Politecnico Di Torino
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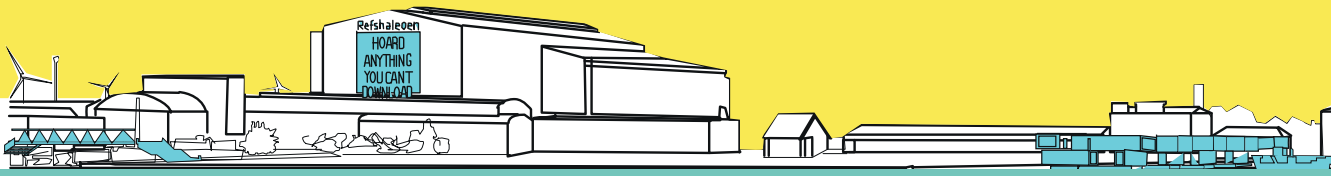
"Almost Public": Hybrid Governance and Participatory Urbanism in Refshaleøen



Supervisor: Prof. Daniela Ciaffi (Urban Sociology)

Co-supervisor: Prof. Antonio Di Campli (Urban Planning)

External Supervisor: Amaya Carina Steensma Tedder

Candidate: Chiara Monelli 313327

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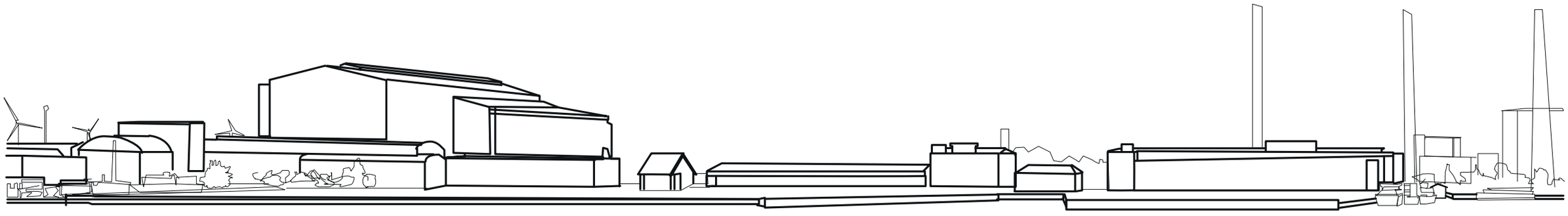

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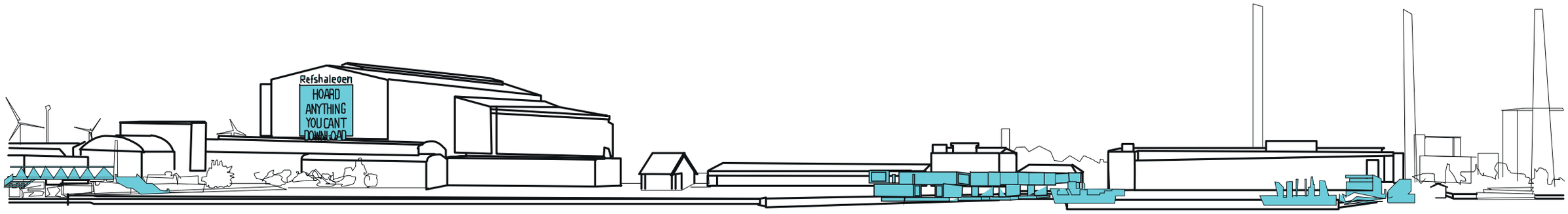

ABSTRACT

The transformation of former industrial and port areas has become a relevant focus in contemporary urban development along waterfronts, raising questions about participation, governance, and the preservation of local identities. This thesis investigates the ongoing redevelopment of Refshaleøen, a post-industrial island in Copenhagen (Denmark), focusing on how participatory processes and public, private, and commoning-oriented agendas shape its transformation.

Particular attention is given to the role of local communities, cultural initiatives, and temporary users, exploring whether and how small actors can influence decision-making processes within a large-scale redevelopment project. The research also examines the tension between preserving Refshaleøen's creative and experimental identity and the potential risk of gentrification associated with future development.

Through this lens, the thesis reflects on temporality, co-management and open-ended urbanism as possible strategies for maintaining spatial adaptability and collective agency over time. The study combines fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, remote socio-spatial desk research, and analysis of planning documents. Through the case of Refshaleøen, the thesis contributes to current debates on participatory urban regeneration, collaborative governance, and the capacity of community actors to shape the future of urban transformation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Urban transformation processes increasingly involve participatory practices, collaborative governance models, and temporary urban strategies as tools for redevelopment. In recent years, participation has become central in planning discourse, often presented as a way to democratize decision-making and include communities in shaping urban futures. However, the actual role of participation within large-scale redevelopment remains an open question. While communities, cultural actors, and temporary users are often involved in the activation of spaces, their capacity to influence long-term transformation processes is a question mark to deal with in this thesis.

Redevelopment often involves processes of economic valorization, identity-making, and spatial negotiation. Across Europe, many former industrial and harbour areas have undergone long processes of transformation after the decline of industrial production. Often privately owned and left abandoned for years, these spaces have gradually become strategic sites for urban redevelopment, raising questions about identity, public access, and who has the right to shape their future.

Refshaleøen, in Copenhagen, is one of these spaces. Once a shipyard and industrial island, today it has become a place of temporary uses, cultural initiatives, festivals, workshops, and informal communities. Its current condition is neither fully abandoned nor fully redeveloped. Rather, it exists in an intermediate state, where everyday practices, temporary occupations, and long-term planning overlap.

This condition makes Refshaleøen particularly relevant as a case study because its transformation is a social and political process where different actors are involved: the municipality, private developers, local communities, cultural producers, and temporary users. Each of them, of any class of power or influence, can contribute to defining the future of the area.

In recent years, Copenhagen has increasingly promoted citizen engagement and collaborative urban strategies through planning policies and municipal visions. At the same time, redevelopment processes in post-industrial areas often produce tensions between openness and control, temporary experimentation and long-term stabilization, collective use and economic valorization.

Refshaleøen reflects these tensions clearly. While its creative and experimental identity is largely produced by small-scale actors, communities, and temporary uses, the growing attractiveness of the area also risks transforming these same qualities into drivers of redevelopment and potential gentrification. Due to this, temporary uses began to be active elements in shaping the image, value, and future of the site.
This thesis investigates these dynamics by focusing on the relationship between participation, governance, and urban transformation.

As its main research question, the study asks how participatory processes and divergent redevelopment agendas, public, private, and commoning-oriented, shape the co-management of Refshaleøen's ongoing transformation.

A secondary research question asks how these redevelopment processes shape the tension between preserving Refshaleøen's distinctive identity and the risk of gentrification.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The redevelopment of former industrial waterfronts increasingly relies on participatory planning to produce more inclusive and sustainable urban transformations. However, participation often remains limited to consultation processes that take place after strategic decisions have already been made, reducing the influence of local communities, temporary users, and cultural initiatives on the future of these areas. This raises critical questions about who shapes urban transformation, how different actors negotiate their roles within redevelopment processes, and whether temporary practices can remain part of the city once redevelopment intensifies. Taking Refshaleøen as a case study, this thesis investigates these dynamics through the lenses of participation, governance, and actor-network relations, providing the foundation for the research questions developed in the following section.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This theoretical dimension investigates urban governance and participatory processes, through different perspectives on collaboration, inclusion, and the right to shape urban space. While Patsy Healey emphasizes collaborative planning and inclusive governance, Sherry Arnstein and Daniela Ciaffi critically address different degrees and forms of participation, questioning how power is distributed among actors. Henri Lefebvre was relevant for participation and also to describe urban commons, while Michel Callon's work on hybrid forums and sociology of translation helps to interpret how heterogeneous actors negotiate knowledge and decision-making. Contributions by Mela, Nick Gallent, and Wagner and Cunningham further expand this discussion by exploring collective urban projects, local governance, and participatory design practices in complex socio-cultural contexts.

I used a different theoretical framework to understand and explain the phenomena that I found in Refshaleoen. After the selection the concepts are explained in this chapter divided in primary and secondary theoretical framework, to give a relevance to the primary concepts and then the secondary theory which anyway supports the firsts.
Primary theoretical framework can be divided into four interconnected thematic blocks:

1. Participation
2. Governance
3. Commons
4. Gentrification

And secondary theoretical framework like

1. Temporary urbanism
2. Third space
3. Boundary object

2.1 Primary theoretical framework

The primary theoretical framework of this research is structured around four interconnected themes: participation, governance, commons, and gentrification.
One of the main theoretical frameworks to introduce is participation. I was interested in how the people can be related to and can be so relevant to their opinion, and it is better to ask before anything else the participation of the people that then are the final users of the proposed project.
Since my research began I first of all found a document from the Refshaleoen official website in which I found a book full of drawings from tenants and children of the area. After I become more interested to ask about it.

Second of all, I needed to understand the local Danish Governance, also because I was interested in the co-management between Private Society companies and public administration.

Then the Commons play a relevant role for the case study where this hybrid context quasi-public, may increase the tensions between the private-public administration. Commons are meant to be a discussion mark to analyze in this research.

In conclusion of this list, I think Gentrification was also a relevant theme to deal with because it will be the consequence of a new development.

2.1.1. Participation

Participation, in the context of this research, refers to the processes through which citizens, local communities, and everyday users are involved in shaping urban transformation. Within planning and redevelopment, participation can be considered as a potential form of influence over decision-making, negotiation, and the co-production of space. In this sense, participation raises fundamental questions about who has the right to shape the future of the city and how different voices can be recognized within redevelopment processes.

These questions are relevant to the reflections that arise in the book "Is It Just Participation!" (Wagner & Cunningham, 2025), where the authors ask:

> "When and how are participatory processes integrated in the design and execution of public space, and how is this impacted by the context they arrive into?"
>
> "What cultural competencies need to be nurtured in the realm of participatory design to be sensitive towards design translations?"

As Wagner and Cunningham (2025) suggest, the issue is how precisely participation is manifested in a design process and its output(s) and through what decision making, and consequently whose voices and contributions are selected as valuable. The relation between participation and its manifestation in design outputs stems from the experience of practice within participatory planning and design.
Moreover, they claim:
"The involvement of communities is a fundamental part of designing collective spaces." (Wagner & Cunningham, 2025, p.388)
Although civic engagement and participatory design have expanded the involvement of multiple actors into a well-established professional standard, the ways in which users' experiences enter the design process remains insufficiently addressed. While proposals and ideas may be opened to broader public discussion during the early stages of design, the final synthesis and decision-making often remain concentrated within professional offices, revealing a persistent asymmetry between inclusion and control. (Wagner & Cunningham, 2025)

This tension becomes particularly relevant when considering representation. As Andrea Kahn (2005) suggests, one of the most significant forms through which users' perspectives emerge is through their own drawings, mappings, and reports of space. (see point 5.7) These materials can act as alternative spatial narratives, capable of challenging dominant professional representations.

This understanding aligns with Patsy Healey's theory of collaborative planning (1997), which reframes planning from a purely technical and regulatory activity into a communicative and collaborative process involving multiple actors and forms of knowledge.

Multiple actors and hybrid forums

Patsy Healey further develops this perspective through the concept of institutional capacity, which refers to the ability of local actors and institutions to build relations, exchange knowledge, and mobilize resources for collective action. In this framework, planning decisions become stronger and more legitimate through the capacity of different actors to negotiate interests and collectively construct meanings around places. In this perspective, planning is concerned with the production of social relations and democratic processes. However, Healey's collaborative perspective has often been criticized for privileging consensus over conflict. This limitation becomes particularly relevant in contexts of urban transformation where competing interests, unequal power relations, and uncertainty shape decision-making processes. In these situations, participation cannot be understood only as collaboration, but must also be read as a field of controversy.
This shift is central to the work of Michel Callon, whose critique of traditional delegative democracy highlights its inability to address complex socio-technical controversies. For Callon, democratic systems often fail because they preserve rigid separations between experts and non-experts, excluding forms of situated and experiential knowledge from decision-making. In response, Callon proposes the concept of hybrid forums, later expanded through the notion of technical democracy (Farías & Blok, 2016).
Hybrid forums are spaces of collective experimentation, rigid boundary between experts and laypeople(non-experts) are dissolved. Scientists, politicians, and lay citizens collaborate to safely experiment and deliberate on complex matters of concern, allowing heterogeneous groups to share experiences, voice hesitations, and construct common projects. Hybrid forums are Callon's proposed spaces where these scientific, ethical, and political controversies can be openly debated and resolved. Callon suggests that everyday life serves as an active laboratory, and hybrid forums allow these real-world experiments to be collectively evaluated and adjusted. Hybrid forums empower society to manage uncertainties, and make decisions transparently when the exact risks or outcomes are still unknown. Protect alternative voices: Ensure that activists, whistleblowers, and lay challengers of techno-industrial practices have a protected seat at the table.

Participation models

Ciaffi and Mela (2006) identify different models of participation, including the ladder, wheel and target models, each representing different distributions of power and involvement among actors.

1. Three models of participation are included:
- The "Ladder" Model (Modello a scala),
- The "Wheel" Model (Modello a ruota),
- The "Target" Model (Modello a bersaglio)

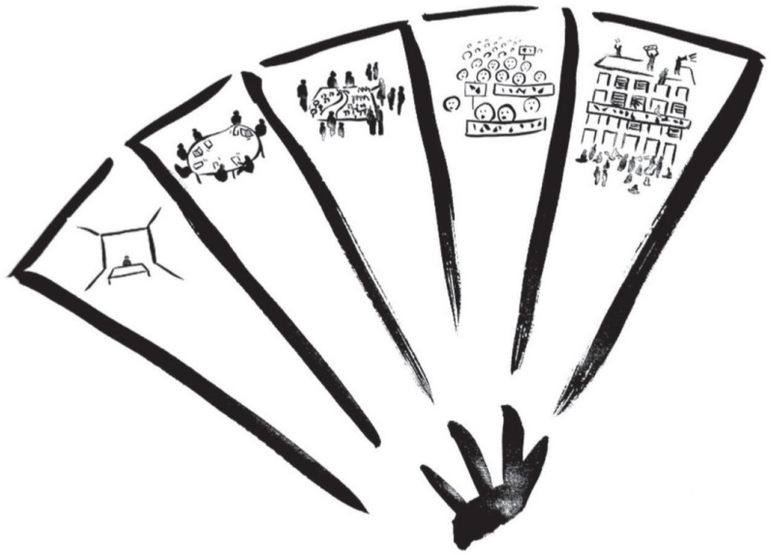
A. The "Ladder" Model (Modello a scala); This derives from the idea that participation can occur at different levels of power and influence. The lower levels involve: information, consultation. The higher levels involve: negotiation, co-decision, co-management
B. The "Wheel" Model (Modello a ruota); In this model, participation revolves around a central actor (usually a public authority or planning institution). The municipality or development authority acts as the hub, while citizens and stakeholders interact with the centre. This model emphasizes: coordination, communication, consultation but decision-making often remains centralized.
C. The "Target" Model (Modello a bersaglio); The target model highlights different degrees of involvement among different groups. Some actors are close to the centre and have greater influence. Others remain in outer circles with limited power. This model is useful for analysing: inclusion, exclusion, unequal participation.

Within this framework, consultation is only one component of a broader participatory process, which should be continuous, relational, and capable of integrating both technical and local knowledge. Urban space, in this perspective, is produced through the interaction between multiple actors, including residents, users, communities, and everyday practices.
This implies that local knowledge, rooted in lived experience, social relations, and everyday use of space, becomes a crucial resource alongside expert knowledge in shaping urban transformation. Planning is therefore understood as a process of negotiation between different perspectives, rather than a purely technical or top-down activity.
However, Ciaffi and Mela also emphasize that participation does not automatically produce inclusive or equal outcomes. Conflict and power imbalances persist, and different actors do not have the same access to decision-making processes or the same capacity to influence outcomes. For this reason, participation should be understood as a field in which different interests, knowledge systems continue to coexist and sometimes collide.

2. Hot and Cold Participation
Within this research, participation can be understood as a temporal condition that shifts between "cold" and "hot" phases rather than as a fixed typology.
Participation at cold refers to planned and structured forms of engagement that occur before open conflict emerges, such as workshops, consultations, or visioning processes. While framed as inclusive and anticipatory, these processes are often shaped by institutional agendas that define who participates, when, and under which terms. Meanwhile, participation at hot emerges once conflict becomes explicit, taking the form of protests, opposition, or public controversy. Rather than being a failure of participation, these moments reveal underlying tensions, asymmetries of power, and competing urban futures. As Callon suggests, such controversies can also generate alternative forms of knowledge.

3. The Spectrum of Positions on Participation
Ciaffi and Mela argue that participation can be defined according to the changes in meaning depending on the political and theoretical lens through which it is understood. In more traditional approaches, participation can be rejected altogether, with decisions concentrated in the hands of experts and institutions, and citizens treated mainly as passive users of urban space.

Figure 1
The Spectrum of Positions on Participation



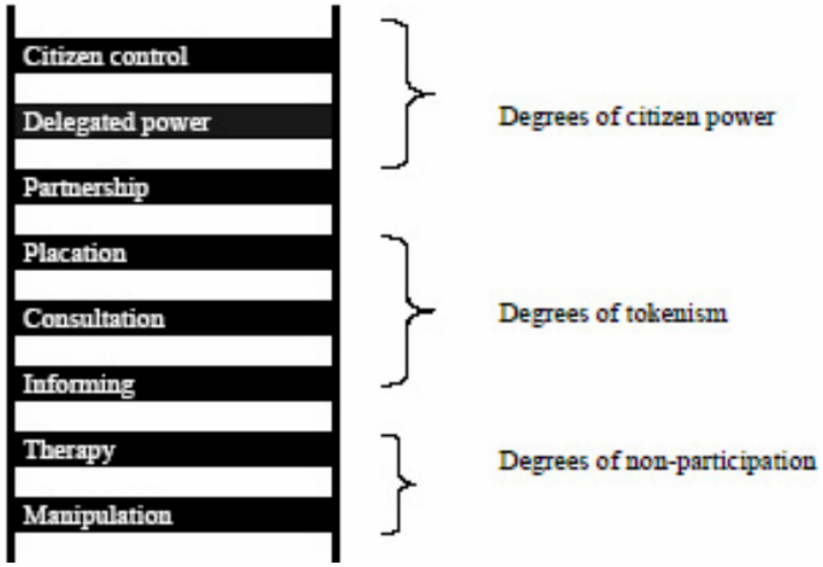
From left to right: (1) the rejection of participation expressed by "elitist" conceptions; (2) the affirmation of participation expressed by organicist, (3) pluralistic and inclusive conceptions; (4) conflictualist; (5) the rejection of participation expressed by radical antagonism.
Adapted Source: Urbanistica partecipata (p. 14), Ciaffi, D., & Mela, A, (2006),Carocci.

From an organicist perspective (Figure 1), society is instead seen as a unified body, where participation is aimed at producing consensus and maintaining collective harmony. In contrast, pluralist and inclusive perspectives recognize the coexistence of multiple interests and actors, and understand participation as a negotiated process where differences are managed through dialogue and conflict mediation. This conceptual framework is often represented visually through a diagram that shows the different models of participation as distinct ways of structuring the relationship between institutions, experts, and citizens.

A Ladder of Citizen Participation

A Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) by Sherry Arnstein, foundational for any critical analysis of participation; provides an immediately legible framework for assessing the quality and structural limits of institutional participation.

Figure 2
Public involvement as a ladder



Adapted Source: A ladder of citizen participation (p. 217), Arnstein, (1969),Journal of the American Institute of Planners.

Arnstein illustrates public involvement as a ladder with different degrees (Figure 2). The model argues that true participation requires a redistribution of power, categorizing the rungs into three main levels: Nonparticipation, Tokenism, and Citizen Power.

Eight-step hierarchy of the ladder, arranged from lowest to highest, include:
Under the theme of Non Participation
Degree 1. Manipulation: Powerholders use citizen committees to "educate". Participation serves as a public relations tool rather than a genuine exchange of ideas.
Degree 2. Therapy: Officials treat citizen grievances as personal issues or "deficiencies" to be cured, rather than systemic problems requiring policy change.
Manipulation and therapy are both non-participative. The aim is to cure or educate the participants. The job of participation is to achieve public support by public relations.

Following the category of Tokenism
Degree 3. Informing: A one-way flow of information from officials to citizens, usually occurring after decisions have already been finalized.
Informing is a more important first step to legitimate participation. However, too frequently, the emphasis at this level is on a one way flow of information, with no channel for feedback.

Degree 4. Consultation: Gathering citizen opinions, but providing no assurance that their feedback will actually be factored into decision-making.
Consultation is a further legitimate step, which can include attitude surveys, neighborhood meetings and public enquiries. Nonetheless, planner Arnstein feels this is still a token ritual.

Degree 5. Placation: Allowing citizens to advise or take seats on boards, but reserving the ultimate decision-making power for traditional powerholders.
It allows citizens to advise or plan, but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

And finally, within the arena of Citizen Power
Degree 6. Partnership: Citizens and powerholders negotiate and share planning and decision-making responsibilities through joint committees.
Partnership means power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders, and planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared.

Degree 7. Delegated Power: Citizens are granted distinct managerial authority or decision-making majorities over specific plans or programs.
Delegated power means citizens hold a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated power to make decisions. The public now has the power to assure that programs are accountable to them.

Degree 8. Citizen Control: The highest rung; citizens hold the majority of seats on decision-making boards and have full managerial and budgetary control.
Citizen control means citizens handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing a program with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds.

