases that help interpret current dynamics. These include theoretical constructs such as post-capitalism, which does not represent a chronologically defined era, but rather a perspective on the decline or transformation of capitalist paradigms, and more temporally grounded phases like Post-Liberalism, Post-Pandemic, and Post-Truth, addressing economics as a consistent element underpinning public decisions (2023). Consulting their article reveals a gradual shift in the way public spaces are approached. Each of these frames highlights how economic and societal shifts influence public decisions and the use of urban space. Beginning with the post-capitalist frame, where placemaking began to be viewed and studied as a means to move away from profit motives. It transitioned into the post-liberalism movement, which drew on historical models of public spaces from Ancient Greece and Rome, emphasizing free democracy. However, this approach allows for new forms of public gatherings that align with religious and traditional norms as part of an effort to address past injustices. It does not develop an inclusion that ensures access for all. In the more recent post-pandemic period, due to the limitations many faced in accessing public spaces or cultivating relationships beyond digital means, the heightened importance of social needs such as spending time outdoors, sharing community spaces, cultivating human relationships, and enhancing outdoor activities and public services has become evident. As reported by Keidar et al (2023), placemaking is often seen as a tool to accelerate the return of people to public spaces. Currently, post-truth aims to reduce controversies between professionals and non-professionals, promoting healthy collaborations and prioritizing the creation and activation of places. Through the development of this thesis, Keidar et al. helps to understand how important the concept and practice of placemaking are, reminding us that it is a continuous evolution

('What Is Placemaking?' Project for Public Spaces, 2007), with modes and visions that vary depending on the type of context, needs, and consequently, on different histories and historicities. This very historicity makes a particular place what it is, and thus, the direct connection between the present and the past of a given place is significant. A structure, such as a house or a residential neighborhood, rather than an individual or a social group, carries its history (Johansson, 2007).

The historical influence is an important concept to consider. Mostly, when many of the places recreated through Placemaking are locations affected by multiple situations, which often reach conditions of degradation and segregation of citizens. These conditions are often caused by past practices of urban expansion in a dispersed manner, contributing to social divides (Madanipour, 2019). Therefore, in such cases, placemaking aims to transform areas on the verge of civility, focusing on revitalization and regeneration.

It is now clear how urban and social development is directly linked to economic gain for public and private entities. This leads to the most profitable way of proposing a public space being one that is based on consumerism, offering public services such as shops, restaurants, and venues where citizens spend their time and money during leisure. The consumption of goods and services is proportional to the city's welfare (Madanipour, 2019). At least, apparently. The rise of privatized public spaces, facilitated by neoliberal policies, often leads to exclusive urban environments, reinforcing socio-economic divisions and reducing opportunities for inclusive urban experiences (Toolis, 2017). This discussion makes us aware that in most public urban spaces, it is difficult to engage in inclusive environments without being attracted by the need to consume something. Thus, creating differentiation between those who can afford certain expenditures and those who cannot. This creates an economic gap. In the same way, the structure of such spaces does not facilitate casual encounters, or the sharing of leisure time dedicated to simple idea exchange, freedom of movement, and enjoying time in public green spaces carefree. As Madanipour (2019) states, "*While the rhetoric of public space often describes it as a space for interaction, in practice, it can be developed and used as a space of attraction, with inevitable implications for urban society*" (p.39). The meaning of 'interaction' is often confused with 'attraction'. Therefore, placemaking serves as a counter-narrative, reclaiming public spaces through community-led interventions aimed at fostering inclusivity, interaction, and accessibility for all social groups (Keidar et al., 2023). Adopting an agonistic approach to placemaking, as suggested by Mouffe (2013) and Bishop (2012), emphasizes that addressing social conflicts directly is essential for creating truly inclusive public spaces.

Repeating, urban neoliberalism has co-opted placemaking efforts, often transforming participatory projects into vehicles for economic development that prioritize the interests of investors over local needs (Davidson, 2010). Therefore, scholars like Madanipour (2019) argue that contemporary placemaking must critically address issues of spatial justice, ensuring that interventions do not contribute to socio-spatial inequalities but rather empower local communities.

These convergences inevitably affect all areas connected to decision-making faculties that influence the development or transformation of urban spaces, particularly public ones. Following the perspective of Toolis (2017), it becomes clear that placemaking must move beyond mere beautification and address the underlying socio-economic injustices that affect marginalized communities. Making up again, Jane Jacobs' advocacy for walkability and human-scale urban planning is closely tied to the principles of placemaking. Jacobs emphasised the importance of diverse, mixed-use neighbourhoods that are accessible and connected, fostering vibrant street life and community interactions (Perrault et. al., 2020). Themes such for example, indiscriminate inclusion, a sense of community, a place's identity, social participation, safety, harmony between the urban and natural environment, pollution, ease of connection, and the elimination of the car. As the 'Project for Public Space' believes, placemaking belongs to anyone genuinely interested in creating great places and who understands how a strong sense of place can influence the physical, social, emotional, and ecological health of individuals and communities everywhere ('What Is Placemaking?' -<https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>, 2007).

This open-mindedness and trust in collaboration, including the next person, is the strength of the mission itself in providing the opportunity for urban and social improvement. However, at times, this power can turn into a double-edged sword, creating places inappropriate to the context with the possibility of negative influences on citizens, such as the creation of exclusive spaces. Based on the latest thinking

stated by Keidar et al. (2023). It could be defined as a risk in placemaking, the fact of creating new places that go on to define new meeting spaces based, for example, on traditions and religions, rather than creating places equally open to all. Erfani (2022) underscores the importance of the “sense of place” as an evolving relationship between individuals and the environment, mediated by memory, daily interactions, and spatial appropriation.

Placemaking in such contexts must go beyond aesthetic renewal to ensure long-term social equity. It is critical to distinguish between participatory placemaking that actively redistributes power and that which primarily serves as a symbolic or visual marker of diversity (Madanipour, 2019). Following the importance of public space that Erin Tolia gives with the citation: A space can be defined as public if: *‘owned by the government, accessible to all without restrictions, and/or fosters communication and interaction’* (Kohn, 2004 -p.10). Places where, according to his theory of ‘Critical Placemaking’, as a counter-narrative resisting the growing privatization of public spaces, supporting an inclusive and democratic urban transformation, the relationship between person and place is discussed, as a platform for dialogue and as a platform for awareness and empowerment. A form of deliberation, specifically, the involvement in discussions and exchange of opinions during which individuals justify their opinions and show the willingness to change their preferences (Michels & De Graaf, 2010).

A crucial aspect of placemaking is its role in fostering urban multiculturalism, transforming public spaces into cross-cultural meeting places. Ash Amin (2002) and Leonie Sandercock (2003) argue that cities should be designed as “spaces of cultural negotiation”, where diversity is not only visually represented but actively embedded in daily interactions. However, Sharon Zukin (1995) critiques what she calls the “Disneyfication of diversity”, a phenomenon in which multicultural aesthetics are commodified for economic or marketing purposes rather than fostering genuine social inclusion.

This tension between aesthetic representation and social integration is evident in many contemporary urban projects, where the presence of cultural symbols does not necessarily equate to real community participation in shaping public space. According to Greg Richards (2017), for placemaking to be truly effective, it must incorporate local narratives and the identities of residents, avoiding urban branding strategies that reinforce gentrification rather than inclusion.

3.2. Public Art in the Urban Environment practices

Considering the use of art in the creation of public spaces within the discipline of urban planning, as noted by Eliot Chinedu in *The Influence of Public Art on Urban Revitalization* (2024), the goal is expressed through the transformation of urban spaces, both aesthetically and culturally, stimulating economic activity. This is a common objective across various urban realities around the world, ranging from poorer to wealthier areas.

Public art has long played a pivotal role in urban revitalization. Not only as an aesthetic intervention but also as a mechanism for community engagement, social empowerment, and placemaking (Cheung et al., 2021). Integrating public art within placemaking strategies fosters a stronger sense of place by visually embedding community identity into the built environment (Zebracki & Palmer, 2019). Artistic interventions have been widely employed in disadvantaged urban areas to strengthen social cohesion, promote cultural expression, and stimulate economic revitalization (Chinedu, 2024).

Moreover, these interventions represent cultural, innovative, communicative, and economic growth. However, while many case studies demonstrate such growth, especially when flagship architecture or star museums are involved, the debate continues whether these outcomes are universally positive. Some scholars argue that branding and the symbolic value of public art may sometimes favour market-driven narratives over genuine community benefits (Richards, 2017; Toolis, 2017). The Heidelberg Project in Detroit and the Superlambanana sculptures in Liverpool exemplify how public art can drive economic revitalization, while also altering the social fabric of neighborhoods (Garcia, 2017). However, Kortbek (2019) critiques the top-down approach in some public art initiatives, arguing that the lack of authentic community involvement can result in artworks that appear imposed rather than organically

integrated. This tension is evident in discussions that contrast local narratives and the creation of authentic cultural hubs with large-scale urban renewal projects that, despite enhancing aesthetics and attracting tourism, may lead to gentrification and socio-spatial exclusion (Madanipour, 2019). Examples of placemaking that include public art span various countries. Brazil's "Favela Painting" project, initiated by Haas & Hahn, transformed entire neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro into large-scale artworks, promoting a new sense of pride and identity among residents while simultaneously attracting international attention and tourism (Zebracki & Palmer, 2019). The Vanak Square in Tehran, Iran, has become an example of how mural painting and sculpture can redefine neglected urban spaces into cultural landmarks. In Johannesburg, South Africa, the city's artistic initiatives, including repurposed theatres, cinemas, and cultural centers, have played a crucial role in urban regeneration (Madanipour, 2019). Similar efforts have been seen in Liverpool, United Kingdom, where public art initiatives have complemented cultural investments to boost economic activity (Richards, 2017).

Beyond these well-documented cases, other cities worldwide have experimented with public art as a tool for social inclusion and economic revitalization. In Copenhagen, Denmark, placemaking projects have been employed to make public spaces more inclusive and participatory (Keidar et al., 2023). However, studies have highlighted contradictions in the governance of such initiatives: while participatory placemaking is theoretically designed to empower communities, in practice, projects are often led by municipalities or private stakeholders, limiting true citizen influence (Kortbek, 2019). This instrumentalization of public art often generates conflicts between a city's economic aspirations and the actual needs of local communities. According to David Harvey (1989), urban regeneration projects based on art risk favoring capital accumulation rather than the equitable redistribution of urban resources, turning cities into consumable products rather than democratic spaces for interaction. New York City's High Line integrates artistic installations within a reclaimed railway infrastructure, demonstrating how contemporary public art can function as both a cultural experience and a catalyst for urban redevelopment (Cheung et al., 2021). Despite its global recognition as a successful urban renewal project, critics argue that the High Line has contributed to significant gentrification, increasing property values while displacing long-term residents and small businesses (Davidson, 2010). This raises one question about who truly benefits from public art and placemaking interventions.

For instance, studies have documented how artistic interventions in neglected areas can revitalize local economies and foster social inclusion, while at the same time raising concerns about displacement. Comparative analyses reveal that while some initiatives successfully create vibrant public spaces, others are critiqued for merely serving as vehicles for urban branding that ultimately attract higher-income groups (Cheung et al., 2021; Davidson, 2010). These debates underscore the need for critical frameworks that balance aesthetic and economic goals with the imperative of social justice, ensuring that the transformation is not only immediate but also long-lasting. Many urban art projects begin with strong momentum but face difficulties in maintenance and community ownership over time (Cheung et al., 2021).

In Italy, notable projects exemplify the transformative impact of public art on urban environments. The Museo d'Arte Urbana (MAU) in Turin, established in 1995, is a permanent outdoor contemporary art museum that originated as a grassroots initiative. Its location is in Borgo Campidoglio district, a late 19th-century working-class neighborhood, MAU integrates public art into everyday life by fostering a direct engagement between artists and residents. Since its inception, the museum has grown to include over 170 murals and installations by more than 100 artists, many of which are displayed on privately owned buildings, highlighting an innovative model of urban cultural participation, as documented in the MAU Annual Activity Report (2021). This community-driven approach aligns with the broader literature on participatory urban art, particularly the research by Novello, Bocconcino, and Mazzone (2020), which emphasizes the role of local stakeholders in shaping cultural landscapes through mural interventions in Turin.

Another significant project in Turin is Parco Dora, a vast inner-city park developed on a former industrial site. Since its inauguration in 2011, Parco Dora has become a dynamic space where industrial heritage coexists with contemporary artistic expressions. The park's Area Vitali serves as a major hub for urban art, particularly graffiti and street art, transforming the once-derelict area into Turin's largest 'Hall of Fame' for graffiti artists (Novello et al., 2020). This fusion of industrial remnants with creative inter-

ventions illustrates the potential of artistic practices to mediate between past and present, preserving historical narratives while fostering new cultural identities. According to Bolzoni and Semi (2022), Parco Dora represents a prime case of adaptive urbanism, where former industrial spaces are repurposed into public art and green infrastructure as part of a broader post-industrial urban strategy. However, their longitudinal study also highlights the gentrification dynamics that have accompanied this transformation, showing how rising property values and changing demographics have influenced the area's social fabric. Furthermore, research by Bottero et al. (2023) underscores the economic value of urban parks in Turin, noting that proximity to green spaces like Parco Dora significantly enhances property values and urban desirability.

In Rome, the MAXXI (National Museum of 21st Century Arts) stands as a testament to the integration of contemporary art within urban spaces. Designed by architect Zaha Hadid and inaugurated in 2010, MAXXI is more than a traditional museum; its unconventional architecture and surrounding public spaces function as open platforms for artistic expression, enabling a dynamic interaction between art, architecture, and the public realm. Cocco (2020) specifically examines how MAXXI's outdoor spaces have evolved into informal gathering areas, reinforcing the role of cultural institutions in shaping urban public life. Moreover, Nart (2022) explores the architectural impact of MAXXI, arguing that its design contributes to a new form of 'monumental urbanity' where cultural institutions become key players in urban regeneration efforts. Both Cocco (2020) and Nart (2022) point out that MAXXI's success also raises questions about the role of cultural institutions in urban restructuring. It is not clear there if contemporary public art is integrated into everyday urban life or if it serves primarily as a branding mechanism to attract cultural tourism.

These projects illustrate how public art can redefine urban landscapes by fostering community engagement and cultural identity. By transforming neglected or underutilized spaces into vibrant cultural hubs, such initiatives demonstrate the potential of art to drive social and economic revitalization in diverse urban contexts. The interdisciplinary nature of urban art interventions spanning architecture, cultural policy, and community development emphasizes their role in producing inclusive and adaptable urban environments. Versaci and Cardaci (2017) particularly stress the significance of such initiatives in urban resilience and participatory placemaking, showcasing how sites like MAU, Parco Dora, and MAXXI exemplify the evolving relationship between public art, spatial reappropriation, and civic engagement in contemporary Italy.

This example underlines the inherent risk in poorly designed or inadequately supported interventions, emphasizing that for placemaking to achieve its full potential, it must integrate robust community input and consider the long-term maintenance and evolution of public art. Additionally, case studies show that projects with strong community participation, such as the mural-based initiatives in Latin America, tend to have more sustainable impacts than those imposed by top-down urban policies (Keidar et al., 2023).

However, such transformations are contingent on multiple factors, including effective community participation, appropriate funding, and supportive urban policies, as illustrated by various case studies from North America, Europe, and beyond. The evidence suggests that while public art can stimulate local economies and social cohesion, it can also contribute to displacement if not managed carefully (Davidson, 2010; Freeman, 2008).

It is evident here that there is a shared goal of improving the urban environment, regardless of the context, through the practice of placemaking by creating public art. This practice is best defined by the term "Creative Placemaking":

"The intentional integration of arts, culture, and community engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development. It's about artists, culture-bearers, and designers acting as allies to creatively address challenges and opportunities. It's about these artists and all of the allies together contributing to community-defined social, physical, and economic outcomes and honoring a sense of place." ("What Is Creative Placemaking?" Creative Placemaking Research. 2020. Accessed December 2024 - <https://creativeplacemakingresearch.org/about/>)

This definition represents the real effectiveness of involving art in urban contexts. Following a challenge

for change, the effects propose opportunities focused on well-being and socio-economic growth. As highlighted in previous research, economics is a central factor in urban growth, influencing city policies and decisions on which initiatives to fund. Several scholars have explored this dynamic: Freeman (2008) and Madanipour (2019) emphasize how public policies integrate art as a strategy to attract investments and enhance urban competitiveness; Cheung et al. (2021) and Zebracki & Palmer (2019) demonstrate how public art fosters urban welfare through economic and cultural revitalization, while Richards (2017) and Toolis (2017) question whether its economic benefits outweigh potential issues like social displacement and urban commodification. The economic impact of public art is multifaceted and has been examined through different perspectives. From an urban branding perspective, public art is often used as a tool for city marketing, positioning urban areas as cultural destinations to attract investment and tourism (Richards, 2017; Madanipour, 2019). However, this approach raises concerns about gentrification and spatial inequality, as artistic interventions sometimes serve economic elites rather than local communities (Keidar et al., 2023; Toolis, 2017). On the other hand, studies focusing on participatory urban development highlight that economic growth through public art is most sustainable when projects are co-designed with local stakeholders, ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed (Cheung et al., 2021; Zebracki & Palmer, 2019). These different perspectives suggest that while public art has the potential to generate economic value, its implementation must be critically assessed to prevent it from becoming an exclusionary force.

Empirical studies have shown that successful public art interventions can increase local business activity and tourism; for example, the transformation of abandoned urban spaces into cultural hubs has been linked to measurable increases in visitor numbers and investment (Cheung et al., 2021; Komarek-Meyer, 2019). However, the dual-edged nature of these outcomes means that planners must remain vigilant about potential negative externalities, such as gentrification and cultural homogenization (Madanipour, 2019).

Denmark, with Copenhagen as a leading remarkable example, is one of the countries that strongly sponsors placemaking through various projects (Keidar et al., 2023, p. 146), which are often cited in studies due to their activity in this regard, as well as for experimental purposes. One such example is a study by Kortbek (2019), also reported by Cheung et al. (2021), which reveals some inconsistencies in the influence and perception of art by, and for, citizens. It highlights a misunderstanding of the artistic element to the extent that the space loses any identity and is damaged through acts of vandalism. This example does not deny the risk of poorly developed projects, making us aware of the importance of considering the possible risks associated with the profession, as they impact crucial aspects of individual and collective urban life. The role of public art in urban environments is contested. While supporters argue that it democratizes space and encourages civic participation, critics warn against its exploitation for economic gain. The commodification of public art through cultural branding and gentrification strategies transforms creative expressions into marketable commodities, often obscuring their original community-driven purposes (Madanipour, 2019).

Both Chinedu (2024) and Cheung et al. (2021), in their studies, highlight, without delving deeply, the expressive and motivational differences of a particular artistic work and, consequently, the different ways in which public art occupies a place and influences the population. The former considers the difference between temporary and permanent art and whether it is connected to the site (site-specific) and its history, or whether it is less connected or not at all. An essential aspect of placemaking is its ability to balance temporary and permanent interventions to activate public spaces effectively. Temporary interventions serve as a flexible tool to experiment, test ideas, and build community engagement before committing to permanent developments.

Chinedu (2024) emphasizes that public art, whether temporary or permanent, plays a significant role in urban revitalization by creating landmarks that reflect community values and histories. He highlights examples where permanent public art installations, such as iconic sculptures and large-scale murals, have reinforced cultural identity and fostered long-term economic benefits through increased tourism and local business development. However, he also notes that the social equity impact of public art depends on participatory approaches, ensuring inclusivity and community engagement in the creative process.

On the other hand, Cheung et al. (2021) explore the role of public art in placemaking by categorizing its effects into various dimensions, including its influence on social cohesion, economic sustainability, and cultural identity. Their research underscores how temporary interventions, such as street art festivals and interactive installations, serve as catalysts for urban transformation by inviting public participation and enabling a dynamic relationship between the artwork and the community. These temporary projects provide a testing ground for longer-term developments, allowing cities to assess their impact before making permanent commitments.

Both studies underscore the necessity of a balanced approach to integrating temporary and permanent public art in urban planning. While temporary interventions encourage experimentation and foster immediate engagement, permanent artworks contribute to the long-term cultural and economic sustainability of a place. As already said previously, an essential aspect of placemaking is its ability to balance temporary and permanent interventions to activate public spaces effectively. Temporary interventions serve as a flexible tool to experiment, test ideas, and build community engagement before committing to permanent developments (Perrault et. al., 2020). This approach fits perfectly with artistic works, and it not only addresses immediate urban challenges but also helps sustain long-term transformations by continuously adapting to the evolving needs of communities (Perrault et. al., 2020). The case of Jubilee Park in Gothenburg illustrates how temporary uses were strategically employed to build a sense of place and pave the way for permanent developments (Perrault et. al., 2020). Similarly, Lilla Torg in Malmö demonstrates how recurring temporary markets help maintain public interest and activity, showing that temporality can be an inherent quality of successful placemaking (Perrault et. al., 2020). Chinedu (2024) and Cheung et al. (2021) advocate for policy frameworks that recognize the evolving role of public art in contemporary cities, ensuring that artistic interventions contribute meaningfully to urban regeneration and social inclusivity.

The latter suggests that, regardless of the type of art involved, its influence depends on its size and visibility in the location where it resides. Since art is interpretative and shaped by both individual and collective perception, it requires ongoing social participation, as well as the importance of maintenance and continuity. These are key elements for the success of an artistic project, especially when it comes to the creation of public spaces. Public art opens the mind to those who allow themselves to be involved, offering many insights, ideas, and fostering conscious and unconscious visions and creativity. It offers the opportunity to learn about and understand many modes of expression that each of us interprets differently due to the infinite expressions of art itself. This, in turn, fuels new ideas and innovation, which is essential for contemporary urban development (Cheung et al., 2021).

Knowing that placemaking, and thus Creative Placemaking, are often used for the revitalization of public places, Eliot Chinedu (2024) reiterates this, presenting Richard Florida's (2002) theory of the creative class: "Cities with a high concentration of creative professionals are more likely to experience economic growth and innovation." This is confirmed by Madanipour (2019), who states that public spaces often play a mediating and facilitating role in economic transformations, creating attractions and interactions that stimulate innovation, investment, and consumption. Public art plays a predominant role in this mission (Cheung et al., 2021).

Regarding the impact of public art on the urban environment, this can occur because of the transformation or creation of new public spaces that meet current daily needs throughout placemaking. Public art plays a transformative role in shaping urban environments by influencing spatial perception, social inclusivity, and participatory engagement. Research highlights that public art interventions contribute to placemaking by embedding cultural and social significance within urban spaces, thereby enhancing their livability and accessibility (Cheung et al., 2021). Through visual and interactive elements, public art fosters community identity, transforming otherwise neutral or neglected areas into meaningful and dynamic public spaces (Karimimoshaver et al., 2021).

A key aspect of public art's impact on urban environments is its ability to facilitate social participation and engagement. Chinedu (2024) emphasizes that public art fosters inclusivity by creating shared cultural experiences that connect diverse populations, reinforcing a sense of belonging and collective identity. The more a community participates in the art-making process, *"the more likely they will find the final product not only aesthetically pleasing but also meaningful and worthy of city funding."* (Cheung et

al., 2021-p.8).

However, as Kortbek (2019) critiques, some public art projects, particularly those driven by top-down approaches, may fail to engage local communities effectively, leading to disconnection rather than inclusivity. Similarly, Bishop's critique of participatory art for its risk of ignoring inherent conflicts in the creation of public spaces is further elaborated by Kortbek (2019), who emphasizes the need to directly confront power relations and hegemonic dynamics. This highlights the necessity for participatory strategies that ensure public art remains an instrument of community-driven placemaking. Exploring contradictions in participatory public art, Kortbek (2019) illustrates how artistic interventions often serve as tools for urban renewal without fully engaging local communities. Because public art, when embedded in placemaking, has the potential to reshape urban landscapes into sites of memory, interaction, and cultural negotiation (Cheung et al., 2021), public art functions as an instrument of spatial justice rather than merely an economic asset. It must be critically examined through the lens of participation, equity, and long-term community impact (Feitosa et al., 2024).

It is important to emphasize how a spatial model can individually and collectively influence a human being on a psychological level in terms of awareness, knowledge, and sense of belonging. The cultural context, the public, both individually and collectively, the artist, and the authorities influence the transfer of meaning through urban art (Karimimoshaver et al., 2021). This raises a crucial intersection with social sustainability, explored in the next section (3.3). While public art interventions may stimulate local economies and reinforce cultural heritage, they must also align with principles of equity and inclusivity. Otherwise, they risk becoming tools of urban speculation rather than authentic forms of community engagement (Madanipour, 2019; Keidar et al., 2023).

3.3. Social Sustainability and Participation

The previous chapter analyzed the role of public art as an economic engine and tool for urban transformation; it is equally essential to examine how these interventions influence social cohesion, the sense of belonging, and citizen participation. Social sustainability is, therefore, a crucial element to ensure that placemaking practices do not become mere tools for gentrification, but rather opportunities to build fairer and more inclusive cities.

Social sustainability, a cornerstone of urban resilience, is deeply intertwined with placemaking and public art. Today, sustainability is the principle upon which the United Nations bases its development and evolution. The 2030 Agenda was created with this in mind, defining "Sustainable Development" as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (ASVIS). This definition includes a series of fundamental points to follow in order to strive for greater equity based on inter- and intra-generational equity principles, allowing for a definition of sustainability that involves not only the environment, but also the economy and the social dimension (Our Common Future, 1987). The social dimension referred to takes into consideration the points on which the 2030 Agenda is based:

- **People** - Eradicate hunger and poverty in all their forms, ensure dignity and equality.
- **Prosperity** - Ensure prosperous and fulfilling lives in harmony with nature.
- **Peace** - Promote peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.
- **Partnership** - Implement the agenda through strong partnerships.
- **Planet** - Protect the planet's natural resources and climate for future generations.

(The five "P"s of sustainable development, ASVIS, Accessed December, 2024 - <https://asvis.it/l-agenda-2030-dell-ONU-per-lo-sviluppo-sostenibile/>)

The influence of social well-being on sustainable growth is, therefore, clear. Delving into this concept within the context of placemaking and urban development, social sustainability is the term often used to define the actual value of social engagement in an ongoing development process. Social sustainability represents a crucial aspect of urban development, as it directly affects the quality of life, collective well-being, and the creation of equitable and inclusive spaces. However, urban neoliberalism often

undermines these goals by prioritizing profit-driven development over social equity (Madanipour, 2019).

In line with this, participatory models of urban governance highlight that citizen involvement in decision-making can enhance the legitimacy of policies and lead to more resilient and cohesive communities (Michels & De Graaf, 2010).

There are many definitions of a sustainable society that have emerged over the years. Here is one I consider comprehensive because it emphasizes the importance of spatial justice, cultural inclusivity, and collective well-being:

“Development (and/or growth) that is compatible with the harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population” (Stren & Polese, 2000- p.16-17).

Feitosa et al. (2024) argue that spatial justice should guide urban planning practices, ensuring that public spaces remain places of empowerment rather than exclusion.

Social involvement in urban development processes is essential for ensuring fair and just planning. According to Feitosa, Wolf, and Marques, spatial justice is a key concept that can be analyzed through various philosophical perspectives, including Rawls' egalitarian liberalism and Sen's capability theory. These approaches emphasize the importance of an equitable distribution of urban resources to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens, especially the most vulnerable groups. Social participation in urban decision-making fosters deliberative democracy and helps build more resilient and cohesive communities (Feitosa et al., 2024)

In achieving a sustainable situation, it is important to consider elements influencing a particular coexistence situation. As expressed in the definition of social sustainability, quality of life increases with the increase in social integration within a cohabitation environment. Elements such as the distribution of resources, equity through equality, justice, and democratic actions in development choices are crucial. Regarding this, Michels and De Graaf (2010), in their study, quote the words of Gemeente Groningen Municipality approach to neighborhood governance (2008): *“Citizens and professionals have the knowledge, experience, and skills to manage problems and improve the quality of life and safety in their specific neighborhood”* (p.484). This highlights the belief that both citizens and professionals possess the necessary expertise to address local issues and enhance community well-being. As Fields (2015) highlights, the financialization of urban space exacerbates housing precariousness and spatial segregation, turning urban landscapes into speculative assets at the expense of community well-being.

