A Public Space Analysis and Design Proposal for Täby Torg

Understanding Public Life and Designing for It

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Abstract

Four years after the opening of Täby Torg, the municipality is already investigating what has led to the square often being empty. The design were meant to inspire social activity and turn Täby Torg into a place where the inhabitants of Täby would gather. This never happened, and this thesis project will, in collaboration with the municipality, aim to deepen the knowledge of why this public space is not working as intended. What can be done to transform this square into the vital core of urban public life that the people can feel proud of?
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Background

When planning and designing contemporary urban spaces, it is important to understand what prerequisites the new design have to become successful. One must fully understand a space to make it into a place. What is it that makes some places lush with life while some places die from depopulation? By understanding how people use, or not use, public space, one can understand how to design it so it will actually be used.

By now we know that dense cities are sustainable cities. A network of public transport, biking and walking routes in a compressed urban habitat will help make future cities more environmentally sustainable (Gehl, 2010). This dense form of living does require quite a bit from an urban planning and design point of view. In a dense city landscape, public space in all forms – parks, squares, streets etc – must co-exist with the private and semi-private realm, in a reduced amount space. When the amount of public space is limited, it is of great importance that the design of that public space is well thought thru, and supports the intended use of the space.

From modernist planning ideals, sprung a reaction to the concept of clean lines and large buildings and inhuman scales, towards a more human friendly urban scale (Gehl, 2010). New urbanism movement started in the late 70s’ and had a clear motive; bring the city back to the people. Blocks and neighbourhoods should be walkable, not car dominated. Cities should be over-all dense, with proximity and accessibility to shopping, housing, public space and services, preferably within walking distance. The idea was to create communities that are mixed-use, human scale and environmentally and socially resilient (CNU, 2018)

With this new ideal of human scale and human activation in the public realm – human-centred urbanism if you will – came ideas on how to best design public space in a way it is most likely to be used as purposed. Jane Jacobs and Jan Gehl are front figures for this field of knowledge – and their work will influence this thesis project, along with other researchers that share their general views on urbanism.
Täby Torg

The suburb Täby is located just 15 km north of the urban core of Stockholm, Sweden. A municipality of just over 70,000 citizens that is connected to the central districts of Stockholm by a light rail train. The building typology in the municipality is quite homogenous – mainly single-family housing, with the exception of some enormous multi-family housing complexes, predecessors of the million homes programme, a massive housing program led by the Swedish government. However, in the most central parts, an urban core is growing fast. A dense, mixed-use centre that expects to grow tremendously over the next coming 20-30 years. It is of great importance that this transformation from a small suburb to an urban district is performed sensibly and with human scale and public life as a top priority.

In the absolute centre of Täby, and right next to Täby Torg, is located an enormous shopping mall. To this area of Täby the light rail train can take as little as 13 minutes from Östra Station, central Stockholm. From this area the urban core will expand, three grand urban development projects are underway only a few hundred meters away.

Täby Torg is the first urban square in the municipality, and although it is geographically strategically located in the centre, next to a shopping mall, library and other public amenities, the square does not attract as many people as planned. What causes this lack of occupancy is yet to be determined, however, the municipality is working continuously to activate the square with several youth programs and other events to attract the public.

The size of the square is roughly 9,000 m², which compared to famously well-functioning squares in Europe would be considered a bit over dimensioned. Well-known researchers claim spatial dimensions of more than 110 meters is inappropriate in any urban setting due to limits of the social field of vision (Lynch, 1984 & Gehl, 1987).

Täby Torg is a flat and rectangular square that measures approximately 135x65 meters. Commercial services and residential areas surround the square and light rail station connecting to Stockholm is only 250 meters away. In absolute proximity to the square most services needed can be found; police station, community centre and city hall, library, bars and restaurants, health centre, church (Christian) and a public bath.

The design of the square is very open. The designers claim the square is divided into sex smaller parts with different conceptual functions (Sangberg, 2018). These individual sites differ mainly in surface material, with no vertical
boundaries to divide them (see picture below).

**Purpose and Questions**

The purpose of this thesis project is to study and analyse the public life of Täby Torg – to determine qualities and opportunities for improvement. Through the analysis, a programme for future development will be produced, along with a design proposal which will be presented for the municipality of Täby, which have collaborated in the production of this thesis project.

The motive with the analysis and the design proposal is to achieve a vision for this public space, in line with the municipality’s own Program of Architecture, as a vital urban core designed with a human-scale for social stimuli and diversity (Täby, 2018).