The right to the city is the right to participate

Lefebvre argues that citizens should actively participate in shaping the city. In Right to the City (1968), Lefebvre criticizes urban development that is driven mainly by economic interests and centralized power.
The Main principles are: Participation, where citizens should be involved in decisions affecting their environments. This goes beyond consultation. Lefebvre argues for: active engagement, collective decision-making, inclusion of different voices. Appropriation, where people should be able to use and transform urban spaces according to social needs. Urban spaces need to include and promote social life and collective practices, to reach more people as possible, with the risk to bring economic values ; as Lefebvre warns, cities increasingly become products for consumption where urban redevelopment may lead into places like branded spaces, investment landscapes, and exclusive environments.

After the explanation of these models, some of which will be applied to the case study in the following chapters.

2.1.2. Governance

In the context of this thesis, governance refers to the processes through which different actors negotiate, influence, and shape urban transformation. Rather than being understood as a top-down form of control, governance is approached here as a relational and often fragmented system of decision-making, where power, responsibilities, and interests are distributed across multiple actors like public institutions, private developers, communities, and civic organizations.

Co-management is understood as a shared mode of managing urban space in which institutional actors and local communities participate together in the care, use, and transformation of a place. It implies a negotiated distribution of responsibilities and recognizes that urban spaces are continuously shaped through everyday practices, temporary uses, and collective forms of stewardship.

Negotiation in this thesis is understood as the ongoing process through which urban actors with different interests and degrees of power interact, conflict, and reach temporary agreements in shaping the transformation of space.

From the book description, Negoziare il territorio. La gestione della complessità (Bettiol, 2005) focuses on how contemporary urban transformation increasingly happens through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and negotiated processes rather than through purely top-down planning. It argues that urban complexity requires mediation among institutions, private actors and stakeholders, and that participation can range from simple information to full co-design. Frames urban transformation as a process of territorial negotiation, where complexity emerges from the interaction between public administrations, private actors and local stakeholders. In this perspective, planning is no longer a purely technical or hierarchical activity, but a process of mediation among competing interests, values and visions. (Bettiol 2005)

2.1.3. Urban commons

Urban commons can be understood as spaces, resources, or infrastructures collectively produced and maintained through shared practices, negotiation, and everyday use. Rather than being defined only by legal ownership, urban commons emerge through social relations, cooperation, and forms of collective care. In the context of urban transformation, they represent spaces where communities actively participate in shaping, appropriating, and managing the urban environment. Within this research, the notion of urban commons is relevant to understand how temporary users, cultural initiatives, and local communities contribute to the identity and everyday life of Refshaleøen, producing forms of commoning that exist alongside institutional and private redevelopment agendas.

On one hand, the scholar Henri Lefebvre was relevant to talk about participation (mentioned in paragraph 2.1.1) in Right to the City, where Lefebvre criticizes urban development that is driven mainly by economic interests and centralized power.
On the other hand, in The Production of Space (Lefebvre, 1974) Lefebvre argues some concepts that could be more important to understand Urban commons. Lefebvre claims that space is socially produced, because cities and urban environments are created through interactions between: political forces, economic systems, institutions, everyday practices, human experiences. Due to this, space is never neutral; every urban space reflects power relations, ideologies and social structures. One of Lefebvre's most important contributions is the idea of the spatial triad, composed of three dimensions:

1. Spatial Practice (Perceived Space)
   This refers to the everyday use of space: movement, activities, routines, social practices. Examples: people cycling, festivals, gardening, informal uses, community activities.
2. 2. Representations of Space (Conceived Space)
   This is the planned and designed space: masterplans, maps, regulations, planning strategies architects' visions. Example: municipal plans, development company strategies, competition proposals.
3. 3. Representational Spaces (Lived Space)
   This is the symbolic and emotional dimension of space: memories, meanings, identities, imagination.

Stavrides argues that urban spaces should not simply be understood as either: private spaces or public spaces. He introduces a third perspective: the city as a commons.
According to Stavrides, urban spaces become meaningful through collective practices, shared experiences and participation. Stavrides proposes understanding the city as a commons generated through collective practices like how people collectively use, manage and produce it, rather than through legal ownership. This means that a space does not become a commons because it belongs to everyone officially, but because people actively create relationships, interactions and forms of collective use. In the Collective Production; cities should be produced through communities, social interactions and everyday practices. Urban space is therefore understood as a continuous process.
Through this perspective, urban spaces emerge from processes of participation, negotiation and shared use. (Examples: community gardens, informal gathering spaces, cultural initiatives, shared urban practices)
Therefore, thresholds are also spaces that function as spaces of transition and interaction. Examples like courtyards, shared paths that allow to connect groups, allow encounters, remaining open and permeable.
Critique of enclosure; He argues that many urban redevelopment processes gradually transform open spaces into controlled and exclusive environments. This can happen through: privatization, commercialization, excessive regulation, gentrification. As a consequence, spaces that were once open and shared risk becoming exclusive.
Directly relevant to how identity and "authenticity" are socially produced and politically contested is important to mention Doreen Massey, who challenges static understandings of place (Massey, 1991), and argues that places are relational and continuously produced through social interactions and power dynamics. Furthermore, space is the sphere of multiple trajectories where different actors and histories coexist simultaneously, underlining that different groups can understand and experience the same place differently. In For Space 2005, Massey develops these ideas further and proposes a new understanding of space itself.
Arguing against the traditional idea of space as: a neutral container where events happen and argues that space itself is an open and unfinished process.
To summarize, all of the authors agree that places are processes rather than bounded entities.

2.1.4. Gentrification

Gentrification refers to the process through which urban areas undergo physical, economic, and social transformation, often resulting in increased land value, changing demographics, and new forms of exclusion. Beyond direct displacement, gentrification can also involve more subtle processes such as the loss of local identity, informal practices, and existing social networks. In the context of post-industrial redevelopment, gentrification is understood as a process shaped by planning strategies, cultural valorization, and institutional decisions.

Before addressing gentrification directly, it is important to consider the broader condition of uncertainty in urban transformation.
Rosario Pavia, in Le paure dell'urbanistica, argues that contemporary planning is often driven by a latent fear of unpredictability, informal appropriation, and the loss of control over spatial development. In this perspective, planning tends to neutralize uncertainty by fixing space in advance through rigid programs, functions, and long-term visions. However, this attempt to stabilize urban space can also become a mechanism of exclusion, reducing openness and limiting the adaptive capacity of places. Particularly in post-industrial contexts where temporality and informal uses play a central role, uncertainty should be an intrinsic condition of urban life. Within this tension, gentrification can be interpreted as one possible outcome of an urbanism that seeks to transform openness into controlled and valorized space.
Foundational theorists such as Ruth Glass first coined "gentrification" in 1964 to describe how working-class areas in London were transformed as middle-class residents moved in, remodeling buildings and altering neighborhood character.

One of the central theoretical frameworks for gentrification is the Rent Gap Theory by Neil Smith (1979, p.538–548). According to this theory, gentrification occurs when the potential ground rent of a site exceeds its current value, creating the opportunity for redevelopment.
In its early interpretation, gentrification was a by-product of post-industrial urban economies. As industries left central cities, large areas of decommissioned land and housing became available for reuse. Artists, students, and creative professionals often occupied these spaces first, attracted by their low cost and aesthetic potential, laying the groundwork for a new cycle of real-estate speculation and investment.
The open discussion is about whether creativity and authenticity are simply cultural qualities or whether they can become economic and political tools within redevelopment processes. To further support this theory is located Sharon Zukin claims that authenticity may become a driver of gentrification, arguing that contemporary cities, especially in post-industrial urban contexts, increasingly rely on Creative activities (Examples include: festivals, artistic initiatives, creative districts, industrial aesthetics) can become marketing tools as mechanisms for urban regeneration and can increase attractiveness and market value. Rather than depending only on industry or infrastructure, cities now compete through cultural value. Urban identity is not an inherent quality of places while authenticity is socially produced and continuously negotiated. Nevertheless, the same cultural elements that make places attractive can contribute to their transformation, as elements of a symbolic economy.

Loretta Lees, one of the leading scholars on gentrification studies, challenges traditional interpretations of gentrification by expands the understanding of gentrification by showing how contemporary urban transformation is often actively facilitated by active role of institutions, planning policies and public-private partnerships. In this perspective, regeneration cannot be considered neutral, as it may simultaneously produce valorisation and exclusion, because contemporary gentrification is no longer simply a process driven by middle-class residents moving into neglected areas. Nevertheless, regeneration does not automatically benefit all users equally. The concept of state-led gentrification helps move beyond the traditional idea that gentrification happens naturally through individual choices and market dynamics. In this perspective the state is an active actor.

2.2 Secondary theoretical framework

This secondary theoretical dimension explores the spatial and relational conditions through which urban transformation unfolds. While the primary framework focuses on governance, participation, and collective decision-making, this section investigates how temporary uses, informal practices, and in-between spaces shape the production of urban space. Through the concepts of temporary urbanism, third space, and boundary work, the research examines how transitional and hybrid conditions can generate forms of experimentation, encounter, and negotiation within processes of urban redevelopment. It is divided into three parts.

2.2.1. Temporary urbanism

Temporary urbanism—using vacant or underused land for provisional activities—can mitigate urban decline, but it also risks accelerating gentrification. Events, cultural initiatives, and temporary housing projects can make areas more desirable, effectively acting as soft catalysts of transformation. The paradox lies in how temporary inclusivity often paves the way for permanent exclusivity.

Temporary urbanism refers to the use of interim, flexible, and non-permanent spatial practices within the city, often emerging in vacant, underused, or transitional areas. According to Philipp Oswalt, these spaces are productive territories of uncertainty, where experimentation, informal use, and adaptive strategies can generate alternative forms of urban life and planning. Temporary urbanism highlights the value of time-based occupation as a tool for reactivating dormant urban sites.

This subsequent category seems particularly important for analysing the role of temporary civic spaces within long redevelopment timelines. There is a strong question here around whether temporary uses genuinely shape redevelopment or primarily soften and legitimize transformation processes.

Temporary urbanism is almost one of the central conditions. Philipp Oswalt and the Urban Catalyst: The Power of Temporary Use project, are probably among the most directly applicable references to discuss: temporary uses, experimental communities, vacant industrial sites and long-term transformation through short-term activities. The Urban Catalyst project emerged from research on post-industrial European sites, especially vacant urban areas undergoing transformation. Oswalt and his collaborators argue that temporary uses should not simply be understood as activities occupying empty spaces

while waiting for permanent development because can actively shape urban transformation and generate new forms of urban value. Instead of seeing vacancy as a problem, they propose understanding it as an opportunity for experimentation and social innovation.
Traditional planning often sees temporary uses as short-term occupations before the "real" project begins. Oswalt challenges this idea. but Temporary uses generate social networks, test urban functions, create identity, activate neglected spaces, attract communities, and introduce alternative forms of use. Temporary uses can become productive urban tools rather than transitional gaps. Interim use as experimentation; Temporary uses create opportunities for testing future possibilities. Examples: cultural activities, artistic projects, community gardens, informal ,public spaces, pop-up initiatives, events and festivals. These temporary practices can act as: urban laboratories. These activities allow cities to observe how spaces are used, what communities need and which activities emerge naturally.
Temporary uses often generate temporary communities; that can be flexible, self-organized based on shared practices. They may create: social networks, local identity, collective attachment. In many cases these communities become essential parts of a place's character. Temporary urbanism and uncertainty, Oswalt argues that contemporary cities increasingly operate under conditions of uncertainty: changing economies, evolving social needs, post-industrial landscapes, shifting urban agendas. Temporary urbanism therefore becomes a strategy capable of adapting to uncertain futures. Temporary uses can produce: positive effects: creativity, social activation, but they may also unintentionally contribute to: place branding, increased attractiveness, rising land value, redevelopment pressures. Therefore temporary urbanism can simultaneously function as: social experimentation and economic valorization. From Philipp Oswalt point of view, temporary use are no more leftover activity but active urban production. Oswalt and the Urban Catalyst project challenge the understanding of temporary uses as merely transitional activities preceding permanent urban development. Instead, temporary practices are interpreted as active processes capable of generating social networks, spatial identities and forms of experimentation. However, these same practices may also increase the attractiveness of the site and potentially become part of broader redevelopment dynamics.

2.2.2. Third spaces

Third spaces, a concept developed by Ray Oldenburg, describe informal public environments that exist outside the binary of home (first space) and work (second space). These include cafés, parks, community spaces, and other everyday settings where social interaction, spontaneity, and collective identity formation occur. Third spaces are essential for urban life because they support informal sociability, accessibility, and a sense of belonging beyond institutional structures.

Third space: refers to social surroundings separate from the two usual environments of home (the first space) and the workplace (the second space). The term was coined by urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg, Professor emeritus in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of West Florida in Pensacola, USA, and author of The Great Good Place. Co-author of this article, Ray Oldenburg passed away on 21 November 2022, a few months before its publication in The UNESCO Courier.

In his 1989 book The Great Good Place, this concept describes physical locations that anchor community life. While the first place refers to home and the second place to work; The third place is one of the physical settings that have throughout history encouraged a sense of warmth, conviviality, and that special kind of human sustenance we call community. These settings include cafés, taverns, libraries and hair salons, where people from different walks of life gather to hang out in an informal atmosphere. (Oldenburg, R., & Christensen, K., 2023). The term "third place" quickly entered the common lexicon. Ray Oldenburg's admirers around the world have looked to his book to find ways to promote social cohesion by designing physical spaces that promote a sense of community. This simple concept reminds us that human connections need nurturing and that community depends on such simple things as a few tables, a friendly host and a willingness to see what happens when we get together face-to-face. Third space as a concept that builds and fosters community.

> *"A Third Place exists outside the confinements of the first place, home, and the second place, work, creating a new communal and public place."*
> Zoe Krueger Weisel and Mila Miletić

Third Places are primarily community-run places. Described in the literature as commons.[5] They aim to serve the vitality of a community while constantly trying to overcome the polarities of openness and closeness, as well as inclusivity and exclusivity. Public goods, including both spaces and places that in their own way resist the neoliberal policies of privatization, financialization, commodification, and new imperialism have not yet entered the mainstream. In his 1968 essay "The Tragedy of the Commons" microbiologist and ecologist Garett Hardin presumed two "inevitable" scenarios for all commons: central regulation by state or privatization.

2.2.3. Boundary work

Boundary work, developed by Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, refers to the processes and tools through which different social groups coordinate, communicate, and collaborate despite having different perspectives or practices. This occurs through "boundary objects," which are flexible enough to be interpreted differently by each group while still maintaining a shared structure. In urban contexts, boundary work helps explain how diverse actors (planners, users, institutions, communities) negotiate meaning and cooperate within shared but contested spatial frameworks. Their concept of Boundary Objects, introduced in Institutional Ecology, 'Translations', explains how different groups can collaborate even if they do not completely share the same goals, language or understanding of a situation. Star and Griesemer developed the concept of boundary objects to explain how cooperation occurs between different social worlds. Cooperation is often possible through objects, concepts or tools that different actors can interpret in their own ways while still using them collectively. Different actors can work together without fully sharing the same perspective. Boundary objects have qualities like "Flexibility"; they are flexible enough to have different meanings for different actors. For example: an architect, a municipality, a local community, a developer may all interpret the same object differently. And "Stability"; they maintain enough common structure to enable coordination and communication. Temporary uses, spatial practices and planning documents function as mediating elements that allow collaboration between stakeholders despite their different interests and priorities. Because boundary objects explain how participation actually happens despite conflicting agendas.

5 Based on the writings of Elinor Ostrom commons are defined as a social practice of governing a resource, not by state or market but by a community of users that self-governs the resource through the institutions it creates.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This research adopts a qualitative multi-method approach to investigate participation as a dynamic and contested process within urban transformation. Since participation involves multiple actors, power relations, and spatial negotiations, no single method is sufficient to fully capture its complexity.

The primary methodological framework consists of semi-structured interviews, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) mapping, and site observation, used to explore actors' perspectives, relationships, and the spatial manifestation of these dynamics in Refshaleøen. These are supported by secondary methods such as ethnographic references and remote socio-spatial research, which provide broader contextual and temporal insights into the site's transformation.
Together, these methods allow the research to address participation as an evolving process shaped by negotiation, conflict, and changing urban conditions.

3.1 Primary Methodological Framework

The Primary Methodological Framework of this research is structured around three complementary methods like interviews, actor-network mapping, and site observation, each contributing a different layer of understanding to the analysis of urban conditions and practices. Together, these methods combine qualitative, spatial, and relational perspectives, allowing the research to move between lived experience, material context, and systems of interaction.
The first component consists of interviews, which provide direct insight into the perspectives, experiences, and decision-making processes of key stakeholders involved in the site. This method captures subjective narratives and helps reveal how different actors interpret and negotiate urban change.
The second component is actor-network mapping, which is used to visualize and analyze the relationships between human and non-human actors shaping the urban system. This approach highlights connections, dependencies, and flows of influence, making visible the often-informal networks that structure spatial production and transformation.
The third component is site observation, which grounds the research in direct empirical engagement with the physical environment. Through systematic observation, the study records spatial behaviours, patterns of use, and temporal variations, providing a grounded understanding of how space is actually lived and appropriated.
Together, these three methods form an integrated framework that connects discourse, relationships, and spatial reality, enabling a multi-scalar reading of the urban condition.

3.1.1. Semi-structured interviews

Social research is a way to find answers to questions about reality by collecting and analysing empirical data with scientific methods through a scientific process. In the process of social research we combine principles, outlook and ideas (i.e. methodology) with a set of specific practices, techniques and strategies.
Social research is more than a set of techniques: it is a structured, organized and systematic process. Interviews are a qualitative research method used to collect firsthand accounts from relevant stakeholders, allowing the capture of personal experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes. They provide insight into how different actors understand and interpret urban conditions and change.
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with actors involved in the transformation of Refshaleøen, including planners, developers, architects, artists and community representatives. The interview structure combined recurring questions with actor-specific questions to allow comparison between perspectives while maintaining flexibility.

The aim of the interviews was to investigate how participatory processes are integrated into redevelopment practices, how responsibilities and power relations are distributed, and how different actors perceive the tensions between temporary uses, long-term planning, and the preservation of local identity.

3.1.2.Actor-Network Theory Mapping

Actor-network mapping is a methodological tool used to identify and visualize the relationships and interactions between human and non-human actors within a system. It highlights the networks of connections, dependencies, and influences that shape spatial, social, and organizational dynamics in the urban environment. This tool also influences how you investigate the case, the study investigated the relationships among institutions, communities, temporary initiatives and spatial elements involved in the transformation. This perspective supported the identification of networks and negotiations shaping the development process.

> *"We are seeing the beginnings of design practice that is in amongst the interplay between multitudes of actors, both human and non-human."*
>
> (Wagner & Cunningham, 2025)

Unlike traditional urban theories that separate people, institutions and physical space, Bruno Latour argues that reality is produced through networks of relationships between many different actors, humans but also objects, infrastructures, technologies and environments. Moreover, financial agendas, participatory processes, governance paradigms, redevelopment strategies, legal regulations can be inclused as non-human actors. His book Reassembling the Social, (2005) is one of the main texts of Actor–Network Theory. Latour criticizes traditional sociology because it often assumes that "society" already exists as a stable fixed structure that determines human actions. Instead, he interprets reality and urban processes as networks of relations among human and non-human actors.

Actors can be: Human actors, planners, citizens, architects, politicians, communities.

Non-human actors: buildings, maps, infrastructures, festivals, policies, technologies, landscapes
but it also includes: financial agendas, participatory processes, governance paradigms, redevelopment strategies, legal regulations.

This is important because non-human elements influence also decisions and behaviors. Urban transformation emerges through interactions among institutions, communities, infrastructures, spaces and material elements.
In relation with Actor–Network Theory It is possible to discuss Michel Callon's Sociology of Translation (Callon, M., 1984).is useful because it explains how different actors become connected and aligned around a project or process. Callon argues that networks are continuously built through a process called translation. This process through which actors with different goals, interests and perspectives become linked together within a common network. Urban and social processes are constructed through negotiations among actors. Callon identifies four main stages: the four moments of translation;
1. Problematization, An actor defines a problem and proposes itself as essential for solving it. 2. Interessement Actors attempt to attract and stabilize other actors into the process. This may involve: meetings, policies, workshops, temporary projects, events, agreements 3. Enrollment. Actors accept certain roles within the network. 4. Mobilization, The network becomes relatively stable and begins producing actions and outcomes.

3.1.3. Site observation / fieldwork

Site observation is a direct empirical method that involves systematically analysing a physical location to understand how space is used and experienced in practice. It focuses on recording spatial behaviour, patterns of occupation, and temporal variations to ground research in real-world conditions.

As a methodological inspiration, Jan Gehl's people-centered approach highlights the importance of observing everyday urban life, public space practices, and human-scale interactions in order to understand how spaces are lived and appropriated. His work has been a long-standing reference in shaping my interest in architecture and urbanism, particularly through the attention he gives to ordinary social behaviours in public space. This perspective became especially relevant for the present research after visiting an exhibition on Danish architecture, where a section dedicated to Gehl presented drawings, photographs, and documents from his studies in Italy on the use of piazze (squares). His observations of how people gather, sit, and interact along the edges of public squares helped clarify how spatial qualities emerge through everyday practices. Gehl's approach has informed the observational dimension of the methodology by reinforcing the importance of reading urban space through lived experience and human presence.
Direct experience of reality is a privileged channel for understanding and interpreting a human group, a place, an environment etc.
A multitude of analytical tools, theoretical perspectives, extremely varied forms and representations: from observing to listening, from experimenting to reflecting, from taking notes to drawing, from photographing to recording or filming people, places, situations, objects. Set of techniques based on a systematic collection by the researcher of information, data and impressions on the surrounding world, through ever ry human sense and

through direct contact. The research began with the collection and analysis of official municipal maps, planning documents, GIS materials and urban cartographies in order to understand the physical, administrative and morphological structure of Refshaleøen. This phase provided the spatial foundation for identifying land uses, ownership structures, infrastructural systems and areas of temporary occupation.
Methods like direct observation, photography, sketches, spatial es, site visits.