Following Markusen & Gadwa Nicodemus (2014) concept of Creative Placemaking, animates public and private space, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate inspire and inspire, we see how public art can not only enhance urban aesthetics, but also serve as a catalyst for civic engagement. However, as Madanipour (2019) and Davidson (2010) point out, when these interventions become tools for urban branding, the risk is that social sustainability is sacrificed in favour of economic interests.

Moreover, as expressed by Erfani (2022), the sense of place and attachment to it are determining factors for individual and collective well-being. A strong sense of place arises from human experiences, emotions, and behaviours of the inhabitants, who both shape and are shaped by the urban environment. Concerning the impact of public art, it promotes the valorisation of cultural heritage, instilling a sense of belonging and ownership between people and communities while also acknowledging the past (Cheung et al., 2021). When urban spaces are designed to strengthen these bonds, greater identification with the territory is created, fostering active citizenship and sustainable management of local resources. This aspect is crucial to avoid social fragmentation and promote participatory governance practices, where citizens play an active role in planning their environment. Karimimoshaver et al. (2021) emphasize that the sustainability of interventions in public spaces depends on ongoing community involvement and the adaptability of governance structures.

Social sustainability is also intertwined with the ecological and environmental importance of urban struc-

ture. Just think about the positive contribution nature and green spaces bring to the daily life of every individual, such as improving air quality. The provision of public spaces is one of the key ingredients of a high-quality environment, and the importance of parks and boulevards has been recognized for centuries (Madanipour, 2019). But also, through the relationship with living plant elements, which grow and transform, thereby transforming the place where they are located. This transformation also happens in terms of space and, consequently, the experiences and feelings it conveys. Erfani (2022) refers to this aspect of natural transformation and its influence on the place, citing examples of natural disasters and how they influence collective and individual perceptions of such phenomena. It is also true that a sustainable urban environment must be designed not only to ensure social equity but also to respond to climate and environmental challenges. Urban planning must consider elements such as public green spaces, sustainable mobility, and energy efficiency, all factors that directly affect the quality of life and collective well-being. In this sense, social sustainability cannot be separated from environmental sustainability, as both contribute to determining the resilience and livability of cities. Cheung et al. (2021) cite Collins (2020), referring to sustainability as the ability to maintain an environment “*at a steady level without exhausting natural resources or causing severe ecological damage*” (p.8)

Social sustainability in the urban context is closely related not only to citizen participation, sense of belonging, and the quality of the built environment, but also to the human perception of it. An integrated approach that considers emotions, behaviours, and human experience in urban spaces can foster sustainable and inclusive growth, ensuring equity and social justice. Referring to the field of public art, for instance, contributes to the creation of a sense of place, which is influenced by how an individual interacts with the space and the art in the space, as well as the type of visual and subjective quality this interaction has. This aspect depends on the individual experience of someone who inhabits a place and how these perceptions are then collectively shared through social participation in the creation of the place itself (Karimimoshaver et al., 2021). With the same approach, one must consider the structure of the place, which influences psychological reactions such as perceptions and experiences that differ from person to person. Erfani (2021) refers to the theories of Kyle et al. (2004), who believe that in the context of regeneration interventions, the impacts on place satisfaction and place identity are “opposed,” while Tuan (1977) highlights the role of “chosen places” in the meaning of place attachment, specifying that choosing attractive landscapes or deep experiences in a place can quickly establish attachment to that place.

Michels and De Graaf (2010), in their study “Examining Citizen Participation: Local Participatory Policy Making and Democracy,” establish a clear connection between citizen participation and political decision-making, contributing to a democratic context, highlighting that community involvement enhances policy legitimacy, fostering resilient and cohesive societies. They define three main functions of participation in democracy: the educational function, which increases civic capacity, making citizens more competent and influential in the public decision-making process; the integrative function, which refers to the public’s sense of belonging to a community; and the legitimizing function, where participation contributes to the production of rules accepted by all.

Cheung et al. (2021) argue that it is essential to mention that public art can also humanize cities and places. It can promote people’s happiness and improve their mental and physical health through community building and social connectivity. Public art can contribute to transforming city spaces and developing a sustainable lifestyle among its inhabitants, ultimately improving livability and quality of life (Chinedu, 2024). The statements provided clearly show the links between creativity, expression, perceptions, and a sense of belonging to a place. As noted in the previous paragraph, it is nearly impossible to think that public art does not influence a place and, in turn, the lives of people living in that place in a broad sense, affecting local socio-economic well-being both individually and collectively. For these reasons, public art can be used as a planning tool to improve the city.

Improving the urban environment includes good connections with public transport, walking, and cycling, proximity to essential services, and adequate spaces for collective use, all points that directly enhance sustainability. A good transport network is now essential for achieving a good quality of life, as seen in the “15-minute city” projects mentioned by Keidar et al. in “Progress in Placemaking” (2023). Therefore, it is necessary to keep a city’s connection networks updated in order to ensure an urban structure that offers common social well-being. As Madanipour (2019) expresses, transportation technologies, like

communication technologies, have transformed the spatial and social organization of cities, and this, alongside the progress of the economic structure, has altered how people live, making us all more aware of environmental degradation, the necessities for living a quality life, and living collectively. This is a thought shared by Karimimoshaver et al. (2021), who, in their article “Art in Urban Spaces,” define “the sense of an urban space” as inevitably influenced by time and people, emphasizing the crucial role of community context.

Finally, it is important to remember that “sustainability” relates to different realities and situations that vary over time, as do people and their perceptions. Therefore, I quote Davidson (2010), who clearly articulates how development and sustainability must involve the ability to change: *“We must consider sustainability’s everyday usage not simply in terms of maintenance or status quo, but rather in a more nebulous normative sense. Sustainability, in its everyday meaning, signifies a sense of change”* (p. 872). This definition is directly connected to what Avci Türkoğlu (2023) believes: *“The genius loci of a place is not a fixed or static entity, but something that is in continuous evolution and changes over time, as the place acquires new meanings, both individually and collectively”* (p. 30-31).

Building on the theoretical discussion of placemaking, public art, and social sustainability, it becomes essential to explore how these concepts manifest in a real-world urban context. The theories examined in the previous chapters, ranging from the role of public spaces in fostering social interactions to the risks of neoliberal urbanism and gentrification, highlight both the potential and the challenges of contemporary urban design interventions. These dynamics are particularly evident in the Superkilen project, which serves as a practical case study to analyze how placemaking can influence multicultural representation, social cohesion, and urban transition.

3.4. The Themes Interconnection

This section delves deeper into the theoretical underpinnings of the research to better understand the dynamics emerging from the analysis of placemaking and its implications in the context of city revitalization. The following table synthesizes four central themes: public art, social sustainability, public participation, and neoliberal urbanism, highlighting their key principles, positive effects, and potential risks.

Theme	Placemaking rule	Positive effects	Criticality
Public Art	Identity and social cohesion tool	Strengthens the sense of belonging and urban vitality	Risk of commodification of cultural identity
Social Sustainability	Creation of equitable and accessible spaces	Greater inclusion, spatial justice. Community expression	Possible exclusion if the project is not truly participatory
Neoliberal urbanism	Influences the development of public spaces	Attracts investment and tourism	Gentrification and increase in the cost of living
Public Participation	Empowerment and co-creation in placemaking processes	Strengthens democratic practices, fosters a sense of ownership and legitimacy	Risk of tokenism and superficial engagement if not genuinely inclusive

Table 1 – Author’s thematic reorganisation. Strategic reflections on key thematics for future placemaking practices. The table is structured after the theoretical analysis.

This Table provides a synthetic framework of four key themes emerging from the theoretical discussion on placemaking, public art, social sustainability, public participation, and neoliberal urbanism, highlighting their guiding principles, positive implications, and criticalities, as addressed in the literature and discussed throughout chapter three.

Public Art, as outlined by Markusen and Gadwa Nicodemus (2014), plays a vital role in activating both public and private spaces, strengthening social cohesion and a sense of belonging through collective expression. Its impact goes beyond aesthetics, contributing to civic engagement and the revitalization of urban life. However, as Madanipour (2019) and Davidson (2010) warn, when public art is instrumentalized for urban branding, it risks commodifying cultural identity, reducing community narratives to tools of marketing and economic appeal.

Social Sustainability is presented as a foundational element of resilient urban development. The UN's 2030 Agenda (ASVIS; Our Common Future, 1987) underscores the need for inclusive growth grounded in intergenerational equity and social justice. As emphasized by Feitosa et al. (2024), spatial justice must guide urban planning to ensure accessibility and equal opportunities for all. Yet, as Michels and De Graaf (2010) argue, these goals can only be achieved through genuine citizen participation; otherwise, there's a risk of tokenism or exclusion, especially for marginalized communities.

Neoliberal Urbanism, while capable of generating investment and tourism (Madanipour, 2019), often prioritizes economic growth over social equity. Fields (2015) and Davidson (2010) critique the financialization of urban space, which leads to housing precarity and spatial segregation. The associated risks of gentrification and increased living costs demonstrate how neoliberal approaches can undermine social cohesion and displacement, especially if development lacks participatory governance and sensitivity to local needs.

Integrating **Public Participation** as a central pillar of placemaking practices allows for the enhancement of local social capital and the strengthening of urban resilience. As highlighted by Michels & De Graaf (2010), inclusive decision-making processes increase the legitimacy of urban policies and citizens' civic capacity. However, Feitosa et al. (2024) warn that without real power-sharing, participation risks becoming a mere symbolic gesture, fostering mistrust and social fragmentation. Therefore, ensuring the authenticity of participation is essential to promote sustainable, equitable, and inclusive urban growth.

This comparative table thus reflects the dual nature of placemaking: while it holds transformative potential for more inclusive and vibrant cities, it can also perpetuate inequalities if not critically managed. As emphasized throughout the chapter, integrating public art and participatory practices within a socially sustainable framework is essential to ensure that placemaking remains a tool for equity rather than exclusion.



4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research questions are explained to better frame the reason for the research through the fundamental points that lend to the overall thesis process. This section aims to clarify the methodology and the research to answer the defined questions.

The research method is represented by the 'case study' method, an in-depth investigation approach on a single case, the Superkilen project, with the aim of obtaining a detailed and contextualised understanding of the influence of public art in the studied area. Considering the real context of the project and multiple data sources, it is based on a qualitative research method and is flexible in its typology.

4.1. Research Questions and Methodological Framing

Here, the research questions are explained in order to better understand the rationale of the study and its underlying motivations. These questions are not only functional to guide the methodological process, but also reflect the conceptual backbone of the research. Specifically, they are structured to investigate three progressive layers of inquiry, each contributing to a holistic understanding of Superkilen and its broader implications.

The first two research questions focus directly on Superkilen as a paradigmatic case study, aiming to understand the dynamics of participatory design, public art, and socio-cultural interaction within an urban regeneration context. These questions reflect a specific interest in analyzing the project's construction phase and its realized impact on public space availability and social cohesion. By doing so, the research situates Superkilen within a broader discourse on the role of inclusive design in multicultural neighborhoods, investigating how aesthetic interventions can become tools for collective identity-building and spatial justice.

The third question, instead, broadens the analytical scope by introducing a comparative dimension. It explores how the case of Superkilen aligns or contrasts with other artistic and urban practices, particularly those developed by the SIMKA artist collective. This comparison is motivated by the need to reflect critically on the project's strengths and limitations through the lens of three core criteria:

1. Cultural representation: making sure different cultural identities are visibly and meaningfully included in the public space,
2. Social cohesion: Social cohesion: creating a space that brings people together and builds a sense of community and belonging,
3. Artistic expression: allowing space for creativity, public art, and local artistic input.

Following the reading of chapter 2, which shows and explains some of SIMKA's works, these three components are often unbalanced in various SIMKA's projects because of their different action contexts. Components that are always present but in different percentages.

These components are proposed here as pillars that, when more equally integrated, could enhance the effectiveness of participatory and public art initiatives. The versatility of SIMKA's multidisciplinary approach, adapting its methods and aesthetics according to different socio-spatial conditions, provides a valuable counterpoint to Superkilen and inspires reflections on how future urban interventions might better calibrate the interplay of symbolic, functional, and aesthetic objectives.

To simplify, using the SIMKA approach as a strategy or method for placemaking, referring to the third question, I would like to understand how it can be designed or carried out, placemaking projects in a way that successfully balances Cultural representation, Social cohesion, and Artistic expression.

So, in essence the question can be translated in "How can placemaking projects, guided by SIMKA, be designed so that they don't overemphasize one of these things at the cost of the others (e.g., full of cultural symbols but no community-building, or art that excludes certain groups), but instead balance all three elements effectively?"

While the first two questions can be addressed through a more direct and structured analysis, the third one calls for a more discursive and open-ended approach, as it involves conceptual issues that are less easily resolved through clear-cut evidence and more subject to interpretation.

By embedding these questions in a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology, the research aims not only to dissect Superkilen's design strategies and community outcomes but also to question how cultural pluralism and artistic practices can be more equitably represented in urban space. The following sections detail the adopted case study methodology and the research tools that support this investigation.

This is followed by a deeper explanation of the "case study" approach and the methodological research steps.

4.2. The Case Study Method

A case study is defined as an in-depth examination of a specific unit of analysis, such as organizations, individuals, or events, to gather qualitative or quantitative data through various methods, including interviews, questionnaires, observations, and document analysis (Yin, 2003). This methodological approach is particularly valuable for investigating complex phenomena within their real-life contexts, where multiple variables interact in dynamic and often unpredictable ways (Stake, 1995).

This research adopts the case study method to conduct an in-depth investigation into the Superkilen project, examining how public art, participatory urbanism, and social sustainability intersect in the transformation of urban space. The project emerged as part of a broader urban regeneration strategy aimed at revitalizing a socially and physically degraded area characterized by ethnic diversity, social tensions, and limited access to inclusive public space (Copenhagen Municipality, 2012; BIG et al., 2012). The site, previously underutilized and marked by signs of neglect, was reimagined through a bold experiment in participatory design and public art (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). More than just a park, Superkilen functions as a symbolic and physical platform for multicultural coexistence, featuring over 100 objects suggested by local residents and representing more than 60 nationalities (BIG et al., 2012). The project is particularly relevant for this study due to its innovative integration of art, identity, and community engagement, making it a paradigmatic case for analyzing the social and spatial implications of inclusive urban design (Sandercock, 2003; Zukin, 1995).

The qualitative research framework employed ensures methodological flexibility and adaptability, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of Superkilen's physical, social, and symbolic dimensions (Johansson, 2007). As Johansson explains, case study research in urban studies facilitates an interdisciplinary approach, combining architectural, sociological, and urban planning perspectives to construct a holistic narrative of the selected case.

To justify the Case Study Approach, Superkilen was selected as a critical and revelatory case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006) due to its unique design intent and participatory framework, which integrates artistic installations within a multicultural urban environment. The project serves as an experimental site for understanding the broader phenomena of placemaking, cultural representation in public spaces, and the social effects of artistic urban interventions.

Following Stake's (1995) Instrumental Case Study model, this research uses Superkilen as an analytical lens to explore larger urban design concepts, including urban regeneration, community participation, and identity formation. Additionally, Yin (2003) classifies case studies into three types: descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. This research integrates both descriptive and explanatory approaches:

- **Descriptive Case Study** - Provides a detailed account of Superkilen's design process, urban function, and public perception.
- **Explanatory Case Study** - Investigates the cause-effect relationships between design interventions, cultural representation, and community dynamics, particularly regarding inclusion, gentrification, and identity politics in urban spaces.

To ensure methodological rigor and mitigate biases, this study employs a triangulated research approach, integrating multiple data sources for data collection:

- Superkilen: Background and Socio-Urban Context
- Document Analysis and Documented Interviews
- Field Observational
- Photographic Analysis

4.3. Tools adopted to collect materials and data

Respectively, here are reported the tools included in the research methodology that were identified as the most suitable for the study of the thesis. The decision was to base itself on the focus of the research, certainly, as fundamental it is to point out the will to rely on the analytical resources available in order to develop a study valid in the academic scientific field through the analysis of reliable data and information. Here, the analysis materials are reported, justifying the choice of their analytical use and therefore the positive contribution in providing data and information of particular interest for a result in terms of methodological research of SUPERKILEN as a case study.

- **Superkilen: Background and Socio-Urban Context**

The contextualization of a case study is a fundamental component of qualitative research methodology, as it establishes the historical, social, and urban framework within which the research subject is analyzed (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). In case study research, a well-defined socio-urban framework ensures that the investigation is not isolated from its real-world conditions, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation of urban transformations, spatial politics, and participatory design (Johansson, 2007).

The useful information for the analysis is taken from different articles, studies, and research specifically about Superkilen, as the study “Superkilen RUC Project, 2012” combined with statistical and governmental documentation, for example, the document “Københavns Kommune, 2020”, concerning the evolution of the context. A context that has been explained with a cone shape, forming a bigger scale of Copenhagen in Denmark, passing to the Nørrebro district in Copenhagen, to the Superkilen contextualization of the area, park, and the project.

Despite its strengths, the case study approach presents inherent limitations. One key issue is the generalizability of findings, as the study focuses on a single case rather than a comparative analysis of multiple urban projects. However, as Yin (2018) argues, case studies do not seek statistical generalization but rather analytic generalization, wherein insights gained from the case can be applied to similar urban contexts.

Another challenge lies in potential observational biases, particularly in fieldwork interpretations. To counteract this, data collection relies on multiple sources to cross-verify findings and enhance validity. Additionally, while the use of indirectly collected interviews compensates for accessibility constraints, it inherently limits direct engagement with stakeholders and community voices. Nonetheless, this is balanced by extensive document analysis and critical reviews of past research on Superkilen's impact.

- **Document Analysis**

Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves the systematic collection, review, and interpretation of written, visual, or electronic records to extract meaningful information and contextual understanding (Bowen, 2009). This analysis is fundamental in urban studies and case study research because it provides a historical context and policy-driven perspective that is often unavailable through direct observations or interviews. Additionally, analyzing these documents allows for an assessment of discrepancies between the stated objectives of urban policies and their actual implementation in public spaces (Bowen, 2009). By integrating document analysis with observational research and interviews based on secondary data, this study ensures that the research methodology is both rigorous and con-

textually grounded. Documents serve as a critical data source, allowing for cross-validation with other qualitative methods, thereby strengthening the credibility and depth of the findings (Bowen, 2009; Stake, 1995).

More specifically, this method is particularly valuable in case study research, where multiple sources of evidence are used to enhance validity and provide a comprehensive understanding of a given phenomenon (Yin, 2018). In this study, the analysis of various urban planning documents, demographic reports, and policy frameworks provides critical insights into the development of Superkilen, its role in the urban transformation of Nørrebro, and its impact on public space, social sustainability, and placemaking.

To gather documents useful for my research, I searched online for references to the project and past urban development actions, as well as statistical data related to the case. This led me to the official website of the “City of Copenhagen.” I then contacted the “Urban Department of the Technical and Environmental Administration of the City of Copenhagen” and the Team Leader of the “Copenhagen Solutions Lab”, which supports the city’s development through testing and implementing smart, data-driven solutions that meet the needs of the city and its residents. By emailing these two figures, Anna Ingemann Jensen and Christian Gaarde Nielsen, I received help and support in finding documents useful for my study.

The documentation was found in an online data system, “*Københavns Kommuneplan 2024*”, under the section “*Tidligere kommuneplaner*”, in English “Previous municipal plans”. I could consult many Municipal plans as *Kommuneplan 2005*, *Kommuneplan 2009*, *Kommuneplan 2011*, *Kommuneplan 2015*, *Kommuneplan 2019*, and the “*Kommuneplan 2024 - Fremtidens klimavenlige hovedstad*” that I report later in chapter five. In the same website, I found documents about the district of Nørrebro and its local government under the section “*Nørrebro Lokaludvalg*” (agenda) and so, I could download important documents as “*Bydelsplan-for-Noerrebro 2023-26*” (District plan for Nørrebro 2023-26) and the “*2-bilag-2.PDF*” (Creation of Superkilen road park in Nørrebro, funding for design).

On the website of the municipality of Copenhagen, in the section dedicated to statistical research “*Københavns Kommunes Statistikbank*”, I also was able to identify and download tables of statistical data of interest to me such as, for example, the “*Summary vital statistics by district and type of movement - City of Copenhagen: Statbank - data and statistics*”, documents that informed me of the numbers regarding Natural increase Immigrants, Internal migration from Danish municipalities, Internal migration from other districts etc. in the period 2009-2022. Other documents I consulted along the analysis are: “*Områdeløft In Copenhagen*” (Urban Regeneration Plan), “*Byfornyelsesprogramfor Områdefornyelsen i Mimersgadekvarteret*” (Urban Renewal Program for the Area Renewal in the Mimersgade Quarter), “*Detailhandelsanalyse-2023*” (The Retail Analysis, 2023), and the “*MJØLNERPARKEN- Lokalplan nr. 506*”.

Almost all the documents were in Danish, a language I unfortunately do not speak, which complicated the analysis, but I managed to export the data I needed for a good analysis. Through reviewing Copenhagen’s urban development plans (Kommuneplan 2005, 2009, 2011, and 2024), local demographic data, and participatory planning frameworks, this study aims to ensure that the research aligns with established urban planning strategies, demographic trends, and participatory design practices.

• Documented interviews

To further explore the intentions, perceptions, and outcomes of the project, I would have liked to have the opportunity to collect primary data by conducting interviews with key stakeholders involved in the creation and maintenance of Superkilen. To this end, I reached out to the offices of the three studios involved: Topotek 1, BIG, and Superflex, asking whether it would be possible to interview any employees or leaders who had been part of the park’s design at the time.

Unfortunately, I did not receive a positive response in this regard. I was unable to establish direct contact to ask the questions I intended to, but I was provided with a series of archival interview data sourced from previously conducted interviews. These interviews were sent to me by the SUPERFLEX office responsible for projects and public relations and were excerpted from the book *Superkilen – A*

Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, a book that anyone could buy. They feature the opinions of spokespersons from the three collaborating groups, as well as representatives from the municipal administration and Realdania.

In detail, the interviews published in the book *“Superkilen – A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX”* were conducted by Barbara Steiner and are titled as follows: *“If You Could Do Anything You Want, What Would You Do? (Participation)”*, *“More Urban Life for All, More People to Walk More, and More People to Stay Longer (Urban Development)”*, *“Imagine a Moroccan Fountain! (Selection and Realization)”*, *“Space for Everybody’s Ideas and Fantasies (Collaboration)”*, *“Red, Black, and Green (Topography and Typology)”*, and *“A Kick in the Nuts of Good Taste (Conflict and Consensus)”*.

Since these interviews were not conducted first-hand, and I did not have direct access to the full interviews, these are defined as documents to analyze. I am going to classify them as documented interviews, a recognized qualitative research method where existing interview transcripts, reports, or media interviews are used as data sources (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). The use of pre-existing interview data is particularly valuable when direct data collection is limited, allowing for insight into expert opinions while maintaining methodological rigor through triangulation with other data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Additionally, publicly accessible video interviews with key stakeholders provide further context on the project’s development. The video interviews are two and are watchable online with the titles: *“Superflex Interview: A Cool Urban Space”* and *“AD Interview: Martin Rein-Cano on the Superkilen Project”*.

Below, in the appendix, it provides a vision about the main points, taking into consideration the concise and coherent analysis of these documented interviews that are reported spread in the analysis chapter six. The aim is to explore the interviewees’ perceptions of public installations, their impact on community cohesion and social sustainability, and how these installations stimulate debate. This approach offers an overview of the perspectives expressed regarding the Superkilen project and its role in reflecting cultural diversity through participatory design.

• Field Observation

To better analyze the Superkilen project and understand the atmosphere of the park within the Nørrebro neighborhood and the city of Copenhagen, this study adopts a direct observational approach. Observational research is a qualitative method widely used in urban studies to assess how public spaces function, how people interact with their surroundings, and how spatial elements influence behaviors (Yin, 2018). This method allows for an empirical, first-hand understanding of Superkilen’s role as a multicultural urban intervention, ensuring that its social and spatial dynamics are examined in real time.

The field observation was conducted over four days, from Tuesday, October 15 to Friday, October 18, 2024, within varied time slots to capture different patterns of space usage. While limited in duration, this method follows qualitative research standards, where short-term ethnographic observations have been demonstrated to provide valid and meaningful insights into urban life when combined with other data sources (Johansson, 2007). However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations and potential biases inherent in the study’s temporal scope and observational framework.

Since the weather was cool and windy, making prolonged outdoor stays inefficient for the study, I planned the field observation in time slots. Thus, each day was dedicated to observing movements in different time frames, spending an average of 4 to 6 hours per observation session. To document my observations, I used a diary, photographs, and video recordings.

The restricted timeframe of the field study, spanning only four days in a single season, presents a potential limitation in capturing seasonal variations in public space usage. Studies on urban public spaces indicate that environmental conditions, temperature fluctuations, and seasonal patterns significantly influence user behaviors and spatial interactions (Gehl, 2011). For example, colder months might reduce the frequency and type of outdoor activities, whereas warmer months may attract more diverse and prolonged engagement with public spaces. Given that the observation was conducted in mid-October, a period transitioning into the colder season, certain activities such as community gatherings, outdoor

markets, or prolonged recreational use may be underrepresented in the findings.

Furthermore, observational bias must be considered, particularly regarding who was observed and at what times. The selection of observation time slots, while structured to capture different moments of daily activity, may not fully represent the entire spectrum of park usage. Urban public spaces often exhibit varied patterns of engagement based on factors such as time of day, cultural routines, and socio-economic background (Whyte, 1980). For instance, individuals with fixed work schedules may have been underrepresented during weekday daytime observations, while students, retirees, or shift workers may have been more visible. Similarly, night-time observations, though included, may not have fully captured the range of social interactions occurring in the park during evening hours.

Despite these temporal and observational constraints, the study adopts a triangulated methodological approach to counterbalance potential gaps in field data. Observations are cross-referenced with document analysis, photographic records, and secondary data interviews, allowing for a broader temporal and contextual understanding of Superkilen's spatial and social impact (Bowen, 2009). Moreover, previous studies on Superkilen and similar urban interventions provide additional insights into how public space dynamics evolve across different seasons. By integrating long-term studies, municipal reports, and past research, the findings of this study are contextualized within a broader temporal framework, mitigating the limitations of short-term observation (Yin, 2018).

I should note that I chose not to anticipate my visit by consulting specific documents about the park's construction or its evolution, but rather by gathering only general information about Superkilen, some critiques, and the processes of placemaking. This was to avoid being overly influenced by preconceived ideas and already-developed perspectives about this project, allowing me to experience it as a citizen or tourist encountering the place for the first time.

- **Photographic Analysis**

The images included in this section are not merely illustrative but function as primary data sources, offering a structured visual representation of how Superkilen is experienced and appropriated by its users. Each photograph is accompanied by specific captions that highlight key details to focus on, aligning with the interpretative framework of this research. Following qualitative visual analysis principles, images are examined based on composition, spatial relationships, and user engagement with public space, which allows for a nuanced understanding of the park's design and functionality (Lehmann, 2023).


The sequence of the images does not fully follow the observation timings previously mentioned but is instead structured into broad thematic sections, grouping time, materials, and defined locations. (Appendix reports photos grouped per daytime). This segmentation is considered broad due to the complexity of urban environments, where temporal, material, and social elements coexist dynamically. As emphasized in qualitative case study research, the spatial and temporal fluidity captured through images helps reveal hidden patterns of interaction, cultural symbolism, and the lived experience of place (Bowen, 2009).

In addition to the images taken on site directly by me, I decided to increase the information collection pictures and maps also from documents named above, official websites, and other articles to ensure a better explanation of the site creation dynamic and the park itself, also some map creation using GIS program and satellite images.

By incorporating photographic analysis, this study enhances the depth and contextual understanding of Superkilen's design intent, community perception, and actual usage. The visual documentation provides a complementary perspective to textual and observational data, reinforcing the multimodal approach of this research and ensuring a comprehensive interpretation of urban space.