The main question to be answered is: how can Täby Torg be vitalized to be an inviting and diverse cityscape for people to occupy throughout the seasons?
Methodology

Three Methods of Studying Public Life

In recent decades, several theories and methods have been developed on how to study public life. Data can be retrieved analogously or digitally, and the desired data can vary between projects and wanted outcome. In the best of worlds, several methods of analysing public space would be used simultaneously, for best and fairest result. However, due to restricted amount of time for this thesis project, only one method of analysing Täby Torg will be used.

In the following, three different approaches on analysing public space will be compared, in order to select one to be used in this project. The chosen method ideally is non time consuming and, if there are design strategies “to go with” the analysing method (e.g. as in Jan Gehl’s work), it should match the municipal Program of Architecture.

Jan Gehl’s and Birgitte Svarre’s Method – Direct Observation

In Jan Gehl’s and Birgitte Svarre’s book ‘How to Study Public Life’ (2013) the authors present methods and theories on how to, with simple measures, study and analyse public life. The book ties back to Jan Gehl’s earlier work on urbanism and design, such as ‘Life Between Buildings’ (1987) and ‘Cities for People’ (2010) but contains also the addition of a toolkit for public life analysis.

By mapping where people walk, where they conduct certain stationary activities, where they meet, and so on, a holistic picture of how the public life at the site looks like.

The method of Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre is uncomplicated and based on direct observation. This means that data is collected analogously. A person observes public life and takes notes of certain activities and patterns in the public space. This manual method gives the observer an opportunity to use hen’s senses, which is critical for understanding public life (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). A manual pen-and-paper data collecting has flaws compared to digital techniques. GPS tracking, for instance, is more exact, nothing goes unnoticed as it might when a human is collecting the data. However, the human input is often desirable when studying people in public space (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). A GPS tracking device cannot detect a hideous smell from a nearby industry or strong winds as a human can – prerequisites that could determine whether a public place is used or not used, successful or unsuccessful.

Jan Gehl’s and Birgitte Svarre’s method of studying public space follows Jan Gehl’s ideology (from previous books) on how cities should be built and designed – with the human in focus. Human-scale public
space with interactive milieus to inspire social activation (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). It should be noted that this method of analysing public space is an established model, undertaken also by other pervasive public life researchers. William H. Whyte is one of them, and his book ‘The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces’ (1980) carry out a similar message, claiming that people observation as a public life analysing method gives a picture that lies close to reality.

**Space Syntax**

The Space Syntax method was first developed by Julienne Hanson and Bill Hillier at the University College London, starting with their book ‘The Social Logic of Space’ (1984). Since then the method have been refined and combined with new technological developments, but the underlying model of analysis is the same, and is well described by Al Sayed in his book ‘Space Syntax Methodology’ (2014), also from University College London.

Sayed (2014) describes: “Space Syntax Observations are a set of techniques to observe movement flows and patterns of space usage in complex buildings or urban contexts”

With quantitative data Space Syntax are using statistical techniques to, for example, summarize a characteristic human behaviour from a sample to produce estimates of population features and test hypotheses (Sayed, 2014). Simply put, space syntax uses behavioral patterns, data that can be collected e.g. with GPS trackers, and algorithms to calculate how public space should be planned to be successful.

Space Syntax would be a great method to determine movement patterns and to see where the greatest potential for future development should be located. However, in a smaller and restricted area, like Täby Torg, these patterns could most likely be visible by simple analogue observation, just as well. Due to the complexity of Space Syntax, and its mathematical mechanisms for which some specialist knowledge are required, this method is valued to be too complicated and time consuming for this project.
Kevin Lynch and the Image of the City

In his classic book ‘The Image of the City’ (1960) Kevin Lynch describes how the inhabitants of three American cities perceive their cities. He introduces well-known expressions and understandable concepts, that can be used by the public in order to understand their perception of the city. Lynch points out that every person has his or hers own associations to the city, and certain parts of the city. These associations hold memories that are tied to significant experiences. For analysists to extract the publics general picture of the city, these mental images must be compared to the actual visual image (Schibbye & Pålstam, 2001).

The analysis method is not totally unsimilar from the direct observation method of Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre (2013). Originally, when the method was developed back in the late 50s, students would walk through the city, noting elements of importance and their visibility and connection to other elements. So instead of observing the people using the public space, this method focuses on the space itself, and the elements in it. This public space/city inventory would later be compared to the city images of the public (Schibbye & Pålstam, 2001).