3.1 Secondary Methodological Framework

The Secondary Methodological Framework, that supports and prepares the primary fieldwork, of this research is structured around two complementary methods—autoethnography and remote socio-spatial research—which support the primary fieldwork by providing experiential and contextual layers of analysis. Together, these methods allow the research to develop an initial understanding of the site before and alongside direct engagement, connecting personal experience, digital traces, and spatial interpretation.

The first component consists of autoethnography, through which the research reflects on the author's own situated experience of the site, including perceptions, movements, and informal encounters. This method acknowledges the researcher's direct involvement in the field and helps capture embodied, temporal, and affective dimensions of urban space.

The second component is remote socio-spatial research, developed as a pre-fieldwork exploratory method through the analysis of digital archives, online platforms, maps, planning documents, social media, and visual materials. This approach supports an initial reconnaissance of the site, helping to identify actors, activities, conflicts, and spatial conditions before entering the field.

Together, these methods form a secondary framework that are complementary methods within the qualitative research approach, by linking personal experience with remote contextual analysis.

3.2.1. Autoethnography

Autoethnography combines: personal experience, observation, critical reflection.
The researcher becomes partially part of the research process where the researcher's own experience is considered a source of knowledge. The research process evolved from remote observation to direct engagement with the site, allowing reflections on how perceptions changed through field experience. Elements of autoethnographic reflection were integrated into the research process through the researcher's direct engagement with Refshaleøen. The investigation developed over an extended period involving remote observation, digital exploration and fieldwork in Copenhagen. This process enabled reflections on how personal perceptions and interpretations evolved through direct encounters with the site and its actors. Rather than positioning the researcher as a detached observer, the study acknowledges the role of researcher positionality in shaping the understanding of the case study.

3.2.1. Remote socio-spatial research

I used digital material to understand a physical urban site before fieldwork the research adopted a phase of remote socio-spatial research as a preliminary ethnographic scoping method. This phase focused on collecting and interpreting digital traces related to the physical site of Refshaleøen. Through official planning documents, GIS mapping, municipal archives, websites, social media platforms, event networks and visual documentation, it was possible to reconstruct the evolving socio-spatial condition of the area, identify key actors, temporary uses and emerging cultural practices. This pre-fieldwork phase functioned as an initial reconnaissance, allowing the research to map relations, detect informal dynamics and frame the fieldwork with greater contextual awareness. Remote socio-spatial research studies how social practices, communities and meanings are produced through digital environments.

Nowadays, it is more established and methodologically clearer in contemporary research. Digital platforms are part of how social life is constructed.
I spent almost one year interacting with the site through digital sources, including: websites, social media, maps, online archives, planning documents, project websites, photographs, interviews available online. This method was employed as a complementary research method to investigate how the case study is represented and discussed through digital environments. Digital spaces were considered active environments contributing to the construction of Refshaleøen's identity and perception. Remote socio-spatial research is becoming also a method increasingly used in professional urban practice.

Figure 3
Orthophoto of Refshaleøen (2023)

Source: Danish Agency for Data Supply and Infrastructure (2023), reproduced in Refshaleøen gør København større — Vision [Refshaleøen Makes Copenhagen Bigger — Vision] (Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab, n.d.).

4. CONTEXT

The island of Refshaleøen in the city Copenhagen (Denmark) serves as the empirical case study context for this thesis. As shown in the orthophoto (Figure 3), Refshaleøen is an artificial island located directly opposite Copenhagen's historic centre (Danish Geodata Agency). To the west lies the historic star-shaped fortress of Kastellet (The Citadel), adjacent to Langelinie, the waterfront promenade that hosts The Little Mermaid, one of the city's most iconic landmarks. Refshaleøen therefore forms the visual backdrop to one of Copenhagen's most visited tourist areas, highlighting its strategic location within the harbour and its close relationship with the historic city. (Copenhagen Municipality)
The site was a former industrial and shipyard area that has undergone a gradual and persistent process of transformation. Once dominated by large-scale industrial production, this waterfront is now characterised by a fragmented and evolving landscape where temporary uses, cultural initiatives, and experimental urban practices coexist with remnants of its industrial past. This condition of transition makes Refshaleøen a relevant case study for exploring how urban space is reactivated through adaptive reuse, informal occupation, and phased development. The area functions as a complex interface between past and future uses, where multiple actors and temporalities shape its identity, turning it into a living laboratory for contemporary urban change.

4.1 Analogous case studies

4.1.1. Harbour redevelopment

Waterfronts, as is the case study of this thesis, represent particularly complex territories because they are simultaneously infrastructural, ecological, economic and symbolic spaces. Their transformation often involves multiple actors and competing visions, making them key laboratories for governance experimentation and participatory urbanism.

The transformation of port areas has generated a long tradition of urban and architectural projects aimed at redefining the relationship between port and city. Even a very concise reference to this debate would help situate the case study within a broader field of reflection. In particular, the Italian tradition of harbour design, including the work of Rosario Pavia and others, has produced significant plans and projects concerned with reconnecting urban fabrics and port infrastructures.

The transformation of former industrial and harbour areas serves as a defining European urban paradigm, reflecting a complex intersection of economic restructuring and architectural strategy. This process has a rich intellectual history, notably within the Italian tradition of harbour design, championed by figures like Rosario Pavia, which has long prioritized the reconciliation of urban fabrics with port infrastructure. In practice, this regeneration often diverges between structured, capital-intensive models seen in projects like Västra Hamnen and Nordhavn, and more hybrid, open-ended approaches like Refshaleøen, where temporary and informal community-led initiatives serve as essential precursors to formal development. These varying trajectories highlight the tension between top-down investment and participatory processes in redefining identity and mitigating the risks of gentrification in post-industrial landscapes.

Since the late twentieth century, many European harbour and industrial waterfronts have undergone profound transformation as a result of deindustrialization, containerization, and economic restructuring. Former port infrastructures, once central to urban production and trade, progressively lost their original function and became strategic spaces for urban redevelopment.

Case studies

While many waterfront redevelopment projects in Europe, such as Västra Hamnen and Nordhavn, have followed relatively structured and investment-driven regeneration models, Refshaleøen in Copenhagen represents a more open-ended and hybrid condition, where temporary uses, cultural practices and community-based initiatives have become integral to the identity of the area prior to formal redevelopment.

Scandinavian Context

A. Nordhavn- Copenhagen

Nordhavn represents one of the most significant recent examples of harbour redevelopment in Copenhagen. Historically a highly active industrial harbour, Nordhavn has been gradually redefined as part of the city's strategic expansion, shifting from productive infrastructure to a new mixed-use urban district. This transformation has been strongly driven by By & Havn (developer), whose central role reflects Copenhagen's public-private governance model. (By & Havn)

Figure 4
Construction plans in Copenhagen's harbour redevelopment

Adapted Source: "Construction Plan," The Copenhagen Post.

While often promoted as a flagship of sustainable urban development (Figure 4), Nordhavn also exposes the tensions of large-scale regeneration: balancing public interest with market-driven agendas, and raising critical questions around accessibility, affordability, and the loss of former industrial and temporary urban uses.

B. Västra Hamnen Sweden

Västra Hamnen is one of the most emblematic examples of contemporary harbour redevelopment in Malmö. Historically, the area was the industrial core of the city, dominated by the Kockums shipyards. Following the industrial collapse of the 1980s and 1990s, Västra Hamnen became a symbol of Malmö's post-industrial transition, gradually transformed into a sustainable residential district. The redevelopment was strongly guided by municipal planning, combining environmental ambitions, housing development, and new public waterfront spaces. (Municipality of Malmö)

Figure 5
Map of the Western Harbor development in Malmö

Adapted Source: Västra hamnen 2031: Ett hållbart och gott liv för alla. Uppdatering av visioner, mål och strategier (July 2013), by City of Malmö, 2013.

Often celebrated as a model of sustainable urbanism, particularly through the Bo01 (Figure 5) exhibition and its ecological agenda. Västra Hamnen also reveals the contradictions of waterfront regeneration: while promoting innovation and green living, it has been criticized for social exclusivity, high housing costs, and the replacement of productive industrial space with market-driven urban development.

Italian Context

Within the Italian debate on port-city transformation, Rosario Pavia analyses the port as a critical interface where logistics, urban life, and public space continuously overlap and conflict. In this sense, port redevelopment is a long-term political process in which urban identity and infrastructure are continuously renegotiated.
This perspective can be situated within broader European trajectories of waterfront regeneration. In the Italian context, the transformation of **Genoa Port** (1992), while the regeneration of **Naples Port** has developed more gradually from the late 1990s and 2000s onwards, through incremental interventions aimed at reconnecting the historic city with its waterfront. Both cases illustrate how port redevelopment unfolds as a prolonged and uneven process, shaped by tensions between accessibility, economic restructuring, and public space production. Pavia, R. (1990) Pavia, R., & Di Venosa, M. (2012).

4.1.2 Participation

The first case study in which the participation is relevant was developed by PLATANT, the office is founded by Ellen T. O'Gara and is known for a series of projects that actively integrate participatory modes into design, construction, and maintenance of places, using collective site activities, co-building, and iterative placemaking to engage diverse groups and sustain collaboration. (Wagner & Cunningham, 2025)

Under Buen - Frederiksberg

'Under Buen', located in Frederiksberg (an independent municipality surrounded by Copenhagen), is an open-air cultural hub underneath the highway bridge Bispeengbuen. (Heward, 2022)

Figure 6
PLATANT proposal for the transformation of Bispeengbuen.

Source: Heward (2020), Danish Architecture and Design Review.

The proposal from PLATANT (see figure 6) to build a deck over the elevated motorway for housing and gardens with access by new towers against the edge of the road (Heward, 2022). The question of how different voices and agencies enter the project drawings make this project valuable to mention in this research. The project transforms residual infrastructural space into a cultural and recreational hub through iterative, collective interventions. Participation is embedded directly into design and construction processes,

Figure 7, The multifunctional yellow grandstand under the Bispeengbuen highway bridge.
Figure 8, A collective dinner session as part of the outdoor culture house Under Buen.

Source: Platant Architects and photographer Rune Rawson

where different groups contribute to shaping the site through hands-on activities rather than purely representational input. Local involvement plays a central role in the project's development, with various groups directly constructing elements of the space, including students building seating structures, neighbourhood groups designing stage components, refugees participating in construction, and skaters informally shaping ramps (Figure 7, 8). At the same time, the project reveals the tensions inherent in participatory planning, as municipal decisions selectively define which groups are formally included or excluded from programmed design outcomes. Despite this, informal appropriations, such as skaters building their own structures, demonstrate how participation become an ongoing negotiation between governance, use, and spatial appropriation. (Lefebvre,1991)

Aotearoa, New Zealand

In Aotearoa New Zealand, contemporary approaches to design and planning challenge conventional technocratic frameworks by emphasising relational and cultural understandings of place. Within Māori design practices, spatial decisions are informed by whakapapa (genealogy) and by the historical and cultural layers embedded in the land.

Figure 9
A young person taking part in pre-design engagement activities in central Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland).

Source: Boffa Miskell Environmental Consultants, photographer Vanessa Le Grand Jacob

Understanding the history of a site is a fundamental condition for defining its meaning, value, and future care. This shifts attention away from purely technical assessments toward the idea that places are produced through ongoing relationships between people, environment, and tradition, challenging architectural approaches that prioritise immediate functional or spatial solutions over long-term cultural continuity. The activities to promote participation are designed to engage diverse passersby (Figure 9). (Wagner & Cunningham, 2025)

4.1.3 Gentrification

European cities have seen a wide variety of gentrification patterns. Where districts became cultural hubs before experiencing massive rent increases. Waterfront regeneration transformed former port and industrial zones into high-value residential and cultural districts. Like Hamburg's HafenCity illustrate how post-industrial waterfronts became laboratories for mixed-use redevelopment, where creative activities coexist, temporarily, with processes of capital accumulation. (Loretta Lees)

1. Lafayette Park in Detroit
2. PREVI experimental housing project in Lima (Peru)

1. Lafayette Park, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, is discussed in Thanks for the View, Mr. Mies as a paradoxical urban experiment: originally conceived as a progressive and socially inclusive modernist redevelopment, it has gradually evolved into a selective and increasingly exclusive residential enclave. The case highlights how even well-intentioned architectural visions of openness can become socially and spatially rigid over time.

A key concept emerging from this discussion is "reversible gentrification", (Aubert et al., 2012) which refers to the idea that gentrification should be understood as a dynamic condition that could, in principle, be slowed down, redirected, or counteracted through planning, governance, and adaptive spatial strategies. In this sense, the focus shifts from only identifying how gentrification occurs, to questioning how urban environments might respond once these processes are already underway. Lafayette Park illustrates this tension, showing how architectural quality, symbolic value, and cultural narratives can contribute to a "silent" form of gentrification, where exclusion emerges gradually rather than through explicit displacement. The case ultimately questions the long-term flexibility of large-scale modernist projects and their capacity to remain socially adaptable over time. (Aubert, Cavar, & Chandani, 2012).

2. Another key reference for this research is the PREVI Experimental Housing Project in Lima, as discussed in ¡El tiempo construye! / Time Builds! (2008). The project is significant because it reframes architecture as a continue open system designed to evolve through occupation, adaptation, and incremental transformation by its inhabitants. Initially conceived as a "progressive" housing model, PREVI demonstrates how built form is continuously reworked over time through extensions, informal modifications, and everyday use, where time itself becomes an active agent in the production of space.

This introduces the idea of a "non-programmed destination", (proposed that will be developed also in the chosen case study), where a neighbourhood is an open framework that allows future transformation. Rather than controlling final outcomes, the architect establishes initial spatial conditions that can be reinterpreted and reconfigured over time. Within this framework, gentrification and urban change are understood as temporal processes, where value and meaning accumulate gradually through use, appropriation, and shifting desirability, rather than through a single moment of transformation. (Time Builds)

The theory is supported by Symbolic Economy of Sharon Zukin and Loretta Lees who both think that culture and creativity are unintentionally drivers of gentrification. (Discussed in the previous chapter in 2.1.4. Gentrification)
In all these examples, temporariness played a strategic role: before redevelopment, informal uses such as pop-up studios, festivals, or community gardens activated the site, improving its image and attracting investment. These short-term occupations often served as precursors to more permanent urban forms.

4.2 Situating the Case Study

Danish context - Copenhagen

In the Danish context, and particularly in Copenhagen, urban development is strongly shaped by a planning culture that combines long-term strategic governance, environmental priorities, and a growing emphasis on liveability and public space quality (Municipal Plan). Over the past decades, the city has positioned itself as a model for sustainable urbanism, promoting cycling infrastructure, climate adaptation strategies, and waterfront regeneration as key drivers of urban transformation. At the same time, this model is closely linked to public–private cooperation and large-scale redevelopment frameworks, where institutions and development agencies play a central role in shaping urban growth. Within this context, former industrial and harbour areas are increasingly redefined as mixed-use districts, reflecting both Copenhagen's ambition for sustainable expansion and the tensions between public value, real estate development, and the production of accessible urban commons.

Governance in Denmark

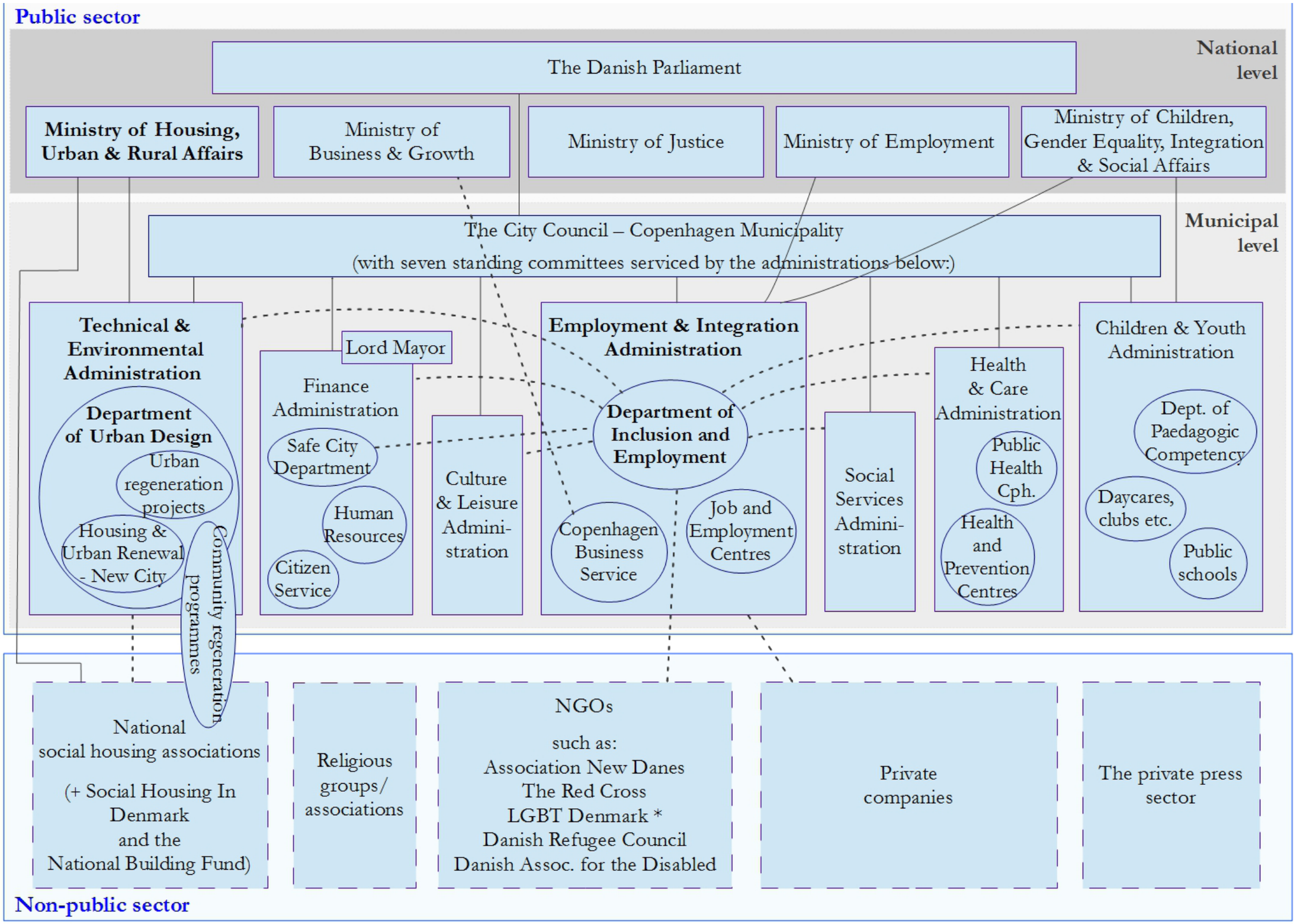
Denmark is divided into 5 regions and 98 municipalities. (European Commission, 2015). The small scale of Denmark (being a country of only 5 million people) means that the distance from national politics to local politics is short; institutionally, legally and in practice. As the largest municipality by far, Copenhagen Municipality[5] is the dominant actor amongst local governments, and in many cases Copenhagen Municipality plays a more important role than the regional council of The Capital Region of Denmark.[6]
On the local level, Copenhagen Municipality is divided into ten areas, all of which are governed by a local council consisting of both politicians and representatives of local associations.
Copenhagen Municipality is the body around which urban policy in Copenhagen is generated as it possesses the main decision-making power in the everyday administration of the city and the municipality is not obliged to follow proposals by the local councils. [7] (European Commission, 2015)

5 The official English name of Copenhagen Municipality is City of Copenhagen. However, for the purpose of this report, the name Copenhagen Municipality is used.

6 For the purposes of this project, the most important role of the regional government is the funding of free counselling and guidance for local entrepreneurs and company owners.

7 A part of Copenhagen is governed by a different municipality, Frederiksberg. Frederiksberg Municipality is much smaller than Copenhagen Municipality (100,000 inhabitants compared with 560,000) and generally more affluent.

Figure 10
Mapping of key institutions and organisations with influence on policies and discourses on diversity from national to municipal level.



* The Danish National Organisation for Gay Men, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgendered Persons.

Source: Denmark/Copenhagen, Feb. 2014

Copenhagen Municipality is governed by City Council which consists of 55 members elected for a four-year term (see figure 10). The council is made up of seven committees, each chaired by a mayor. The Finance Committee is the overarching and coordinating body, and its administration manages the finances of the city and formulates long-term strategies for the physical, commercial and financial development of the city on a macro scale. The top management of the Finance Committee is the responsibility of the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen. The other six committees of the municipality administer different subject fields. They are each chaired by a mayor and serviced by a corresponding administration. Regarding urban policy formulation, the key player is the Technical & Environmental Administration, which is in charge of local planning, urban regeneration, environmental issues and construction policies. They manage the cooperation with the social housing sector, the city's area-based programmes and community regeneration programmes. The coordinating body of these efforts is the Department of Urban Design.
A very central player in the formulation of diversity-related urban policies is the Employment & Integration Administration and especially the Department of Inclusion & Employment. The Employment & Integration Administration manages income-support payments and employment activities. It is also responsible for coordinating the city's general diversity strategies and efforts and for the integration of foreigners into the labour market.
The Department of Inclusion & Employment is responsible for formulating, coordinating and monitoring efforts regarding inclusion and integration of ethnic minorities, as well as equality of treatment and antidiscrimination regarding gender, sexuality, age, etc. The Employment & Integration Administration is also home to the Copenhagen Business Service, which services and supports local businesses and entrepreneurs. The Children & Youth Administration manages the public schools, day-care institutions and youth clubs of Copenhagen, making it a key player in the social and cultural inclusion of the city's young inhabitants.[5]

Furthermore, the prevalence of private actors such as private hospitals and private educational institutions is limited due to the extensive welfare state. They do exist of course, but mainly as specialised alternatives oriented towards specific target audiences. In Copenhagen, the most important non-governmental actors regarding the formation of diversity-related urban policy are organisations representing specific population groups (i.e. unemployed ethnic minorities, highly educated foreigners) along with locally-based organisations and private institutions (i.e. private schools, youth clubs based on volunteers and drop-in-centres).
Furthermore, the social housing sector plays an important role as this sector accommodates a great number of economically and/or socially marginalised people. In Denmark, social housing organisations are independent, but legally subjected to and financially supported by both the national government and local municipalities, situating them in the quasi-public sector.