The following chapter delves into an in-depth analysis of Superkilen, a public park in Copenhagen that was envisioned as an inclusive, participatory, and multicultural urban intervention. By examining its design approach, participatory strategies, and socio-political impact, this chapter seeks to evaluate whether the park succeeds in promoting equitable urban regeneration or, conversely, contributes to the very

forms of exclusion and gentrification discussed in the theoretical framework. Through a combination of qualitative research methods, including document analysis, observational study, and photographic documentation, this case study offers a critical perspective on the intersection between public art, participatory design, and urban sustainability.



5. SUPERKILEN: BACKGROUND AND SOCIO-URBAN CONTEXT

This chapter analyzes Superkilen, an iconic public space project located in Copenhagen's Nørrebro neighborhood, through a multidisciplinary lens that combines urban planning, public art, and social dynamics. To fully understand its meaning and implications, the chapter develops from a global vision of contests, following a general overview of Copenhagen's urban policies, then focuses on the Nørrebro neighborhood, and finally narrows in on the Superkilen project, investigating its genesis, structure, and impacts. The aim is to reconstruct the socio-urban framework that made this particular form of urban regeneration possible, highlighting the tensions between participation, cultural representation, and placemaking practices.

5.1. Copenhagen: between inclusive narratives and urban gentrification

Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, is located on the eastern coast of the island of Zealand (Sjælland), facing the Øresund Strait, which separates Denmark from Sweden. The city holds a strategic position within the Øresund Region, forming a transnational metropolitan area together with the Swedish city of Malmö, connected via the Øresund Bridge, inaugurated in 2000 (Øresundsbron, 2023).



Figure 8 - Satellite picture reporting the location of Denmark and its capital city, Copenhagen. The author's edit of the Google Earth satellite base image.

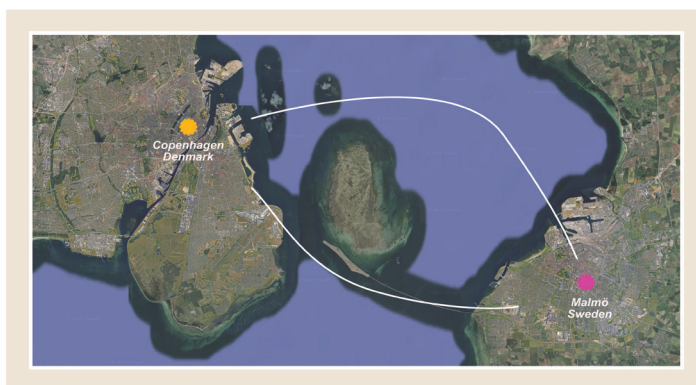


Figure 9 - Map showing the entire territory of Copenhagen in Denmark, its placement on the sea and its proximity to Malmö city, in Sweden. The author's edit of the Google Earth satellite base image.

The Municipality of Copenhagen (Københavns Kommune) has a population of approximately 650,000, while the wider metropolitan region, known as Greater Copenhagen, includes over 2 million residents across 34 municipalities on both sides of the strait (Statistics Denmark, 2023; Region Hovedstaden, 2023). The city develops on relatively flat terrain, with an average elevation below 20 meters above sea

level, a geographical feature that has historically supported the expansion of soft mobility modes, such as cycling and walking (Gehl, 2010).

Morphologically, Copenhagen is characterized by a balance between urban density and green space, including parks, canals, and open areas spread evenly across the city (European Environment Agency, 2021). Approximately 30% of the municipal area is dedicated to natural or recreational spaces, while the remaining surface is used for residential, infrastructural, and productive purposes (EEA Urban Atlas, 2021).

The city of Copenhagen has developed, throughout the twentieth century and especially since the 1990s, an internationally recognized urban model for its ability to integrate strategic planning, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion. The foundation of this development dates back to the Finger Plan of 1947, a visionary project that guided the city's growth according to a radial model, alternating urbanized areas with green and agricultural zones, connected by railway lines (Greater Copenhagen Authority, 1947).

This framework laid the foundation for a still-visible polycentric system, where urban densification is encouraged along public transport lines, reducing urban sprawl, and strengthening the connection between the center and periphery (Knowles, 2012). Subsequent revisions of the Finger Plan, particularly those of 2007 and 2013, introduced a new metropolitan scale, Greater Copenhagen, to tackle contemporary challenges such as population growth, social diversity, and climate change (Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2013).

Since the 1990s, urban policies have followed two main directions:

- Regeneration and consolidation of central and semi-central areas (such as Vesterbro, Inner Nørrebro, Amagerbro);
- Controlled expansion into new strategic districts such as Ørestad (south), Nordhavn (north), and, more recently, Sydhavn.

The Ørestad project, launched in 1995 through the Ørestad Development Plan, represents one of the most ambitious urban development operations in Northern Europe. The area covers about 3.1 million m² and is expected to host 20,000 residents and 80,000 workers upon completion (By & Havn, 2020). It was conceived as a high-accessibility, multifunctional hub connected to the new Copenhagen Metro, designed to host residential, business, and university functions.

Similarly, the Nordhavn project, active since 2010 as part of the Nordhavn Development Strategy, encompasses over 3.6 million m² of former port area, intending to accommodate 40,000 residents and 40,000 jobs by 2050. The model is oriented toward climate neutrality, bicycle mobility, and high-efficiency architecture (Gehl Architects, 2015; By & Havn, 2021).

The Sydhavn plan, developed since 2006, includes districts such as Teglholmen and Sluseholmen, the latter built on a system of artificial canals inspired by Amsterdam. The area plans for the construction of about 6,000 housing units (Realdania, 2014) include numerous pilot projects on sustainable living, as well as a new branch of the M4 metro line, inaugurated in 2024.

The Urban Development Plans of Copenhagen (Kommuneplan 2005, 2009, 2011, and 2024) highlight the city's shifting priorities and long-term urban strategies. While early plans primarily emphasized economic expansion, housing growth, and infrastructure improvements, later documents integrated sustainability, social inclusion, and cultural representation as central planning goals. Kommuneplan 2005 focused on making Copenhagen a competitive European metropolis by driving economic development, supporting large-scale urban regeneration projects such as Holmen, Havnstaden, and Ørestad Nord, and expanding new residential districts in Sluseholmen and Teglholmen. The following Kommuneplan 2009 introduced the concept of "The Thinking City," which aimed to balance urban growth with sustainability and inclusivity, fostering better connectivity within the city through public transportation, bicycle infrastructure, and pedestrian-friendly planning. By 2011, urban policy had shifted further, incorporating measures for environmental resilience, water management, and historic preservation alongside a rein-

forced commitment to high-quality public spaces and community-centred development in urban regeneration (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2011).

In parallel, numerous urban regeneration interventions have been implemented in the city's consolidated fabric, transforming historically working-class and marginalized neighborhoods. A notable case is Vesterbro, which underwent a broad urban renewal project between 1990 and 2006, involving the refurbishment of existing buildings, the creation of new public spaces, and the settlement of cultural and commercial activities (Larsen & Hansen, 2008). The project, part of the Kvarterløft program, also included 400 million DKK in public investment and resulted in a 35% reduction in crime over ten years (Københavns Kommune, 2010).



Figure 10 - Map reporting the district division of Copenhagen city territory. The author's edited picture from the GIS data source.

Within this framework, districts such as Amager, Sydhavn, Brønshøj, and Nørrebro have been targeted with specific policies for social and territorial rebalancing, through instruments such as the Områdeløft program (translated as “area uplift”), aimed at strengthening social inclusion, local identity, and access to services in socially marginalized neighborhoods (Jørgensen, 2008).

In the case of Nørrebro, transformations have especially affected the northern zone, traditionally inhabited by migrant communities, which has seen progressive changes due to public housing renewal (Jørgensen, 2008), reactivation of unused spaces (Københavns Kommune, 2011), and investment in educational and cultural services, to enhance social cohesion and counteract forms of urban exclusion (Skifter Andersen, 2010). These transformations took place within a complex framework marked by the coexistence of multiculturalism and gentrification pressures, a dynamic particularly evident in the northern part of the district, where renewal policies have produced ambivalent outcomes: improved urban quality on one hand, and indirect exclusion of long-standing communities on the other (Larsen & Hansen, 2008; Majoor & Mandrup, 2014).

This dynamic will be further explored in the next chapter, as it represents a paradigmatic case of high-density multicultural urban transformation in the study-interested district.

Copenhagen's approach to urban planning stands out for its high capacity for multi-level governance, based on cooperation among public agencies (By & Havn, City of Copenhagen), private stakeholders, and local communities. The presence of long-term plans, supported by flexible regulatory tools such as the Kommuneplan (updated in 2019 and 2023), has enabled the city to evolve according to an integrated vision, where urbanism, ecology, and social cohesion are addressed in synergy (Københavns Kommune, 2023).

5.2. Nørrebro: neighborhood identity and processes of exclusion

This section outlines the historical trajectory of Nørrebro, the political and design motivations behind Superkilen, and the theoretical underpinnings of its role as a site of spatial representation, civic participation, and placemaking.

The district of Nørrebro, in Copenhagen, is historically shaped by waves of migration and social struggles and remains one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Copenhagen, home to more than 60 nationalities, with large populations from Turkey, Pakistan, and the Middle East (Superkilen project - BIG website). According to Statistics Denmark (2021), 40% of Nørrebro's population is of foreign origin, with an increasing number of residents from Africa and the Middle East in recent decades. The Turkish population notably grew between the 1980s and 1990s, while from 2000 onwards, groups from Somalia, Morocco, and other African countries increased (Københavns Kommune, 2020).



Figure 11 - Google Earth satellite screenshot edited by the Author and reporting the Area of Nørrebro district in Copenhagen, Denmark.



Figure 12 - Google Earth satellite screenshot edited by the Author reporting a zoom of the Nørrebro district.

Before the mid-19th century, Nørrebro was a rural area outside Copenhagen's medieval boundaries. As industrialization progressed, it became a dense working-class district, later shaped by waves of migration, particularly from Turkey, Pakistan, and the Middle East. However, this social diversity also brought political tension, as seen in protests against urban expansion in the late 20th century (Alshehri, 2019). This diverse social fabric, however, has also been marked by episodes of civil unrest, contested urban

policies, and processes of socio-economic marginalization, making it a critical site for spatial interventions that attempt to bridge inclusion and transformation (Alshehri, 2019).

Over time, the area became populated by immigrants for work-related reasons. The village gradually expanded through urban development plans, eventually becoming a district of the larger city. The neighborhood was a site of resistance and protests. For example, the Battle of the Commons in 1872 saw local workers protesting against excessively long working hours, leading to violent conflicts with the police. Another key episode occurred during the German occupation of Denmark in World War II when a violent protest took place against local Nazis. Toward the late 20th century, protests began against municipal decisions regarding the expansion of the neighborhood. These continued into the early 2000s, including demonstrations against police mistreatment. In that period, Nørrebro became a focal point for radical and resistance groups (Alshehri, 2019).

The challenges faced by Nørrebro can be traced through the significant migration patterns that shaped the district's social and economic landscape. In the 1970s-1980s, Nørrebro was primarily a settlement for migrants from Turkey, Pakistan, and the Middle East, driven by industrial demand. These communities were often marginalized and lived in low-income housing, mostly concentrated in areas like Blågårdsgade and Sankt Hans Torv (Larsen & Hansen, 2008). Later, in the 1990s, the presence of other immigrant groups from Eastern Europe, such as former Yugoslavians and Somalians, further increased the area's diversity (Københavns Kommune, 2020).

This difficult situation, involving frequent protests and a high crime rate compared to other city districts, made Nørrebro seem dangerous and unattractive. By the early 2000s, this climate of unrest, coupled with a rising crime rate, created a perception of Nørrebro as unsafe and uninviting. The Områdeløft program played a crucial role in transforming Nørrebro from a marginalized district into a renewed urban space. Introduced in the early 2000s, it aimed to reduce crime, enhance social cohesion, and create vibrant public spaces (Copenhagen Municipality, 2011).

The typology of housing in Nørrebro has been strongly influenced by post-World War II social housing policies. Large residential complexes designed for the working class and migrant populations were built, and these buildings still dominate the neighborhood today, housing a significant portion of the low-income population. Over the years, however, these buildings have undergone renovation and modernization, improved the quality of housing, but also driven up rental prices, contributing to the displacement of some residents (Larsen & Hansen, 2008). According to a study by the Danish Institute for Local and Regional Government (2014), the urban regeneration programs introduced since the early 2000s, including those associated with the Områdeløft program, have unintentionally contributed to the exclusion of many long-term residents due to increased property values.

The socio-economic transformations brought by these urban policies, especially the gentrification process, have had a significant impact on the local population. The introduction of international supermarkets, cafes, design boutiques, and restaurants in the past 10 years, combined with the creation of public spaces like Superkilen, has altered the functional dynamics of the neighborhood. This has led to the arrival of a new, younger, cosmopolitan middle class that now coexists with the long-established migrant community (Københavns Kommune, 2020). The real estate market also saw significant changes: between 2006 and 2020, property values in Nørrebro increased by about 30-40%, and areas such as Vesterbro experienced even higher growth (Københavns Kommune, 2020). While these developments brought improved infrastructure and amenities, they also contributed to the displacement of long-term residents, making it more difficult for the working-class, migrant populations to remain in the area.

In addition to the housing changes, the typology of public spaces in Nørrebro has evolved. International supermarkets, cafes, restaurants, and design boutiques have all increased in the past decade, alongside the creation of public spaces like Superkilen. These urban transformations have led to the development of new kinds of spaces, creating opportunities for cosmopolitan interaction. This has attracted a younger middle-class population and reshaped the character of Nørrebro, which was once primarily characterized by its working-class and migrant communities (Akšamija, 2016; Larsen & Hansen, 2008).

An important aspect of the urban transformation of Nørrebro has been the indirect exclusion of many

long-standing residents due to rising property prices and the cost of living. According to a study by the Danish Institute for Local and Regional Government (2014), urban regeneration policies have exacerbated this issue, contributing to the displacement of lower-income residents and marginalizing those who had been part of the neighborhood for decades.

Multiculturalism has long been a defining characteristic of Nørrebro, but the district's social fabric has been significantly influenced by the waves of gentrification that have taken hold in recent decades. In contrast to the often homogeneous, wealthier neighborhoods of Copenhagen, Nørrebro remains a vibrant, multi-ethnic community that has maintained a strong sense of identity despite the challenges posed by urban transformation (Superkilen RUC Project, 2012).

Along this wave, the Copenhagen Municipality and the Realdania Foundation launched a public competition in 2005 to design a unique urban space that would revitalize the district and foster both local and global identity (Superkilen Project - BIG website). Realdania, a private philanthropic foundation, played a pivotal role in funding the Superkilen project. The competition was won by the Danish architecture firm BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group), the German landscape architecture firm Topotek 1, and the Danish art group Superflex. This team of experts focused on creating a public space designed for enjoyment, with an innovative design for a multicultural setting (Akšamija, 2016), which began construction of the park in 2009 and was then inaugurated in 2012.

While its contribution facilitated an ambitious and well-financed urban intervention, it also raised concerns about how private entities influence public space design (Superkilen RUC Project, 2012). Superkilen's creation reflects Nørrebro's complex history of migration, social unrest, and urban regeneration. Superkilen was not just an aesthetic addition to Nørrebro but a tangible outcome of these urban regeneration efforts (Jensen, 2016).

While the park contributes to a sense of civic identity and global inclusivity, it also represents the challenges posed by gentrification. As the neighborhood continues to evolve, questions about social equity and the impact of urban policies on marginalized communities will remain central to discussions about the future of Nørrebro. The ongoing process of urban renewal and transformation marked by the shift from a working-class district to a more mixed-income area reflects broader global trends in urban development, where multiculturalism, inclusion, and gentrification intersect in complex ways.

5.3. Superkilen: participation, art, and cultural identity

Superkilen is a public park located in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen, Denmark. Delving deeper, Jensen (2016) reveals that Superkilen was built in an area that previously hosted transport infrastructure and a tram depot, a legacy of Nørrebro's industrial and transport past. This area, once characterised by industrial sheds and infrastructure, including a railway depot, has now been repurposed into Nørrebrohallen, a testament to the urban regeneration of the area (Bloom, 2013). However, before its redevelopment, the site of Superkilen was an underutilized urban corridor with limited social function, failing to foster strong communal interactions (Bloom, 2013; Yiğit-Turan, 2021). This space, poorly integrated with the surrounding neighborhood, failed to evoke interest or a sense of belonging within the local community (Yiğit-Turan, 2021). Instead, it was labelled a "ghetto" area, a designation that residential zones meet when they satisfy two out of three criteria concerning crime, unemployment, and a high percentage of immigrants. These criteria still apply today to Mjølnerpark, the park adjacent to Superkilen, as defined by the Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs (Jensen, 2016).

Understanding Superkilen requires an interdisciplinary approach, where urban planning, public art, and social dynamics intersect. In qualitative urban studies, contextually analyzing a public space like Superkilen provides insight into how public spaces shape and are shaped by their surrounding communities (Bloom, 2013).

The district's history of migration and social struggles highlights the importance of Superkilen as both a reflection of local identity and a contested space where different social, political, and cultural dynamics

play out. Directly connected with these reasons, it was designed as a symbolic and functional urban intervention. Superkilen was conceived within the broader framework of urban regeneration to address socio-spatial inequalities, public participation, and multicultural representation (Akšamija, 2016).

Copenhagen's urban planning has evolved significantly over the last few decades, emphasizing pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, sustainable mobility, and urban resilience. Policies such as the *Copenhagen Municipal Plan 2011* (Copenhagen Municipality, 2011) and strategic initiatives like *Områdeløft* have aimed at bridging socio-spatial inequalities, particularly in districts like Nørrebro (Jensen, 2016).

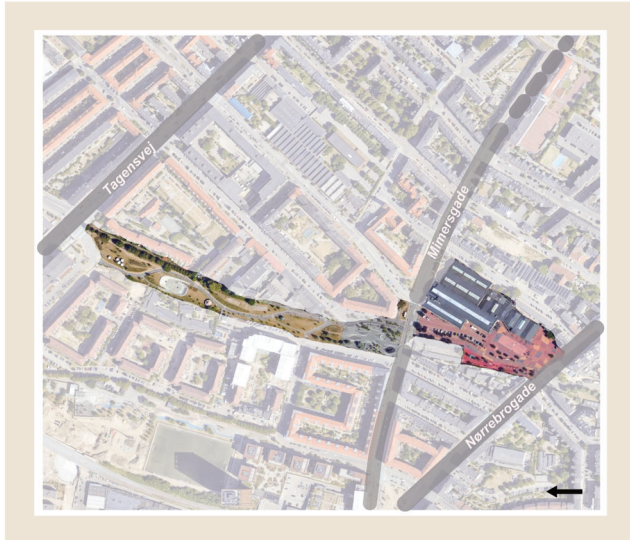


Figure 13- Satellite picture from Google Satellite reporting the Superkilen area from an Ortofoto perspective.

Superkilen, which derives from the Danish word “kilen” meaning “wedge,” takes its shape from its location between two major streets that cross the neighborhood: Tagensvej and Nørrebrogade (Abdullah Alshehri, 2019). Superkilen was designed with three main objectives, which led to its selection as the winning project:

1. Connecting Nørrebro with surrounding districts by ensuring safe and transparent pedestrian and bicycle routes specifically designed for this purpose;
2. Serving as a public park offering a variety of outdoor activities, such as cultural events, leisure, and sports
3. Functioning as an exhibition of the neighborhood's cultural diversity (Akšamija, 2016).

These three dimensions formed the foundation of the park's creation process, promoting connectivity, civic participation, social inclusion, and a sense of belonging in a space that embraces diverse cultures and traditions.

The park extends for 1 kilometre and consists of three distinct areas: The Red Square, the Black Market, and the Green Park.

The Red Square, dedicated to cultural and sporting activities suitable for a lifestyle routine. It designates modern, urban life with café, music, and sports. (Superkilen Objects, 2012).

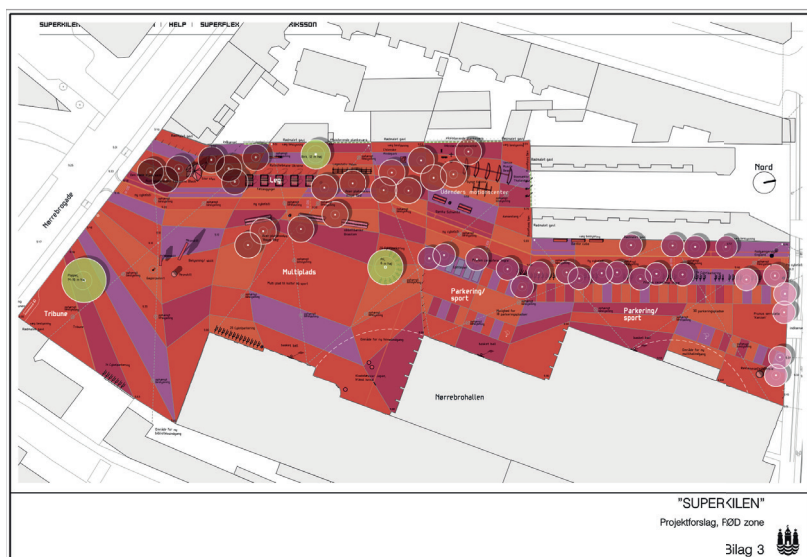


Figure 14 - Red Square project plan picture, from "40- Bilag-11_0.PDF.", Project Appendix document

Among the objects in the Red Square, one of the more meaningful is the boxing ring from Thailand, which was transported and reconstructed in Superkilen (Voss, 2018). This object speaks to the universality of sports as a means of social engagement and identity formation, particularly within immigrant communities. *“The boxing equipment was selected by Ali and Bilal who grew up as childhood friends in Mjølnerparken next to Superkilen. Bilal is a trained Thai, Kick, and K1 boxer, and he has won medals at Danish Championships in all three disciplines. Together with Ali and the artist group SUPERFLEX from the Superkilen advisory board, he travelled to Thailand to bring home some of the Thai boxing culture for Superkilen”* (Superkilen Objects, 2012- p.17).

Equally striking is the neon sign from Russia. “*The neon sign on the Hotel Moskvich (Москвач) is sitting on top of a 16-storey building in the southeastern part of Moscow, capital of Russia. Dating back to Soviet times, the hotel got its name from the neighbouring factory’s most famous product. Here the state-controlled enterprise AZLK would manufacture the classic Soviet car, Moskvich (Moskovit), during the period between 1939 and 1991. The factory, whose abbreviated name stood for the Lenin Communist Youth League Automobile Factory, was assigned the task of producing small, durable cars for the average Russian as well as for export markets. Domestic demand, however, nearly always exceeded the supply, so waiting lists to get a Moskvich were long*” (Superkilen Objects, 2012).

A more subtle but equally meaningful object is the Iranian benches. “The benches sit at Lake Zarivar in the Kurdish part of Iran, i.e. in the village of Marivan in the province of Kermanshah near the Iraqi border. They form part of a series of benches which are all decorated with various proverbs about living in a city”.

The captions on the benches read: “A good city could not be found, you have to build it” and “If you have a good hometown, you have every- thing” (Superkilen Objects, 2012- p.21). While the bench itself is an everyday urban element, its inclusion in Superkilen takes on a deeper geopolitical meaning, highlighting the complexities of cultural representation in public spaces.

The Black Market: Features social activities such as games and theatrical performances. It is defined more as a classic site with a fountain, trees, and benches (Superkilen Objects, 2012).



Figure 15 - Black Market project plan“ picture from 40- Bilag-10_0.PDF.”, Project Appendix document

A more intimate setting is home to objects that emphasize everyday cultural practices. A place that includes many different bunches from all over the world that show how various cultures are used to hang over and spend everyday time in the city squares. The Moroccan fountain, for example, “... is based on the Arab symbol, *Rub el Hizb*, consisting of two overlapping squares surrounding a circle. The symbol recurs in a number of Arab emblems, signifying among other things the end of each chapter in the Quran, the holy scripture of Islam. Moreover, the symbol recurs on the flag of the Marinid dynasty, flying over Morocco for much of the 14th and 15th centuries” (Superkilen Objects, 2012- p.14). Traditionally, such fountains serve as gathering spaces, reinforcing the idea that public water sources are not just functional but also deeply woven into social interaction.

Nearby, a Mexican bench is present. Precisely, “*The double chair sits in the town of Valladolid on the Mexican Yucatán peninsula and is considered to be typical of that particular region. Its local name is ‘Los Confidentes’ – the confidants. In other words, it invites passersby to take a seat and engage in conversation with someone intimate, e.g. a close friend or perhaps even a lover. Thus, the chairs are also sometimes referred to as ‘the lovers’*” (Superkilen Objects, 2012- p.15). The bench, while offering a place for rest, also visually connects the neighborhood’s Mexican communities to their heritage.

In a more contemporary reference, the Qatari dentist’s sign adds an unexpected element to the Black Market. This neon sign, transplanted from Doha, with origins dating back 2,000 years B.C., the symbol of the crescent moon and star was used in the 14th century by the Ottoman Empire, which later became what is now known as Turkey.

Still a national symbol today, though it has since also come to signify Muslim countries as such. In his version of the powerful symbol, a dentist in Doha replaced the star with a molar tooth for the sign of his medical practice (Superkilen Objects, 2012). Perhaps the most beloved object in Superkilen is the Japanese octopus shape slide, which originates from a popular playground structure found in Tokyo (Superkilen Objects, 2012). This whimsical play equipment is not just an attraction for children, but a symbol of how shared childhood experiences transcend cultural boundaries. The selection of such objects raises questions about what aspects of daily life become symbols of cultural representation and how urban branding shapes identity.

The Green Park is generally used for sports and picnics. “*This part offers grass fields and more greenery, where you can have a picnic or take a stroll with the dog*” (Jensen, 2016).



Figure 16 - Green Park project plan picture from "40- Bilag-9_0.PDF.", Project Appendix document

The most prominent object in this zone is the Osborne Bull from Spain (Superkilen Objects, 2012). Originally an advertisement for Andalusian wine, the 14-meter-tall silhouette became an emblem of Spanish identity after legal battles granted it cultural heritage status. Its presence in Superkilen raises questions about how commercial symbols become markers of national pride and how they translate into a multicultural context.

Its presence in an urban European environment emphasizes the merging of different worlds in public space.

The way these objects were chosen and integrated also illustrates the tension between participation and aestheticization (Bloom, 2013). For example, the bench, Omo River in Ethiopia. "The bench was spotted in a photo from 1898. It was taken during a Russian expedition to Ethiopia just after the First Italian-Ethiopian War, which ended in Italian defeat. *The bench belonged to the local population at the Omo River outfall into Lake Turkana. Omo River is where archaeologists excavated a number of bone fragments from early humans of the species Homo Sapiens in 1967*" (Superkilen Objects, 2012- p.8).

Similarly, the Qatari dentist's neon sign, while an interesting cultural artefact, raises the question of whether everyday commercial signage truly represents local identities or whether it was selected for its visual appeal and exoticism rather than its deep cultural meaning. Each zone is identified by its name and color and has a specific function. However, all three areas are connected by a pedestrian and bicycle path that runs through the entire park, linking the two main roads and, consequently, the surrounding neighborhoods (Balik Lökçe & Balik, 2020), transforming a semi-peripheral area into a more central one.

What makes the park unique is not only its visual aspect but also the development process, which actively involved residents in design choices (Pallarés and Castellanos, 2016). Superkilen serves as both a beacon of multicultural visibility and a cautionary tale of urban commodification, illustrating the complexities of public art's role in contemporary placemaking. It provides a compelling example of how participatory placemaking can mediate social tensions in a multicultural district, transforming public space into an active tool for representation, social belonging, and cultural exchange (Alshehri, 2019).

The idea of 'Participation Extreme,' developed by the artist collective SUPERFLEX, was meant to amplify community voices by allowing local residents to select objects representing their cultural backgrounds (Superkilen RUC Project, 2012). Extreme participation is a form of participation in which participants are not only consulted or marginally involved but become active protagonists and often co-authors of decision-making or design processes. It often involves a much deeper emotional, temporal, and operational involvement than traditional participatory methods. In this model, community members are considered full members of the design team, participating in all phases of the project

and directly influencing decisions (Udoewa, 2022). “Cheung et al. (2021) support this notion, stating that public art can promote a sense of belonging only when it genuinely reflects the stories and values of the communities it represents. However, a closer examination of the process reveals discrepancies between the project’s inclusive rhetoric and its actual execution. While the initiative was framed as democratic, the final selection and placement of objects were heavily curated by architects and designers rather than being a direct outcome of collective decision-making (Pallarés & Castellanos, 2016).