The data for the ‘public images’ were collected directly from the public, through deep interviews. The interviews and the inventories of the city and its elements were analysed and the concept of analysing the city “with the public” was developed. Five categories of elements were developed, with the advantage that they were easy to understand by a public and descriptive and non-evaluative, which makes it hard for the user to draw conclusions from the analysis (Schibbye & Pålstam, 2001). The categories were summarized as follows:

- **Paths** – roads, walking paths, trails etc. along which people move and interact with their surroundings.
- **Edges** – linear elements that is not perceived as paths, or borders between different types of areas or districts.
- **Districts** – area with a typical character, clearly differentiated from its surroundings.
- **Nodes** – strategic places to which one can walk. Could be between paths or among a concentration of characteristic elements.
- **Landmarks** – physical elements that are normally easy to identify and contrasts from its surroundings. Could be significant for the city’s identity.

Concludingly, this method analyses the visual aspects of a city or an area. Data collecting is done by field inventory and deep interviews. The method can be used on different scales but were originally thought of as a tool for city planning and not site planning. The positive
aspect of this method is that it gives a clear picture of the user’s perception of the public space, which is highly important when planning for people. However, conducting deep interviews is time consuming, thus it is not a perfect method for the short period of time this thesis project is done in.

Selected Method

Space syntax and Kevin Lynch’s method are great methods for understanding public space. However, space syntax is complex and not easy to use, and Kevin Lynch’s method is very time-consuming due to deep interviews.

The Program of Architecture (Täby, 2018) issued by the Täby municipality states that all future urban development projects should:

- Be based on human-scale for human needs
- Have high architectural quality and contribute to a vital urban environment
- Offer a great variety of environments and functions for a rich city life all year around
- Have a clear pedestrian perspective

From these points, and the general guidelines of the Program of Architecture, Jan Gehl’s and Birgitte Svarre’s method of studying the public life of Täby Torg is the most suitable. Direct observation seems to be the least time-consuming method. It is also an advantage that the authors previous literary work complies with the Program of Architecture. Therefore ‘How to Study Public Life’ (2013) by Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre will be indicative for this analysis, complemented by the earlier works of Jan Gehl that led to the 2013 publication.

Inventory

To grasp what preconditions Täby Torg has to become a vital urban core, the inventory will present the existing functions of the square. Seating, activities, greenery, walkways, façades, built structures, lighting, bike racks and other equipment on the square will be part of the inventory. The inventory is important to the further understanding of why the square is used the way it is, which hopefully will be shown in the analysis. Thus, the inventory together with the analysis will show if the design supports the usage of the square. If for instance the inventory shows a low number of primary seating, and the analysis shows that few people use the square for sitting, a conclusion could be there is a lack of primary seating on the square.

The result from the inventory will be presented in text, complemented with an inventory map that will serve as visual presentation.
Analysis

Below follow the tools used for the public space analysis.

Counting

Counting all people using the square – active users and those just passing by. Males, females, children (girls and boys) and elderly (male and female) are counted separately to get specificity in who is using the space. This is important since the latter three groups of individuals historically often are ignored in planning and designing of public space (Gehl & Svarre, 2013).

Other groups of individuals, such as non-binary, can be hard to separate from other groups, and will therefore not be included in the counting. This is unfortunate, although, it is important to be able to determine the gender distribution between women and men, to understand the dynamics of the public space (Whyte, 1980).

Mapping

Observing different activities taking place on the square – sitting, playing, eating etc – by marking different symbols on a map of the square where the specific activities took place. Behavioural mapping is a simple method to determine where stationary activities happens in the space – where people prefer to spend their time on the site (Gehl & Svarre, 2013).

Tracing

To estimate the different flows of people, where people choose to walk, lines of movement were drawn on a map. This method is not particularly precise, but it offers a general idea on which the dominant passages are and where people in fact move about in the square (Gehl & Svarre, 2013).

Looking for Traces

This method could mean many things. It could be to look for desire lines in a patch of grass to find where people preferably walk or finding large amounts of cigarette butts to assume where people are smoking. People leave traces that could reveal truths about the general usage of the square (Gehl & Svarre, 2013).

Photographing

To complement the quantitative data from counting, mapping and tracing, photographs are a good way to liven up the statistics. This method can very realistically capture the social interaction happening on the square (Gehl & Svarre, 2013).
Keeping a Diary

This method is one of the great advantages of using humans as the data collector. Combining the numbers with details and nuances no computer or high-tech solution would notice, will widen the knowledge of the public life on the square (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). The diary also works to simplify e.g. mapping. If a group of 30 kindergarten kids showed up at the square, I would simply make a note of it in the diary, instead of mapping the activity of every child.