5 The remaining three committees and their administrations play a less prominent role in the formulation of diversity policies in Copenhagen. However, they are in no way unimportant. A central part of the municipal strategy on diversity is to mainstream diversity efforts making it a responsibility of all administrations.

"I have worked with Refshaleøen, and for a long time, there's an old local plan here from 1992, and it was, then Copenhagen was an industrial town, like Torino, I think, it was, you make a lot of automobiles, and so on.
And here was the most important ship in Denmark, Burmeister & Wain (B&W) . And this local plan was made to make it possible to extend and build more ships, but four years later, it collapsed, and there was no shipyard afterwards, and they thought, how can we use this building and this area? And it took 14 years before they could make a correct strategy for temporary use of the areas. And it was temporary, because in a municipal plan, we have, we call it a perspective area, that you don't can develop even for the period of 12 years.
And this, our planning system is, we have a municipal plan that works for four years, then we make a new, or just decide it was the same, and so it's a rolling planning. And for 12 years, it's a three municipal plan, where you decide every four years, should we develop this area or not. And it has been not in so many years, and frustrating for the owners, but the special in this is not to make new areas, developing new areas, because it's a lot of money for the municipality, because you have to use new schools, and new infrastructure, and so on."...
"for Reshaleoen it was important that open the area for everyone, and to make a new identity. And now I think it's very well-known places in Copenhagen, there's a lot of tourists that go to the street market, and other things in Copenhagen. And back in the 90s, there was a lot of these things, but not in that size as Refshaleøen"

Interview to Peter Nielsen - Municipality

"Every four years, you make a new community plan, and when you are in the community plan, registered as a new development area, then you are allowed to bring in proposals to make local plans"

Interview to Carsten Rasmussen

Basically, The municipality plan of Copenhagen (Københavns Kommune) is the set of documents that contain the overall plan for the physical development of the city which came from many researches, assessments, consultations from the authorities, citizens and third party stakeholders.
Furthermore, according to the Planning Act, Copenhagen's Citizens' Representation must adopt and publish a planning strategy every 4 years. The municipal plan strategy is the Citizen Representation's assessment of the city's development and contains a long-term strategy for the development of Copenhagen. This strategy also serves as a background or a context for the final municipality plan, that has to be a comprehensive framework plan for land use in a given municipality and to provide information on the intended actions.

Participation in Denmark

In Denmark, new professional engagement roles are emerging in the field of participatory design and planning, bringing in cultural and social competencies. Overall, this signals the relevance to develop multidisciplinary collaborations, alongside design and environmental professions, supporting community and challenging the established disciplinary norms of the design profession. Current practitioners are starting to address research concerns that participation be more closely embedded into the context and so de-centre design epistemes. By being more engaged in this narrative mire, designers and design documentation are becoming more entangled with the relationship between site and place.

Copenhagen does not seem to have one specific participation department. Participation works mainly as a cross-functional and mainstreamed approach integrated into different municipal administrations rather than as a separate institution.
Locally founded programmes (such as area-based urban regeneration) try to establish fora for daily interactions and communication in the local neighbourhood.

Policy frameworks

Policies regarding the social housing sector seek to create a socioeconomically diverse composition of residents on the estates (by promoting the influx of resourceful residents into these estates and through community regeneration programmes).
Policies for diversity and the recognition of multiple voices play a central part Campaigns and political statements endeavour to spread the notion of inclusion and diversity as a strength and an asset for the city (e.g. changing the term integration to inclusion, promoting campaigns for diversity, handing out financial means to diversity-promoting projects, etc.), and equal opportunities are considered a prerequisite for a thriving diversity:

> *"Everybody should be able to feel at home in Copenhagen and to engage in local decision making.*
> *We must respect each other's differences […]. Only in this way is it possible to make sure that everyone has equal opportunity"*

This quote originates from the Action Plan for the Inclusion Policy (specifically from the document titled Get Involved in Your City), which was published by the City of Copenhagen in 2010. Policy frameworks for co-creation show how Copenhagen has progressively institutionalized participation. Participatory governance has progressively shifted from consultation-based models toward co-creation-oriented frameworks. This is evident in policy documents such as:

- Metropolis for People (2009) - Visions and goals for urban life in Copenhagen 2015, focuses on creating spaces of encounter in the city based on the idea that meeting different individuals in the city strengthens the tolerance and understanding of others. The core philosophy was developed in collaboration with the Danish architect Jan Gehl.
- 'Get Involved in Your City' (2010), served as the municipality's official policy blueprint and motto for the 2011–2014 period, during that year there was a foundational inclusion programme running called 'Engage in Copenhagen'.
- Communities in Change—Think Tank the City 2025 in 2014, report published by the (former) Danish Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs (MBBL), promoting citizen engagement, "welfare experiments," and new collaborative setups to support communities.
- Co-create Copenhagen Vision for 2025 (2015) asked to *"unleash Copenhageners' creativity so everybody works together to build the city we want" and is inviting everyone "to play an active part in developing the city."*(City of Copenhagen, 2015)
- Copenhagen Vision for the Technical and Environmental Area of the City of Copenhagen (2024) that suggests that "the city's role as an authority will transform into that of a facilitating operator for co-creation."(City of Copenhagen, 2024)

These documents made participation visible in policies and supported professionals working with and within the public administration in strategically arguing for the need to develop citizen engagement further.
From the first municipality (An overview of Copenhagen plan 2019) plans were published and since then with all significant adjustments to the municipal plan, there have been many efforts to ensure the comprehensivity of the plans in order to support the process of urban planning. When the Municipal Planning Act was adopted, it was decided that the municipal council should endeavour to involve the municipality's citizens in their design prior to the preparation of the municipal plan. The public should be involved as far as possible in the work on the design of our surroundings. Municipal plans may contain outline proposals on how an area may be used or a planned project should be carried out in concrete terms. As part of this activity, citizens' meetings were also to be held and given the opportunity for the public to discuss opportunities and proposals themselves in working groups and to express themselves on the municipal council's proposals and to make their own proposals for the design of the municipal plan, including for issues which may have escaped the attention of the municipal council.

Ellen T. O'Gara, a trained architect experienced with facilitating and incorporating civic engagement, founder of Platant Architects in Copenhagen (already mentioned in 4.1.2), describes her experience with urban design projects in which it is the idea "that a participatory phase should be at the beginning". O'Gara describes how the transfer of information between project phases is another critical point; one company often facilitates the participatory process, summing it up, typically, via a report that they deliver to the architects making the drawings in the next phase. O'Gara argues for more specific requirements and goals concerning participation, direct engagement of community on-site, continuous information to people involved in "what results their contribution to the project has created, in terms of design," and requirements as to what happens on site during project development and construction, to sustain the existing local dynamics.

She argues that "civic engagement can do so much more", discussing what 'designerly' cultural competencies are needed in participatory design work, especially in multicultural settings, O'Gara, claims that:

> *"I'm curious to discuss this now that we have people that specialise in participation. I think I have used myself, as a human, and my ability to mirror people and to be able to talk with most people. And being genuinely curious."*
>
> Ellen T. O'Gara
> cited in Wagner & Cunningham, 2025, p. 391

What is interesting in Ellen T. O'Gara's approach is her emphasis on participation as a situated, embodied practice rather than a formalised or workshop-based procedure. She draws on everyday experiences and associative forms of engagement, favouring collective making and practical collaboration over conventional consultation formats such as structured workshops or post-it based exercises. In this sense, participation is understood less as representation of opinions and more as shared action in space.

At the same time, her method introduces a more strategic dimension to participation, where specific actors are actively selected for their "mixed competencies" and positioned as mediators within the process. The idea of "giving the work away" is therefore a carefully curated redistribution of tasks and responsibilities. Similarly, the effort to develop a shared language highlights both the potential and the limitation of this approach: while it enables inclusion, it also raises questions about who defines what counts as understandable knowledge and how participation is framed and translated into professional design processes.

Marc Baily, urban designer, described his thinking in this situation, noting how a good urban design needs topossible futures but instead enable the "other appropriate processes to work themselves out." This acknowledgement of different worldviews signals a clarity in how the entanglement of local and professional practice work together. The concern with needing to encode, and so steward, a site differently through early-stage mapping of local relationships to place, and on to a developed design. Given O'Gara's concern about the bridge between engagement processes and designs, this raises questions about how engagement can have more design-specific tools that enable designers to better align with local narrative territories, so a project can better account for the cultural and social impacts of place-change. This signals the further professionalism of engagement, beyond a procedural add-on to design practice and guided by a critical review through an engagement-specific lens of design practices and professional *'places of practice'*.

C O P E N H A G E N

Copenhagen

- City Area: 183.20 km²
- Urban: 525.50 km²
- Øresund Region: 20,754.63 km²
- City Population: 1,390
- Metro Population: 2,200,634

Copenhagen is a city shaped by water, industrial heritage, and an enduring commitment to social and environmental innovation. As the capital of Denmark, it stands at the intersection of history and contemporary urbanism, balancing centuries-old architecture with pioneering approaches to mobility, sustainability, and public space. The city's structure reflects its maritime origins: originally a fortified harbor settlement, Copenhagen has grown through successive layers of expansion, reclamation, and infrastructural development, extending outward across islands and waterfronts that continue to define its identity. Today, Copenhagen is internationally recognized as one of the world's most livable cities. This reputation is the result of strategic governance and a strong cultural emphasis on collective well-being. Cycling infrastructure, rooted in everyday life, has become a global reference for sustainable mobility. Public spaces—parks, squares, waterfront baths, and pedestrian streets—form an essential framework that encourages social interaction and a sense of community across the city. The integration of climate-resilient urban design, blue-green systems, and multifunctional landscapes demonstrates Copenhagen's proactive response to future environmental challenges. Economically and culturally, the city is driven by creativity and innovation. Former industrial districts have been transformed into vibrant hubs of design, gastronomy, and contemporary art. Areas such as Refshaleøen, Nordhavn, and Carlsberg illustrate how Copenhagen reuses its industrial past to generate new forms of urban life. Copenhagen has long been recognized as a model of strategic urban planning, where growth, mobility, and environmental quality are integrated through a coherent metropolitan vision.

Copenhagen's Urban Planning: the Finger plan

A key foundation of this development is the Finger Plan (Fingerplan), first introduced in 1947 as a regional planning framework to guide the expansion of the city. The plan conceptualized Copenhagen's growth as five "fingers" extending outward from the historic urban core, structured along railway corridors, while the spaces in between were preserved as green wedges for recreation, agriculture, and ecological continuity. This model established a balance between urban densification and landscape preservation, shaping the metropolitan region through a clear relationship between infrastructure and settlement. Today, the Finger Plan remains one of the most influential planning paradigms in Denmark, providing the spatial logic through which Copenhagen's peripheral and post-industrial areas, such as Refshaleøen, can be understood within broader processes of urban transformation, connectivity, and adaptive redevelopment.

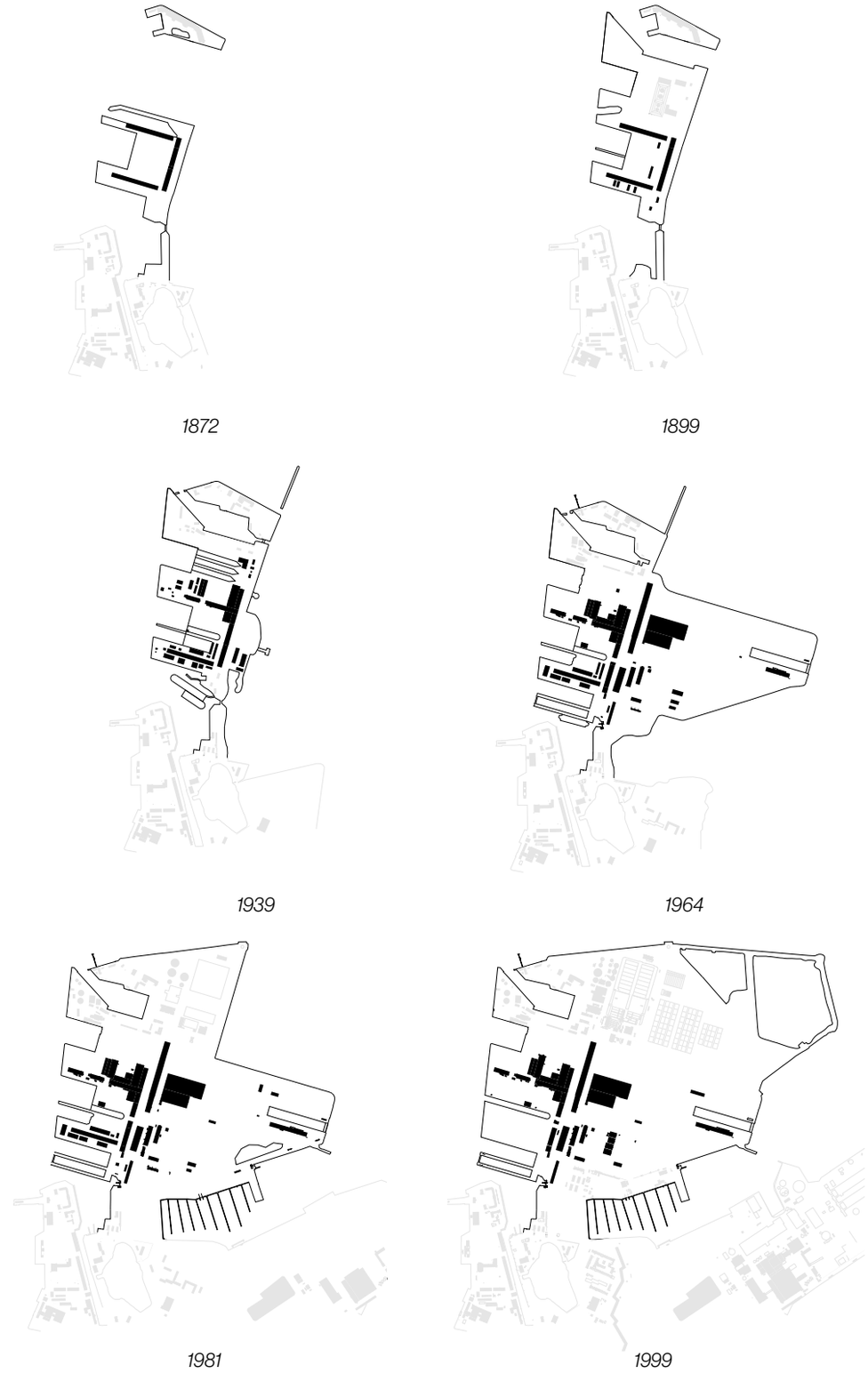
Figure 11
Aerial photograph of Refshaleøen

R E F S H A L E Ø E N

Source: Photograph by Nicolas Cosedis, reproduced in Bilag 3: Bystrategisk stedsanalyse inklusiv matrikelkort [Appendix 3: Urban Strategic Site Analysis Including Cadastral Map] (Municipality of Copenhagen, n.d.).

Fotograf: Nicolas Cosedis

Figure 12
Refshaleøen's historical timeline



Source: Bilag 5: Refshaleøens historiske identitetsmarkører [Appendix 5: Refshaleøen's historicall identity markers], by By & Havn & Over Byen Arkitekter, n.d., Refshaleøen development report. August 2023 (pag.4)

4.3 Refshaleøen

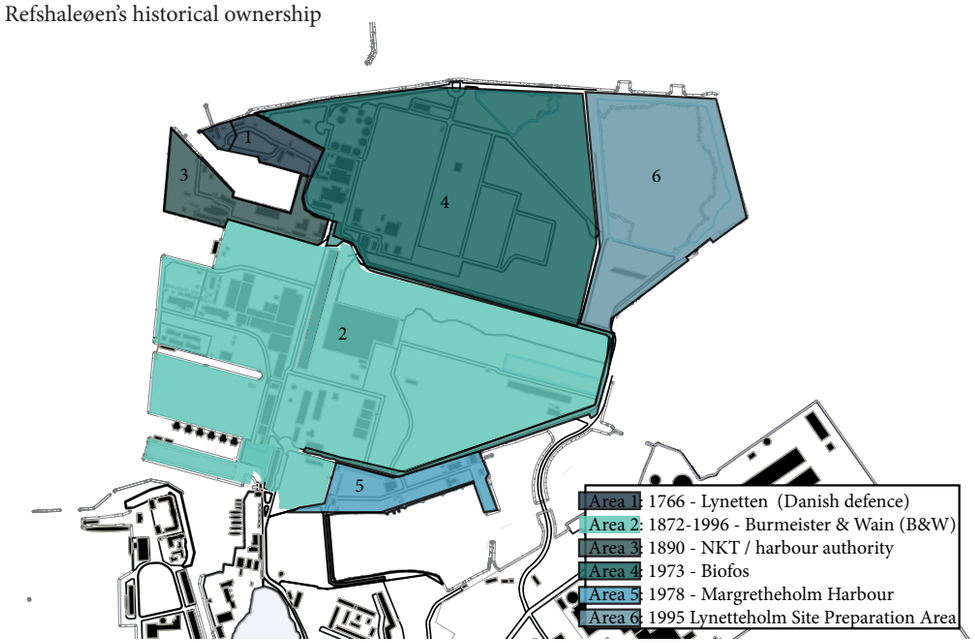
Refshaleøen is an island located in Copenhagen Harbour. Originally an industrial area, it has undergone significant transformation in recent decades (Refshaleøen Development Report, 2023). Today, the buildings on Refshaleøen in Copenhagen host a variety of functions, including culture, housing, commerce, and innovation. The area is an interesting example of urban regeneration. Several redevelopment proposals for Refshaleøen are underway, reflecting its development as an innovation, cultural, and residential center. In recent years, the area has undergone significant transformation, but the redevelopment process is still ongoing. Key proposals and trends for the future include new residential developments, with a focus on environmental sustainability and the construction of low-impact buildings.
Furthermore, improved mobility and transportation: With growing interest in the area, improved transportation connections are planned. These proposals will consolidate the area as a cultural hub for Copenhagen.
Unlike other waterfront regeneration projects in Copenhagen, Refshaleøen still maintains a condition of openness and experimentation, where temporary uses actively shape the identity of the area. However, this condition also generates tensions between the preservation of its creative and informal character and the increasing pressure of future urban development. (Oswalt)
The transformation of Refshaleøen is shaped through the interaction between top-down redevelopment strategies and bottom-up participatory practices. (Refshaleøen Development Report, 2023). Public institutions, private developers, creative communities and temporary users all contribute to defining the identity and future of the area through a continuous process of negotiation.

4.3.1 Historical ownership

The broader historical landscape surrounding Refshaleøen is deeply shaped by overlapping military, infrastructural, and industrial layers. Built on an artificial island later integrated into the Refshaleøen territory, it evolved through successive expansions of bunkers, and 20th-century military structures.
The construction started to the north(see figure 12), where Lynetten originated in the mid-18th century as a naval battery (1766–1767), forming part of Copenhagen's coastal defence system. The area between the shipyard and Lynetten, reflects a historically fragmented industrial landscape shaped by multiple stakeholders. This area hosted a range of industrial actors, from large-scale enterprises to smaller businesses.