Given that over 60 nationalities coexist in the neighborhood, the designers wanted to represent a small part of each reality. Recognizing the district’s rich cultural diversity, designers invited residents to suggest urban objects that represented their cultural heritage” (Superkilen RUC Project, 2012). According to the meaning of extreme participation, this approach helped immigrants feel more at home in the district.

As part of this participatory initiative along the project process, local residents were asked to suggest a piece of urban furniture linked to their cultural background. The park’s identity as a multicultural exhibition is reinforced through its 108 urban objects, which originate from over 60 countries and represent the diverse communities residing in Nørrebro (Superkilen RUC Project, 2012). Each object carries historical, social, or political significance, transforming Superkilen into an interactive museum of global cultural exchange (Voss, 2018). This process tied their heritage to the creation of an open exhibition showcasing “best practices” in urban furniture from around the world. The objects were selected through catalogues and photographs, although defining specific details was not always easy (Azra Akšamija, 2016). The selected objects were then either replicated or purchased and transported from their country of origin.

As anticipated, a creative aspect of the design process was the so-called “Participation Extreme” approach, developed by Superflex, which is not just a way to amplify community voices, generally speaking, but also as a way to include the less vocal and less dominant members of the community. The artists asked groups of young and elderly people: “If you could choose anything from anywhere, what would you like to see in the park?” and then travelled with residents to five of the proposed sites (Thailand, Spain, Palestine, the United States, and Jamaica) to find these objects. (Akšamija, 2016). This approach allowed for the inclusion of “invisible voices” in the public discourse, redefining the relationship between art, public space, and community (Voss, 2018).

It is argued that, due to the uniqueness of the park’s participatory inclusion in design choices and its final aesthetic, an eclectic mix of objects with varying design styles, functions, and vibrant colors, Superkilen is not only a “showcase of best practices in urban design” but can also be considered, in some respects, an art exhibition. The objects transform into design elements, acquiring new meanings as artworks and lighting elements (D. Balik Lökçe, G. Balik, 2020). Arguably, it is also an interactive exhibition that evolves over time.

5.4. The Superkilen paradox: between visibility and inequality

Superkilen was branded as a project of ‘Extreme Participation,’ inviting local residents to contribute objects reflecting their cultural background despite the project’s participatory branding, only 11 out of the 108 objects were directly proposed by residents, meaning that over 90% of the objects were ultimately selected by the design team rather than the community itself (Pallarés & Castellanos, 2016). This imbalance raises concerns about the authenticity of participatory design. Probably, this was not an attempt to empower marginalized voices but more as a merely performative exercise that reinforced the designers’ vision. Scholars such as Yiğit-Turan (2021) argue that the process functioned more as a symbolic gesture than as a true act of inclusion, with participatory input being carefully curated rather than fully integrated into the final design. The selection of objects in Superkilen aimed to encapsulate various cultural identities, repeating what was argued by Voss (2018), the project’s participatory framework was limited in scope, reducing the potential for true community ownership. As Toolis (2017) warns, placemaking projects that lack mechanisms for continuous civic engagement risk being perceived as static interventions rather than evolving public spaces.

Although with Superkilen the Copenhagen municipality sought to transform the “ghetto” narrative, it has also been interpreted as a tool for “whitewashing” the neighborhood’s image, aligning with urban regeneration policies that often prioritize aesthetics and economic capital over the needs of marginalized communities (Yiğit-Turan, 2021; Balık Lökçe & Balık, 2020). As such, numerous critiques have emerged, as this public park represents both a physical space and a symbolic terrain where political, cultural, and social issues intertwine. Considering the decision to unite such a heterogeneous community through cultural symbols from over 50 nations, it is evident that this is a challenging endeavour, requiring the creation of a shared sense of belonging through an extreme participation process. This process invited all citizens to propose objects tied to their multiple cultural identities. This dynamic is further complicated by Markusen & Gadwa (2010), who stress that placemaking is most effective when it actively involves the community, not only in the initial design phases but also in continuous modifications and adaptive governance structures.

As many scholars have noted, Yiğit-Turan (2021) and Akšamija (2016) highlight that this representation risks reducing complex identities and collective memories to mere aesthetics, simplifying the complexities of their histories and identities while depoliticizing the historical and cultural context from which they originate. This observation extends beyond the result of representing over 50 cultures in the park to include the influence of this change, which has led to an event of gentrification in the area. This transformation, fueled by the park’s media success, has shifted the neighborhood’s image from a problematic “ghetto” to a trendy and desirable area, impacting its socioeconomic aspects (Yiğit-Turan, 2021). This has resulted not just in infrastructural improvements and investments but also in increased living costs, forcing many original residents to leave the area as they can no longer afford to live there (Yiğit-Turan, 2021).

Superkilen has been instrumental in reframing Nørrebro’s public image. While the neighborhood was previously stigmatized due to crime and social tensions, the park’s international visibility and cultural narrative have contributed to branding it as a vibrant, inclusive space (Bloom, 2013; Yiğit-Turan, 2021). This shift has not only attracted tourists and media attention but also driven significant changes in the local economy, including rising property values and rental costs (Balık Lökçe & Balık, 2020). Consequently, Superkilen’s message of cultural integration contrasts with the socioeconomic realities unfolding around it (Yiğit-Turan, 2021; Borgerinddragelse og Superkilen, 2012). This dynamic contradicts the narrative of inclusion and pluralism promoted by the project.

While the park has brought investments and cultural visibility, it has also increased the cost of living, displacing long-term working-class and immigrant residents (Jensen, 2016). The area’s transformation into a desirable hotspot follows a broader trend of ‘state-led gentrification,’ where government-driven urban renewal strategies, despite their inclusive rhetoric, often benefit wealthier newcomers at the expense of existing communities (Jensen, 2016). Davidson (2010) further argues that such urban renewal projects contribute to the gentrification of surrounding areas, subtly displacing low-income residents through rising property values and the transformation of the commercial landscape, altering the socio-economic fabric of neighborhoods. Similar transformations have been observed in global urban renewal projects, such as The High Line in New York and Seoulo 7017 in Seoul, where revitalization efforts initially intended for public benefit inadvertently accelerated gentrification (Balık Lökçe & Balık, 2020). The increased property values and commercial transformation following its completion mirror patterns seen in other cities, such as London’s Shoreditch and Berlin’s Kreuzberg, where cultural-led urban renewal projects have redefined neighborhoods but also displaced long-term residents (Davidson, 2010; Bloom, 2013).

Referring to the extreme public participation, one of the central aspects of the project during the decision-making process for the elements to be included in the park, it was conceived as an innovative tool to foster dialogue among the neighborhood’s diverse communities. As reported by several scholars like Lökçe and Balık (2020) and Bloom (2013), the apparent inclusion of citizens in the project becomes evident. This participation appears superficial, as the selection of objects was influenced by decisions from designers and funders rather than exclusively the community, leaving little room for genuine co-creation by residents and suggesting a park aesthetic aimed more at media consumption than authentic community representation. Superkilen’s use of public art aligns with the *Creative Placemaking* approach, transforming the park into a symbolic landscape where global cultures converge within a Danish urban

setting (Akšamija, 2016).

The diverse objects materialize cultural diversity, offering marginalized communities a visible presence in public space (Balık Lökçe & Balık, 2020). However, public art in placemaking is not without contradictions. However, public art in placemaking is not without contradictions. As Kortbek (2019) argues, participatory public art can become a tool for urban branding rather than genuine social transformation and this curated approach to participation aligns with broader trends in urban design, where community engagement is often used as a branding tool rather than as a meaningful practice of co-creation (Bloom, 2013). Madanipour (2019) critiques how neoliberal models prioritize aesthetic innovation and investment appeal over long-term social sustainability. A critique that is particularly relevant in analyzing Superkilen's evolving role in the local urban fabric.

The aestheticization of cultural diversity in Superkilen, seen in its vibrant colors, curated object selection, and heavily designed landscape, suggests that the project was shaped more by a desire to create an internationally acclaimed design rather than to foster genuine grassroots participation (Yiğit-Turan, 2021). While the park undoubtedly showcases multiculturalism, the extent to which it actively involves and represents its diverse communities remains contested.

Yiğit-Turan (2021) raises a complex thought on how the very aestheticization of diversity may perpetuate a form of conditional inclusion, where "other" cultures are accepted only as exotic expressions while existing power and subordination dynamics remain intact.

Superkilen aligns with global urban branding strategies that use public spaces as marketing tools rather than community-driven projects. Like urban renewal efforts in Chicago and Seoul, where 'designed diversity' is leveraged for city image-building, Superkilen's success in architectural discourse has overshadowed its deeper socio-economic consequences (Balık Lökçe & Balık, 2020). This process, referred to by some scholars as "border colonialism," uses design and public space to represent a diversity that does not challenge existing social and political hierarchies. Is this inclusion or silent exclusion? According to Pallarés and Castellanos (2016), this result raises the question of whether the participatory process was successful or a failure.

Continuing along this line, Superkilen can be interpreted as a creation of an urban design that goes beyond forming an inclusive space, becoming a means for symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them." Instead of seeking uniform consensus, the design chose to represent these tensions and diversities as an integral part of the neighborhood's identity (Pallarés and Castellanos, 2016). It is natural to refer to Denmark's past dynamics and their influence on current inclusion policies. A colonial past and the present tension regarding citizenship and immigration pressures are represented in Superkilen through the desire to overcome dogmas. However, despite being an image of successful integration and co-existence and a symbol of tolerance and diversity, Superkilen contributes to concealing the reality of persistent inequalities and the power dynamics inherent in urban design, a mode in which colonialism continues to influence urban and social policies (Yiğit-Turan, 2021).

Confirming the persistence of such dynamics, Pallarés and Castellanos (2016) report the current state of degradation and vandalism of some objects and surfaces in the park, suggesting that social conflicts remain in the neighborhood. The stark contrast between the project's inclusive narrative and the reality of top-down decision-making suggests that while the park succeeds as a visually compelling urban space, its participatory elements remain largely superficial (Yiğit-Turan, 2021; Pallarés & Castellanos, 2016).

Superkilen has been described as an open-air museum and an "interactive exhibition" that blurs the boundaries between art, design, and public space (Balık Lökçe & Balık, 2020). The project represents a unique artistic experience that, through collaborative creativity, gathers numerous ideas expressed in the disparate elements that compose it. These objects, strategically placed in the park, are highlighted by their spatial distribution and the use of vivid colors, which play a central role in defining the visual identity of the place.

However, the strong emphasis on the park's visual aspect and image, amplified by media and inter-

national awards, raises questions about the use of art as an urban branding tool. This phenomenon, as highlighted by Bloom (2013), can distort public perception, transforming the park into a commercial product rather than an authentic space for participation and dialogue. A practical example of this is the Red Square, which has caused disruptions and malfunctions, leading to flooding issues. The excessive paving of the area raises doubts about its environmental impact and design decisions, which seem to prioritize visual appeal over sustainability (Bloom, 2013). It is easy to assert, in this case, a clear design failure that required the area's repaving only a few years after the site's inauguration.

Michelle Leigh Voss further underscores the transformative role of public art as a vehicle for social inclusion and memory preservation. In the case of Superkilen, the park has become a sort of "living archive" that celebrates the neighborhood's cultural diversity through the selection of symbolic objects from over 50 nations (Voss, 2018). The tension between the democratization of public space and its commercialization is evident in how art is used as a tool to redefine the neighborhood without necessarily addressing the complexities of existing social and cultural inequalities. Ultimately, Superkilen demonstrates how public art can unite and divide, simultaneously revealing both the potential and the inherent contradictions of artistic integration in urban space (Voss, 2018).



6. ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF DATA

The multi-method analysis of Superkilen through historical and socio-urban contextualization, document analysis, observational research, photographic analysis, and indirectly documented interviews reveals a complex interplay between design intent, public participation, and urban transformation. The findings suggest that while Superkilen presents an innovative model of multicultural urbanism, it also exposes structural challenges related to participation, spatial equity, and long-term sustainability.

To investigate these dynamics more closely, the chapter is structured in three analytical sections. The subchapter 6.1. (Placemaking Strategies and Governance in Superkilen), focuses on the material configuration of the space and its spatial affordances. The second, 6.2. (Social Engagement and Participatory Challenges in Superkilen), explores the participatory processes and their perceived effectiveness. And the 6.3. (Public Art, Cultural Representation, and Urban Branding in Superkilen), examines questions of governance, maintenance, and the long-term social implications of the intervention. Together, these sections aim to provide a critical reading of how Superkilen operates as a lived and evolving urban environment.

6.1. Placemaking Strategies and Governance in Superkilen

The analysis of Superkilen as a placemaking intervention reveals a complex interaction between artistic representation, social sustainability, gentrification, neoliberal urban policies, participation, branding, and broader socio-spatial transformations influenced by migration and urban connectivity. The Superkilen project emerged as part of Copenhagen's broader urban regeneration strategy, specifically targeting the Nørrebro district, historically known for its social diversity and grassroots activism (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2005). The project was developed through a collaboration between the City of Copenhagen and the Realdania Foundation, in line with the Områdeløft program (2005–2010), which focused on social integration, infrastructure improvements, and public space revitalization (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2005)

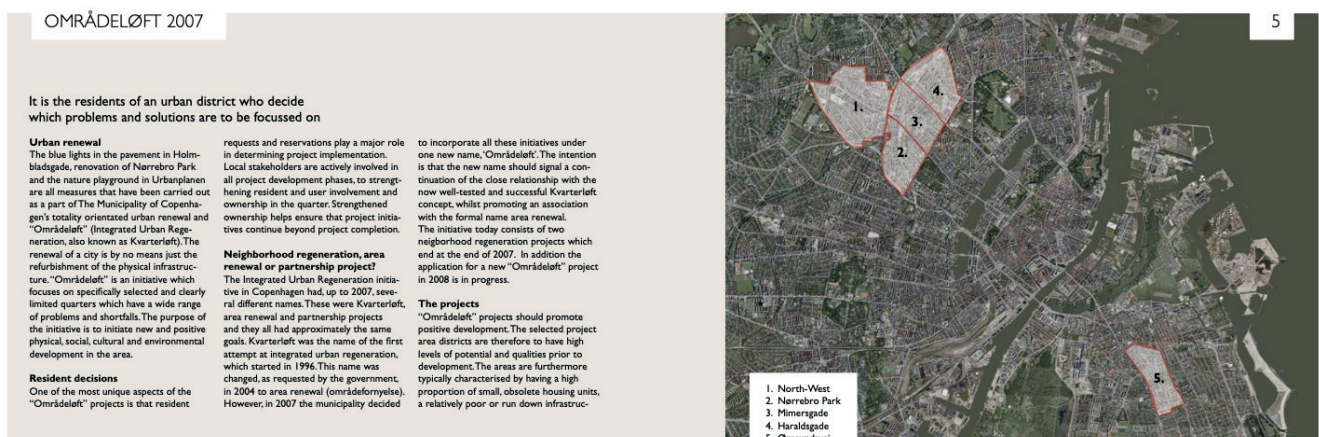


Figure 17 - The 2007 plans planned in the city of Copenhagen, inclusion also Nørrebro district development. Picture from "Områdeløft in Copenhagen, 2007" - City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Administration.

More specifically, Superkilen was conceived as part of a broader urban renewal initiative in Mimersgade, a historically marginalized area within Nørrebro.



Figure 18- Zoom in on the Nørrebro district project, illustrating peculiarities of the area. Picture from "Områdeløft in Copenhagen, 2007" - City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Administration

The area's strong transport connections, including the cycling infrastructure and proximity to major transit routes, have made it increasingly attractive to new residents, contributing to ongoing gentrification processes.

The Kommuneplan 2005, 2009, 2011, and 2024 reflect shifting urban priorities in Copenhagen. The Kommuneplan 2005 primarily aimed at economic expansion and large-scale urban redevelopment (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2005), while the Kommuneplan 2011 introduced a stronger emphasis on environmental resilience, social sustainability, and high-quality public spaces (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2011). Despite these evolving policies, Nørrebro was often excluded from large-scale urban renewal projects, instead receiving localized initiatives like Superkilen (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2023). The Bydelsplan for Nørrebro 2023-2026, in particular, aims to counteract gentrification while enhancing cultural identity and urban connectivity, positioning Superkilen as an example of artistic interventions mitigating urban fragmentation (Bydelsplan for Nørrebro, 2023-2026), the more recent Nørrebro district plans acknowledge Superkilen's role in addressing urban fragmentation, yet my field research highlights the paradoxical contribution of such projects to the gentrification process through a process in line with the free market process of commercialisation. While intended as an inclusive space, Superkilen's proximity to increasingly affluent areas and its focus on aesthetic diversity have inadvertently contributed to social displacement.

As regards the strategy on which the practical creation of the park is based in the three representative areas:

"When we looked at the topographic map, there were already three parts. We just transformed them into the Red Square, the Black Market, and the Green Park. That seemed to be an easy way to do it." (Bjarke Ingels, BIG -Interview published on Superkilen-A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, 2013) and so, in the same interview, Jakob Fenger (founder of SUPERFLEX) also confirms that the idea of the three areas came out easily and directly from the first visit to the project area, as the main strategy derives from the concept of "Copy-Paste" of the multiple proposals that arrived from the competition to the city council. The shared aim was therefore to reform a single identity by including people in the design process by requesting ideas from all over the world.

Regarding the methods of selecting the elements present in Superkilen, Jakob Fenger clarifies again, in a response to an interview (Interview by Steiner and Arvinus, 2013), expressing their will as a team, to create a uniqueness of the park through the coexistence of particular elements that identify distant and different places. With the idea that an object changes meaning, role, and reasons for being once it is re-proposed elsewhere than in its place of origin.

In my observations, Superkilen represents a blend of cultural symbols, which, while visually diverse, may not serve as substantial tools for social integration. Although these objects are intended to rep-

resent multiculturalism, their symbolic nature risks reducing cultural diversity to a visual display rather than fostering genuine social exchange.

Lorenz Dexler (TOPOTEK 1 Partner), in the documented interview (Superkilen-A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, 2013), reflects on the selection of tree species, explaining: 'The palm trees come from Spain, but they are a cold-resistant Chinese species.' This underscores how, even in its landscape design, Superkilen embodies a mix of cultures visually and ecologically. Unlike other instances where non-native plants suffer from environmental stress, careful selection ensured that these species were adapted to Copenhagen's climate, allowing them to thrive within the park. The decision to integrate various global elements, even in terms of vegetation, mirrors Superkilen's broader strategy of multicultural representation and creates a new environmental coexistence.

However, while Superkilen was meant to enhance the district's green infrastructure, personal observations indicate that the amount of actual green space is limited. The balance between aesthetic representation and ecological functionality appears uneven, with large portions of the park being dominated by hardscapes rather than vegetated areas. Despite the careful selection of resilient plant species, the overall proportion of greenery remains minimal compared to the extensive paved surfaces. Field research further highlights clear boundaries between planted zones and constructed elements, questioning whether Superkilen genuinely serves as a 'green oasis' within the urban fabric.



Figure 19 - Pictures reporting the green elements in Superkilen park and the so strict way of division from natural species and concrete surfaces. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.

A GIS analysis of green space coverage could provide a quantitative assessment of this discrepancy.



Figure 20 - Maps reporting the area of Nørrebro, zooming to Superkilen park in 2005 and 2022. Images from Copenhagen Webgis to compare the green surface before and after the project.

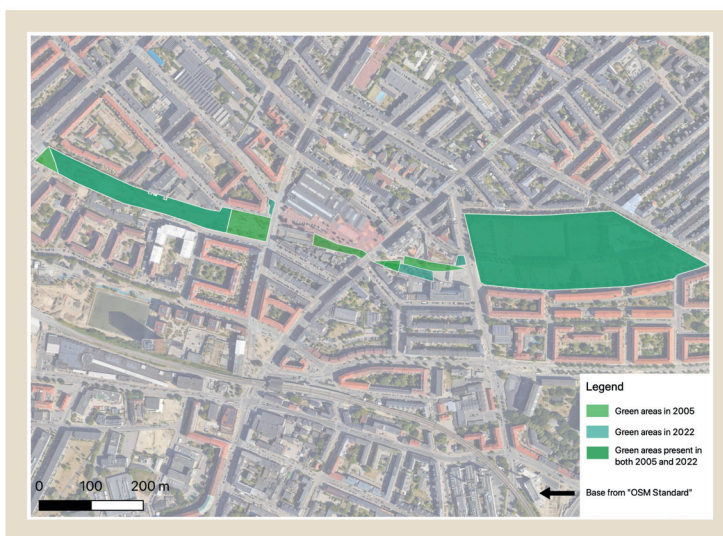


Figure 21 - Maps showing the area of Nørrebro, zooming to Superkilen park, reporting the difference between the green surface area in 2005 (74951 m²) and in 2022 (67852 m²). Orthophoto map from Copenhagen Webgis to compare the green surface before and after the project calculated by QGIS software.

Bjørnstjerne Christiansen (co-founder of SUPERFLEX) in a documented interview (Superkilen-A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, 2013), clarifies that the selection process for urban objects was not politically driven: 'We didn't choose a Moroccan fountain for inclusivity but because it's an incredible piece of craftsmanship.' This statement underscores the tension between artistic intent and public interpretation. While the designers approached object selection from an aesthetic and craftsmanship perspective, the socio-political context of Nørrebro inevitably influenced how these choices were received. Superkilen's open-minded and socially progressive design environment allowed for creative freedom, but it also meant that some broader social, economic, and urban-environmental consequences were not fully anticipated at the time of its conception.

As discussed in the next chapter, the design process aimed to involve citizens through active participation in the choice of elements and, therefore, possible uses of the spaces, creating a sense of community. Differently, the feeling during my field observations, the participatory process in the design of Superkilen seemed to be more externally directed than truly community-driven because of the everyday usage of the objects, which were mainly the same ones "touched", and additionally, for the zone decor in terms of cleanliness. The final design appears to be shaped more by artistic vision and urban branding objectives than by the active participation of the local community. Although the project was marketed as a collaborative effort (fig.22), the reality somehow shows that decisions were largely guided by curators and external designers rather than emerging organically from the residents themselves.



Figure 22 - Invitation for a Citizen's Meeting in Nørrebro, 2008 from Interview "If You Could Do Anything You Want, What Would You Do? (Participation)"

Based on my observations and document analysis, the participation process appears more curated than co-created, raising questions about the authenticity of community ownership. I would dare to call it a process that has brought a mediocre result and, that could perhaps be caused by the conditions that were created during the design. Conditions that Martin Rein-Cano from Topotek 1 reports in an interview as *"Participation processes...Usually the outcome is just chaotic, leading only to mediocre results."*(Interview by Steiner and Arvinus, 2013)

I noted a contrast in how the park spaces are used, which does not necessarily align with the initial design intentions because of, for example, the creation of different groups in the park areas that differ from a mixed way of living in the place, sharing.

The structured nature of its participatory framework ultimately limited the potential for true community ownership, reinforcing the critique that participation was employed as a symbolic tool rather than a substantive process (Yiğit-Turan, 2021). The Bydelsplan for Nørrebro 2023-2026 emphasizes cultural identity preservation, enhanced public spaces, and anti-gentrification efforts, reflecting objectives similar to those initially associated with Superkilen. However, newer urban policies now focus on district-specific interventions, extending urban renewal projects to neighboring areas such as Vingelodden, the continuation of Nørrebro's development (City of Copenhagen, 2023).

This contrasts with earlier strategies, such as Kommuneplan 2005, which aimed to position Copenhagen as a competitive European metropolis through large-scale urban redevelopment, prioritizing economic growth over localized participatory processes (City of Copenhagen, 2005). Projects such as Ørestad Nord and Holmen, which were part of this strategy, illustrate how urban revitalization initiatives can serve broader economic agendas while still affecting local communities in distinct ways. Superkilen, positioned between these two urban strategies, represents both a success in multicultural branding and a challenge in ensuring long-term social sustainability.

Tina Saaby (Copenhagen City Architect) explains how the definition of urban plans takes place and therefore, the definition of expansion areas, "One should probably know that we have a mapping system for the city development projects. It is a "social economic" map, which allows us to get some kind of overview of the whole city. We use that as a tool for pointing out necessities for urban development in these specific areas. To be able to do so, we go out and start mapping the situation, actually, we do different kinds of mapping in those areas", while Astrid Bruus Thomsen (Interview by Steiner and Arvinus, 2013), explains the method used to select the areas to be redeveloped: Through socio-economic maps you can see where urban transformations are needed. He also underlines the need for public-private partnerships, stating: 'If municipalities don't invest, we don't invest either. It requires a joint commitment.' This reinforces the importance of collaboration between private foundations and municipal authorities in determining where and how urban interventions take place. The case of Superkilen exemplifies how urban renewal is not only driven by cultural and social considerations but is also highly dependent on financial feasibility and institutional support.



Figure 23 - Lokalplan nr. 506 Mjølnerparken med kommuneplantillæg nr. 31 - Københavns Kommune

"Gårdsvej The location of the local plan area on the border between the Nørrebro and Bispebjerg districts. The local plan area is indicated in red and the district boundaries are marked in blue."

One of the key planning objectives of Superkilen Park was to improve connectivity and public space accessibility. The Mjølnerparken Local Plan (2014) highlights how Superkilen was envisioned as a corridor linking different parts of Nørrebro while reinforcing physical coherence across urban barriers (MJØLNERPARKEN Lokalplan nr. 506).



Figure 24 - The illustration from "Lokalplan nr. 506 Mjølnerparken med kommuneplantillæg nr. 31 - Københavns Kommune", shows important, existing and future connections. It is important to ensure physical coherence across borders and barriers.

These interconnected spaces were designed to foster engagement between different demographic groups while enhancing the district's accessibility through pedestrian and cycling routes. However, my field observations reveal discrepancies between the planned connectivity and its real functionality: the absence of directional information and city signs makes it difficult for first-time visitors to locate the park and navigate through it (Author's Field Observations, October 15–18, 2024).

Contrary to what has sometimes been suggested in previous literature, the Black-Market area does not seem to be significantly less used than the Red Square; rather, the level of activity varies depending on the time of day, function, and weather conditions. The Green Park, during my observations, was the least used space, likely due to lower temperatures, which make passive outdoor recreation less attractive. In addition, the cycling path running through Superkilen sees heavy use, particularly during commuting hours, reinforcing its success as a transit-oriented design intervention (Author's Field Observations, October 15–18, 2024).

As reported from my first impression, also below in the appendix, I noticed that without using my phone's navigation, it would have been difficult to locate the park since there was no signage providing relevant information. The street was not very busy, but the high presence of bicycles as a common mode of transport was immediately evident. This bike path was in use even at that late hour, with streetlamps positioned along it. (Author's first Field Observations, October 15, 2024)



Figure 25 - Pictures showing the use of Superkilen as an important way of connection, thanks to the cycling line. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.

Following the cycling route along the pedestrian path, I reached the Black Market, crossing Mimersgade, a transversal street that divides these two areas. This street is well-lit and features an urban element that stands out as you exit the Red Square, a nearly scenic structure of four connected arches with an oriental aesthetic, making it feel like a setting outside Denmark. Later, I found out that this is a replica of a bus stop from Kazakhstan. (Author's first Field Observations, October 15, 2024).

A note from the site visit observations on the design concerns the placement of elements. They are mixed rather than grouped by nationality, though it is possible to find adjacent elements from the same country, each element has its own unique position. (Author's Field Observations, October 15–18, 2024).



Figure 26 - Pictures showing the replica of a bus stop from Kazakhstan installed in Superkilen park between the Red Square area and the Black Market one. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.

What is particularly striking, however, is how the type of multicultural representation that Superkilen attempted to create is arguably more in demand today than it was at the time of its conception. Since its development in the 2010s, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of cultural diversity in urban spaces not only as a visual marker of inclusion but as an active, evolving process of engagement. Throughout the design of Superkilen, the intention was to communicate a sense of belonging and inclusivity. However, my field observations suggest that while the park aims to convey this message through its artistic elements and multicultural symbols, the actual experience of belonging varies among the local community. The park's narrative often fails to resonate with everyone, as it may appear more like a representation of inclusion rather than a lived experience of it. Some residents may feel distanced from the park's symbolic representation, leading to a disconnect between the intended and perceived messages of inclusivity.