Jan Gehl’s 12 Quality Criteria

In addition to the tools to study public life with, and research on planning and design theories, Jan Gehl have listed 12 criterions that, according to him, must be fulfilled in a public space for it to be fully enjoyable and well-functioning. These 12 points must work simultaneously, and none can be left out (Gehl, 2010)

In order to grasp what qualities and flaws Täby Torg has, these quality criterions will be used to evaluate the square. The criterions will be judged as either bad, sufficient or good and will be presented in a theoretical framework below.
Theoretical Framework

Criterions for Success

In the following chapter the characteristics of Jan Gehl’s work on understanding and designing public space will be presented. Using Jan Gehl’s 12 quality principles, his theories on urban design will be presented and eventually be used as a framework to tie the public life analysis of Täby Torg, to the design proposal. For credibility reasons, sources that verify Jan Gehl’s theories will be presented parallelly, as far as it is possible.

The criterions are divided into three separate sections; protection, comfort and delight (Gehl, 2010). The quality index aims to support a pedestrian urban landscape, which again, goes hand in hand with the Program of Architecture from the Täby municipality (Täby, 2018), which must be fundamental for the design proposal, for highest probability of realization possible. It should be noted that the criterions are judged from the inventory and the direct observations performed by the author and may not be seen as substantiated facts, but guidelines to understand what needs to be prioritized in the design.

Protection

A prerequisite for urban life is that the users feel safe in the public realm. There are plentiful of unpleasant features that can exist in the public space that can make people avoid using it. There is the risk of traffic hazards, crime and violence and, especially important in our northern climate, unpleasant weather conditions (Gehl, 2010). A safe place is a good place (Jacobs, 1963).

Concerning traffic hazards, Täby Torg is doing quite well. With a 30 km/h road as the only road passing the square, the fear of traffic on and around the square is insignificant. Wide sidewalks, low speed roads and pedestrian crossings have made the square into a space where cars exists but are not dominant over other means of transport. Protection against traffic hazards are considered to be good.

Preventing crime and violence in public space is not an easy thing to do. A lively public space with many eyes on the street has long been said to reduce violence and crime; more people increase the sense of security (Jacobs, 1963 & Gehl, 2010). To ensure that a place is not only active and safe during the light hours of the day, overlapping functions and pleasant lighting at night are important features, Jan Gehl claims (2010). In this area Täby Torg has some flaws. The square is not as populated as estimated when developed, few or no functions are overlapping day and night and many of the square’s ground lighting is malfunctioning due to faults in the projection of the paved surface. However, the general sense of security is not bad, neither is it good. It is
sufficient with room for improvements.

Jan Gehl (2010) claims all contemporary urban development projects need protection against unpleasant sensory experiences. In Swedish northern climate, weather protection is of great importance, with unpleasant weather conditions as a normal factor. In megacities, where traffic pollution is a bigger concern, this unpleasant sensory experience might be the greatest concern. For a public space to be successful it must offer shelter in certain unpredicted weather conditions (wind, rain, snow, cold and heat) and from pollution (noise and dust/particles) simultaneously. Täby Torg offers practically no protection from rain, wind, snow or sun. A few young trees, that some day might be useful, will not protect the users from a sudden rain and the shadows they create will not shade many users on a warm and sunny day. The noise and air pollution on site are on the other hand quite good, which would make the overall mark on this criterion sufficient, with room for improvement.

**Comfort**

This category is subdivided into six groups of prerequisites that needs to be fulfilled for a public space to be comfortable for people to use. Gehl (2010) claim that a public space is likely to be comfortable if it gives the opportunity to:

- Walk
- Stay and stand
- Sit
- See
- Talk and listen
- Play and experience

Walking is as simple as creating enough room for people to walk comfortably through the space, with good accessibility for everyone. But when it comes to staying and standing, there is a bit more underlying complexity. What Gehl (2010) refers to as “the edge effect” is a phenomenon to describe how people generally occupy public space, or even more specifically, where they choose to stand or stay in public space. When a person stays in public space, he is likely to seek out the edges of the space. People always want something to protect them from behind, something to shield from danger. Standing towards a facade or a hedge, elements often found to frame a space, people ensure their backs are clear, as well as the visionary field ahead (Gehl, 2010). A public space should have interact with surrounding buildings. This creates edges for the space, in which human life is bursting. Making comfortable places for people to stand and stay are important to keep public space vital. A parallel can be drawn to life in nature. The transition zones or the edges between forest and agricultural land are ecologically valuable because of the variation and diversity of species in the local ecosystem in
that habitat. The edge creates a perfect habitat, both for plants and animals in nature and for people in public space.