During the 20th century, Lynetten was expanded on all sides, thereby losing its original identity. The battery remained in service until 1922, after which it was used as a military headquarters and a school.
Alongside this defensive infrastructure, the northwestern areas of Refshaleøen developed around 1900 into a mixed industrial zone, hosting facilities and, later, Nordiske Kabel- og Trådfabrikke (NKT)'s cable and wire production (1968–1996). NKT operated a reinforcement factory, extending the industrial function of the site through both adapted and newly constructed buildings, many of which remain today. Alongside these private actors, the Copenhagen Port Authority played a central infrastructural role, managing shipyard facilities, workshops, and service buildings that supported harbor operations across both the northwestern and southwestern sectors. (Appendix 5: Refshaleøen's historicall identity markers)

Figure 13
Refshaleøen's historical ownership



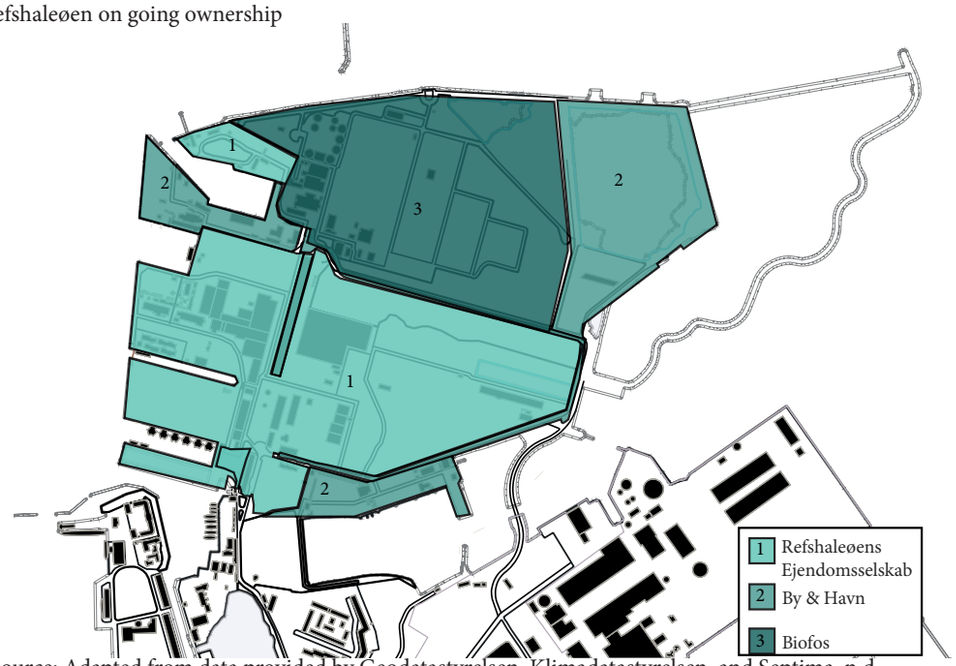
Source: Bilag 5: Refshaleøens historiske identitetsmarkører [Appendix 5: Refshaleøen's historicall identity markers], by By & Havn & Over Byen Arkitekter, n.d., Refshaleøen development report. August 2023 (pag.5)

Moreover, the port authority buildings in the northwestern section have been preserved. Between the dominant industrial enclaves of Burmeister & Wain (B&W, 1872-1996) which dominated its productive use as a shipyard for more than a century and Lynetten, smaller subdivided plots enabled the emergence of minor enterprises, while large dockside coal storage areas further reinforced the site's role within Copenhagen's industrial-port metabolism. Together, these actors reveal that Refshaleøen has a layered and multi-stakeholder productive landscape (see figure 13).

4.3.2 Current ownership

Refshaleøen originated as a publicly led harbor reclamation project initiated by the Copenhagen Port Authority in 1868, establishing the territorial and infrastructural basis for its later industrial development. That means the initial landmaking was driven by a public port authority, not by a private developer; In this first phase, the key decision-maker was therefore the harbor authority, operating within the broader framework of state/municipal port governance. Although the island became strongly associated with Burmeister & Wain, its governance during this period was never purely private. Rather, it operated through a public–private functional alignment: public authorities created and maintained the harbor territory, while B&W directed industrial production and spatial expansion within that framework. This arrangement reveals how Refshaleøen's industrial identity was rooted in a hybrid regime, where public infrastructure enabled private productivity without relinquishing territorial control. A decisive shift occurred with the shipyard's closure in 1996, when ownership transitioned to Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab, whose predecessors were the pension-fund owners behind the company today, and those properties were leased back to B&W before the final collapse. Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab was founded in 1985 to inject immediate liquidity into Burmeister & Wain through a sale-and-leaseback agreement, acted strictly as a financial landlord until the shipyard's final bankruptcy in 1996. This transition transformed the island from an industrial landscape into a real-estate and temporary-use territory.

Figure 14
Refshaleøen on going ownership



Source: Adapted from data provided by Geodatastyrelsen, Klimadatastyrelsen, and Septima, n.d.

From this point onward, governance became increasingly negotiated: the private owner gained control over leasing, programming, and temporary occupation, while Copenhagen Municipality retained authority over planning frameworks and legal permissions. This relationship became particularly evident with the 2015 amendment to Local Plan 209 (next paragraph 4.3.3 Planning Framework), which enabled a wider range of temporary uses. So here the public-private relation was very clear: the owner acted as landlord and initiator; the municipality acted as planning authority and legal enabler or constraint. That is also why it is inaccurate to say that the municipality "managed" Refshaleøen after 1996 in the same way an owner would. It did not exercise the responsibilities of a property owner. Rather, it shaped the conditions of legality, timing, and permitted use. The owner could curate tenants and temporary activities, but only within the planning envelope the municipality allowed. At the same time, the municipality could not itself decide what would happen on privately owned parcels unless it used planning law or other regulatory tools. (Appendix 5: Refshaleøen's historicall identity markers)

Today, Refshaleøen's official site states that the island covers about 115 hectares. The area is no longer governed by a single actor but by a fragmented multi-owner structure, including *Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab* (Property Company) , *By & Havn* (which is in turn owned by the Municipality of Copenhagen), Biofos (is a municipally owned utility company, so it operates as part of the public infrastructure system. The facility is owned by 14 different municipalities in the Copenhagen area), and the Danish Defence. Is a multi-owner territory inside Copenhagen Municipality where development depends on continuous negotiation between private ownership, public regulation, and infrastructural coordination. The map (see figure 14) illustrates the three different actual owners of the area. In other words, Refshaleøen has never been purely public or purely private. It has always been shaped by some form of **public-private** interdependence. In this instance, Refshaleøens Ejendomselskab "represents" all the landowners of Refshaleøen. (This information was confirmed by a representative during interviews.) Together, they reached an agreement to establish a single company for the entire site and to share the revenues.

4.3.3 Planning framework

Lokalplan 209 - 1992

The Lokalplan, a municipal planning instrument under Danish law, which defines the legal planning framework.
The adoption of **c**in 1992 established the formal legal framework for Refshaleøen's transition from industrial shipyard to future redevelopment area. While the original plan preserved the site's industrial function, the 2015 amendment marked a decisive shift in planning logic by institutionalizing temporary uses as a strategic urban tool. Rather than emerging solely through spontaneous occupation, temporariness was explicitly framed by Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab as a long-term development strategy aimed at generating "new life and identity" and increasing public familiarity with the area (Lokalplan 209, Supplement No.1, 2015, p. 15). This reveals an important contradiction: temporary urbanism, often associated with bottom-up experimentation and informal appropriation, here becomes a carefully managed instrument of pre-development. Flexibility is regulated through time-limited leases, profitability criteria, and curated programming. In this sense, temporality functions both as a mechanism of openness and as a technique of governance, producing social and cultural value in advance of permanent urbanization.

> *"The undeveloped areas should be usable for a wide range of activities, including urban farming, alternative temporary urban spaces, experiments, open spaces, solar panel installations, and areas where noisy events like 'Copenhell' can take place. "*
>
> *(Municipality of Copenhagen, 2014, p. 15-18).*

Seven Dogmas 2023

The formulation of the Seven Dogmas for Refshaleøen emerged within a broader participatory process aimed at shaping the island's transition from temporary occupation to permanent urbanization. Framed by the ambition to preserve Refshaleøen's existing "DNA" while embedding climate awareness, community, inclusion, and health into a future district, a series of public meetings were held on 4 February and 4 March 2023 at Werkstatt.

These gatherings brought together landowners, local tenants, citizens, and fourteen invited experts to discuss the challenges and possibilities of this transformation. Through debates, island walks, artistic workshops, and collective activities, the process positioned itself as an open platform for dialogue and vision-making. Within this context, Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab and By & Havn jointly articulated the Seven Dogmas as a preliminary framework for development. While presented as a collaborative and inclusive vision, the dogmas also reveal how participation is mobilized to align diverse actors around a pre-structured redevelopment agenda, turning public engagement into an integral part of the planning process itself.

The seven dogmas describe the underlying qualities that will also characterize Refshaleøen in the future as the raw, blue, green, historical and creative district that Copenhageners have already come to know through the temporary activities and uses of recent years.

1. **Refshaleøen as Copenhagen's creative district**
2. **History as identity-bearing structure**
3. **Ambitious green transition**
4. **Accessible and varied waterfront**
5. **Wild urban nature and biodiversity**
6. **Health and community-oriented development**
7. **A dense and mixed Copenhagen district**

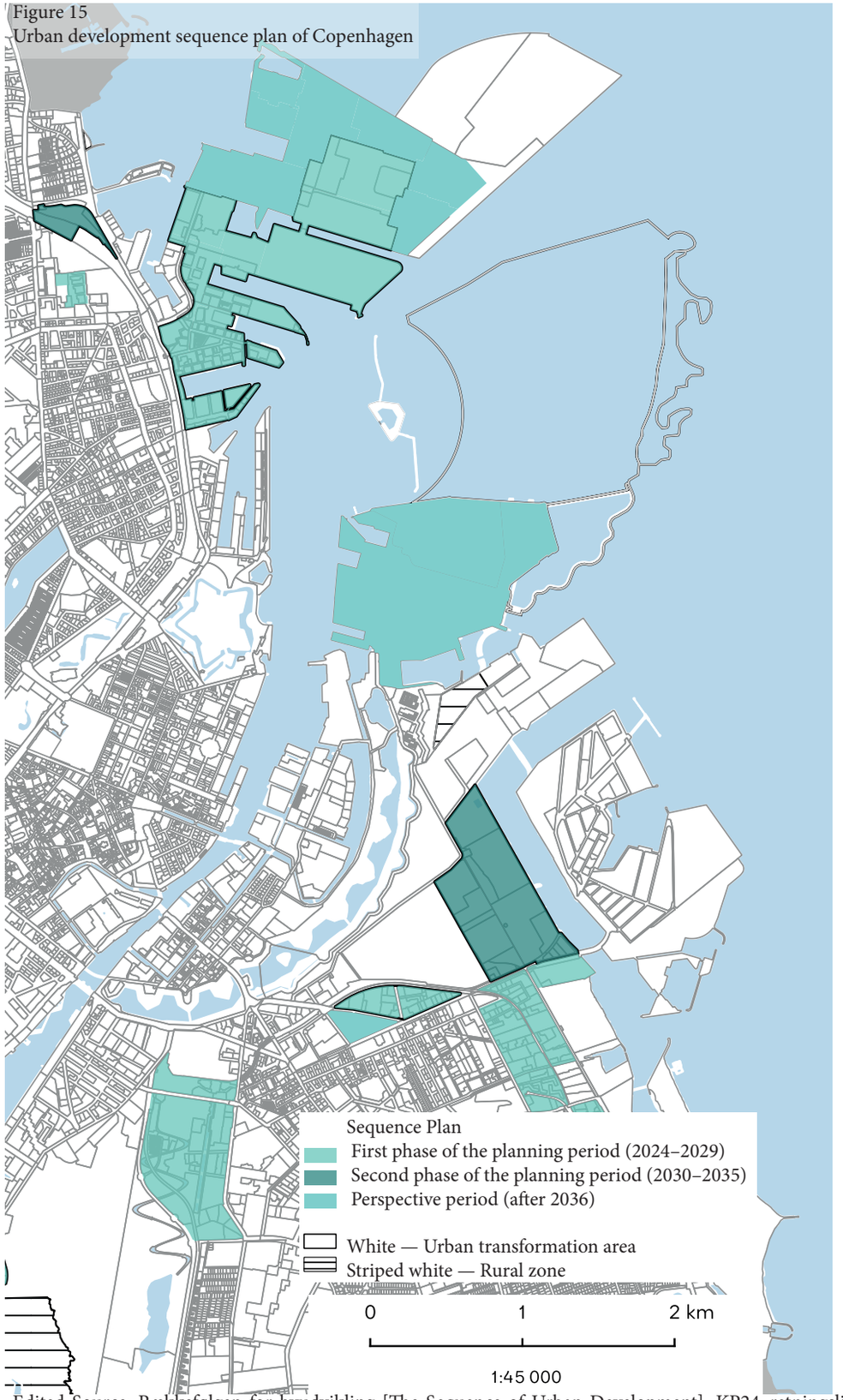
The seven dogmas reveal a development strategy that attempts to reconcile preservation, sustainability, and growth by framing Refshaleøen as both an experimental and highly curated urban project. On one hand, they emphasize values such as creativity, community, biodiversity, and industrial heritage, suggesting a desire to maintain the site's existing informal and hybrid character. On the other hand, these principles also function as a governance narrative that translates spontaneity into a planned asset, integrating temporary uses and cultural identity into a long-term redevelopment logic. This creates an important tension: the qualities that emerged through openness, informality, and incremental occupation are now being formalized and strategically embedded into the masterplan. In this sense, the dogmas do not simply protect Refshaleøen's identity; they also reveal how urban authenticity itself can become an instrument of valorization and controlled transformation.
With its location, history and activities, Refshaleøen plays a central role for Copenhagen and its residents. That is why we are further developing the island through a long and thorough dialogue process.
To ensure ownership and community, will be organized as smaller, site-specific neighborhoods with individuality, character and structure with an urban space hierarchy, as is known from, for example, the bridge neighborhoods, Christianshavn and the Århusgade neighborhood.

The Refshaleøn of the future will be a dense and mixed district, where the characteristic Copenhagen building typologies can be found again in new interpretations. The development will include public housing, space for building communities and combined residential and commercial units.
On Refshaleøen, history must be present, and as in the city's historic districts, one must be able to explore the crooked streets with a varied urban and commercial life. Just as today, Refshaleøen must also be an innovative district in the future that continues to inspire internationally.

Visionary area 2024

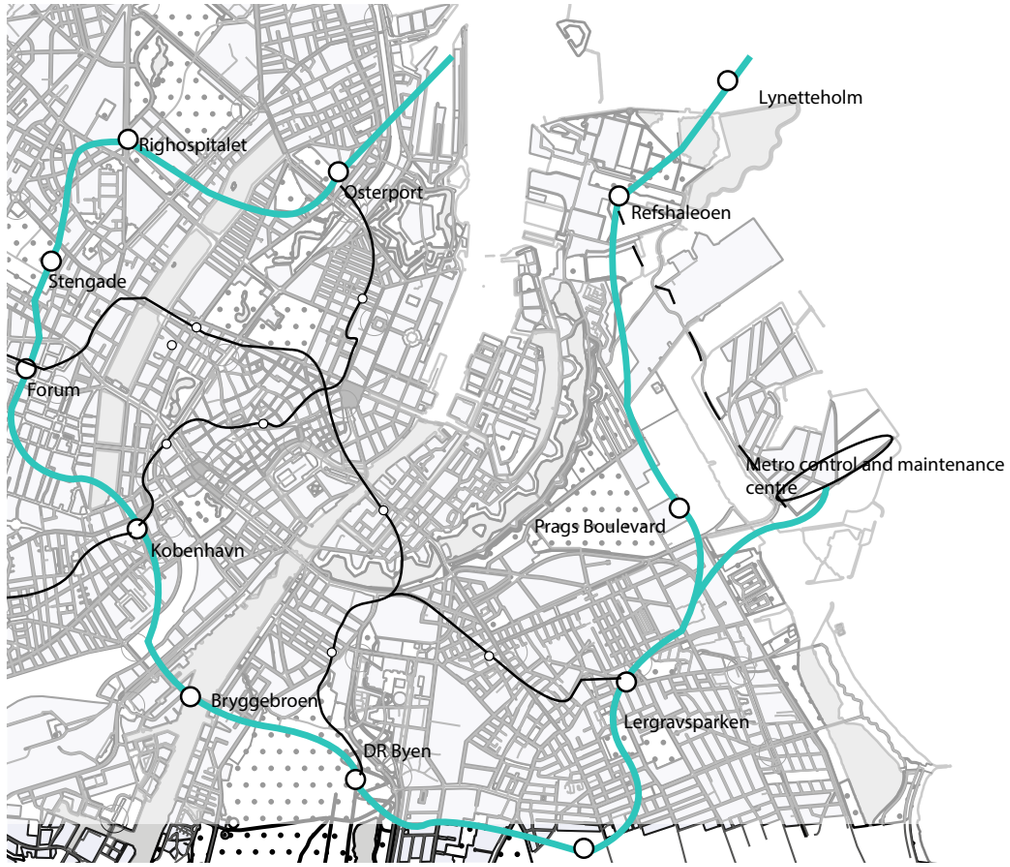
Refshaleøen is part of the Local Plan from the municipality
The order of urban development defines the areas with the greatest potential for growth. The planning framework also encompasses smaller areas that form part of a wider urban context or hold particular significance in relation to the overall development of the city. Areas have been designated for urban development either in the first phase of the planning period (2024–2029), in the second phase (2030–2035), or in the long-term perspective beyond the 12-year horizon of the master plan (after 2036).

Figure 15
Urban development sequence plan of Copenhagen



Edited Source: Rækkefølgen for byudvikling [The Sequence of Urban Development], KP24_retningslinjer_1_rækkefølgeplan_ØU_EV-a, in Kommuneplan 2024 [Municipal Plan 2024], by Copenhagen Munic-

Figure 16
Proposed M5 metro line



Edited Source: "Can Lynetteholm Be Car Free?", by J. Heward, 2020, Danish Architecture and Design Review, May 16

Within Copenhagen's Municipal Plan 2024, Refshaleøen is maintained as a visionary area(Figure 15), positioning it as a long-term urban development reserve rather than an immediate construction zone. Under the municipal phasing strategy, its full transformation is projected beyond the current planning horizon, contingent on major infrastructural investments, most notably the future M5 metro line (Figure 16) and the eastern ring road. This deferred condition is significant: it preserves Refshaleøen in a state of productive suspension, where temporary uses, cultural production, and informal urban life continue to shape the site while permanent urbanization remains postponed. At the same time, the municipal plan recognizes the historical legacy of the former Burmeister & Wain shipyard as a protected cultural environment, framing heritage as both a memory of Copenhagen's industrial past and a strategic asset for future development. The plan therefore imagines Refshaleøen as a hybrid district where new housing, public facilities, climate adaptation infrastructures, and recreational spaces will gradually integrate with existing cultural and creative activities. Yet this vision also exposes a fundamental contradiction: the very temporary and experimental uses that reactivated the island have become instrumental in constructing its future value. As densification approaches in the municipal visions for 2036 and 2070, Refshaleøen stands at a critical threshold where openness and informality risk being absorbed into a more regulated and capital-intensive urban logic.

Figure 17
Proposed Lynetteholm scenario

Note. From "Can Lynetteholm Be Car Free?", by J. Heward, 2020, Danish Architecture and Design Review, May 16

Figure 18
Climate activists against Lynetteholm

From. Reproduced from Lynetteholm on trial, by CPH:DOX (2026)

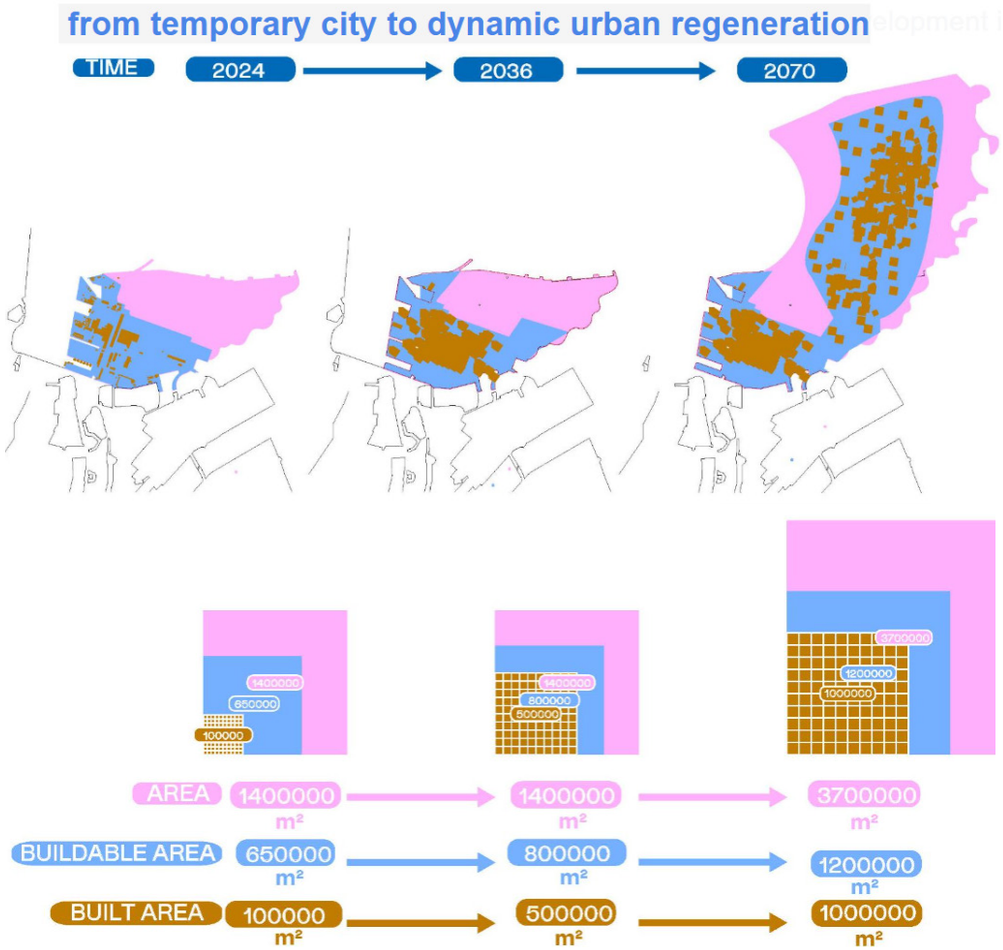
L Y N E T T E H O L M

Lynetteholm will be developed in the perspective period (after 2036) (see Figure 15) and the project will be a mega-man-made island that will transform the entire area (Heward, 2022). Environmentalists accuse the project of greenwashing, saying it could damage the harbor ecosystem and worsen water quality rather than protect it. There's even a lawsuit pending against the government over the risk of pollution from the dredging of millions of tons of soil.The Lynetteholm project represents one of the most ambitious and controversial urban expansion plans in contemporary Copenhagen. Approved through Law No. 1157 (2021), the artificial island is planned as both a climate adaptation infrastructure and a major urban development area, responding to projected population growth of approximately 60,000 new residents between 2024 and 2036. Within this broader sequential development strategy (Figure 17), Copenhagen must accommodate around 5.7 million square meters of new floor area, including 3.3 million m^2 of housing and 2.4 million m^2 of commercial space, with reserve capacities distributed across strategic harbour districts such as Nordhavn and Refshaleøen. In this sense, Lynetteholm is part of a larger eastward urban expansion that will redefine the entire harbour geography through new metro lines, ring-road infrastructure, cycling connections, and new links across the waterfront.