Superkilen has been designed under contemporary urban paradigms; It is likely that a more adaptive participatory approach would have been employed, emphasizing ongoing engagement rather than a one-time consultation. In my observations, Superkilen reveals some details about how the concept of participation has tried to evolve beyond a one-time phase in urban design to become an ongoing process. Just consult Figure 22 above, which reports the invitation to participate as anticipated. Then, if we go into detail, the invitation is to consult 5 different project proposals, 5 projects already pre-set, therefore. The involvement of the community, though structured during the project's initial stages, continues to shape the park's identity and function over time inevitably. This dynamic approach reflects a broader shift in urban planning, where participation is increasingly seen as an adaptive and continuous practice rather than a fixed design stage.

In this sense, Superkilen could be seen as a project that was ahead of its time in its vision but constrained by the methods available during its implementation. While it pioneered a model of multicultural representation in public space, its structured approach to participation now feels somewhat outdated compared to newer frameworks that emphasize long-term community involvement and adaptive governance. The question remains whether Superkilen can evolve beyond its initial artistic vision to incorporate more dynamic and participatory elements in the future.

The approach aimed at inclusion through the medium of art is another identifying point of the project strategy. This will to use art, as an element of visual and behavioural expression of a community, known as social participation, and the captivating image of Superkilen as expressed in advertising terms of the concept itself, because in practice, they are used as an advertising medium for the project, almost as a slogan of public action in proposing such a public space: "*Superkilen, an artistic showcase park, co-created with the community and aiming for inclusion.*" Through this narrative, connecting to what is expressed by Erfani (2022) about the experience and its influence on the sense of belonging to a place, certain information and feelings can be communicated to those who live in and observe the changes in a place. In the case of Superkilen, the modes of storytelling along its creation process have been

unclear. Better said, the narrated story/action/plan does not fully represent what was done. From this perspective, a community might feel tricked because it was used as a means but not as a collaborator, as it ultimately did not play a true role in shaping the reality park reality.

This reveals a fundamental tension within Superkilen's governance model: while the project was framed as a participatory urban intervention, the actual mechanisms of civic involvement tell a more complex story. Understanding these contradictions requires an examination of how public participation was structured, implemented, and perceived both by designers and the local community.

6.2. Social Engagement and Participatory Challenges in Superkilen

Superkilen's approach to urban regeneration aligns with Copenhagen's broader municipal planning strategies but also diverges in keyways. The "Extreme Participation" methodology, developed by Superflex, which sought to engage Nørrebro's diverse residents in shaping the aesthetic and functional elements of the park (Community Engagement and Urban Planning in Copenhagen, 2023). However, documented interviews and participation records indicate that actual local involvement was limited.

According to Bjarke Ingels (Founder of BIG), during a documented interview (Superkilen – A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, 2013), Superkilen was conceived as 'not just a park but an experiment in aestheticizing urban diversity,' emphasizing its role in cultural inclusivity and artistic urbanism (Superkilen-A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, 2013). However, Martin Rein-Cano (Founder of TOPOTEK 1), in the documented interview, criticized the participatory approach, describing it as 'chaotic and ineffective,' arguing that it functioned more as a bureaucratic requirement rather than an actual design tool (Superkilen-A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, 2013). Similarly, Astrid Bruus Thomsen (Programchef Realdania) pointed out that community meetings were often dominated by a small, non-representative group of middle-aged men, failing to represent Nørrebro's diverse demographic, questioning the depth of local engagement (Superkilen- A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, 2013).

The range of people who were practically involved in the project process could, from their small part, influence the actual spatial Usage. Direct field observations between October 15-18, 2024, confirm significant discrepancies between the design intent and actual usage. The Red Square, envisioned as a dynamic community hub, is underutilized in the evening due to insufficient lighting, while the Black Market functions more effectively as a social space.

In detail (see Appendix: Author's Field Observations, October 15–18, 2024), during my first visit of Superkilen on October 15, 2024; I found myself in the Red Square, and shortly after, I realized that the sensation of emptiness was likely due to the vastness of the square and the lack of many elements filling it. At the southernmost edge of the square, there is a large colorful graffiti on a black base covering the wall of an adjacent building, serving as a landmark for this place. A structure nearby, which I later learned was the sports hall, was closing at that hour, with some staff working on its shutdown. At first glance, I thought the building might be a cinema.

Other urban furnishings, such as benches and playground equipment for children and adults, were being used by some people. However, because the area did not seem very bright, some elements did not immediately stand out to me as they did in the following days. (Author's first Field Observations, October 15, 2024).

Upon entering the Black Market, the atmosphere felt different from the Red Square, a bit more illuminated and more expansive, as it is flanked by two secondary streets that create a broader space, not directly bordered by buildings or dividing walls. Here, I noticed key urban elements such as grilles, concrete tables engraved with board games, and special seating arrangements. A prominent feature in this area is the large black octopus-shaped play structure, a well-known symbol of the park, which was also illuminated (Author's first Field Observations, October 15, 2024).



Figure 27 - Pictures showing the park during evening hours and the difficult usage of the area because of the light and the single way of objects use. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.

The Green Park extends further and is longer compared to the other two areas. The cycling route continues through this part of the park, leading to Tagensvej, another major road opposite Nørrebrogade. This section is marked by green spaces and recreational zones dedicated to activities such as outdoor sports, a basketball court, multi-sport areas, picnic areas with covered tables, hammocks, and various outdoor installations from different nations. There are colorful benches, gazebos, ping-pong tables, swings for adults, and a large black bull, a Spanish symbol placed on a small hill at the far end of the park (Author's first Field Observations, October 15, 2024).

The lack of seating and shade in the Green Park further limits its usability during certain seasons.



Figure 28 - Pictures showing the Green area of the park and placed components that are more suitable for summer activities. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.

It is possible to interpret community Participation as Rhetoric vs. Reality because what came out from the analysis is that local community members were invited to propose urban objects reflecting their cultural heritage, and over 100 public elements from more than 50 countries were ultimately integrated into the park's design. These included Portuguese ceramic benches, Moroccan fountains, and Turkish backgammon tables Community Engagement and Urban Planning in Copenhagen, 2023). However, despite the project's emphasis on community engagement, reports indicate that only 11 of the final 108 objects were directly selected by local residents. The majority of design decisions were ultimately guided by planners and designers, raising concerns about the extent to which participatory urbanism was meaningfully applied (Borgerinddragelse og Superkilen, 2012).

From my own observations, I noted a tension between visual identity and actual use, which might suggest that aesthetic strategies risk overshadowing structural inclusivity. Observing the park and the inside area of the NørrebroHallen (the old train station, Fig. 29), in the Red Square, I felt something different in terms of people's behaviour. Notably, the NørrebroHallen, encompassing a sports hall, library, and café, emerges as a crucial social node facilitating multigenerational interaction and reinforcing the park's multicultural narrative through its fusion cuisine and diverse visitorship (Fig. 29). Here, people are a lot, and there is a continuous flow in and out. Who comes for some sport time, who for study reasons, or kids' reading session, and who for a coffee break. A coffee restaurant that represents the project's multiculturalism of Superkilen, first for the multigenerational use of the space, second because of the cuisine proposed, with a fusion and mix of food cultures made by different chefs, who represent the district.

Reporting observation from the second visiting day, I entered the Sports Hall, and a new world opened to me. I was able to observe a place with multiple functions for both children and adults, like an extension of the outdoor area, but indoors. There were various game areas for basketball, badminton, children's play on mats, several sections with tables and benches, an information office, and, most importantly, a café/restaurant and a library, which are widely used by all categories of people. Another important aspect is the door that opens onto "Bragesgade," a street parallel to the park, providing access to the building (Author's first Field Observations, October 16, 2024).

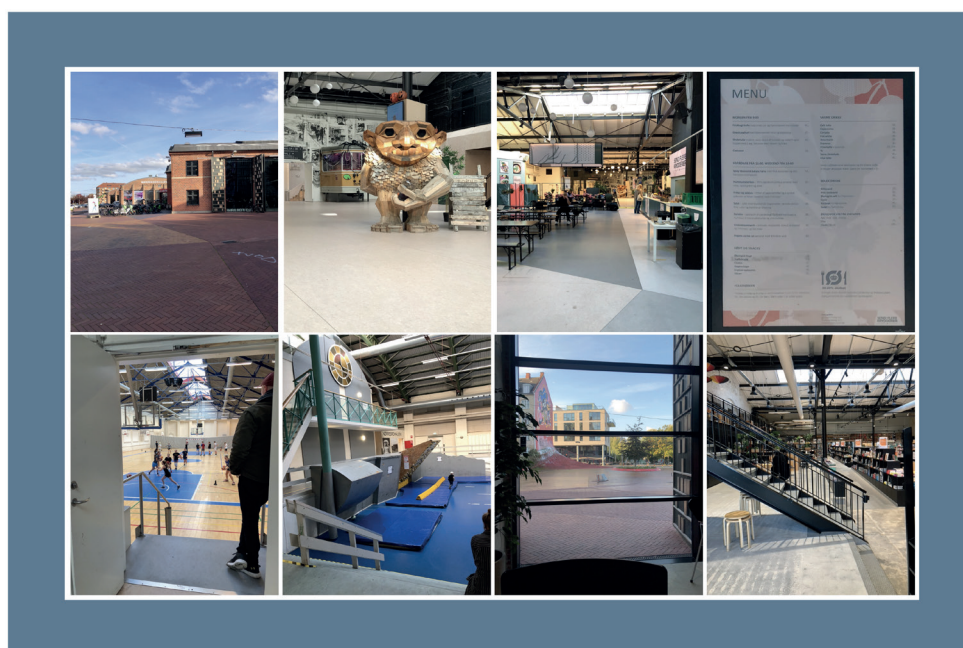


Figure 29 - series of pictures reporting the various zones inside: Old train station, Library, Caffee anche its menu, gym. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.

The following visiting day, I spent more time in the NørrebroHallen. It was a pleasant and welcoming space where many parents brought their young children to spend time between gym activities and reading books in the library. It was also a place where people could eat and share experiences with others, creating a space for various lifestyles. Besides the high number of athletes, the Sports Hall was frequented by students and casual readers, who had direct access through the door next to the

library. Another important observation is the lack of covered spaces within the park, with only a small, empty gazebo of medium-small dimensions)Author's first Field Observations, October 17, 2024).

In this regard, Superkilen represents a paradox in contemporary placemaking. On one hand, it successfully redefines the visual identity of Nørrebro as a multicultural and inclusive neighborhood, enhancing Copenhagen's international image as a progressive and diverse city. On the other hand, it exemplifies the risks of aestheticizing diversity without fostering true structural inclusivity. From my observations, it emerged that space risks remaining tied to a fixed image, rather than being continuously reinterpreted by the daily uses of citizens. I noted that while the design of Superkilen invites interaction, the ways people actually use the space often diverge from its conceptual framework, reinforcing the idea that placemaking must be continuously negotiated rather than predefined. One could argue that the park operates within a dual reality: on one hand, it provides a space for spontaneous interaction, community engagement, and social encounters; on the other, it is embedded in broader market-driven strategies that prioritize image over long-term inclusivity.

This seems to suggest that the artistic aspect aligns with what could be defined as a creative project, but certainly cannot be called a persistent, open-air exhibition offering multicultural expression in an open, public space. This implies that cultural expression cannot be presented singularly and constantly through objects and colors because different traditions are expressed through behaviors and actions that vary over time and occur through people and changes; they do not endure. This leads to the argument that, in some ways, Superkilen conflates art with branding, transforming participatory design into a marketing strategy rather than a long-term tool for urban inclusion.

The role of branding in Superkilen extends beyond participation; it also shapes the park's identity as a cultural landmark. While intended to showcase multicultural diversity, its artistic and aesthetic choices have had wider implications on urban branding, gentrification, and the commodification of public space, tourist-attractive.

Contradictions in policy intentions between urban planning and social impact have been presented, positioning Superkilen as part of Copenhagen's broader strategy for inclusive urbanism of the district. The Urban Regeneration Plan (2005, 2011, 2023) highlights that while the park was intended to promote social integration and multicultural representation, its long-term effects have included a rise in property values and demographic shifts in Nørrebro, leading to potential gentrification (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2023). The Retail Market Analysis (2023) further supports this, noting that Superkilen has contributed to the commercialization of Nørrebro's cultural identity, attracting businesses that cater to new demographics rather than long-standing residents (Retail Market Analysis, 2023). The Bydelsplan for Nørrebro 2023-2026 acknowledges these socio-economic transformations, aiming to counterbalance them through strategies that preserve cultural identity and social sustainability (Bydelsplan for Nørrebro, 2023-2026). These documents highlight an inherent contradiction: while Superkilen fosters multicultural branding and social interaction, the rising cost of living and changing socio-economic composition of Nørrebro challenge the sustainability of its inclusivity narrative and raise concerns about who ultimately benefits from such interventions (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2023; Retail Market Analysis, 2023; Bydelsplan for Nørrebro, 2023-2026).

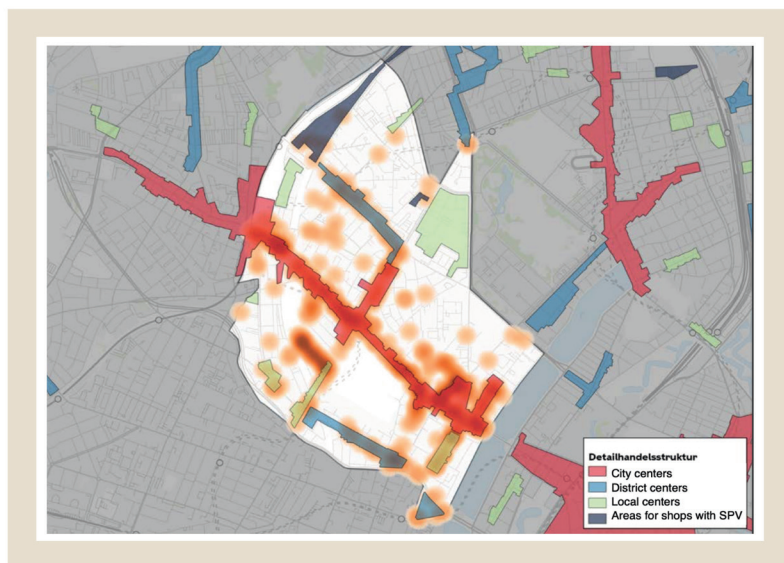


Figure 30 - Maps from the "Retail Analysis, 2023", Produced by COWI from for "Københavns Kommune 2023". The location of the shops in the Nørrebro district. The map shows the concentration of shops in the district. The darker the more shops.

Following these perspectives, till here, highlight the tension between Superkilen's public narrative of participatory inclusivity and the reality of its decision-making process, where artistic vision and urban branding played a more central role than substantive community involvement (Borgerinddragelse og Superkilen; Superkilen – A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX).

6.3. Public Art, Cultural Representation, and Urban Branding in Superkilen

While Superkilen has been widely praised for its innovative approach to placemaking, it is notable how it has been subject to critical analysis, particularly regarding its impact on gentrification and urban branding. The Summary of Vital Statistics by District and Type of Movement - City of Copenhagen (2023) reveals a sharp increase in property values in Nørrebro following the park's inauguration in 2012, raising concerns about the unintended consequences of culture-driven urban renewal. The district's rising rental prices have led to the displacement of some lower-income residents, indicating that Superkilen, despite its inclusive ambitions, has contributed to processes of socio-economic exclusion. Additionally, the Retail Market Analysis (2023) examines the commercialisation of Superkilen's identity, noting how the project has become a tool for rebranding Nørrebro as a creative and desirable destination, thereby reinforcing the economic forces driving gentrification rather than mitigating displacement risks.

This aligns with what I gathered from secondary sources, as the increase in housing costs in Nørrebro has been linked to the success of Superkilen as a global architectural landmark. While this economic development may be perceived as a positive urban transformation, it also raises questions about who really benefits from such interventions. From an urban governance perspective, this can be identified as a neoliberal policy model where aesthetic and innovations are the main point to invest in, and which is completely along with the Superkilen development process.

This continuous usage is undoubtedly influenced by the multicultural selection of installed objects and the diverse cultures that populate the area. Different cultures create different uses of the elements and bring their own traditions regarding daily routines, such as using the park at different times based on cultural habits (See appendix - Author's Field Observations, October 18, 2024).

Another crucial dimension of the analysis concerns the perception and involvement of local residents with the space. Thinking of the environments as places where actions happened and so, memories and personal feelings are born, creating a "sense of place". Although my research recognises that Superkilen fosters moments of cultural recognition, the deeper attachment to the place remains a matter

of debate. However, my field observations suggest that while the public art, also represented by the curated cultural artefacts, may serve as mnemonic devices, their effectiveness in strengthening local belonging is highly subjective. Some residents interact with these elements as recognisable extensions of their identity, while others perceive them as externally imposed representations that fail to capture the nuances of their lived experiences.

As mentioned, the multi-use nature of the park can be expressed through the coexistence of various nationalities, each bringing its own knowledge, culture, and experiences. This diversity creates a form of art that is expressed through the different ways people interact in this public space. This artistic expression is also reflected in the aesthetic design; the colors and public furniture are distinctive and representative of different installations, yet they are not merely objects to be observed but rather functional elements for daily use (Author's Field Observations, October 18, 2024).

The absence of signs, prohibitions, or explicit guidelines allows for an unrestricted approach to every corner of the park. This sense of freedom can also be felt inside the Sports Hall, where people always respectfully come and go, read, shop, and exercise simultaneously in the same space, with a sense of liberty (Author's Field Observations, October 18, 2024).



PRESERVE

PUBLIC

HOUSING

Figure 31 - Picture showing residents' claims. Report from "Bydel Plan For Nørrebro 2023-2026"

Watching the other side, as shown in the figure. 31 is to underline another aspect of the effectiveness of the project. The voice of residents and their desires for the neighborhood where they live is something important to include in such a transformation project to keep people belonging to that place. When in Superkilen, I did not understand if people felt like they belonged there. I saw an attractive square, open to all, mainly to visit. In my mind, I began to think that the boundary between the privacy of a private place and a completely open area can be defined by a very thin edge. The risk of aestheticization at the expense of authenticity becomes particularly evident in how Superkilen is marketed as a global success story, overshadowing the more localized and contested aspects of its social integration. The role of the park as a space of memory and narrative is equally significant. Markusen and Gadwa (2010) emphasize that placemaking should emerge from the organic narratives of local communities rather than be curated through top-down design processes.

Just think about the difference that can exist between a branding action without an actual useful purpose or a desire to involve people once in the park, as could be the App of the park (Fig. 32). The Superkilen App was thought out and created to better understand the objects chosen in the creation of Superkilen. It was open to all, but it is to highlight that today, I have not been able to use it because it does not appear as an existing/active application.

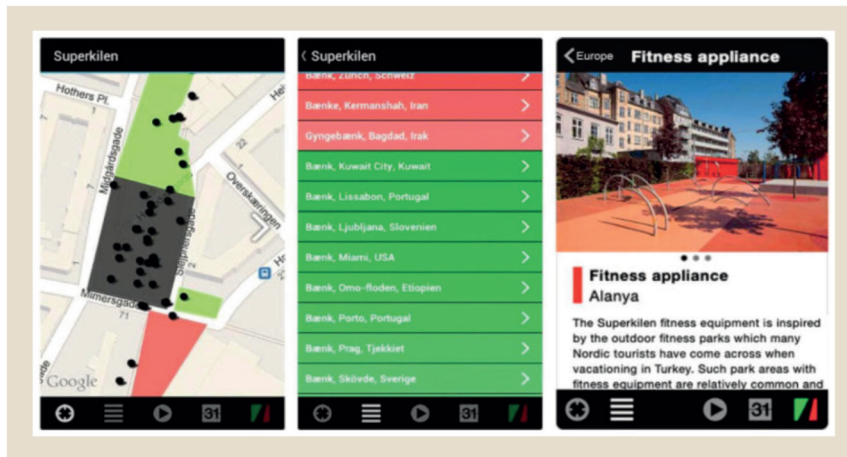


Figure 32 - Screenshot of the Superkilen Application made to connect people with the place, knowing the elements introduced. From Realdenia & Superflex, 2012

The structured approach to multicultural representation led to a paradoxical situation in which Superkilen stands as a global icon of diversity, while simultaneously reinforcing tensions over which narratives are told and who has the agency to shape them. The discussion of perception and branding further complicates the park's impact. An important dynamic to point out. Rein-Cano (Founder of TOPOTEK 1, documented interview Superkilen – A Project by BIG, TOPOTEK 1, SUPERFLEX, 2013) discusses the difficulty of integrating diverse cultural elements into a coherent urban space, emphasising that: 'Our approach was to create an urban landscape that encouraged people to interact and share their cultures in a common space.' While this vision aligns with the project's ambitions, the reality of how space is used highlights a more complex interaction between physical design and social behaviour. While Superkilen's urban landscape offers multiple opportunities for cultural engagement, field observations reveal that certain spaces are underutilized or appropriated differently from the original design intentions, reflecting the evolving needs of the community. In my opinion, while Superkilen's participatory framework was ambitious, its implementation remained more curated than co-created, limiting opportunities for organic evolution based on community needs.

Superkilen presents a unique fusion of public art, urban branding, and multicultural symbolism, raising questions about its impact on social inclusion and neighborhood identity. Limits of iconic design have been created in terms of spatial and functional realities. Site visit observations and photographic analysis indicate that while Superkilen's art installations create a visually striking public space, their actual use deviates from the intended design, yet still creates places that can be a space of free expression for those who feel free to use them in a way that is not intended.



Figure 33 - Series of pictures showing people using the Superkilen park in unconventional ways. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024

One of the most argued themes that emerges along the research is the aestheticization of Diversity and Urban Branding. However, photographic analysis and direct field observations reveal that while the park's aesthetic identity is visually striking, some elements do not foster genuine multicultural social interaction.



Figure 34 - Series of pictures showing the contradiction between park elements and interaction and loneliness/privacy. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.

The broader economic impact of Superkilen also aligns with global patterns of urban renewal, where public art and cultural branding are used to attract investments. As Chinedu (2024) highlights, public art contributes to economic growth by increasing tourism and local business activity, which in turn attracts investors. This trend is evident in Zebracki's (2017) study, which demonstrates how urban cultural projects have driven local business development, leading to increased property values and demographic shifts.

In the case of Superkilen, while it has undeniably contributed to Copenhagen's international image, it has also intensified the process of gentrification in Nørrebro. This raises major fundamental questions about who benefits from such interventions and whether they ultimately reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities rather than mitigating them.

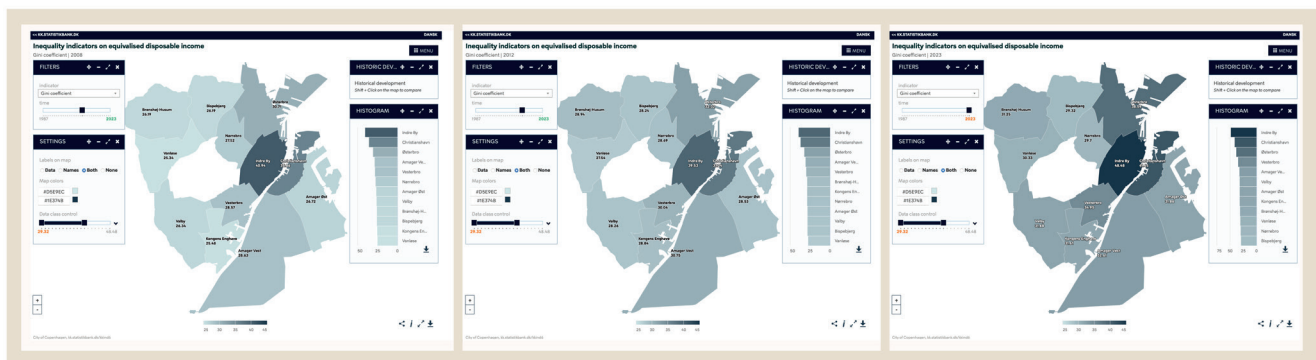


Figure 35 - Maps reporting the Inequalities indicator on equivalised disposable income, as percentage value of years 2008, 2012 and 2023 in the Copenhagen territory. "Gini Coefficient" data from the Statistical Bank of Denmark - Accessed March, 2025.

Moving forward, Superkilen offers valuable lessons on the future challenges of balancing aesthetic representation, social sustainability, and the political economy of urban renewal. Ensuring that public spaces remain inclusive not only visually but also in practice requires a more nuanced, bottom-up approach

that prioritizes local narratives, flexible adaptation, and active community participation. Superkilen's branding as a "community-driven" space raises important questions about the role of narrative in urban planning. This aspect is particularly relevant in Superkilen's case, where the dominant narrative shows a co-created project, yet community participation was much less than advertised.



*Figure 36 - Pictures showing two elements introduced in Superkilen that are not there anymore. A sound system from Jamaica
<https://livingthecity.eu/en/2020/09/07/superkilen/> © Superflex
 A bench tiled with Portuguese tile, heavily eroded <https://thepeoplecity.com/2021/05/01/images-of-inclusion-at-superkilen-park/>*

The case of Superkilen highlights how urban renewal projects must navigate the fine line between representation and commodification, participation and control, inclusion, and displacement. As cities continue to experiment with artistic and participatory placemaking, the lessons from Superkilen underscore the importance of ensuring that such interventions serve not only as cultural symbols but as living, adaptive spaces that truly reflect and respond to the needs of the communities they intend to engage.

Last, but not least, it is to take a look at the three park areas and green spaces and their Long-Term Maintenance Issues. The initial project plan aimed to strengthen the district's green infrastructure, but observations indicate that vegetation is minimal and that maintenance issues have emerged over time (Author's Field Observations, October 15–18, 2024).

Some urban objects show signs of deterioration, and some others are not there anymore because too damaged to keep them in the place.

Residents have expressed concerns about the long-term sustainability of the installations (Borgerinddragelse og Superkilen, 2012).

While in the green zone, I noticed a greater level of degradation in some installations. Certain elements were damaged by time and vandalism, such as faded wooden structures, dirty objects, graffiti, missing information plaques, and muddy areas (See appendix - Author's Field Observations, October 17, 2024)

The lack of maintenance and the slow repair process for key urban elements, particularly in the Red Square, has led to criticism from local residents and stakeholders involved in the participatory process. Some argue that the imported materials make repairs difficult, resulting in prolonged periods of degradation (Borgerinddragelse og Superkilen, 2012).



Figure 37 - Series of pictures showing the damage situation of some of the objects in the park. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.

It was quite unthinkable to find the park's neon signs turned off during the night hours. In Fig. 38, the images taken around 9.30/10.00 P.M. are shown.

Better reported in the "Personal Observation"- appendix section; One aspect that was immediately noticeable during the first night visit of the Park, was the presence of four large, illuminated signs in different styles, inspired by signage from various nations. However, these were not turned on. I wondered why, as evening would be the ideal time to showcase their aesthetic and lighting function. Seeing them off gave a sense of abandonment.

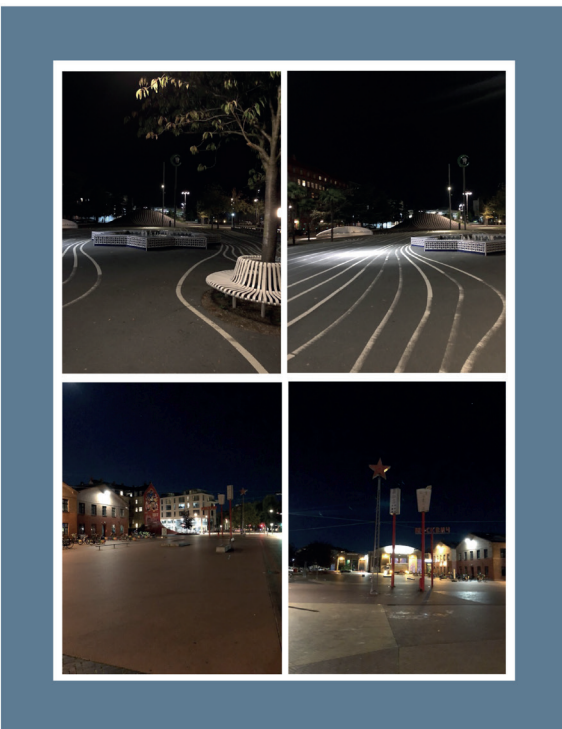


Figure 38 - Series of pictures showing majestic neon signs in Superkilen, switched off during dark hours. From the Author's field observation, October 15-18, 2024.



7. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings reveal complex dynamics at the intersection of placemaking, public art, and social sustainability. While these dimensions are distinct, they are deeply interconnected in shaping contemporary urban experiences. The evidence collected and the observed patterns point to recurring tensions that underscore the susceptibility of placemaking practices to neoliberal co-optation. On one hand, such practices may foster inclusion, accessibility, and social justice; on the other, they risk becoming instruments of economic speculation and spatial exclusion.

This chapter offers a critical analysis of the results in light of existing theoretical debates, emphasizing the ambivalences embedded in urban regeneration practices. It challenges dominant models of participation, the aestheticization of social issues, and the branding of public space, while also exploring the transformative potential of critical placemaking. The aim is to reflect on the role of participatory and artistic strategies in either promoting or undermining sustainable forms of urban coexistence.

The interdependent nature of placemaking, public art, and social sustainability reveals the necessity of resisting neoliberal co-optation. These elements do not function in isolation but as interconnected mechanisms shaping contemporary urban experiences. However, their effectiveness depends on ensuring that public spaces remain inclusive, accessible, and socially just, rather than being leveraged as tools for economic speculation and urban exclusivity.

The ongoing debate on placemaking revolves around several key critical issues:

- **Community Needs versus Profit Motives:** Placemaking can either prioritize local engagement or be used as a strategic tool to attract investment and higher-income residents, often leading to gentrification. Scholars such as Madanipour (2019) and Lefebvre (1996) highlight how urban spaces risk being shaped by economic interests rather than community-driven needs. This debate raises fundamental concerns about whether public space interventions genuinely serve residents or cater primarily to external investors.
- **Consensus versus Conflict:** While placemaking is often framed as a collaborative process, it also involves negotiation and contestation, particularly when different stakeholders hold conflicting interests. Mouffe (2000) argues that conflict and dissensus should be acknowledged as part of urban governance, rather than placemaking being used as a homogenizing tool. This approach aligns with critical placemaking, which recognizes spatial inequalities and power imbalances in decision-making.
- **Aestheticization of Social Problems:** There is a risk that public art and placemaking interventions, rather than addressing systemic urban inequalities, merely beautify these issues, making them more palatable without tackling their root causes. Zukin (1995) critiques the use of cultural symbols to mask deeper socio-economic problems, warning that aesthetic strategies often fail to challenge existing inequalities. Projects like those discussed by Toolis (2017) show how participatory design can sometimes be more performative than substantive.
- **Placemaking as a Platform for Inclusive Dialogue and Spatial Justice:** Can placemaking genuinely foster long-term community empowerment, or does it risk becoming an instrument for branding and top-down urban renewal? Harvey (2012) and Soja (2010) emphasize that public spaces should not only be accessible but also actively challenge dominant power structures, ensuring a right to the city for all urban residents.

These debates highlight the complexity of placemaking as both a planning tool and a socio-political practice, requiring a nuanced understanding of its implications for urban development and community agency.

On regards of the branding effect refers to the strategic use of placemaking to craft a marketable image for cities, aiming to attract tourists, investors, and higher-income residents. While this can enhance the cultural capital of a place, it also raises concerns about the commodification of public spaces. This approach often prioritizes aesthetics and marketability over the needs and identities of local communities, transforming public spaces into symbols of urban prosperity while deepening socio-economic divides

(Richards, 2017).

Public art plays a crucial role in this process. While art installations and cultural markers attract visitors, they also draw designers, artists, and the professional creative community seeking visibility and professional opportunities. This generates a cycle of attraction that brings socio-economic benefits. However, for this cycle to sustain itself in the long term, it requires continuous innovation and the creation of new spaces. This dynamic underscores how placemaking strategies can influence urban models and, consequently, reshape city structures over time.

In terms of possible actions, critical placemaking, supported by an agonistic approach, can serve as a powerful tool to amplify marginalized voices and confront socio-economic conflicts in contemporary urban spaces. Unlike mainstream placemaking, which often seeks consensus, critical placemaking acknowledges tensions and disparities within the urban fabric and uses public space as a platform for civic engagement and resistance.

This perspective is closely linked to Jane Jacobs' advocacy for walkability and human-scale urban planning. Jacobs emphasized the importance of mixed-use neighborhoods fostering street life and community interactions (Handbok i nordisk placemaking, 2023). Similarly, the 15-minute city model, which promotes self-sufficient neighborhoods, echoes Jacobs' vision by prioritizing accessibility and local interactions (Progress in Placemaking, 2024; Keidar, 2024). However, while creative placemaking aims to empower communities, it is also vulnerable to co-optation by commercial interests. Scholars critique how public art is sometimes leveraged as a branding tool rather than a genuine community-building initiative (Toolis, 2017; Richards, 2017).

On a level that would achieve sustainability, I see governance related to SIMKA's contribution as the possible starting point of action. Karimimoshaver et al. (2021) emphasize that the sustainability of interventions in public spaces depends on ongoing community involvement and adaptable governance structures. This requires urban planning approaches that not only recognize cultural and social diversity but also actively integrate mechanisms to prevent displacement and socio-economic stratification.

In this regard, Superkilen illustrates both the potential and the limitations of placemaking in achieving social sustainability. While the project successfully integrates multicultural elements, its long-term impact on social cohesion remains uncertain. The absence of directional signage makes it difficult for first-time visitors to navigate the park, yet the cycling path sees heavy use during commuting hours (Author's Field Observations, October 15–18, 2024). While this might suggest that locals do not require signage, it contrasts with the branding strategy aimed at external visitors.

SIMKA's contribution, with its experience in adaptive and participatory urbanism, further emphasizes the need for ongoing engagement between designers, residents, and policymakers. SIMKA's "Corners of Europe" project, which employed diverse participatory methods based on contextual and cultural differences, demonstrates the value of adaptive, evolving community engagement rather than a fixed participatory process (SIMKA, 2020).

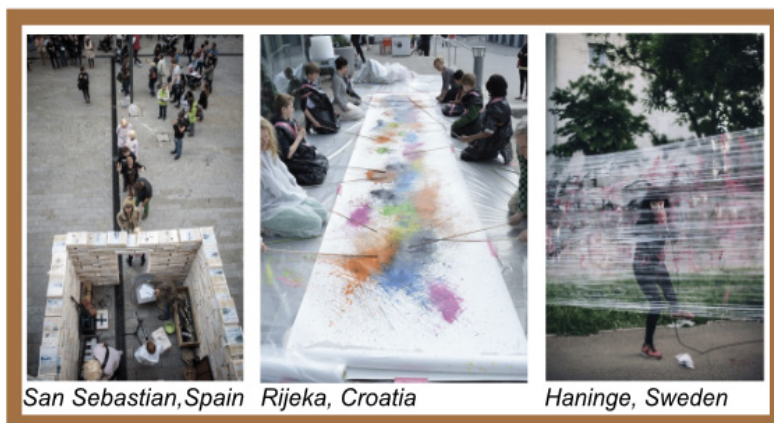


Figure. 39 - Corners of Europe project
- Project website - <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/j2yspt591no5u4recjr5k/SoAM-Haninge.pdf?rlkey=5hgiihfdv-g4z4w1aqwxvbwelj0&e=1&dl=0>

Their approach to flexible and evolving urban strategies aligns with the broader discourse on community-driven placemaking, supporting a continuous process of co-creation rather than a single design intervention. Reflecting on the Corners of Europe project, SIMKA engaged different groups through varied participatory methods, showing that urban engagement strategies must evolve based on shifting social dynamics.

To propose a comparative reflection between the Parco Dora, Turin, and Superkilen, Copenhagen, is linked by the industrial legacy and contemporary placemaking; both Superkilen in Copenhagen and Parco Dora in Turin share a common origin rooted in industrial landscapes. Historically, these areas were dedicated to utilitarian functions: Parco Dora was the site of major steel and mechanical factories, populated by assembly-line workers, while the area now occupied by Superkilen housed tram and train depots, serving a predominantly working-class community. In both cases, the spaces were primarily functional, responding to the demands of production and labor mobility characteristic of the early and mid-20th-century urban fabric.

Their respective transformations into public parks through urban regeneration strategies reflect broader shifts in urban policy, where deindustrialized spaces are reimagined as vibrant cultural and recreational hubs. However, despite this shared trajectory, the nature and implications of their redevelopment differ significantly.

Superkilen's regeneration was embedded in an explicitly multicultural narrative, aiming to represent the cultural diversity of its contemporary inhabitants through an "Extreme Participation" process, albeit with critical limitations regarding true community agency. Its design aestheticizes multiculturalism, yet simultaneously participates in processes of urban branding and gentrification, subtly displacing the very communities it sought to celebrate.

In contrast, Parco Dora's placemaking process emphasized the preservation of industrial memory and environmental restoration. By incorporating the massive steel structures of the former factories into the park's design, Parco Dora fosters a dialogue between past and present, offering a raw and authentic reflection of the site's industrial heritage. The regeneration prioritized creating an open, flexible space for collective use, including large green areas, cultural events, and leisure facilities, thus enabling social interaction without overtly commodifying the site's historical or cultural narratives.



Figure 40 - Series of pictures showing Dora park in Turin. From the Author's field observation, October, 2022.

Looking ahead, integrating principles of resilient design, environmental awareness, and an evolving participatory framework could transform Superkilen into a more inclusive and adaptable urban landscape, capable of responding dynamically to both social and environmental needs. Ensuring that public spaces are not only visually appealing but also accessible, reliable, and sustainable for future generations is key to equitable and lasting urban development.

Finally, the challenge of placemaking lies in ensuring that interventions are not only visually appealing but also adaptive, socially inclusive, and sustainable over time. As urban spaces continue to evolve, future placemaking strategies must incorporate:

- Flexible and long-term participatory governance to ensure that projects remain relevant and community-driven.
- An awareness of gentrification risks and proactive policies to mitigate displacement.
- A balance between artistic innovation and functionality, ensuring that public spaces remain accessible and practical.
- An understanding of the evolving role of branding in placemaking, considering how public art and design shape socio-economic outcomes.
- A dynamic and adaptive approach, inspired by models such as SIMKA's participatory framework, ensures that urban spaces remain responsive to community transformations over time.


Superkilen remains an influential case study in contemporary urban design, illustrating both the potential and the limitations of participatory placemaking. While its visual identity and conceptual framework have inspired urban projects worldwide, its challenges in equity, accessibility, and long-term social impact highlight critical lessons for future urban interventions. To truly embody inclusive and sustainable urbanism, future projects must balance artistic ambition with practical engagement, ensuring that public spaces serve communities beyond their aesthetic appeal.

An important dimension that emerges from this discussion is the role of art as a medium for achieving spatial justice. According to Feitosa (2021), spatial justice involves not only the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities across urban spaces but also the symbolic and material recognition of marginalized communities within the spatial fabric. In this context, public art transcends its aesthetic function to become a political tool capable of challenging dominant spatial orders and empowering underrepresented groups.

Within placemaking practices, critical and participatory art interventions can thus be seen as acts of spatial justice. By re-appropriating public spaces, amplifying suppressed narratives, and fostering inclusive representation, art can contribute to the creation of more equitable urban environments. However, this potential is contingent upon resisting the commodification of art and maintaining its rootedness in community needs and struggles.

SIMKA's projects, with their emphasis on flexibility, context sensitivity, and continuous community engagement, embody this transformative role of art. Their participatory approach challenges the traditional top-down dynamics of urban design and offers a framework where spatial justice is not a static outcome but an ongoing, negotiated process. Similarly, comparing cases like Superkilen and Parco Dora highlights how the capacity of placemaking to foster spatial justice depends less on the aesthetic form and more on the relational processes and governance structures that sustain community agency over time.

Recognizing art as a catalyst for spatial justice not only redefines the purpose of public interventions but also expands the vision of urban sustainability, one that is inseparable from the pursuit of equity, recognition, and participatory democracy within the urban realm.



8. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER THOUGHTS

This final chapter brings together the key findings of the thesis and reflects on their broader implications. It revisits the research questions considering the case study and theoretical framework, discusses the comparative insights gained through the internship with SIMKA, and considers the opportunities and limitations of creative placemaking as a tool for inclusive urban transformation.

Superkilen was conceived as a public space that visually celebrates multiculturalism through urban and artistic interventions. However, a critical analysis of its functionality reveals an inherent paradox: while the park is aesthetically diverse, its social and behavioural dynamics reflect a homogenised model of public space, predominantly shaped by Danish urban norms. The artistic expression embedded within Superkilen does not translate into an active engagement of multiple cultural traditions in daily life. Instead, the park remains a structured and curated environment with limited spontaneous cultural interactions.

The essence of inclusivity meant to define the project becomes an aestheticised image rather than an organic social practice. The absence of evident cultural distinctions in behaviours and encounters raises questions about whether the intended multicultural vibrancy has been truly realised or if it has been subsumed under a singular, dominant urban framework. Finally, the engagement of art in a public urban context has a straightforward sense in the case of Superkilen, which can be reflected in the usage of green neutral elements in the park. An important note to point out and further expand as a study, and practically propose in the next cases of public space projects.

8.1. Reflections on the Research Questions

Although the three research questions, mostly the first two, have been addressed progressively throughout the theoretical framework, case study, and discussion chapters, this section provides a direct and concise reflection of the findings related to each. This effort aims to make the outcomes more explicit and accessible.

The starting information I was interested in understanding more about was addressed by the spontaneous question directly linked with the thesis topic: *“How do the artistic interventions in Superkilen contribute to the placemaking process along a regenerative neighbourhood project and the creation of an inclusive public space?”*

Methodologically, my approach to answering this question is deeply rooted in a complex and comprehensive theoretical framework, which provides the basis for understanding the intersection of urban regeneration, placemaking, and public art. I used a combination of critical analysis and case study analysis, drawing on relevant theories to interpret the specific characteristics of the Superkilen project and its artistic interventions. The visit to the site of interest of the research contributed to the understanding of the different information and data collected during the entire research process. From the theoretical framework and therefore the theories of others to the documentation of policies and the statements of those who collaborated directly and permanently with the project.

The artistic interventions in Superkilen play a key role in establishing a strong visual and symbolic identity for the area. By incorporating objects and designs that reference over 60 national cultures, the project attempts to celebrate the diversity of Nørrebro's residents and to transform a previously underused public space into a vibrant, engaging environment.

However, the effectiveness of these interventions in generating long-term inclusivity is debated. While the aesthetic dimension successfully creates a unique sense of place, the participatory processes behind the design were largely symbolic and limited in scope. This restricts the project's ability to foster deeper forms of social ownership and co-creation. Thus, Superkilen contributes meaningfully to placemaking on a symbolic and aesthetic level, but its inclusivity is more representative than relational, and somewhat fragile over time.

Secondly, the other question linked to the thesis topic that the research wants to answer is *“In what*

ways does Superkilen foster or challenge social sustainability within the local community?"

Superkilen's strategy of cultural representation through design elements supports social sustainability by acknowledging the presence and histories of diverse communities. Social Sustainability is intended as the set of influences that a sustainable model has on the social sphere; therefore, it certainly in the involvement of people in the design of public spaces, in balancing such participation with the economic-productive factor and taking into consideration the importance of the ecological aspect of the environment. A significant factor in placemaking is to bring back social well-being and, therefore, citizen satisfaction.

The park invites multicultural recognition and encourages interaction through its open, accessible layout. It contributes to social cohesion by creating a space that symbolically includes various identities. However, critical literature and observations suggest that the project may unintentionally contribute to gentrification. The beautification and branding of the area attract external interest, potentially displacing vulnerable populations. Furthermore, limited community involvement in long-term management and design phases reduces the sense of local ownership. Therefore, while Superkilen promotes social sustainability at the level of symbolism and accessibility, it challenges it in terms of governance, continuity, and deeper civic engagement.

Replying to the third research question, *"How can the SIMKA approach be applied to similar placemaking projects to achieve a more effective balance between cultural representation, social cohesion, and artistic expression?"*

Keeping the idea of giving more attention and time to this section in depth at another time, focusing on research that would shift the focus more on the specific projects' comparison and details. I am replying to this question in a discussed way because of the real collected resources and the difficulties of a deep answer.

Regarding the broader repercussions of similar SIMKA placemaking strategies in public spaces, it becomes evident that the nature of temporality in artistic interventions plays a crucial role in fostering inclusive environments. SIMKA's approach, which prioritises adaptable and transient projects, presents an alternative to static and fixed installations like Superkilen. By allowing for flexible urban transformations, temporary artistic interventions create opportunities for continuous dialogue between the community and the space itself, adapting to social transformations and shifting demographics. Unlike Superkilen, which, despite its participatory intent, largely functions as a predefined exhibition of multicultural elements, SIMKA's work demonstrates how non-permanent interventions can generate an ongoing placemaking process, fostering greater community involvement over time.

Furthermore, reflecting upon similar urban regeneration experiences strengthens the understanding of Superkilen's challenges and opportunities within a broader context and highlights different placemaking approaches. A comparative insight between Superkilen and Parco Dora in Turin offers an additional perspective on how post-industrial urban landscapes can be transformed and reinterpreted in diverse contexts.

Both projects demonstrate the challenges and opportunities inherent in reimagining post-industrial spaces. While Superkilen leverages cultural diversity as a design motif within a broader neoliberal urban agenda, Parco Dora adopts a more restrained approach, emphasising memory, openness, and environmental recovery. Yet, they are also connected by the risk that, without continuous community-centred governance, such spaces can become detached from the social fabric they were intended to serve. A risk that SIMKA's approach, with its temporary and community-engaged projects, seeks to mitigate. However, the SIMKA approach faces its own challenges, particularly due to the smaller scale of its interventions and the deep, tailored connection it aims to establish within each specific context.

Thus, examining Parco Dora alongside Superkilen highlights two distinct strategies of placemaking in post-industrial contexts: one focusing on cultural symbolism and global visibility, the other on environmental and historical continuity. Both reveal the critical importance of moving beyond aesthetic regeneration toward genuinely inclusive, adaptive, and socially sustainable urban futures.

Through this reflection, the many difficulties encountered during the placemaking process become even clearer, as well as the possible ways to act sensitively within places rich in contradictions, cultures, and layered histories. Clearly, in different contexts, artistic expression committed to correctly pursuing the different final objectives involving cultural representation and social cohesion is fundamental and would be elaborated differently depending on the size of the context. Although on small to medium scales, SIMKA could be taken into consideration as a starting point on which to base studies and methods of placemaking actions. Similarly, to a first draft, it could be developed to create a guideline in this regard. Aiming to include communities using contemporary art.

8.2. Final Considerations: Contributions, Limitations, and Future Outlook

Previous reflections are particularly relevant when considering urban regeneration in different contexts, such as Italy, where projects often struggle with administrative fragmentation and limited access to structured documentation. A comparison of the Superkilen project with initiatives like the MAU (Urban Art Museum) in Turin could be useful to better understand how to improve the defined type of placemaking process. From the limited information collected about the MAU museum, for example, it is already possible to highlight the effectiveness of decentralized and evolving forms of artistic expression, which contrast with top-down, rigidly designed urban spaces. MAU operates as an open-air museum embedded within the urban fabric, where artistic interventions are not confined to a specific location but are dispersed across a district, creating a continuously evolving artistic landscape. This model shares similarities with SIMKA's approach, where temporary and adaptable interventions maintain an active relationship with the community, ensuring that the space remains dynamic and reflective of contemporary cultural and social transformations.

The flexibility of MAU contrasts with the permanence of Superkilen, demonstrating how scattered artistic interventions can foster long-term engagement rather than a one-time urban branding operation. MAU can be better identified as an Open-Air exhibition, over the years new artistic elements. There is always something new to gaze at. Reasons to visit the place again, not only as a tourist. Of course, it is needed to do deeper studies and compare these projects and contexts to affirm the kind of findings, and I would encourage similar research to better understand the dynamics and influences of different approaches in placemaking.

Additionally, the challenges faced during this research, such as the difficulty in collecting sources, conducting in-depth field studies, and obtaining direct interviews, underline the need for more flexible methodologies in urban studies, particularly when applied to contexts with weaker institutional frameworks. Furthermore, Superkilen should not be studied as a static entity but rather as an evolving urban experiment that requires continuous reassessment over time. The impact of public art and placemaking initiatives cannot be fully captured at a single point in time but should be analyzed longitudinally to understand their real effects on social cohesion, identity formation, and urban integration. A long-term study could reveal how demographic shifts, behavioural patterns, and policy adaptations influence the park's effectiveness as a multicultural space.

The regeneration of abandoned and neglected areas is always a challenge that involves various actors and a lot of questions regarding aspects related to social life. From this research, Superkilen shows many strengths and weaknesses, as most of the projects do. Probably in terms of inclusion, there will be a forever discussion in this case. Generalising, we can say that overall, the area of Nørrebro now is accessible to everyone and Danish people also, who in the past were not going there because of the "Ghetto" reasons, nowadays is attracting people to go to that district, and for sure Superkilen is one of the major areas to pass through.

The issue of gentrification, participation, and social sustainability remains central to Superkilen's legacy. While urban interventions have undeniably succeeded in creating a globally celebrated public space, the extent to which they foster long-term inclusion and equitable urban development remains an open question. As Toolis (2017) warns, placemaking that lacks mechanisms for continuous civic engagement and adaptability risks becoming a static project, disconnected from the communities it intends to serve.

Looking to the future, urban strategies inspired by Superkilen should integrate more flexible, bottom-up participatory governance models that allow for dynamic reinterpretations of space over time, ensuring that branding and visual identity do not overshadow the lived experiences and needs of residents.

Reaffirming the role of art in contexts like these, which seek to use artistic expression to enhance inclusion in public space, art comes to define itself as public art and community expression. In addition, public greenery should be taken into consideration as an element more thought in aesthetic-artistic terms. With its multiple forms of growth and representation. Another strength that can be in the role of art, moreover, has a recognised positivity on the environment as well as on people's lives.

As it comes out from this research, while placemaking can strengthen a sense of belonging and enhance urban vitality, it also carries inherent risks such as the commodification of cultural identity, social exclusion, and gentrification. This is particularly relevant in the case of Superkilen, where the aesthetic representation of diversity does not necessarily translate into active community participation. To overcome these limitations, a more dynamic approach, such as that employed by SIMKA and MAU, can provide greater flexibility and inclusivity. It is fundamental to remember the different project scales. The same principle can be applied to the ongoing regeneration process of Porto Vecchio, an old port area, in the city of Trieste, my hometown in the north of Italy. There, a combination of permanent and temporary interventions could help balance historical preservation with the adaptability needed to address contemporary urban challenges.

This discussion aligns with the broader reflections presented by Gabriele Qualizza in "Oltre lo Shopping" (2006), in English "Beyond Shopping", where the author critiques the transformation of urban spaces into commodified and spectacle-driven environments. The book's main phrase, found on its front page, states: 'Cities are increasingly experienced as open-air shopping centres, where consumption dominates public space and conditions social relations'.

Superkilen, while initially conceived as an inclusive public space, risks becoming a curated attraction rather than a lived, participatory environment, like a big and open shopping centre. The park's aestheticised approach to multiculturalism echoes Qualizza's concerns about the commercialisation of public space, where artistic and cultural expressions are often repurposed as branding tools rather than catalysts for meaningful social interactions.

I would like to take inspiration from Qualizza's thought about the idea that stores are places of meetings, paths hosting events, and manifestations, but mostly places to link memories, feelings, and dreams. Also, Tuan (1977) refers to the importance of experiences in a place and the link it has with the feeling and the memory of that specific moment, and so the creation of place attachment.

This helps us to understand that nowadays, studying outdoor and indoor spaces can be really similar at the moment because both reflect post-commercial dynamics, and so are defined as places of attraction. It is important to consider art also as an element that creates a specific atmosphere around us, a situation for us to remember, and that inevitably touches us somehow. The same as music and design do anyway.

A stronger call to action is necessary for future urban projects to avoid these pitfalls. Urban regeneration strategies must go beyond visual representation and focus on fostering genuine community participation, adaptability, and continuous civic engagement.

For all these considerations till here, and because I care about strengthening the findings from this research and taking them as an example of an ongoing public space transformation to practically apply this knowledge to another scale case study. I came back to what I introduced some words above, the Porto Vecchio regeneration project. I would like to launch a discussion about the largest urban regeneration project in the city. This project involves a large area that represents the old city port. A place of strong history and memories for Trieste, but also for all the surrounding areas that involve the various nations bordering the territory itself. The ongoing revitalisation of "Porto Vecchio" represents one of the most significant urban Italian redevelopment projects, aiming to transform the historic port area into a multifunctional district blending heritage conservation with contemporary cultural and social elements (Municipality of Trieste, 2023).

The redevelopment of “Porto Vecchio” offers an opportunity to learn from both Superkilen’s limitations and SIMKA’s dynamic methodologies to take advantage of a more suitable improvement. The historic port is undergoing transformation into a vibrant urban district, with a will to incorporate public and cultural institutions and recreational spaces through the development based on a sustainability strategy. It must prioritise long-term inclusion over aesthetic appeal, following a community-based decision process and the presence of artistic aspects as an expression of citizens. Successful regeneration will depend on policies that encourage local involvement, adaptive reuse of historical spaces, and a balance between permanence and change. By integrating both permanent and temporary artistic interventions, like the approach taken by MAU and SIMKA, Porto Vecchio could become a dynamic urban landscape, fostering continuous community interaction rather than merely serving as a showcase of renewal. These are the fundamental points I would keep as a life-motive for a project like that.

Ultimately, the case study of Superkilen underscores that placemaking should be seen as a continuous and participatory process rather than a finite intervention. While the project successfully integrates artistic elements from diverse cultures, its real impact on everyday intercultural interaction remains ambiguous. Along this aspect, I would also consider another approach to introduce in the ones used as a mixed approach. The one I refer to is known as “Tactical Urbanism”, an approach initially introduced in the theoretical framework. Representing, experimental, participatory, and low-cost approach to urban planning, designed to trigger lasting change through temporary actions. A practice that consists of temporary and rapid urban interventions, often community-led, to test solutions to urban problems and stimulate broader transformation processes. It is a method of engaging citizens and stakeholders and demonstrating the potential of underused public spaces before permanent solutions are adopted. (Lydon and Garcia, 2015).

A truly inclusive placemaking model should embrace flexibility, foster genuine participation, and evolve over time to reflect the ever-changing dynamics of urban societies. Superkilen offers valuable lessons on the opportunities and challenges of integrating public art into urban planning, demonstrating that the success of placemaking depends not only on the visual representation of diversity but also on the active and sustained involvement of the community in shaping their environment throughout their lifetime.

Another crucial aspect that emerged during the fieldwork is the importance of maintenance and continuous care of public spaces and their components. During my visit to Superkilen, I observed that several objects originally installed in the park, such as the Jamaican sound system and the Portuguese bench, were no longer present or had deteriorated significantly.

This absence is not merely a technical oversight but represents a deeper contradiction: the very elements that were introduced through an extensive participatory process, the so-called “extreme participation”, have not been preserved over time. The objects were meant to embody the cultural identities and aspirations of the local community. Therefore, their removal or neglect can be perceived not only as a failure of maintenance but also as a subtle form of cultural exclusion and discrimination.

If the contributions of certain communities are no longer visible or accessible within the public space, the original intent of representing diversity is compromised. A sense of injustice may arise among the community members whose symbols have disappeared. Moreover, future visitors, residents, and new citizens are deprived of the opportunity to experience and recognize the richness of cultural expressions that once animated the park.