At the same time, Lynetteholm has become a symbol of the contradictions of Copenhagen's sustainable urban narrative. While promoted as a solution to housing shortages and flood protection, the project has been strongly criticized by environmental groups (Figure 18), who accuse it of greenwashing and warn about irreversible damage to the harbour ecosystem caused by the dredging of millions of tons of soil.

This tension is critically documented in the Lynetteholm on Trial(2026), presented at CPH, which frames the project as a legal and environmental conflict between climate activists and the Danish state. The case reveals how large-scale urban development is a contested political arena where questions of democracy, environmental justice, and urban futures are actively negotiated.

Figure 19
Timeline redevelopment



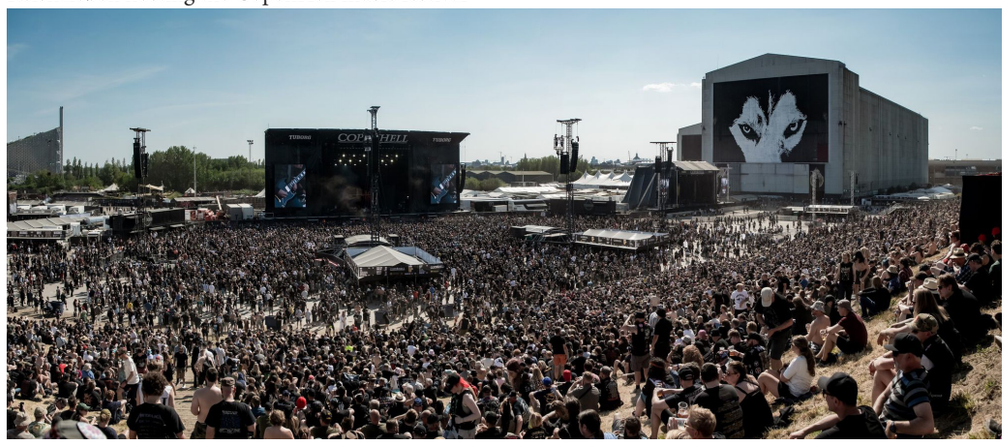
Source: Diagram created by the author of this thesis; Chiara Monelli.

4.3.4 Festivals and temporary uses

"Big music events can be held on Refshaleøen "
(Municipality of Copenhagen, 2011, p. 27).

Refshaleøen's identity can be understood also through the temporary cultural activities that currently shape its identity. Festivals such as CopenHell, O Days Festival, and the activities connected to Karusel demonstrate how the area operates as an active experimental landscape, continuously reactivated through temporary events, cultural production, and collective occupation. These festivals attract large and diverse audiences, transforming former industrial spaces into temporary public environments and contributing to the social and symbolic construction of the site.

Figure 20
Refshaleøen hosting the CopenHell music festival



Source: Third Nature. (n.d.). Refshaleøen Competition. https://www.thirdnaturearchitects.com/news/refshaleoeen-competition

Their spatial distribution reveals how cultural uses are part of a broader process of place-making, reinforcing Refshaleøen's identity as a creative and flexible urban territory. At the same time, these temporary activities increase the visibility and attractiveness (See Copenhell in Figure 20) of the area, becoming part of the wider redevelopment dynamic and potentially contributing to processes of urban valorization.

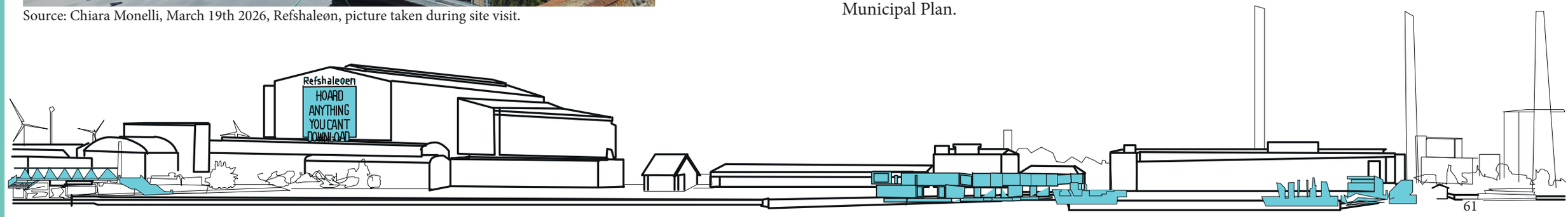
"because it's a part of our DNA to have music out here."
(Carsten Rasmussen, Refshaleøen's property company, Interview March 19th, 2026).

Figure 21
Houseboats in Refshaleøen

Source: Chiara Monelli, March 19th 2026, Refshaleøn, picture taken during site visit.

Figure 22
Houseboats in Refshaleøen

Source: Chiara Monelli, March 19th 2026, Refshaleøn, picture taken during site visit.



Houseboats

The Copenhagen Municipality plan (2011) regulates houseboats as a hybrid urban typology that blurs the boundary between housing, infrastructure, and public use within harbour areas.

Figure 23
Urban rigger student houseboats in Refshaleøen

Source: Chiara Monelli, March 19th 2026, Refshaleøn, picture taken during site visit.

Houseboats are defined as potential spaces for collective, cultural, educational, and commercial functions, including cafés, institutions, and small-scale services. Their placement is strictly controlled through spatial, environmental, and navigational conditions, including minimum distances, access requirements, and restrictions linked to water quality and harbour use, with certain areas prohibiting residential use until environmental conditions are met. At the same time, the regulation reveals a highly controlled vision of "floating urbanism," where flexibility is carefully bounded through precise limits on size, height, and spatial configuration. While the framework allows for variation, especially for larger converted vessels with public functions, it remains strongly governed by infrastructural and safety constraints, indicating that so-called adaptive or experimental water-based living is only possible within a tightly managed planning regime. In this sense, houseboats (Figure 21, 22) are a curated and regulated extension of the city's waterfront development strategy. One of this located in Refshaleøen is Urban Rigger 2017 designed by Bjarke Ingels (Figure 23) explores floating housing as an innovative response to urban density and housing shortages. Built from recycled shipping containers, it illustrates how harbour areas can accommodate temporary yet high-quality residential uses through adaptable waterfront architecture.

The draft local plan is in accordance with the guidelines and framework in the 2011 Municipal Plan.

Figure 24
Aerial photograph of Refshaleøen

Source: Photograph by Nicolas Cosedis, reproduced in Bilag 3: Bystrategisk stedsanalyse inklusiv matrikelkort [Appendix 3: Urban Strategic Site Analysis Including Cadastral Map] (Municipality of Copenhagen, n.d.).

Fotograf: Nicolas Cosedis

5. ACTOR DYNAMICS

Rather than presenting the transformation of Refshaleøen as a linear planning process, this chapter adopts a vignette-based approach to reveal the layered dynamics, frictions, and negotiations between actors. Through fragments of interviews, visual mappings, and relational diagrams, the chapter compares different perspectives, highlighting how each actor constructs a distinct narrative of the site. This method allows conflicts, overlaps, and asymmetries of power to emerge more clearly: between openness and control, experimentation and investment, temporary use and long-term planning. In this sense, the chapter expose the multiplicity of positions that continuously shape its transformation. The use of a graphic and diagrammatic language becomes central to the thesis itself, as a methodological tool to visualize relationships, tensions, and evolving alliances.

Third sector

It is interesting, in this temporal trajectory, that apart from the third sector, like the associations, there was a phase in which much more informal groups and individual citizens were involved.
This represents a historical shift. It is true that the city council is always present, but there are also the non-developer, often very private actors. There is also growing interaction between individual citizens and informal groups; indeed, not everyone chooses to formally establish an association. It is worth noting that many of these activities are community-based volunteer initiatives aimed at preserving local biodiversity and cultivating urban gardens, thereby fostering educational activities that further strengthen the local community.

In Refshaleoen the community of transfer (The Garden of Decay) with the garden; the landowner who allowed them to stay there and also take care of that piece of land that was otherwise abandoned. But all their voluntary work, they manage themselves.

Another example is Oens have, which instead is a community of urban gardens, but more organised, and they instead earn by renting the space, etc.

5.1.1 Actor Network Mapping

Urban transformation emerges from relationships between actors. In Refshaleøen there is a network involving planners, developers, temporary users, creative initiatives, spatial structures and policies.

Figure 25
Actors of people interviewed during this research

Development Manager
Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab

Urban planner at Copenhagen municipality

Associate Design Director
Henning Larsen

Architect at Hørsholm Kommune, ex resident in CPH VILLAGE, Master thesis on Refhslaeøen at Royal Danish Academy

Artist and resident - Kolonien

conceptual artist training focusing on food art and a lot of eco-social dimensions

eco-social designer experience working in conventional and biohybrid architecture, ex resident in URBAN RIGGER

Farmer at Øens Have Refshaleøen

Diagram created by the author of this thesis; Chiara Monelli.

Figure 26
Actors network map

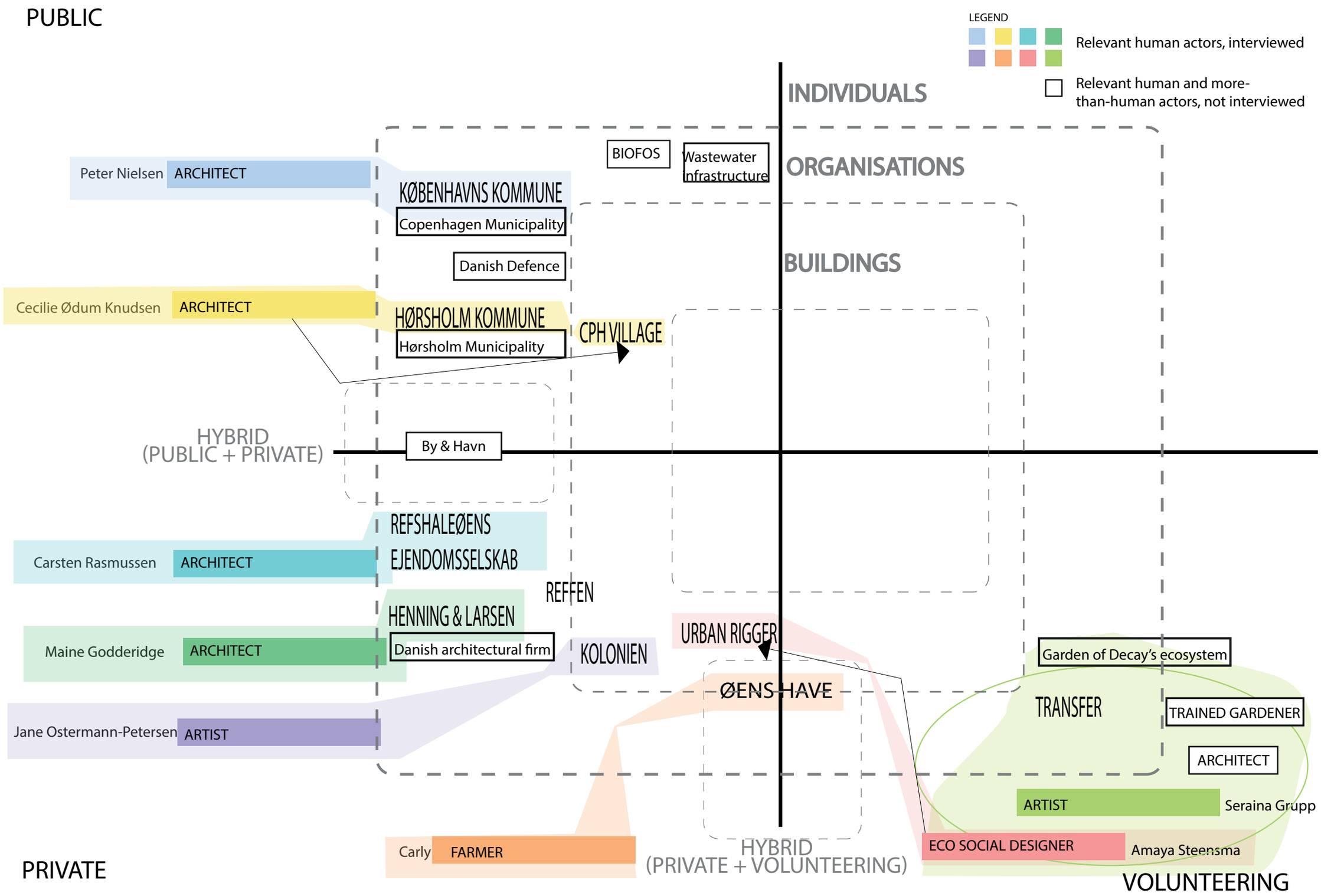


Diagram created by the author of this thesis; Chiara Monelli.

5.1.2 Timeline

Figure 27
Timeline from 2018 to 2026

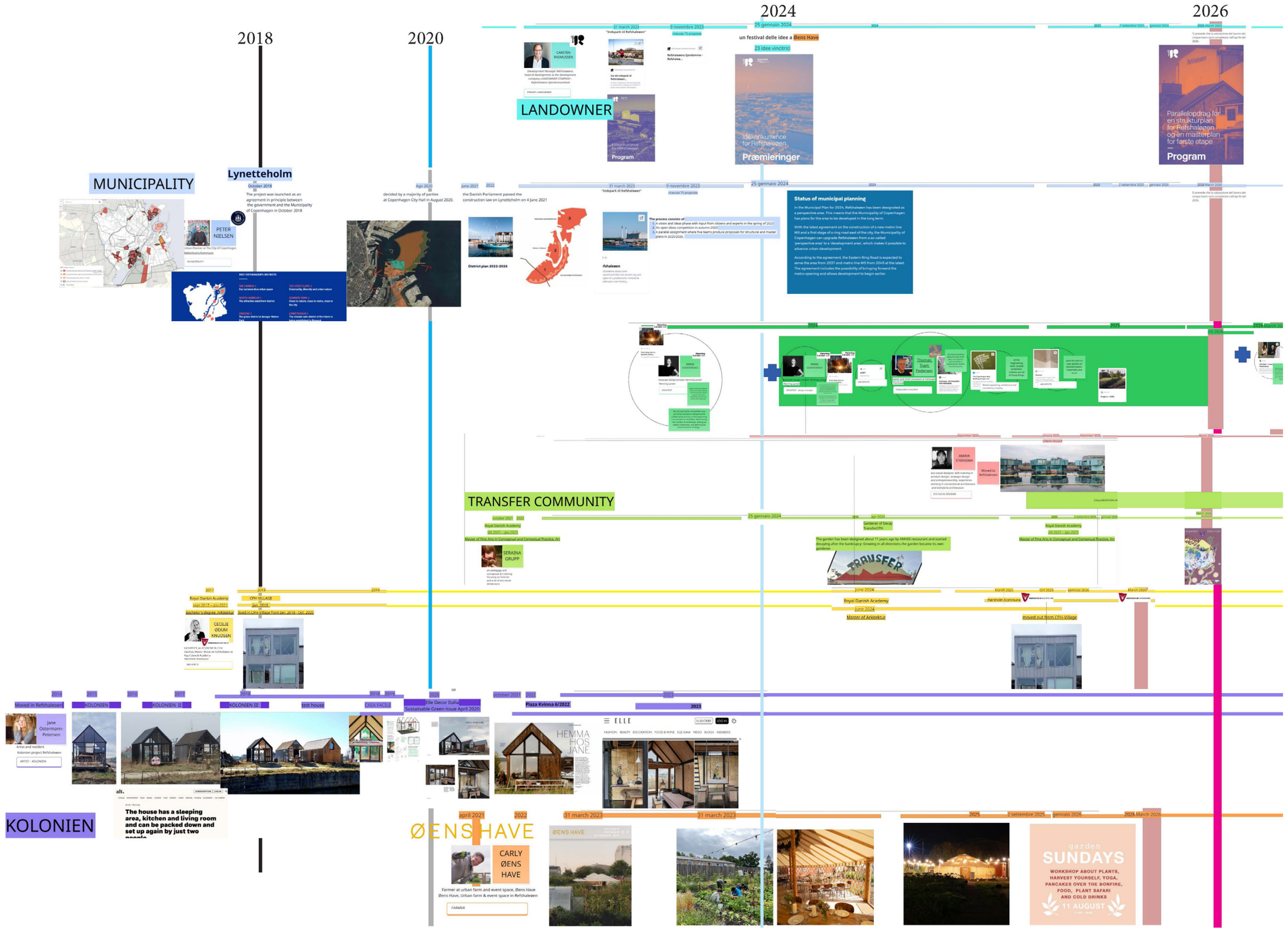


Diagram created by the author of this thesis; Chiara Monelli.

Drawing on Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, Refshaleøen can be understood as a dynamic actor-network, where agency is distributed across a heterogeneous assemblage of people, objects, infrastructures, and spatial conditions.
In contrast to traditional perspectives that separate active human subjects from passive material objects, Actor-Network Theory (Figure 26) proposes that municipalities, developers, architects, artists, residents, and community initiatives interact alongside industrial buildings, harbour infrastructures, temporary structures, open spaces, water systems, planning documents, and cultural events, all of which actively shape urban transformation.
In the case of Refshaleøen, redevelopment emerges from the continuous interaction and negotiation between these human and non-human actors, forming networks that remain unstable and constantly evolving as new actors enter, others leave, and relationships shift over time. This perspective is particularly relevant given the site's transitional condition, where temporary uses appear and disappear, communities change, and redevelopment strategies continuously adapt.

Through interviews with key stakeholders, such as Carsten Rasmussen, Peter Nielsen, Seraina Grupp, Maine Godderidge, and Amaya Steensma, this research effectively maps these relational networks, revealing multiple perspectives ranging from development and governance to community, architecture, and ecological concerns.

5.1 Participation in Refshaleøen

In Refshaleøen Public participation appears to happen through co-creation, stakeholder engagement, temporary initiatives, NGOs, local actors, developers and municipal departments working together, instead of a single formal mechanism. Participation in Copenhagen appears to operate as a distributed governance practice embedded across institutions and actors rather than through a dedicated participatory body. Its implementation relies on collaboration among municipal departments, local communities, private actors and engagement processes. (European Commission, 2015)

The participatory dynamics of Refshaleøen can be effectively interpreted through the Target Model of participation (see 2.1.1. Participation), as the redevelopment process reveals a structured but unequal distribution of power and influence among different actors. Unlike linear models such as the Ladder (see 2.1.1) of Participation, the Target Model better captures how participation is spatially and politically differentiated, rather than evenly distributed.

At the core of this structure are institutional and economic actors, including the Municipality of Copenhagen, By & Havn, and Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab, who maintain control over land ownership, strategic planning, and long-term redevelopment frameworks. Around this central core operate intermediate actors such as architects, cultural organisations, and initiatives like TRANSFER, who contribute to the activation and cultural production of the site, although their role is often consultative rather than decisional. In the outer layer are temporary users, visitors, and citizens without formal representation, whose everyday practices shape the lived reality of the area but have limited influence on its future transformation.

Rather than being a static structure, this layered configuration can be further understood through Callon's notion of translation (see point 3.1.2.Actor-Network Theory Mapping). From this perspective, participation in Refshaleøen is continuously produced through processes of problematization, interessement, enrollment, and mobilization, through which actors are gradually positioned and aligned within the redevelopment network. Institutional actors define the redevelopment agenda, while cultural initiatives and temporary uses function as mechanisms of engagement that attract and stabilize participation around specific spatial practices and narratives.

Figure 28
The Target model applied to the case

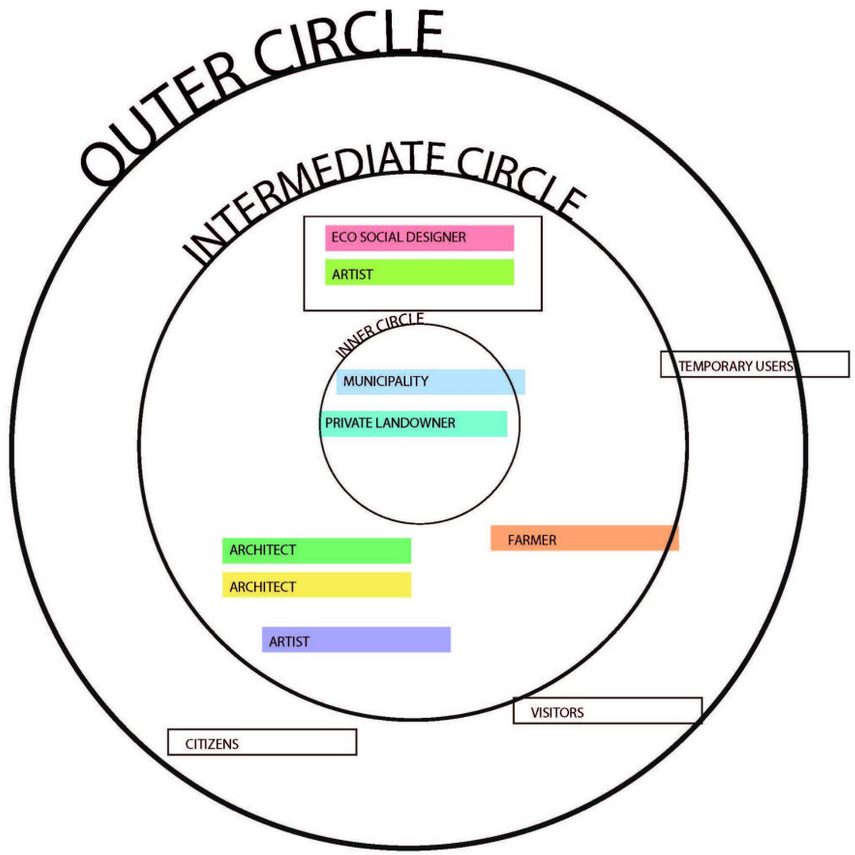


Diagram created by the author of this thesis; Chiara Monelli.
Description: Inner circle - Municipality of Copenhagen - By & Havn - Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab
Intermediate circle - Architects - Cultural organizations - Community initiatives such as TRANSFER
Outer circle - Temporary users - Visitors - Citizens without formal representation

In this sense, the Target Model (Figure 28) describes the structure of unequal participation, while Callon explains its production over time. Refshaleøen therefore emerges as a negotiated field in which participation is constantly translated, adjusted, and reconfigured through shifting relations between governance (private and public), culture, and everyday urban practices.

Callon's four moments of translation—problematization, interessement, enrollment, and mobilization—offer a further lens to understand how these actors negotiate roles and align interests. In Refshaleøen, the municipality and development company first define the challenge of transforming the area while preserving its identity; cultural projects, festivals, and temporary initiatives then act as mechanisms of interessement, attracting actors into the process; these actors subsequently assume specific roles within the network, from planners and architects to artists and community groups; and finally, these relations stabilize into concrete outputs such as urban plans, events, and spatial interventions. Through this framework, Refshaleøen and the future of the area is shaped by the alignment, conflict, and collaboration of multiple interconnected actors.

Interviews about Participation

The interviews reveal a highly ambivalent and contested understanding of participation in the development of Refshaleøen, where openness is repeatedly claimed at a formal level but questioned in practice. On one hand, institutional actors describe an extensive and inclusive process characterised by public meetings, idea competitions, and open calls for contributions, framing participation as a broad civic exercise involving citizens, professionals, and political stakeholders. This narrative emphasises accessibility and visibility, suggesting that the redevelopment process is intentionally open and dialogical.

However, the perspective of designers, users, and community actors introduces a more critical reading of these processes, exposing a gap between formal participation and actual decision-making power. Several interviewees describe participation as partial, selective, or symbolic, where engagement is often limited to early-stage consultation or creative input that does not necessarily influence final design decisions. In this sense, participation is perceived by some actors as performative rather than transformative, with concerns raised about transparency, inclusivity, and the unequal ability of different groups to access information or influence outcomes. At the same time, more situated forms of negotiation, such as agreements with temporary users over land use or relocation, suggest that participation does exist, but often in informal, pragmatic, and negotiated forms rather than within official participatory frameworks. This tension reveals Refshaleøen as a contested field where inclusion, control, and negotiation coexist uneasily across different levels of power and visibility.

Chiara Monelli:
How were citizens, tenants, and local stakeholders involved throughout the development process of Refshaleøen?

"I don't think that any project had a more open process."

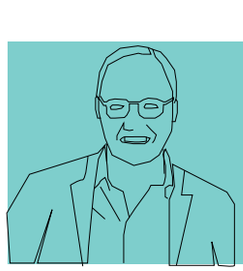
"Actually, we have done a lot of discussions with the city. We had arranged meetings out here, where we invited the whole city to come and discuss the area, also with the tenants in our buildings out here."

"All the city was invited, but of course, it's important for us also to be very close to our tenants, to tell them they don't have to be afraid"

"We did those kinds of discussions out here. We have politicians out here, we have architects, we have any people you could mention."

"First of all, we just asked people,
"Would you write something to us? Would you make a drawing or whatever?"

"Then we collected it in this book, and there are ideas from children's work. So, we have in here more than 100 different ideas, maybe ideas from other places, where they said you can also do something like that out here."



CARSTEN RASMUSSEN

Development Manager
Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab

"As designers, we need to understand both sides — the private interests and the public interests — and balance them. "

"it is about carefully reading the brief, understanding the stakeholders, and even researching their positions."

MAINE GODDERIDGE

Associate Design Director
Henning Larsen

Chiara Monelli:

How were citizens, tenants, and local stakeholders involved throughout the development process of Refshaleøen?

"Yes, there was a meeting."

"They basically organised a gathering for maybe two hours or so, where they presented the master plan, and then people could ask questions. Okay. And I think it was a lot about the concerns people had."

"But I wouldn't say it's a participative process. "

"I think sometimes they try to listen to us, but I think it's a very intransparent system for me, how they listen or not listen. Like when are they listening and when are they ignoring. I think that is for me a bit of a question mark."

SERAINA GRUPP

conceptual artist training focusing on food art

"I do not believe that citizens have been effectively involved in the development process. "

"Refshaleøen is a very international community, where the common language is English. The documentation that they publish on their website with specifics about their structural plans is all in Danish."

"I have never seen an open call for community members to give their input. "

"Once, I sent an email asking if I could attend a meeting with the architectural firms in the competition, and was denied."

CARLY

Farmer at Øens Have Refshaleøen

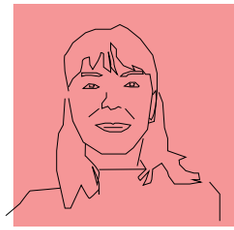
"There are certain things that are unknown to all of those who use the land on Refshaleøen because the landowners don't know, and other things that they choose not to communicate, such as an honest statement of limited willingness, foresight, and ability to truly involve people because of the control that they have in their agendas. "

"In terms of what was going on with the masterplan competition, they brought us into a room for a meeting in Danish. I didn't attend because I can't speak much Danish, but my fellow community garden stewards did. They simply told us that fewer buildings were going to be demolished than originally planned.."

"As a professional who knows participatory processes and is continually trying to learn myself, after having many discussions with people who work in advancing participatory architecture as well specifically, I can tell you for sure it wasn't."

"I consider what they did to be social washing, because it gives them kudos on the side of the municipality to say, yay, you involved kids to draw us some drawings really early on, and then disregard everything that is substantially important and not aligned with their long-term financial agendas. ."

ABOUT TRANSFER "They gave us this other plot that was available. We have been able to negotiate these things with them, and I am still amazed by how they have even allowed us to exist and have recognised the value of the more-than-human community we are protecting and what we bring as a human community to the island. I am extremely grateful to the two women who have been our contact people."



AMAYA STEENSMA

eco-social designer experience working in conventional and biohybrid architecture, ex resident in URBAN RIGGER

“They started with this idea competition, just to open up to everyone. Where both architects, students, neighbours, and citizens could share their ideas for Refshaleøens future. And just to start to have some focus on the qualities. And then they narrowed it down to the competition that they’re currently running.”

“I know from the municipality side, because I work in Hørsholm municipality now. So I work with local planning, and also the municipal plan. ”

“The local plans regulate what’s allowed and what kind of activities you want there. In both processes, you are inviting the public. And especially if people live in the area, where you work with the local plan, they’re invited to hear about what their new neighbourhood is going to look like.”

CECILIE ØDUM KNUDSEN

Architect at Hørsholm Kommune, ex resident in CPH VILLAGE, Master thesis on Refhslaeøen at Royal Danish Academy

“They did it because they were actually lobbying for the development to go through within the municipality. So they really were working towards that that was going to happen. ”

“So we were really invited for talks and then when they didn’t get the permission to go, the meeting stopped. ”

“It’s of course a political game.”

JANE OSTERMANN-PETERSEN

Artist and resident - Kolonien

Chiara Monelli:

How were citizens, tenants, and local stakeholders involved throughout the development process of Refshaleøen?

Figure 29
image from public debate on the future development of Refshaleøen.

Source: Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab "Se debatterne om videreudviklingen af Refshaleøen", "See the debates on the further development of Refshaleøen" (2024)

Figure 30
image from public debate on the future development of Refshaleøen.

Source: Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab "Se debatterne om videreudviklingen af Refshaleøen", "See the debates on the further development of Refshaleøen" (2024)

Refshaleøen Ideas Festival, January 25–31, 2024
The landowners of Refshaleøen concluded their autumn ideas competition with a festival of ideas, consisting of three well-attended events held in Øens Have, January 25–31, and March 5, 2024.

In the winter of 2023, Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab and City & Port initiated a two-year public process in three phases to create the best possible vision, idea and planning basis for the further development of Refshaleøen.

The process consists of: A vision and ideas phase with input from citizens and experts in the spring of 2023, An open ideas competition in autumn 2023

In January 2023, the companies published a preliminary vision with seven dogmas. During the winter of 2024, the landowners on Refshaleøen concluded the autumn ideas competition with an ideas festival (en idéfestival) with three well-attended events from 25 to 31 January in Øens Have.

25 January 2024
Here, the judging committee consisting of professional judges (Figure 29,30) and representatives of Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab and By & Havn awarded 10 main prizes within the five competition themes on 25 January, while 13 other idea proposals were awarded for good ideas.

Figure 31
Poster for the public meeting on the future development of Refshaleøen 25-31 January

Figure 32
Poster for the public meeting on the future development of Refshaleøen March

Source: Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab "Se debatterne om videreudviklingen af Refshaleøen", "See the debates on the further development of Refshaleøen" (2024)

The two posters document the 2024 Ideas Festival (Figure 31,32), an initiative organized by Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab and By & Havn to conclude the public ideas competition for the future redevelopment of Refshaleøen. The festival presented an exhibition of the 75 submitted proposals, together with public debates, discussions, and award ceremonies, allowing citizens, professionals, and stakeholders to engage with alternative visions for the area. The complete collection of proposals was also made freely available as a downloadable publication on the organizers' website, extending public access to the ideas generated during the competition.

January 30 2024

Professional debate January 30, 2024, 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM;
A meeting behind the award-winning ideas and hear about their solutions to the main challenges in creating a dense and recognizable district on Refshaleøen.
Moderator: Lars Fjendbo Møller, DAC

The 10 winning proposals were then presented by the proposers and discussed in a professional debate with experts and landowners on January 30,

January 31 2024

Political debate January 31, 2024, 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM;
Meet Sophie Hæstorp Andersen (S), Mia Nyegaard (B), Ole Birk Olesen (I), Frederik Kronborg (Ø), local committee and landowners in a debate about the next steps in the further development of Refshaleøen.
Moderator: Lars Fjendbo Møller, DAC

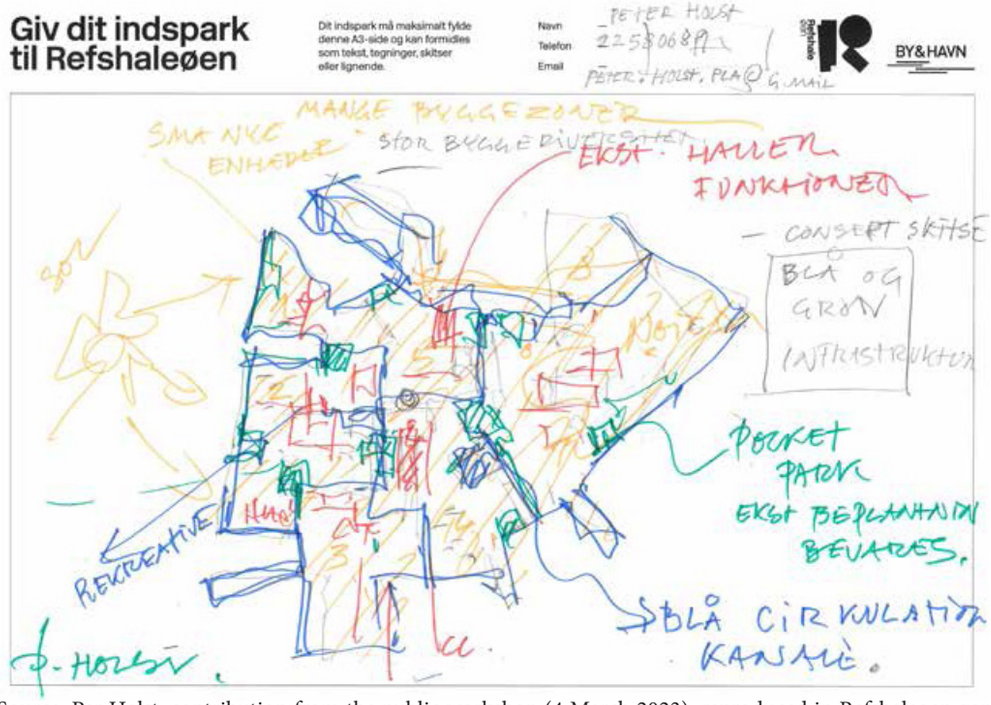
The ideas festival was then concluded with a debate about Refshaleøen's potential between members of the City Council Sophie Hæstorp Andersen (S), Mia Nyegaard (B), Ole Birk Olesen (I) and Frederik Kronborg (Ø) on January 31, with contributions also from Christianshavn's Local Committee and the landowners. Among other things, the next steps
in the further development of Refshaleøen were looked forward to, which will be the competition for a structure plan and a master plan for the first stage of further development

March 5 2024
In spring 2024, Refshaleøen's landowners, Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab and By & Havn, prepared the competition programme that will guide the selection of architects, landscape architects, and engineers for the future masterplan and structural plan of the area.

As part of this process, the preliminary ideas for the programme were presented at a large public dialogue meeting on 5 March at the former industrial building Rørværksted Syd, now used as an event venue. The meeting introduced key themes for the future development, including the identity of Refshaleøen, its functions and neighbourhood structure, as well as its blue and green spaces and infrastructure systems. The landowners invited stakeholders, local organisations, experts, and citizens to take part in the discussion, and more than 200 participants contributed feedback and suggestions.

A parallel assignment where five teams produce proposals for structure and master plans in 2025/2026

Figure 33
Citizen sketch illustrating a vision for the future development of Refshaleøen, produced during the public workshop of 4 March 2023.



Source: Per Holst, contribution from the public workshop (4 March 2023), reproduced in Refshaleøen gør København større — Vision (Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab, n.d.).

This document (Figure 33) is a public consultation form, called *"Giv dit indspark til Refshaleøen"* (Give your input to Refshaleøen) filled out in Danish, containing a proposal for urban and architectural development for the island of Refshaleøen in Copenhagen. The author of the proposal is Peter Holst, who outlined a concept map enriched with colored textual annotations to describe his vision for the area.

The following is a list of the terms identified, along with their translations from Danish to English:
The Orange Text (Zones and Population Density):
Mange byggezoner: Many building zones.
Små nye enheder: Small new units.
Stor byggediversitet: Great building diversity.
Sol: Sun (indicated with arrows for sunlight orientation).
The Red Text (Structures and Functions):
Eksist. haller / funktioner: Existing pavilions/functions (referring to the maintenance of the area's historic industrial structures).
Hub: Center / Node (indicated at a specific point on the map).
The text in Blue (Infrastructure and Water)
Blå cirkulation / kanaler: Blue circulation / canals (relating to the management of water and internal water flows).
Rekreative: Recreational / Recreational areas.
Text in Green (Green Areas and Nature)
Pocket park: Pocket park (small urban green area).
Exist. beplantning bevares: Preserving existing vegetation.

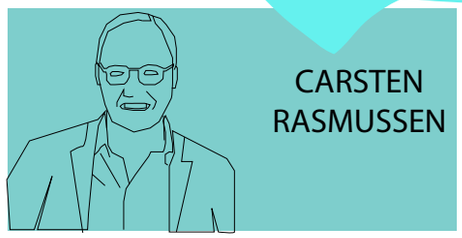
5.2 Governance in Refshaleøen

Through Patsy Healey's perspective, Refshaleøen can be understood as a negotiated urban process in which governance structures, temporary uses, and participatory practices actively contribute to shaping both its present identity and future transformation. Rather than a linear redevelopment project, it becomes a field of ongoing negotiation between institutional planning and situated forms of urban use.

This reading can be further deepened through Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space, which shifts the focus from space as a physical outcome to space as something socially produced through everyday practices, representations, and lived experience. Although, its perceived freedom, industrial atmosphere, and the sense of belonging generated by its temporary communities. As highlighted in interviews, spatial qualities such as low-density structures also contribute to emotional and social attachments that shape how the area is understood and inhabited. From this perspective, Refshaleøen emerges as a space where conceived plans, lived practices, and perceived meanings continuously overlap and sometimes conflict, producing an urban condition that is inherently unstable and relational.

The transformation of Copenhagen's waterfront has attracted not only public development agencies such as By & Havn but also international financial investors. For example, there was a controversy surrounding Blackstone's acquisition of residential properties that illustrates how global capital has increasingly become part of the city's urban development dynamics, raising debates about affordability, housing commodification and gentrification. Although Blackstone is not involved in the redevelopment of Refshaleøen, its presence reflects the wider economic context within which contemporary urban transformation takes place.

Chiara Monelli:
What do you think about this co-administration(public-private)? Do you know how it works?



CARSTEN RASMUSSEN

Development Manager
Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab

"There is co-administration/work because the co-work goes on at many levels. We can continue doing that for a long period if we want. But we can't do anything more than we do now, because we don't have the municipality plan and the local plans that actually tells us how much we can build an pay for infrastructure."

"The municipality also try to figure out how many people will be in Copenhagen 10 or 20, 30 years from now. And then they begin to point out different areas where can we actually build for them."

"if you have to tell about how we work together with the municipality, then there are these formal steps that you have to get them interested. And after that, we can come in this kommune plan every four years, they do the new one. And after that, you can make the planning documents for each area out here. "

PETER NIELSEN

Urban planner at Copenhagen municipality

"It's over a long time and we have a municipality plan that says what you can use in this area. "

"And, then we say to the company, yes, you can develop this area. We have to buy an area for schools and children and everything of this older people and so on. And, then we also say in this how much you can build. We say 150% or less. And, so there's a lot of demands in front. And, then we negotiate how to do it."

"It's mostly a private company. it's legal in the municipality plan"

"They made many of the development sets together with the owners. And, we have a working group with people like me from the municipality and the ground owner and their advisors."

"The end of this process is a local plan and it takes two or three years where we make the ground owners make an architect competition and make a master plan. And, there is a process where we have to work with the master plan."

"We usually work for private clients, but private development is always dependent on the municipality, because they are the ones who ultimately approve or reject projects."

"It is also a strategic process."

"I think the municipality here also knows that they cannot do everything themselves, and they know that it's getting better if they invite ambitious landowners. They put pressure on the landowners. There is usually a negotiation process behind the scenes, where both parties align on shared goals."

MAINE GODDERIDGE

Associate Design Director
Henning Larsen

Chiara Monelli:

What do you think about this co-administration(public-private)? Do you know how it works?

"I mean, I'm not Danish, so it's kind of a bit a hard question. I am from Switzerland."

"That's just like politics really destroyed a lot in the last 25 years in terms of land ownership, for example. I mean, that it is so speculative. "

"**There's probably, as I assume, a very strong lobby from real estate that it was even possible to gain so much private property.** "

"Denmark was a social state. So, also one third of the city is commonly owned housing. So, then you buy yourself into a collective ownership of housing. It's really hard to access. It's almost impossible if you're not Danish."

SERAINA GRUPP

conceptual artist training
focusing on food art

"Copenhagen municipality built the metro back in like, 2002-2007 (first metro development phase), I think. Maybe before that. And they were in so much debt that they weren't allowed to like, develop anything else. So they made a debt company. And that's By&Havn (2007 foundation year). So they are 95% owned by the municipality. And then they took over the municipality's debt. And then they also took over the development Copenhagen municipality's land.."

CECILIE ØDUM KNUDSEN

Architect at Hørsholm Kommune, ex resident in CPH VILLAGE, Master thesis on Refhslaeøen at Royal Danish Academy

"But the thing that's unique with Refshaleøen, that it's also privately owned by a company. But places like Øresund, for example, or Nordhavn and Sydhavn, they used to be owned by the municipality of Copenhagen.
So what By&Havn does is that they develop these places, and then they sell them, so that they can earn money to pay for the debt of the municipality.
Right now they have a huge debt. And they're also building the metro. So I think a part of the plot of land they're selling and developing is paying for the future."

"There are three pension funds and the municipality managing the development of Refshaløen. I know somewhat how it works."

"My thoughts are that pension funds, whose goals must always be to make more money, are not a good match to address a municipality's housing crisis."

CARLY

Farmer at Øens Have
Refshaleøen

"The plans, the longer plans for the city is only being discussed, I think, like every fourth of eight years, 12 years, something like that. So it's quite important to get yourself in that little spot there, because otherwise it will first be discussed again 12 years later. "

JANE OSTERMANN-PETERSEN

Artist and resident - Kolonien

5.3 Urban commons in Refshaleøen

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre, Stavros Stavrides, and Doreen Massey, Refshaleøen can be understood as a complex and continuously negotiated spatial condition rather than a fixed urban entity. Lefebvre's spatial triad provides a useful framework for analysing the site through three interrelated dimensions: spatial practice, visible in the everyday routines and informal uses of the area such as cycling, festivals, gardening, and community activities; representations of space, embodied in municipal masterplans, development strategies, and architectural proposals that attempt to define its future; and representational spaces, expressed through the symbolic, emotional, and collective meanings attached to the site by its users. This triadic reading reveals how Refshaleøen is simultaneously lived, planned, and imagined. Building on this, Stavrides' concept of common space helps interpret the area as a site of commoning, where temporary communities, cultural initiatives, and collective practices actively produce shared forms of urban life outside purely institutional or market logics. These practices contribute significantly to the creative identity of the area, but they also raise critical questions about whether such openness can survive within future redevelopment processes. This tension directly relates to the risk of gentrification, suggesting that preserving Refshaleøen's creative character may depend less on conserving physical forms and more on maintaining spaces of participation, openness, and collective appropriation. At the same time, Massey's relational understanding of space challenges the idea of a singular or authentic identity to preserve. For Massey, space is the coexistence of multiple trajectories, meanings, and interests. In Refshaleøen, industrial heritage, temporary urbanism, community practices, cultural experimentation, and redevelopment agendas all overlap and interact, producing a layered and contested identity. From this perspective, Refshaleøen should be seen as an ongoing process where different actors continuously negotiate its future. Its raw identity is constantly reproduced through social relations, power dynamics, and spatial practices. (Massey, D.,1991).