These considerations are a call for a broader reflection on the role of long-term maintenance in placemaking projects. Public space regeneration should not be conceived as a static intervention but as a living process that evolves over time. Proper maintenance must go beyond the mere preservation of existing elements; it should support the gradual improvement and innovation of the space itself. Well-maintained environments not only provide a sense of care, cleanliness, and order, but they also create the conditions for future enhancements, making it easier to adapt to changing needs and urban dynamics. When maintenance is integrated with a forward-looking strategy, resources are not consumed only to repair and restore, but also to update, evolve, and enrich the space over time, avoiding the stagnation of public areas and promoting their sustained relevance and vitality.

While the evolution of public spaces is natural and often necessary, it must occur in a way that respects the history, meaning, and shared memory embedded in them. In projects like Superkilen, which base their legitimacy on public participation, maintenance becomes not only a practical need but an ethical obligation. It is essential to ensure that the representations of different cultures remain present, cared for, and celebrated over time, allowing all citizens, present and future, to recognize themselves and their histories within the urban fabric.

This consideration is closely connected to the broader understanding of art as a tool for spatial justice: when cultural symbols and artistic elements are carefully maintained in public space, they actively contribute to the recognition, dignity, and visibility of diverse communities. Conversely, their neglect undermines the principles of equity and inclusion that placemaking initiatives should pursue.

Art in public space, therefore, must not be reduced to a one-time aesthetic gesture, but must be continuously nurtured as a living testimony of collective memory, identity, and rights to the city. In this regard, the role of public administration in the management of places designed by public-private partnerships is clear. Especially knowing the origin of the project based on a principle closer to the top-down project than the bottom-up one.

Finalising the look to the future, through the teachings of Superkilen, urban regeneration projects such as Porto Vecchio could benefit from hybrid methodologies that blend permanent cultural infrastructure with experimental, participatory artistic actions. One possible direction lies in what might be termed “adaptive cultural ecologies”: frameworks where cultural, social, and spatial elements evolve in response to community feedback, policy changes, and shifting urban demographics. Rather than fixating on the form or permanence of interventions, this approach centres on their responsiveness, inviting artistic processes that function as ongoing negotiations between memory, identity, and spatial justice.

From now on, the citizens’ voice must be the main one if a project aims to be sustainable and create a sense of place. These voices do not have to focus on image and aesthetics, but on the use and feeling of the space discussed or imagined. In this way, it is possible to create a place that better fits a new working public space in harmony with the neighbourhood. Because the images and elements representing cultures and traditions do not have a direct power in describing people and their sense of belonging to them, nor do they directly enrich a place of art. Different could be if art is directly used to communicate something and is the subject to express and enrich local cultures and voices through art. Images, sounds, videos, etc. Exposing the full sense of meanings, feelings, and expression from people, without just pointing to the cool aesthetics.

With a thought on the art aspect, I would think about art as something that gives more opportunity to artists to express themselves in times. I would propose more “calls for artists” in the public space to then define that space “Open air museum” exhibiting works of many artists and periods. A museum that could be composed of permanent or temporary installations, or a mix of those two. Art that calls artists to follow citizens’ proposals and needs, to create a common public space with a meaning and a sense found in sharing Projects could also draw inspiration from international models such as “Living Labs” or “Art-Led Urban Prototypes”, where interdisciplinary teams of artists, architects, researchers, and citizens collaborate on iterative installations or interventions that are both place-specific and temporally sensitive. Events, such as concerts and festivals, play an important role too in the meaning of the place, memories, and identification of a sense of place.

These methods allow for phased transformation, in which community engagement is embedded at every stage from concept and implementation to maintenance and eventual redefinition or simply as audiences. Because by following the popular proposal, the project has a greater chance of supporting good maintenance of the place in collaboration with the citizens who will intervene in the area according to an instinct created by the sense of belonging they feel.

In addition, I would conclude by inviting a more straightforward use of public greenery, both for a positive contribution to the climate, urbanity, and people’s lives, but also as a possible artistic element. Superkilen’s use of green elements is thought of, but at the same time, it reflects a strict division between urban and nature. It reports a contrast in thinking about the actual global will in sustainability city terms.

The connection nature-people, nowadays living mainly in cities, is not shown through the park zones division itself. Comparing the greenery introduced with Superkilen's use of art and community expression, there is an analogy. A will in acting aiming the inclusivity, local involvement, and social sustainability but with a semi-reach result. Nature is a living element; it can evolve over time and can be used for different purposes. Also, to create art and develop in the most varied ways, reflecting and respecting the multiple needs of urban development. Nature is an ever-evolving element that creates art on its own in a unique and difficult-to-replicate way. With the ability to attract people's attention and seeing it to bring citizens closer to nature and its elements, understanding the different evolutionary phases.

Given the contrast highlighted in the current social reality of the globe, where discrimination and massive social injustices are still evident, I would like to end this thesis with a personal reflection connected to the topic discussed, reflecting on the current social flow.

It is important to remember that art and greenery are tools that can be used to express oneself and, therefore, to tell one's ideas, feelings, and needs. These tools, together with public spaces, those places that everyone has the right to frequent, represent the fundamental means to achieve Sustainable and inclusive growth, ensuring equity and social justice. Tools that have a certain value for their simple usability and their expressive power. Powers that should not be forgotten can lead us to aspire to the acceptance of diversity, exalting it, including and sharing places, ideas, and moments, and increasing social wealth. Wealth is directly connected to social and economic well-being.

To counteract the current situation, it is essential to cultivate the differences that are present and peculiar to a territory. The motivation that drives it is creativity as the ability to generate ideas, products, or behaviors that are, at the same time, original (Runco & Jaeger, 2012) and appropriate to a context, and is supported by cognitive, emotional, social, and realization components (Wolf, 2014). It manifests itself in many areas, including art, which is one of the most recognized and culturally influential forms. This makes us understand how sharing, and therefore, knowledge of multiple realities, helps us to be creative. The ability to use the numerous pieces of information deriving from a multicultural context to create something new. Innovation.

9. BIBLYOGRAPHY

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- If You Could Do Anything You Want, What Would You Do?
- More Urban Life for All, More People to Walk More, and More People to Stay Longer
- Imagine a Moroccan Fountain!
- Space for Everybody's Ideas and Fantasies
- Red, Black, and Green
- A Kick in the Nuts of Good Taste

Public Video Interviews:

- Superflex Interview: A Cool Urban Space
- AD Interview: Martin Rein-Cano on the Superkilen Project

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10. APPENDIX

In this final part of the thesis, it is possible to consult some of the important steps useful for the study process. Starting from the definition of some terms often repeated in the text and fundamental for the understanding of Superkilen project processes, to the analysis steps I had gone through to better report the results of the study itself.

Definition of terms

SIMKA is the project name for the visual artists Simon Häggblom's and Karin Lind's shared artistic activities. Through SIMKA, they combine their knowledge and skill from visual art, set design, and landscape architecture.

The core of their work is the investigation and formation of different spaces and sites for human interaction.

BIG is a Copenhagen, New York, London, Barcelona, and Shenzhen-based group of architects, designers, urbanists, landscape professionals, interior and product designers, researchers, and inventors. The office is currently involved in a large number of projects throughout Europe, North America, Asia, and the Middle East. BIG's architecture emerges out of a careful analysis of how contemporary life constantly evolves and changes. Not the least due to the influence of multicultural exchange, global economic flows, and communication technologies, which all together require new ways of architectural and urban organization.

SUPERFLEX is an expanding collective of humans and non-humans working with an expanding idea of art.

Topotek 1 works in the fields of landscape and architecture, understanding itself as a traveller in the fringe areas of typologies and scales, jaunting into urban design, music, and art. The studio develops concepts through a critical and inquisitive understanding of given realities – contemporary, cultural, and historical.

Superkilen is a public park designed to bring immigrants and locals together, promoting tolerance and unity in one of Denmark's most ethnically diverse and socially challenged communities.

Nørrebro is one of the 10 official districts of Copenhagen Municipality, Denmark. It is northwest of the city center, beyond the location of the old Northern Gate (Nørreport), which, until dismantled in 1856, was near the current Nørreport station. It hosts Superkilen Park.

Social engagement and **Art** represent a dynamic and evolving field that transcends traditional art boundaries to engage directly with social issues.

Documents Analysis

Despite its omission from these large-scale citywide initiatives, Nørrebro was subject to localized urban renewal projects, particularly under the Områdeløft program (2005–2010), which aimed at social integration, infrastructure improvements, and public space revitalization (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2005). Also, with the Mjølnerparken local plan (2014), a Nørrebro district area, involving the green zone of Superkilen park, it is possible to understand the will of following the Superkilen project and the same time being helped from the already regretted are using as fundamental the connectivity that it is in transportation systems.

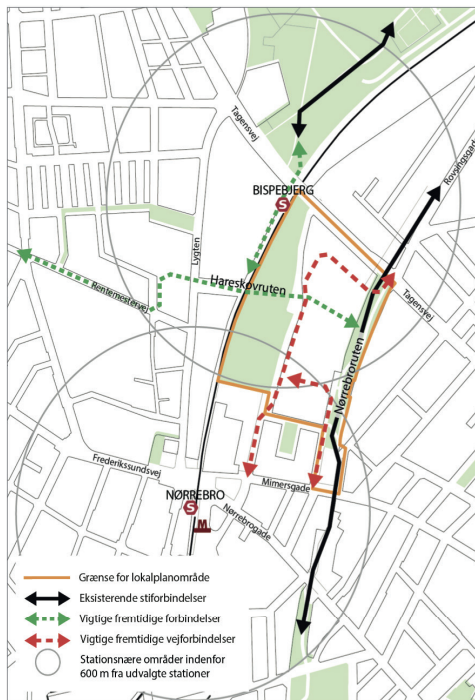


Fig.1 - The illustration from “Lokalplan nr. 506 Mjølnerparken med kommuneplantillæg nr. 31 - Københavns Kommune”, shows important, existing and future connections. It is important to ensure physical coherence across borders and barriers.

The Bydelsplan for Nørrebro 2023-2026 presents a more focused strategy for urban regeneration, with an emphasis on preserving the neighborhood’s cultural identity, enhancing public spaces, and counteracting gentrification trends, aligning closely with Superkilen’s objectives. With the idea of developing other districts of the city, also those next to Superkilen as Vingelodden, the continuation of Nørrebro from the north side. Similarly, the Analysis of Densification in Existing Urban Areas (2023) underlines Superkilen’s function as an example of how artistic interventions can be utilized to mitigate urban fragmentation and foster greater connectivity between different communities.

From a demographic perspective, the Summary of Vital Statistics by District and Type of Movement and Population by District, Sex, Age, and Ancestry provide essential insights into Nørrebro’s evolving social landscape. To better understand the rank of development, I focused the research between the 2009 and 2023 data, a range of years involving the beginning of the project processes and ideas until nowadays. In this period, 2009 and 2023, the district has remained one of Copenhagen’s most multi-cultural neighborhoods, with more than 60 nationalities represented among its residents’ Population by District, Sex, Age, and Ancestry - City of Nørrebro, 2023). Statistical data confirm a steady population increase, driven by a rising birth rate (from 1,267 births in 2013 to 1,305 in 2023) and a declining mortality rate (from 702 deaths in 2009 to 481 in 2023), reinforcing the notion that Nørrebro remains a vibrant and expanding urban district. However, migration trends indicate a stabilization of Western immigrant populations since 2016, accompanied by a slight decline in non-Western immigrant numbers, offset by an increase in Danish-born descendants. Age distribution analysis suggests that most residents fall within the 20–39 age range, although a growing proportion of the population is now over 60, marking a demographic shift that aligns with broader urban trends in Copenhagen (Summary of Vital Statistics by District and Type of Movement - City of Copenhagen, 2023). These demographic transformations provide an important context for evaluating Superkilen’s long-term social effects, particularly in relation to inclusion, displacement, and the sustainability of public participation in placemaking initiatives.

Superkilen was conceived as part of a broader urban renewal initiative in Mimersgade, a historically marginalized area within Nørrebro.

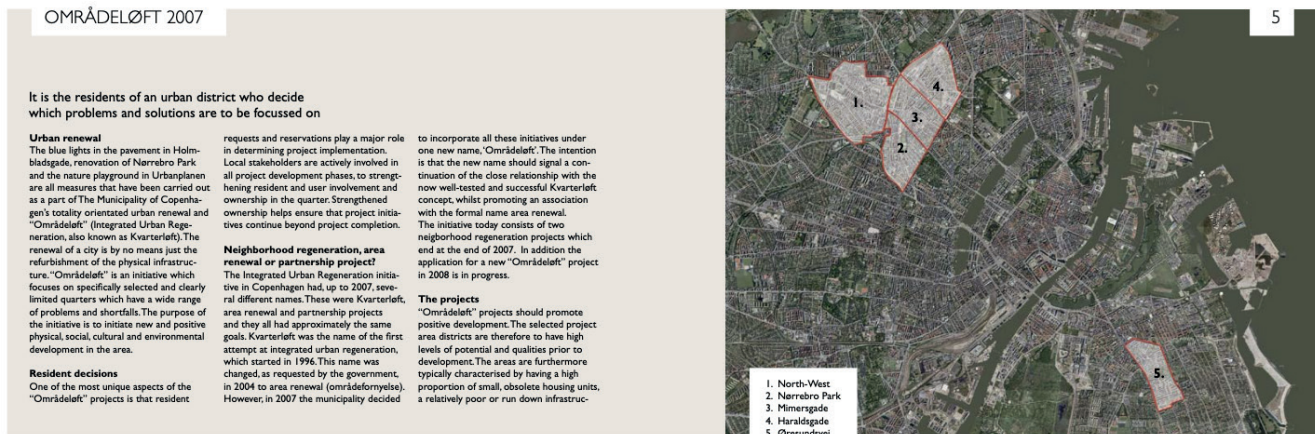


Fig. 2 - The 2007 plans planned in the city of Copenhagen, inclusion also Nørrebro district development. Picture from "Områdeløft in Copenhagen, 2007" - City of Copenhagen, The Technical and Environmental Administration.

In 2005, the Municipality of Copenhagen and the Realdania Foundation launched an international competition seeking innovative approaches to public space revitalization. The selected project was proposed by a team comprising BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group), Topotek 1, and Superflex, whose interdisciplinary expertise in architecture, landscape design, and public art formed the basis for Superkilen's distinct identity (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2005). The project's implementation followed a structured timeline, with participatory planning beginning in 2009, construction taking place between 2010 and 2011, and the official inauguration in 2012 (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2023). The Appendix to the Urban Development Plan series (2023), a collection of supporting documents related to Copenhagen's urban development policies, details the rationale behind the project's integration into the city's broader planning framework, highlighting the need for enhanced social cohesion and connectivity in the district. While Nørrebro's multicultural character remains a defining aspect, concerns over gentrification and displacement have emerged in recent years. Reports indicate an increase in property values following the inauguration of Superkilen in 2012, leading to a rise in rental prices and the displacement of some lower-income residents (Urban Regeneration Plan, 2023). The Retail Market Analysis (2023) also highlights the commercialization of Nørrebro's cultural identity, with Superkilen playing a role in branding the district as a vibrant, artistic hub while potentially sidelining local socio-economic concerns.

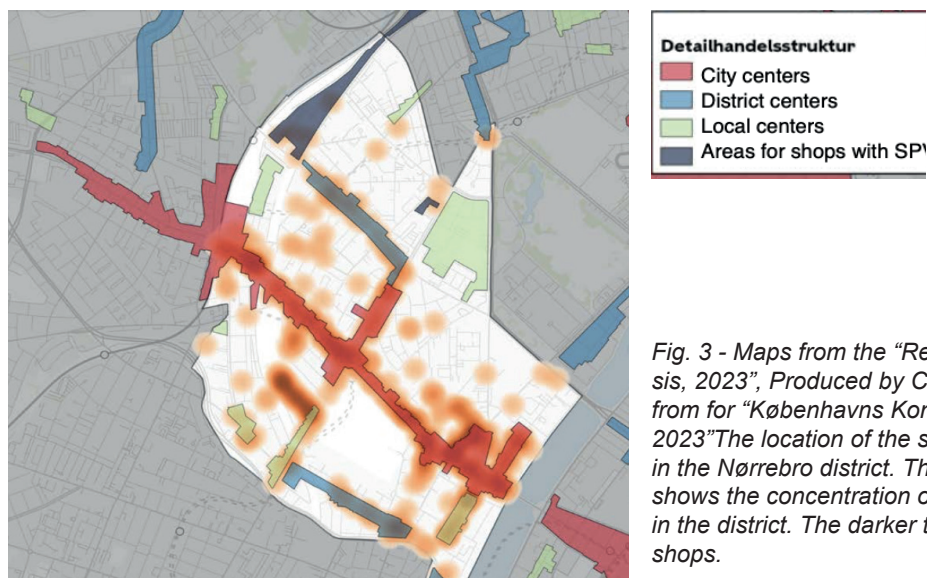


Fig. 3 - Maps from the "Retail Analysis, 2023", Produced by COWI from for "Københavns Kommune 2023". The location of the shops in the Nørrebro district. The map shows the concentration of shops in the district. The darker the more shops.

A defining aspect of Superkilen's design was its commitment to public participation. The project employed the Extreme Participation methodology, developed by Superflex, which sought to engage Nørrebro's diverse residents in shaping the aesthetic and functional elements of the park. Local community members were invited to propose urban objects reflecting their cultural heritage, and over 100 public elements from more than 50 countries were ultimately integrated into the park's design. These included Portuguese ceramic benches, Moroccan fountains, Chinese lion sculptures, and Turkish backgammon tables (Community Engagement and Urban Planning in Copenhagen, 2023). However, despite the project's emphasis on community engagement, reports indicate that only 11 of the final 108 objects were directly selected by local residents. The majority of design decisions were ultimately guided by planners and designers, raising concerns about the extent to which participatory urbanism was meaningfully applied. The Retail Market Analysis 2023 provides further insight into this debate, suggesting that while Superkilen was marketed as a community-led initiative, its execution leaned heavily toward designer-curated choices rather than grassroots-driven decision-making (Community Engagement and Urban Planning in Copenhagen, 2023).

The spatial organization of Superkilen reinforces its role as both a public space and a curated urban exhibition. The park is divided into three distinct areas, each serving a different purpose within the overall design. The Red Square, characterized by its bold color and open layout, functions as a space for public events, performances, and sports activities. The Black Market provides a setting for social interaction, incorporating street furniture, gaming tables, and seating areas designed to encourage informal gatherings. The Green Park, with its more naturalistic aesthetic, is intended for relaxation, play, and outdoor exercise.

These interconnected spaces are designed to foster engagement between different demographic groups while enhancing the district's accessibility through pedestrian and cycling routes. The Analysis of Densification in Existing Urban Areas highlights Superkilen's contribution to urban connectivity, emphasizing its role in transforming a previously overlooked section of Nørrebro into an active and recognizable urban space.

While Superkilen has been widely praised for its innovative approach to placemaking, it has also been subject to critical analysis, particularly regarding its impact on gentrification and urban branding. The Summary of Vital Statistics by District and Type of Movement - City of Copenhagen, (2023) reveals a sharp increase in property values in Nørrebro following the park's inauguration in 2012, raising concerns about the unintended consequences of cultural-driven urban renewal. The district's rising rental prices have led to the displacement of some lower-income residents, indicating that Superkilen, despite its inclusive ambitions, may have contributed to processes of socioeconomic exclusion. Additionally, the Retail Market Analysis, (2023) examines the commercialization of Superkilen's identity, noting how the project has become a tool for rebranding Nørrebro as a creative and desirable destination, thereby reinforcing the economic forces driving gentrification rather than mitigating displacement risks.



PRESERVE

PUBLIC

HOUSING

Fig. 4 - Picture showing residents' claims. Report from "Bydel Plan For Nørrebro 2023-2026"

Documented interviews Analysis:

• ***If You Could Do Anything You Want, What Would You Do? (Participation)***

This interview presents the interviewees' thoughts on the participatory process:

Martin Rein-Cano (TOPOTEK 1) criticizes public participation as ineffective and chaotic: "People are involved in things they have no idea about, and the result is often mediocre." He also notes that participation has become a bureaucratic requirement rather than a genuine design tool: "You need an army of experts just to qualify for projects."

Bjarke Ingels (BIG) highlights the importance of integrating participation into the design itself: "We designed responses to manage participation, not just discussed with people."

Astrid Bruus Thomsen (Realdania) speaks about the limitations of participatory processes, stating that public meetings often do not represent the entire community: "In these meetings, we always find the same 15 middle-aged, slightly overweight white men dominating the discussion."

Bjørnstjerne Christiansen (SUPERFLEX) recalls the community's skeptical reaction to the Extreme Participation proposal: "When we told the kids we would take them to Jamaica to choose an object, they laughed in our faces: 'We don't believe you, you're lying.'"

Jakob Fenger (SUPERFLEX) emphasizes the value of uncertainty in the participatory process: "We didn't know what would happen, and that made it all the more interesting."

Rasmus Nielsen (SUPERFLEX) adds that the project was made possible thanks to additional funding to cover unforeseen costs, such as travel and meetings: "We created a free space for ourselves, without having to justify our choices too much."

• ***More Urban Life for All, More People to Walk More, and More People to Stay Longer (Urban Development)***

Interviewees express their views on the urban development aspects:

Astrid Bruus Thomsen (Realdania) explains the method for selecting areas for urban renewal: "We have socio-economic maps that show us where urban transformations are needed." She also highlights the importance of private co-financing: "If municipalities don't invest, we don't invest either. It requires a joint commitment."

Tina Saaby (City Architect) defends Superkilen as a successful model: "This project embodies the city's strategy: more urbanity, more walkability, more permanence." However, she expresses frustration over maintenance issues: "We cannot take six months to fix a bench."

Jakob Fenger (SUPERFLEX) underscores diversity as a key value: "Superkilen demonstrates that public spaces do not need to be homogeneous to function."

• ***Imagine a Moroccan Fountain! (Selection and Realization)***

Jakob Fenger (SUPERFLEX) explains the difficulty in gathering specific proposals from citizens: "People don't suggest objects, but functions."

Bjørnstjerne Christiansen (SUPERFLEX) stresses that the selection was not politically motivated: "We didn't choose a Moroccan fountain for inclusivity but because it's an incredible piece of craftsmanship." Bjarke Ingels (BIG) discusses the challenges of adapting objects to Danish regulations: "We had to redesign 30 objects based solely on photos."

Nanna Gylholm Møller (BIG) talks about issues with play equipment: "The Iraqi swings were removed

for safety reasons, but now they're being reintroduced."

Lorenz Dexler (TOPOTEK 1) reflects on tree selection: "The palm trees come from Spain, but they are a cold-resistant Chinese species."

- ***Space for Everybody's Ideas and Fantasies (Collaboration)***

Bjarke Ingels (BIG) praises teamwork: "It wasn't architecture, art, or landscaping, but a mix that worked." Lorenz Dexler (TOPOTEK 1) notes that the project redefined professional roles: "We all went beyond the traditional boundaries of our work."

Martin Rein-Cano (TOPOTEK 1) recounts: "We had no contract, but we earned our place on the team." Jakob Fenger (SUPERFLEX) says that Superkilen allowed for real cultural exchanges: "I got the donut sign, someone else got the Palestinian soil."

Rasmus Nielsen (SUPERFLEX) emphasizes the conceptual value: "It's a conceptually fresh project and fun to realize."

- ***Red, Black, and Green (Topography and Typology)***

Bjarke Ingels (BIG) explains the origins of the three colors zones: "Looking at the topographic map, it was already clear that there were three distinct parts. We simply transformed those areas into Red Square, Black Market, and Green Park."

Jakob Fenger (SUPERFLEX) notes that the initial idea was simpler than what it became: "At first, it seemed like a very straightforward idea, but then we realized there was a huge amount of detail work to develop."

Martin Rein-Cano (TOPOTEK 1) recalls controversies over color choices, including accusations of political symbolism: "Actually, it was the topography that guided these choices, not a political message."

- ***A Kick in the Nuts of Good Taste (Conflict and Consensus)***

Martin Rein-Cano (TOPOTEK 1) highlights the importance of conflict: "We juxtaposed objects from clashing cultures, and that's okay."

Astrid Bruus Thomsen (Realdania) reiterates: "Superkilen is deliberately ambiguous, and people are drawn to it because of this."

Bjarke Ingels (BIG) concludes with humor: "It was called 'a kick in the nuts of good taste', but we're fine with that."

In addition to the documentation, below are VIDEO interviews – open online resources for everyone.

- ***Superflex Interview: A Cool Urban Space***

In this interview, the artists of SUPERFLEX discuss the conception and realization of Superkilen, a public park in Copenhagen designed to reflect the cultural diversity of the Nørrebro neighborhood.

Bjørnstjerne Christiansen emphasizes the importance of involving the local community in the design process, stating:

"We wanted to create a space that represented the different cultures present in the neighborhood, involving residents in selecting the objects to be included in the park."

Jakob Fenger adds that the project aims to celebrate diversity by incorporating objects from around the world:

“We asked residents to suggest objects that represented their cultures of origin, thus creating a mosaic of international elements in the park.”

Both highlight that Superkilen is not just a recreational space but also a symbol of inclusion and cultural coexistence, designed to promote interaction among the neighborhood's diverse communities.

- ***AD Interview: Martin Rein-Cano on the Superkilen Project***

Here, Martin Rein-Cano, landscape architect of TOPOTEK 1, delves into the philosophy and challenges behind the Superkilen project.

He explains that the main goal was to create a public space that reflected the ethnic and cultural diversity of Nørrebro, stating:

“We wanted to represent the different communities through the inclusion of objects and cultural symbols from the residents' countries of origin.”

Rein-Cano also discusses the challenges of integrating diverse cultural elements into a coherent space, emphasizing the importance of a design that fosters social interaction:

“Our approach was to create an urban landscape that encouraged people to interact and share their cultures in a common space.”

He concludes by highlighting how Superkilen serves as an example of how landscape architecture can promote diversity and inclusion in urban areas.

Author's Field Observations, October 15–18, 2024

To better analyze the Superkilen project and understand the atmosphere the park creates in the Nørrebro neighborhood and in the city of Copenhagen, I decided to conduct direct observation by spending a few days in the city, specifically within walking distance of the park. The idea behind this is to gain firsthand insights into how public spaces foster engagement and to contextualize how art functions as a catalyst for placemaking. Due to various reasons, including limited time and available funds, I was only able to dedicate four days to the site observation. From Tuesday, October 15 to Friday, October 18, 2024, I aimed to spend as much time as possible in the park to observe the different urban dynamics in the various areas at different time slots.

October 15th (Night time Observation)

On my first day, arriving in Copenhagen in the evening, I visited the park at night, reaching my destination around 9:30 PM. I was eager to explore the area, and as I approached from one of the streets bordering the park, Nørrebrohallen (Nørrebrogade), I noticed that without using my phone's navigation, it would have been difficult to locate the park since there was no signage providing relevant information. The street was not very busy, but the high presence of bicycles as a common mode of transport was immediately evident.

By that time, it was already dark, and while the street was well-lit, walking towards the park, knowing it would be to my right, I suddenly noticed an “empty” space between the buildings along the street. I immediately recognized it as Superkilen. At that moment, I was very excited and started recalling some of the general information I had read about the site.

I found myself in the Red Square, and shortly after, I realized that the sensation of emptiness was likely due to the vastness of the square and the lack of many elements filling it. At the southernmost edge of the square, there is a large colorful graffiti on a black base covering the wall of an adjacent building, serving as a landmark for this place. A structure nearby, which I later learned was the sports hall, was

closing at that hour, with some staff working on its shutdown. At first glance, I thought the building might be a cinema.

Other urban furnishings, such as benches and playground equipment for children and adults, were being used by some people. However, because the area did not seem very bright, some elements did not immediately stand out to me as they did in the following days. Instead, one aspect that was immediately noticeable was the presence of four large, illuminated signs in different styles, inspired by signage from various nations. However, these were not turned on. I wondered why, as evening would be the ideal time to showcase their aesthetic and lighting function. Seeing them off gave a sense of abandonment. Another crucial element that stood out right away was the Nørrebroleden cycling route, which runs along the entire park and connects the Red and Black areas. This bike path was in use even at that late hour, with streetlamps positioned along it. Following the cycling route along the pedestrian path, I reached the Black Market, crossing Mimersgade, a transversal street that divides these two areas.