5.4 Gentrification in Refshaleøen

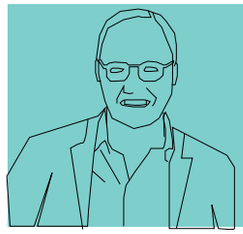
Applied to Refshaleøen, gentrification can be understood through the perspectives of Sharon Zukin and Loretta Lees as a complex process in which culture, creativity, and authenticity become central drivers of urban transformation. Zukin's concept of the symbolic economy (Zukin, S., 1995) is particularly relevant, as it explains how cities increasingly generate value through cultural production, aesthetic identities, and creative lifestyles. In Refshaleøen, the industrial atmosphere, temporary activities, festivals, and experimental communities contribute to a strong creative identity that makes the area attractive both socially and economically. However, Zukin argues that authenticity is socially produced and a contested condition, shaped differently by artists, local communities, developers, and municipalities. In this sense, Refshaleøen's "authenticity" may function simultaneously as a lived social reality and as a strategic cultural asset within redevelopment and branding processes. (Zukin, S., 2010) This raises critical questions about whose version of authenticity is being preserved and who benefits from its value. Lees further complicates this by showing creative initiatives and participatory practices (Lees, L.,2014). , while often framed as inclusive and community-based, can also contribute to state-led gentrification by increasing the symbolic and market value of an area, eventually producing exclusionary redevelopment dynamics.

"There's a lot of controversy surrounding the redevelopment of Refshaleøen. People fear that the new development will distort the soul of the place, turning it into an upscale neighborhood and eliminating the creative community that makes it special."

Riccardo Piazzai

From this perspective, Refshaleøen's temporary urbanism and cultural production cannot simply be understood as resistance to gentrification, but also as potential mechanisms that support future urban valorization. At the same time, alternative approaches, such as temporary, modular, and reversible structures like Kolonien, as discussed in Thanks for the View, Mr. Mies: Lafayette Park, Detroit (Aubert, Cavar, & Chandani, 2012), suggest that avoiding rigid and permanent development models may offer a way to preserve openness, adaptability, and collective use without fully commodifying the site. Refshaleøen therefore becomes a critical case for examining whether creative identity can remain socially embedded through redevelopment, or whether it risks becoming instrumentalized as a catalyst for gentrification.

"85% of tenants have said that they would like to see themselves as a part of our further development."



CARSTEN RASMUSSEN

Development Manager
Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab

CECILIE ØDUM KNUDSEN

Architect at Hørsholm Kommune, ex resident in CPH VILLAGE, Master thesis on Refhslaeøen at Royal Danish Academy

"from a perspective with focus on qualitative values, development strategies like these are ruining the city. By using temporary activities as a development strategy with no intentions of keeping their qualities, when tearing down and building new, leaves the neighbourhoods soulless and gentrified. At the same time, the housing prices are rising in these areas which makes it impossible for many social groups to live there since only a few can affort it."

5.5 Temporary Urbanism in Refshaleøen

From the perspective of Philipp Oswalt's concept of the Urban Catalyst, temporary uses can be understood as active forms of urban production that generate social, cultural, and spatial value. Applied to Refshaleøen, this perspective is particularly relevant, as the area hosts a dense ecology of temporary practices, including cultural initiatives such as TRANSFER, festivals, artistic occupations, creative communities, and experimental settlements such as Kolonien. Rather than simply filling an infrastructural void, these activities actively contribute to shaping the identity of the site by producing social networks, collective practices, and alternative imaginaries of future urban development. In this sense, Refshaleøen can be understood as an urban laboratory, where informal and temporary uses function as catalysts that test spatial, social, and cultural possibilities within a transitioning industrial landscape.

However, Oswalt's framework also reveals an inherent ambiguity within temporary urbanism. While these practices foster experimentation, openness, and adaptability, they may simultaneously contribute to the increasing visibility, attractiveness, and symbolic capital of the site, thereby becoming indirectly integrated into broader redevelopment **dynamics. Kolonien exemplifies this tension: as a self-built, collective housing experiment based on modular and reversible structures, it explores alternative models of living, sustainability, and community organisation within a semi-temporary framework. At the same time, its presence contributes to reinforcing Refshaleøen's identity as a creative and experimental district. In this way, temporary are tools of urban innovation and also as potentially ambivalent mechanisms that can both resist and enable processes of long-term urban transformation and valorisation.**

5.6 Third space in Refshaleøen

In Refshaleøen, the idea of third space can be understood as the set of in-between urban conditions where formal planning, private ownership, and everyday practices overlap without fully stabilising into a single coherent system. These spaces are neither strictly public nor private, nor fully regulated or entirely informal, but emerge through temporary permissions, adaptive reuse, and negotiated access to former industrial land. In Refshaleøen, this is visible in the coexistence of cultural and experimental environments such as TRANSFER, seasonal festivals, pop-up events, creative workshops, urban gardens, and self-organised initiatives like Kolonien, which operate within shifting legal and spatial frameworks.

However, these third spaces are not neutral zones of openness. Their existence depends on landownership structures, temporary agreements, and institutional tolerance, which means access and influence are unevenly distributed. For example, cultural and artistic initiatives may be allowed to activate space temporarily, while long-term decisions about redevelopment remain in the hands of actors such as By & Havn and Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab. In this sense, the "third space" in Refshaleøen is best understood not as a fully open hybrid realm, but as a fragile and negotiated condition where experimentation, precarity, and strategic urban development coexist, and where the boundaries between participation, control, and appropriation are continuously redrawn.

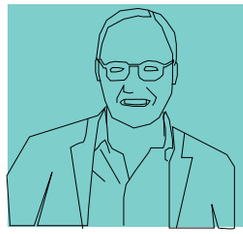
"We have tried to make this mix of people because the mix of people also can, they actually help each other."

" People have come to us and said, we can see you have a building down there. We can just take it. You don't need to do anything for us because we can do it ourselves."

"Maybe they have to pay a higher rent. And the thing could maybe change a lot out here. But we will try to work against it all the time. "

"At Reffen, we have so many weird people out here that make a lot of crazy things and it's very good."

"Also about the houseboats, all of these will live with the redevelopment. Because I think the houseboats, some are permanent, other are temporary. All of these are otherwise. The question is, the final redevelopment includes the temporary occupation. "



CARSTEN RASMUSSEN

Development Manager
Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab

"The problem often with the temporary things, when they grow to be a success, they very often become not temporary any longer, but something that

Chiara Monelli:

What role do temporary activities play here? Do you think these activities are temporary or will they influence the future?

PETER NIELSEN

Urban planner at Copenhagen municipality

" it's better to make temporary uses of the area, and for Reshaleoen it was important that open the area for everyone, and to make a new identity. And now I think it's very well-known places in Copenhagen"

"The good things about the existing buildings on Refshaleøen, it's a large company buildings, is that it's very difficult to transform them to housing. It's too deep buildings. So, a lot of this building must have another use, and I think some of the existing company will stay in the future."

“ I think in Refshaleon are absolutely crucial. Without them, people would not know Refshaleøen, it would just be an abandoned industrial silhouette somewhere.”

“I think activation is key; it is the reason why people care, and why people care is key to becoming a good area”

“Everybody knows that is special but is also very strategic. The land-owners understand this and they know that land value goes up.”

“I think as they develop, what will typically happen is that the temporary activation will move out. ”

“I think in Refshaleøen, since this has be-come such a vital part of the identity of Refshaleøen. I suggest in our proposal for the competition to keep some areas un-programmed. And that is dynamic.”

“This is our way of embracing the unique culture of Refshaleøen, accepting that we don’t have all the answers. We want to move away from the idea of the ‘all-know-ing’ architect. It’s about making room for the creativity of Copenhagen.”

MAINE GODDERIDGE

Associate Design Director Henning Larsen

“The landowners own have strategies to balance costs for tenants. If a tenant brings a strong creative value to Refshaleøen, they get a lower rent. So that’s an economical tool used to curate the area’s identity.”

Chiara Monelli:
What role do temporary activities play here? Do you think these activities are temporary or will they influence the future?

“There are a lot of temporary initiatives. But they are basically like this project based on voluntary work.”

“most projects, they burn out before they are stabilised.”

“**You get easily funding for new projects. You don’t get funding for maintaining.** ”

SERAINA GRUPP

conceptual artist training focusing on food art

“ I used to live in something called Co-penhagen Village. And I think for what it is, it’s way too expensive.”

“there’s this other speculative. Of course.”

“I mean, it activates the place so much, I think it’s such a special place”

“Everything in Refshaleøen currently is temporary”

“Since the garden emerged (TRANSFER), I think it brings a value and a liveli-ness to a place that flowers do in the spring to a site.”

“You know that they’re going to go away sometime soon, you try to enjoy them as they last, and you hope that they’ll come pop up somewhere else after they disappear, and I think these temporary pop-ups, they’re very different to nature also.”

“I think the diversity itself is also an element that plays a role within these temporary activities.”

“it was interesting, there was temporary engagement within the community.”

AMAYA STEENSMA

eco-social designer experience working in conventional and biohybrid architecture, ex resident in URBAN RIGGER

“Temporary activities is being used as a development strategy for companies”

“I think what they learned is that they can use temporary activities to make people connect to a place and sell it more expensive that way.”

“I don’t think anyone would care for Refshaleøen without the tempo-rary activities because it used to be closed but now it’s where all the big festivals are and there are cafes and there are bakeries and the street food market. ”

CECILIE ØDUM KNUDSEN

Architect at Hørsholm Kommu-ne, ex resident in CPH VILLAGE, Master thesis on Refhslaeøen at Royal Danish Academy

“From an economic perspective only, I think it is a great strategy because it makes nearly worthless plots of land quite attractive be-cause of the many local activities and the peoples connection to the place.”

"for me, it has a huge aesthetic value, you know, that old industry, post-war industry"

"some aesthetic qualities, which I really like. There's some "good ghosts". The special about this place is that it's so close to the city and you still have this area which is sort of waiting for something to happen, and then there is happening a lot of things in the meanwhile."

JANE OSTERMANN-PETERSEN

Artist and resident - Kolonien

Chiara Monelli:

What role do temporary activities play here? Do you think these activities are temporary or will they influence the future?

"Temporary activities contribute immensely to the character of Refshaleøen."

"These kinds of activities draw people from all over the world to Refshaleøen, even though it is outside of the city center and not so easy to access."

"all the activities on Refshaleøen feel temporary - and that lends a certain kind of playfulness and involvement from local creatives"

"I don't think temporary activities on the island will be able to sustain and influence the future.

CARLY

Farmer at Øens Have Refshaleøen

Example of Temporary activities in Refshaleøen

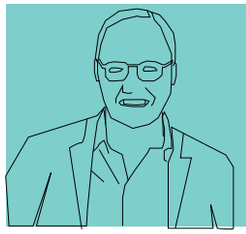
Figure 34
The Garden of Decay Transfer and her founder Seraina Grupp

Source: Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab. (n.d.). Træd ind i et levende eksperiment, hvor biodiversitet, fællesskab og kreativitet mødes [Step into a living experiment where biodiversity, community, and creativity meet].

Figure 35
The yurt at Øens Have, a community gathering space within Copenhagen's urban farm.

Source: Øens Have. (n.d.). Øens Have. https://www.oenshave.dk/

About festivals



CARSTEN RASMUSSEN

Development Manager
Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab

"we have O-Days there. We have something called Carousel in this green area there. I guess we also have Distortion. It's also a big festival and Carousel is a small, it's a techno so in this kind of forest with light and everything."

Chiara Monelli:

What is the role of large events, such as festivals (e.g.Copenhell), in the identity and development of Refshaleøen?

"And the people who's making the festivals, they're also sthey are sort of protecting this area, they're putting up the fence, so there's a lot of understanding."

JANE OSTERMANN-PETERSEN

Artist and resident - Kolonien

"I think the role of those festivals is that it's really good and nice for Copenhagen to have a pretty central area where they can just go and be noisy."

"Festivals may move elsewhere in the future. This reflects the nature of temporality: activities shift over time."

MAINE GODDERIDGE

Associate Design Director
Henning Larsen

CARLY

Farmer at Øens Have
Refshaleøen

"Large events like festivals bring energy and character to Refshaleøen. They contribute to its identity as a place for many different kinds of people and interests. I don't know if there will still be space for them when the island is developed"

PETER NIELSEN

Urban planner at Copenhagen municipality

"in this local plan, we have indicated some area where you can have and make more noise than usual. Noise is a very big part of the city's discussion."

"festivals are important to the landowners, because it's the only way how they can use the land. And maybe they make more money from that. But once they are built, I don't think there's going to be any festivals anymore. "

"I think the festivals are also a bit of a stress test every year for the community. "

"In summer the festivals, they really change the whole island a lot."

SERAINA GRUPP

conceptual artist training focusing on food art

"I really like the festivals and I really like that it's so close to Copenhagen without being too noisy for anyone. "

CECILIE ØDUM KNUDSEN

Architect at Hørsholm Kommune, ex resident in CPH VILLAGE, Master thesis on Refhslaeøen at Royal Danish Academy

AMAYA STEENSMA

eco-social designer experience working in conventional and biohybrid architecture, ex resident in URBAN RIGGER

"Money. Money.
Yes, I mean, also I must say."

"It's to use a space that is very expensive land. That's why I say it brings in money. It's also a big thing. It attracts people from around the world."

Figure 36
Report with vision from Refshaleøen

Source: Chiara Monelli, March 19th 2026, Refshaleøn, picture taken during site visit.

5.7 Boundary Work in Refshaleøen

Applied to Refshaleøen, the concept of boundary work, developed by Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, provides a useful framework for understanding how actors with different interests, roles, and priorities are nevertheless able to collaborate in shaping the transformation of the area. Through this perspective, Refshaleøen itself can be interpreted as a boundary object: a shared spatial platform that holds different meanings for different actors while enabling coordination between them. For the Municipality of Copenhagen, it represents a future urban district; for developers, a long-term investment opportunity; for communities, a social and cultural environment; and for artists, an experimental space of creativity and freedom. Beyond the site itself, other elements also function as boundary objects. Temporary uses can simultaneously act as spaces of expression for communities, tools of activation for developers, urban strategies for the municipality, and sites of social experimentation for researchers. Festivals similarly operate across multiple meanings: for citizens they are leisure spaces, for the municipality they contribute to city branding, and for developers they increase visibility and attractiveness. Even masterplans and maps function as mediating devices, serving as technical tools for planners, future visions for communities, and investment frameworks for developers.

> *"site drawings, models, and discourses are (...) evidence of thought in formation, a thought about what the urban site might be."*
> *(A. Kahn, 2005,p. 289)*

Through these shared yet differently interpreted objects, participation becomes possible despite conflicting agendas. In this sense, boundary objects help explain how redevelopment and participation at Refshaleøen are interconnected forms of negotiation where temporary uses, spatial practices, and planning tools mediate collaboration and conflict. This makes temporary urbanism itself one of the most significant boundary objects in the site's transformation, linking community practices to institutional redevelopment while continuously reshaping the future identity of the area.

Furthermore also the drawings from tenants collected from the Refshaleøen landowner can be considered boundary objects.

The report Vision for Refshaleøen (Figure 36) summarizes the outcomes of the public workshops, expert recommendations, and citizens' contributions collected during the first phase of the participatory process. It translates these inputs into a revised vision that establishes the strategic principles guiding the subsequent ideas competition and the development of the structural masterplan.

> *"Drawings and design documents play important roles in, as well as in-between, the processes of design, the construction phase, and the maintenance and appropriation of space."*
> *(Wagner, 2022, p. 111)*

6. PROPOSAL

Best practise; redesigning the participatory process

At the beginning of this research, the intention was to arrive at a conventional architectural proposal, as often expected within an architectural proposal, as often expected within architectural practice.
However, throughout this thesis, the investigation of Refshaleøen revealed that urban transformation requires reading the site through multiple lenses: social, political, cultural, and relational. This process expanded the role of the architectural project itself, showing that architecture can also operate through the ability to read, interpret, and intervene in the social and political processes and dynamics that shape urban space.
Through the analysis of roles, networks, and participatory processes shaping Refshaleøen's redevelopment, this thesis therefore moves beyond a fixed spatial proposal and instead advances a process-based framework. The proposal rethinks participation as an earlier, continuous, and adaptive process, capable of integrating local knowledge, temporary uses, and evolving community dynamics into the long-term transformation of transitional urban territories.
The research has shown that participation often enters too late in the planning process, once strategic decisions, competition briefs, and development frameworks have already been defined. As a result, many local actors, temporary users, and community initiatives remain peripheral, despite their active contribution to the social and spatial production of the area.

A stronger participatory model would therefore require continuous engagement throughout the entire development process, not only at its beginning, allowing conflicts, local knowledge, and evolving practices to actively inform urban transformation over time.

At the same time, this research does not seek to close the project with definitive solutions, but intentionally leaves it open by reframing the redevelopment of Refshaleøen as a series of unresolved spatial, social, and political questions.

If participation is not a singular event but a continuous process, at what stage should local actors enter the transformation?

Integrate the local actors during all the project allows participation to become capable of integrating local knowledge, informal practices, and emerging conflicts into the long-term transformation of the site.

At the same time, this research opens further questions about governance and cooperation between public and private actors. While private landowners already allow a certain degree of freedom for experimental practices such as Kolonien, cultural initiatives, and artistic occupations, these practices should also be critically understood as possible operational strategies that increase the symbolic and economic value of the land. Through Oswalt's Urban Catalyst, temporary uses can be read as generators of urban value; however, as Lefebvre reminds us, the production of space is never neutral, but always linked to power.
This raises an important responsibility for the municipality: to ensure that the promotion of arts, culture, and temporary communities is not reduced to place-branding or tourism-driven strategies, but accompanied by real mechanisms of preservation, care, and long-term protection of local activities. Governance could move toward stronger forms of cooperation where local actors, tenants, informal groups, and cultural communities are not only consulted, but structurally embedded in decision-making.

This leaves the discussion open:

Can urban transformation remain truly inclusive once the value produced by temporary communities becomes part of the formal development logic?

And how can planning protect the very practices that made the place valuable in the first place?

How can temporary communities, informal practices, and cultural ecologies remain active without being reduced to instruments of urban valorization?

And ultimately, who has the right to shape the future identity of a place whose value has been collectively produced long before formal redevelopment begins?

These questions do not offer definitive answers, but they suggest that the future of transitional urban territories may depend less on fixed solutions and more on the capacity to maintain openness, negotiation, and plurality within processes of change. These final questions can therefore be understood as a methodological and political repositioning of participation as a continuous, negotiated, and evolving process.

Figure 37
Refshaleøen's meeting

Source: Refshaleøens Ejendomsselskab "Se debatterne om videreudviklingen af Refshaleøen", "See the debates on the further development of Refshaleøen" (2024)

7. CONCLUSIONS

The case of Refshaleøen reveals that urban transformation is the outcome of a continuous "game" between actors, where institutions, developers, communities, artists, and temporary users negotiate space, meaning, and future possibilities. This "game" operates within an almost-public condition, where private interests and informal negotiations produce consequences of collective and general interest. In Refshaleøen, many of the decisions that shape the area's identity and future emerge from these overlapping and often invisible negotiations, showing how urban production is deeply relational and contested.

The research demonstrates that participatory processes in Refshaleøen are structured through differentiated levels of influence, where some actors hold central decision-making power while others contribute through more indirect or temporary forms of participation. At the same time, these peripheral actors, particularly cultural initiatives, temporary communities, and experimental practices, play a fundamental role in producing the social and symbolic identity of the site. This suggests that participation should be understood simply as a structural reconfiguration of practice itself. Rather than adding local voices to fixed planning procedures, a more transformative approach would require decentralizing the designer and planner, allowing them to operate alongside continually emerging local narratives, informal practices, and collective forms of spatial production.

In relation to the research questions, this study shows that the transformation of Refshaleøen is shaped by the constant interaction between redevelopment agendas and participatory processes, where temporary uses act both as spaces of experimentation and as mediators between conflicting interests. The findings also suggest that the preservation of the area's creative identity cannot rely solely on maintaining its aesthetic or cultural image, but depends on protecting the open, flexible, and collective conditions that enable commoning and experimentation to continue. However, these same qualities can also become resources for urban branding and valorization, contributing to processes of gentrification. Ultimately, Refshaleøen illustrates that urban identity is a dynamic condition continuously produced through negotiation, conflict, and collaboration. Its future will depend on whether redevelopment can sustain this openness without reducing it to a commodified image of creativity.

> *"[There] should be a structural change: beyond adding local people to professional practice via participatory procedures and, instead, decentring the designer as they come alongside continually emergent local narratives."*
>
> (Wagner & Cunningham, 2025)

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AI Use Declaration

During the preparation of this thesis, artificial intelligence tools were used solely as a support for language refinement and text revision, as English is my second language. In particular, AI was employed to assist in improving clarity, grammar, and coherence of the written content.
The intellectual content, research methodology, and all analytical and design outputs are the original work of the author, who assumes full responsibility for the thesis.