This street is well-lit and features an urban element that stands out as you exit the Red Square, a nearly scenic structure of four connected arches with an oriental aesthetic, making it feel like a setting outside Denmark. Later, I found out that this is a replica of a bus stop from Kazakhstan.

Upon entering the Black Market, the atmosphere felt different from the Red Square, a bit more illuminated and more expansive, as it is flanked by two secondary streets that create a broader space, not directly bordered by buildings or dividing walls. Here, I noticed key urban elements such as grilles, concrete tables engraved with board games, and special seating arrangements. A prominent feature in this area is the large black octopus-shaped play structure, a well-known symbol of the park, which was also illuminated.

Even here, as well as later in Green Park, I noticed that the illuminated signs inspired by foreign urban furnishings were not turned on. Despite this, the white lines on the dark pavement stood out, an iconic design feature of the park that is recognizable worldwide, along with the hill that connects this area to the Green Park.

The Green Park extends further and is longer compared to the other two areas. The cycling route continues through this part of the park, leading to Tagensvej, another major road opposite Nørrebrogade. This section is marked by green spaces and recreational zones dedicated to activities such as outdoor sports, a basketball court, multi-sport areas, picnic areas with covered tables, hammocks, and various outdoor installations from different nations. There are colorful benches, gazebos, ping-pong tables, swings for adults, and a large black bull, a Spanish symbol placed on a small hill at the far end of the park.

After concluding my first day of observation, I retraced my steps through the park to return to the Red Square and continued toward an adjacent park, which I partially crossed to head home nearby. Along this walk, I observed several additional aspects, including an illuminated skatepark where some people were using the space in a convivial manner.

October 16th

The following day, rested from the day before, I went back to the park at 10:30 AM. Even though it was quite a windy day, it was daytime, and with the atmospheric light, I was able to notice more details. Man-hole covers from different cities around the world have been installed, and each of the 108 elements is accompanied by plaques informing about their origin in the native language of the object and in Danish.

As soon as I arrived at the park, I immediately noticed a different atmosphere compared to the nighttime of the previous day. There were numerous people of all ages engaged in many different activities. It was a lively scene where many things were happening simultaneously: people cycling by, children, parents, teenagers, groups, and individuals in the playgrounds, on benches, or swinging on the swings.

There were also some skaters using certain elements installed in front of the Sports Hall, which I hadn't noticed the day before were specifically placed for that purpose.

I entered the Sports Hall, and a new world opened to me. I was able to observe a place with multiple functions for both children and adults, like an extension of the outdoor area, but indoors. There were various game areas for basketball, badminton, children's play on mats, several sections with tables and benches, an information office, and, most importantly, a café/restaurant and a library, which are widely used by all categories of people. Another important aspect is the door that opens onto "Bragesgade," a street parallel to the park, providing access to the building.

Returning to the city's movement, I would define this park as almost a crossroads where every area is a passage or an intersection, with people, whether on foot or by bike, finding their way through it. The three zones are connected and unify the neighborhood while at the same time separating different environments. The park, though well-defined, expands uniformly with the surroundings through streets that both delimit and define Superkilen. In terms of space, I would say it creates an identity while also proposing the identification of multiple realities.

Regarding the details of the furnishings, as I walked back and forth through the park, I observed something new each time. For example, the park is furnished with a series of streetlamps from all over the world, which are part of the 108 elements. These create a unique aesthetic by introducing diversity into what is typically a monotonous feature in cities, where such installations usually have a uniform appearance. All elements were clearly selected with the intent of offering an alternative and creative proposal compared to what is commonly seen in cities worldwide. It was here, between the black and green zones, that I started asking myself more concrete questions about the selection of plant species in the park.

October 17th

On the third day, I arrived at Superkilen at 8:30 AM, taking a lunch break to organize the data I had accumulated before returning at 4:30 PM. It was precisely during these two time slots that bicycle traffic was at its highest, while at the same time, fewer people stopped in the park. This was likely because, despite being a sunny day, it was quite windy, and the cold was becoming harsher.

For this reason, and because I was already familiar with the place after two days of surveys, I decided to alternate my outdoor observation with watching the park's movements from inside the Sports Hall. This decision also allowed me to better understand how and by whom the Sports Hall was actually used, especially on days when the indoor environment was likely preferred over the outdoor one.

It was a pleasant and welcoming space where many parents brought their young children to spend time between gym activities and reading books in the library. It was also a place where people could eat and share experiences with others, creating a space for various lifestyles. Besides the high number of athletes, the Sports Hall was frequented by students and casual readers, who had direct access through the door next to the library.

At the entrance, there was a small piece of a tram that served as a reminder of the building's past as a railway warehouse. Reflecting on this, it is worth noting that this building is the only facility along the entire park; there are no shops, cafés, or restaurants of any kind within the three zones, though some services can be found on the adjacent streets. I would say that the Sports Hall is the heart of the park, even though it is not the main reason or attraction for using the park.

Another important observation is the lack of covered spaces within the park, with only a small, empty gazebo of medium-small dimensions. One morning activity I had not noticed the day before was the cleaning of public spaces. While in the green zone, I noticed a greater level of degradation in some installations. Certain elements were damaged by time and vandalism, such as faded wooden structures, dirty objects, graffiti, missing information plaques, and muddy areas.

October 18th

On the last day, I dedicated my time to observing what happens during lunchtime, from approximately

11:00 AM to 3:00 PM. This was the peak time for park usage, creating a continuous flow of people. Most people did not stay long; they passed through on foot or by bike, stopping for an average of about 15 minutes, using the various pieces of urban furniture as they saw fit.

The primary users of the space were locals, which makes sense considering that the area is a residential zone. However, the park is certainly a place for everyone, and there were also visitors and tourists, though not many during those days; they were definitely present.

This continuous usage is undoubtedly influenced by the multicultural selection of installed objects and the diverse cultures that populate the area. Different cultures create different uses of the elements and bring their own traditions regarding daily routines, such as using the park at different times based on cultural habits.

As mentioned, the multi-use nature of the park can be expressed through the coexistence of various nationalities, each bringing its own knowledge, culture, and experiences. This diversity creates a form of art that is expressed through the different ways people interact in this public space. This artistic expression is also reflected in the aesthetic design; the colors and public furniture are distinctive and representative of different installations, yet they are not merely objects to be observed but rather functional elements for daily use.

The absence of signs, prohibitions, or explicit guidelines allows for an unrestricted approach to every corner of the park. This sense of freedom can also be felt inside the Sports Hall, where people always respectfully come and go, read, shop, and exercise simultaneously in the same space, with a sense of liberty.

Further Observations

Reflecting on my visit, I considered how places are often designed by drawing inspiration from existing locations. This method is commonly used when beginning to conceptualize a new space by referencing established examples. In Superkilen, elements from elsewhere have been incorporated, forming a complex system of references.

At the same time, this selection of reference objects may have simplified the design process from an aesthetic and functional perspective. However, each element must coexist with the others and contribute to creating a harmonious and enjoyable environment.

Regarding the availability of resources for understanding the project and all its components, the open-access nature of the information makes it easy to learn about. Although the project could be considered complex, the accessible data does not conceal anything from the public, making everything appear transparent and well-organized.

A final note on the design concerns the placement of elements. They are mixed rather than grouped by nationality, though it is possible to find adjacent elements from the same country. Each element has its own unique position.

Regarding the generational aspect, which certainly includes all possible age groups, it is worth noting that the presence of older adults is significantly lower compared to other age groups.

Photographic Analysis

Consistent with what has been analyzed so far, the 'Case Study' research method is supplemented by the on-site observations I personally conducted, which are presented here in photographic form. Photographic analysis is a widely recognized qualitative research method, particularly in urban and social studies, as it allows for a systematic visual examination of spatial, social, and environmental dynamics. This method serves as both a data collection and analytical tool, helping to identify patterns of spatial use, materiality, and human interaction with the built environment (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995).

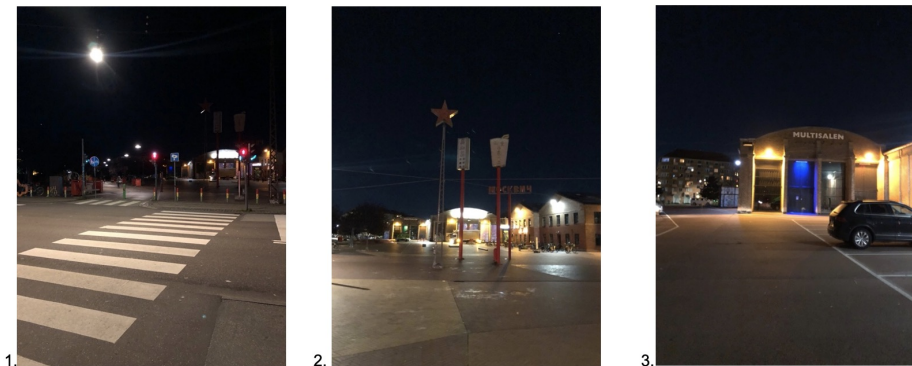
The images included in this section are not merely illustrative but function as primary data sources, offering a structured visual representation of how Superkilen is experienced and appropriated by its users. Each photograph is accompanied by specific captions that highlight key details to focus on, aligning with the interpretative framework of this research. Following qualitative visual analysis principles, images are examined based on composition, spatial relationships, and user engagement with public space, which allows for a nuanced understanding of the park's design and functionality (Lehmann, 2023).

The sequence of the images does not fully follow the observation timings previously mentioned but is instead structured into broad thematic sections, grouping together time, materials, and defined locations. This segmentation is considered broad due to the complexity of urban environments, where temporal, material, and social elements coexist dynamically. As emphasized in qualitative case study research, the spatial and temporal fluidity captured through images helps reveal hidden patterns of interaction, cultural symbolism, and the lived experience of place (Bowen, 2009).

By incorporating photographic analysis, this study enhances the depth and contextual understanding of Superkilen's design intent, community perception, and actual usage. The visual documentation provides a complementary perspective to textual and observational data, reinforcing the multimodal approach of this research and ensuring a comprehensive interpretation of urban space. Consistent with what has been analyzed so far, the 'Case Study' research method is supplemented by the on-site observations I personally conducted, which are presented here in photographic form. The images include specific captions that aim to highlight details to focus on in order to outline the interpretation of the photographs based on the on-site experience, on line with the research needs.

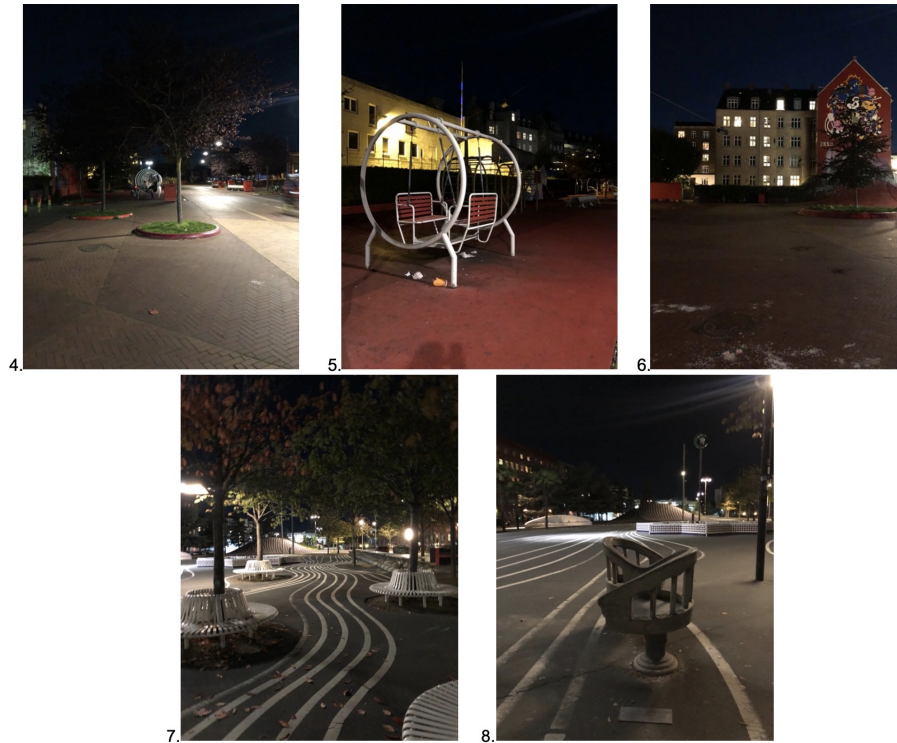
The sequence of the images does not fully follow the observation timings previously mentioned, but they are displayed in broad sections that group together time, materials, and defined locations. This segmentation is considered broad due to the difficulty of reporting the elements individually, as the environment simultaneously includes times, materials, places, and people.

Starting with 'Superkilen by night', as it was the first observation moment for me. From the photos, it is evident that the park has little lighting.



In the first six photos, the entrance to the park from the 'Red Zone' is shown, and it is clear that the lighting is insufficient, as seen in the turned-off light signs and the darker areas of the square. In the following images, the 'Black Market' area is shown.

1. The pedestrian crossing on 'Nørrebrogade' bordering the park, which does not have any signage defining the start of Superkilen or directions for the bike lane that crosses the square, where a person on a bicycle can be seen, demonstrating nighttime transit; 2. A clear contrast between the illuminated signs (part of the urban furniture that identifies the park) and the glaring lighting of Nørrebrohallen, which at that time (after 9:00 PM) is closed; 3. A structure that is part of Nørrebrohallen, which makes me think of a cinema, but it isn't one; it is a multi-purpose space used for certain types of events to host a large number of people.

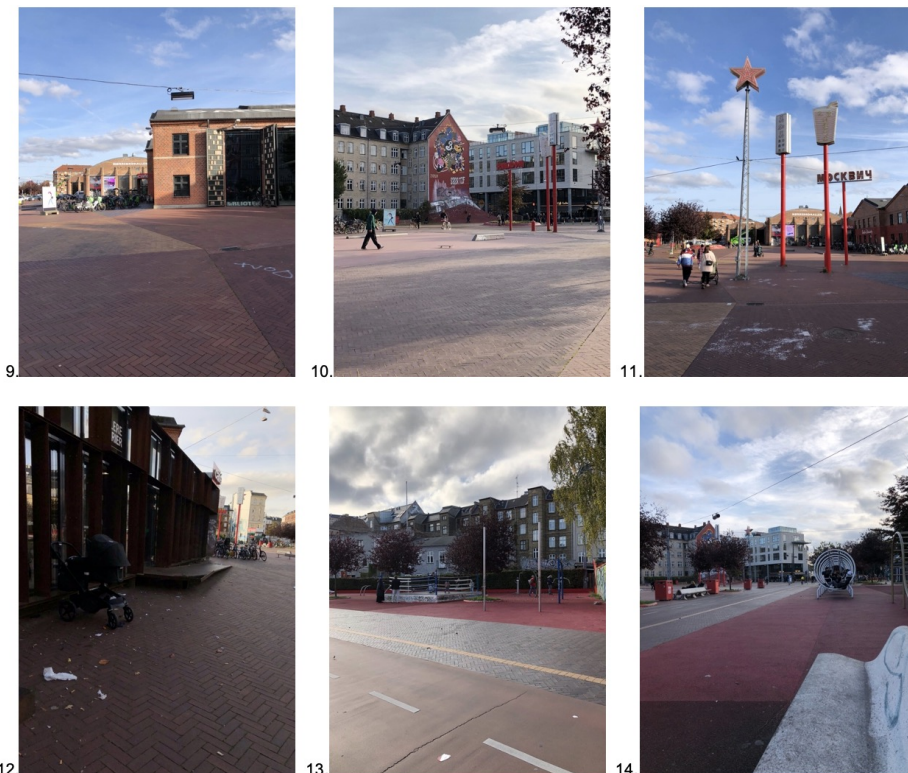


4. Shows the presence of people spending time using the swings/seats available in the square; 5. There is visible litter on the ground, presenting an image of decay and a lack of interest in the place by those using the space; 6. The square is an iconic location due to its shape and appearance, and the graffiti on the wall of one of the sides of the square, even though it is not illuminated, remains an element that can easily be noticed. 7. The 'Black Zone' is more illuminated and is easily noticeable. It attracts attention merely through the image it presents to the passerby due to the colors of the pavement and the elements present; 8. Again, the light signs are turned off, providing no added value to the square at nighttime, as they are difficult to notice when turned off.

Continuing with the images of 'Superkilen daily movements', I would like to highlight here what is most significant among the numerous photos taken during the observation hours spent in the park during the daytime, which represent most of the time spent there.

Starting with the 'Red Zone', photo number 9 aims to show the high presence of bicycles parked outside Nørrebrohallen, thus indicating the actual use of the structure. From the image, the facade of the bookstore is visible, and it has direct access from the square. Image 10 shows the area being used by pedestrians, cyclists, and skaters, with some passing through and others staying for longer periods.

Photo 11 highlights the presence of people, particularly families with young children, visiting Nørrebrohallen. In succession, photo 12 shows the information from the previous images in more detail, where one can observe the peace of mind in leaving strollers unattended, as it is a zone where there is no concern during those hours, and in that context. However, the context is somewhat dirty due to the litter left on the ground at the entrance of the building.



The series of photographs from 13 to 18 document the use of the various structures, such as urban design installations for leisure, by different population groups, either individually or in groups, in an active or static form, but always through a use that lasts for a period of enjoyment, not just a simple passage through the park. From picture 18th, it is possible to gaze at a group of people far away; those people are playing with children rolling down the hill.

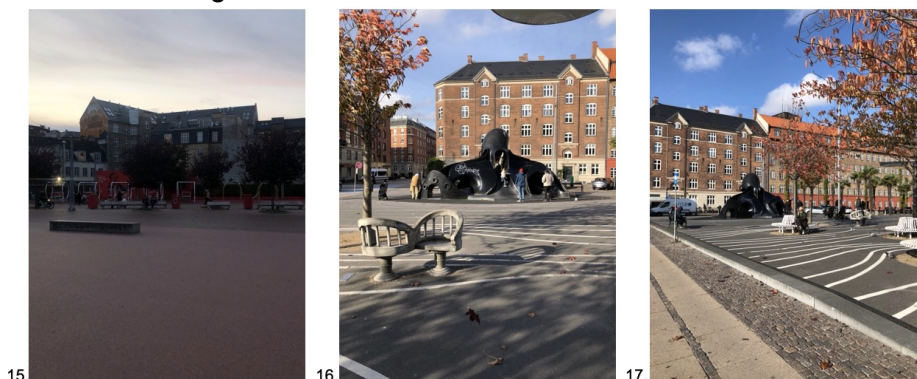
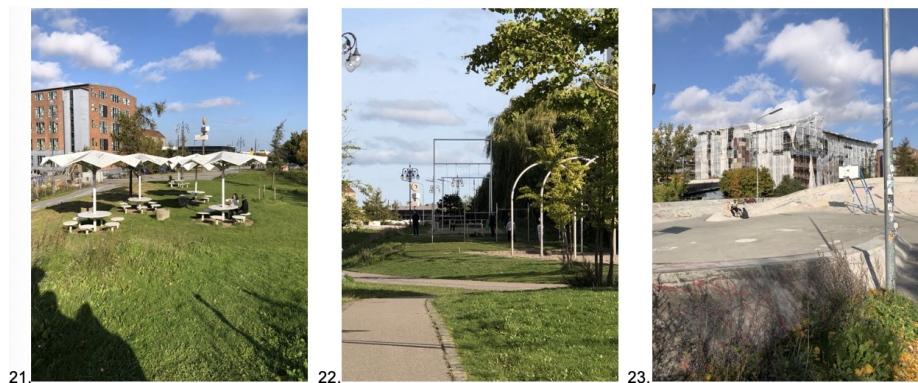


Image 19 differs from the previous ones because, in addition to demonstrating the actual use of the 'Black Market' area, it shows the light signs that become prominent and impactful in daylight. These installations, combined with the iconic aesthetic of the paving, represent the image of the area.



Image 20 also highlights the light signs, but what is meant to be emphasized is the 'boundary' between the 'Black Zone' and the 'Green Zone'. From the highest point of the park, the hill where the Palestinian soil is placed, there is a clear separation between the asphalt and the ground. In this case, the absence of grass is also noticeable, which suggests inadequate maintenance of the green areas.



Images 21 and 22 show the use of the picnic area in the 'Green Zone,' a space that, in a cold and windy period such as autumn and winter, is presumably unattractive, but on sunny days, there are still people who frequent it. Images 23 and 24, unlike the previous ones, not only show the use of the 'Green Zone' during cooler periods but also demonstrate the use of parts of the park that are less expected, and most importantly, in a way different from what the place is designed for. This shows the use of the park in the freest way possible, according to the desires and needs of the people who visit it. In image 23, there is a group of young girls sitting on the perimeter of the basketball court, while in image 24, a family is sitting on a low wall in the park.



From image 24, the bike lane becomes more evident, which can also be seen in some of the previous photos. As shown in box 25, the bike lane is a constant and dominant feature of the space, especially in the green area, which consists of various elevations on the sides of this connecting route. From this image and through to image 31, a clear view of the actual use of the park is presented, even if only for connectivity purposes, as it serves as a passageway for the bike lane and pedestrian path that connects

different areas of the neighborhood and the city. In these photos, various individuals on bicycles are visible, but also groups of pedestrians, families, and parents walking, as well as people sitting along the route to rest, observe, or for any other common need.



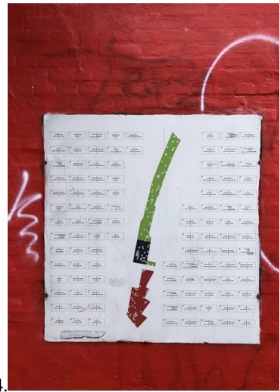
Images 28 and 31 also show symbolic elements, such as the illuminated signs with the doughnut and the 'M'-shaped structure, almost sculptural, on the grass. But if you pay close attention to all the images, each one features at least one iconic or significant element that represents SUPERKILEN as a museum-like exhibition. In photo 28, it is possible to notice the direct connection of the park with another area of the city and one of the main connecting arteries of the area, Røvsingsgade (Tagensvej) street, where other public transport passes and where the bike lane continues.



Finally, pictures 32 and 33 show the cleaning and green maintenance actions of the park with the use of specific work cars and workers during the early morning hours alongside the citizen passages through the park.

Regarding the museum objects, here we continue by showcasing some 'Superkilen elements' to provide a closer and more figurative look at what is presented in the textual chapters.

Images 34 and 35 show the illustrative maps of the 108 elements present in the park. As you can see, the characters have been ruined by vandalism, which makes consulting the information very difficult. Information of an informative nature on the element's protagonist of Superkilen.



34.



35.



36.



37.



38.

Images 36, 37, and 38 show three of the many manhole covers taken from various parts of the world and installed in the park. On them, one can read the authenticity of the element in terms of originality, as, like most manhole covers in the world, they bear the marking of the local administrative entity. However, in photo 39, an example of a plaque displaying information about an element is shown. The same formula is repeated next to each identified element of the park, each of the 108 objects selected to be part of this open-air exhibition. In image 40, it is emphasized how every element, not just the object but also the park's structure itself, creates a space that can be used by the public. Observe the edging of the flower bed around the tree, where people can sit. It is possible to see a lot of wall drawings all around the red area. In image 41, the boxing ring is shown up close, as well as the creative context open to the public, a place where people can train and express themselves through graffiti.



39.



40.



41.



From images 42 to 46, urban design elements representative of the park is shown in detail. Image 42 shows tables with games engraved on the surface and a public-use grid; 43 shows colorful chairs and the striped white and red-roofed gazebo in the distance; 44 shows the concrete basketball court, which is also suitable for skateboarding; 45 shows tables, permanent umbrellas, and a hammock in the distance supported by two yellow poles. Together, there are visible graffiti drawings signs; and 46 shows the black bull with the Spanish symbol on a grassy hill, along with streetlights along the bike lane. These too are taken from different cities around the world.

Continuing with the observations, here are images of 'Inside the Nørrebrohallen,' the building at the heart of individual and group activities in the park. It is the only public multifunctional structure in the park area.

In the first two images, 47 and 48, two representative elements of the building's design are shown: this giant wooden piece and a section of an old tram, which serves as a reminder of the building's historical use as a railway warehouse. Images 49 and 50 show the sports areas available to the public. Image 49 shows a space with soft mats and a climbing wall that I saw being used by several very young children accompanied by their parents. 50. shows one of the gyms used for various sports, which can be used by those interested, depending on whether a reservation has been made or not.



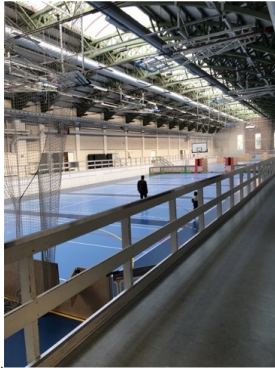
47.



48.



49.



50.



51.



52.



53.

Images 51 and 52 show the bar/refreshment area and its usage in various forms and age ranges. Similarly, image 53 shows part of the bookstore inside the Nørrebrohallen.

The observation continues with 'the natural aspects' of the park. The presence in the area raises questions about the park's green image, asking whether the park can truly be defined as green. For this reason, the observations reported in the images focus more on the black and green areas, as I perceive them to have more green elements, mainly trees and grass.



54.

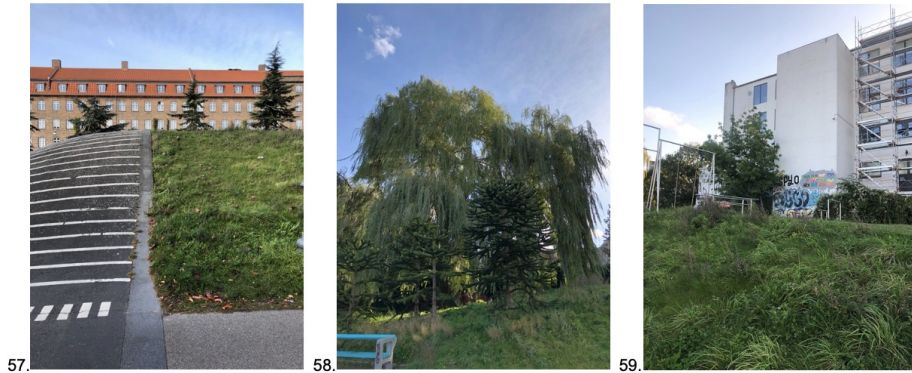


55.



56.

From images 54 to 59, the varied choice of vegetation in the park is demonstrated. I would define this as a diverse selection in terms of tree species and their origins, as many of the species will not be found together in natural environments, as they are mostly endemic to different ecosystems. For this reason, attention is drawn to the skill of maintaining the vegetation, as it is growing healthily. One note should be made regarding the clear boundaries between concrete and grass, which, although allowing plants to coexist in an urban environment, means that the park can never truly be a green oasis capable of supporting a large amount of biodiversity in both flora and fauna. In this regard, it should be noted that the choice to maintain the park with minimal maintenance actions, only through the necessary ones, as seen in images 55, 58, and 59, gives the environment a 'wilder' feel in terms of sensations.



To complete this long reportage of where Superkilen emerges, I also focused, to a lesser extent, on 'Next to Superkilen', what lies in the Nørrebro neighbourhood close to the park.

From images 60 to 63, images taken in areas adjacent to Superkilen are shown. These are part of a true continuation of the case study towards 'Nørrebroparken, nord'. Along the bike and pedestrian path, 60 shows a skatepark, murals, and graffiti; 61 shows a basketball court illuminated among grassy areas; 62 shows a gathering place and a bar open both day and night; and 63 shows a highly frequented park path with the presence of a 'mobile bar/café.'



Image 64 shows the presence of a kindergarten directly adjacent to the park along the green area, while image 65 shows the ongoing construction work in the upper part of the green zone, a clear example of urban development as it involves a large area. Image 66. is a photograph of a soccer field just a few meters away from the park, north-west direction of the green area, while image 67 shows a square just steps west of the park, where one of the closest metro and train stops is located to reach it.



From images 68 to 70, the presence of certain corners of the neighborhood is shown, demonstrating the reality of Nørrebro as a creative neighborhood with artistic and expressive elements that are not entirely common in cities around the world. It represents one of the most expressive neighborhoods in the entire city of Copenhagen. Stop "Nørrebro st.".