Walking on Täby Torg can be done easily for anyone, it offers flat surfaces and good accessibility. Although, a good walking environment is not created solely with physical preconditions to enable people to walk. Interesting facades, preferably with many doors and possibilities for the visitor also enhances people’s willingness to walk in public space (Gehl, 2010 & Hiller and Hanson, 1984). The facades surrounding Täby Torg are of mixed quality. Two facades have active ground floors with restaurants and different services, and the two other facades only have entrances to the shopping mall. The edges of the square and the opportunities to walk and stay or stand on the square are not particularly good, they are sufficient with room for improvement.

For longer stays in public space possibilities to sit down is crucial. Decent places to sit require the seating to have certain features. The principle of having ones back covered is the same for sitting and standing, as are a stimulating microclimate. Since sitting often is a social activity, seating areas should have a noise level that enables conversations to take place without difficulty. A good view for the users is also important, whether it is interesting architecture, art, vegetation or simply a good place to watch public life – other people (Gehl, 2010 & Whyte, 1980). Sitting in public space could also be a non-social act; waiting for someone or enjoying an ice cream in the sun. For these sitting activities smaller, undisturbed and more intimate places are ideal. A mix of seating arrangements is preferable.

Seating areas exist on Täby Torg, both primary (benches) and secondary (steps or other objects that are not originally intended to sit on) (Gehl, 2010). Whether the seating areas are working as purposed will be determined from the full analysis below, but seating areas exist in the current design. What can be noted regarding the opportunities to sit on Täby Torg is that they are not designed according to Jan Gehl’s designing principles. Jan Gehl takes inspiration on this matter from British-Swedish architect Ralph Erskine – who developed certain rules to design sociable seating areas. He claimed that by placing benches with an angle people could choose to sit alone or to face each other to enable conversation – so called ‘talkscapes’ (Gehl, 2010). The benches on Täby Torg are either placed back-to-back or in circles around the trees. By the looks of it, the square offers sufficient sitting opportunities.

It should also be noted that the Parks Department at the Täby municipality have procured movable chairs and tables and parasols to put on the square, which enables people to create their own talkscapes. Unfortunately, they are not
placed on the square until late spring, after this public life study was conducted.

Jan Gehl’s fourth criteria under the comfort subdivision is that public space needs to give the visitor the opportunity to see. With this he means, in short words, that public space should have certain dimensions to keep visitors within ‘the social field of vision’ (Gehl, 2010).

Looking back at historically well-functioning squares in Europe, one can see that distances in public space rarely exceed 100 meters. This is not a coincident, but a reaction to how people relate to the built environment. In a clear visionary field, a human can spot a person and some general signs of body language in a distance of 100 metres. If the distance is greater, the person might as well be a shrubbery or a wooden pole. From 100 meters and closer, we start seeing things we deem important to us. In a distance of 50-70 meters we can recognize a person, and if we get closer (22-25 meters) we can understand expressions and emotions in people’s facial expressions and behaviour, and between 0-7 meters people can truly socialize, hearing and seeing each other fully (Gehl, 2010). Consequently, a public space where social activation is desired, spatial distances of more than 100 meters is to be avoided.

While most people would enjoy a small plaza in an old Italian city, it is not small dimensions that makes great public spaces. As much as humans need to feel safe and be able to read their surroundings, they also like views and undisturbed sightlines (Gehl, 2010) – most of us have climbed a tree or a hill to get a good look at the surrounding. Hence, a perfect public space has both – opportunity to get an overview and opportunity to socialize in more intimate spaces. In this respect, Täby Torg is a bit over dimensioned. With its 135 meters from one end to the other, with no vertical elements to divide the space into intimate places, it is hard to identify what is happening on the other end of the square and to find places to socialize and be intimate at. The square does on the other hand offer a good overview, due to its flat and uninterrupted surface. Interventions that benefit the social field of vision could be valuable on Täby Torg; currently it is not quite sufficient.

For a public space to be inviting for many different groups of people it needs to be diverse in its design. A square with a playground and a basketball hoop might be popular among youngsters, but not so intriguing for elderly people. For this Jan Gehl have developed two different criterions to be fulfilled simultaneously – opportunity to talk and listen and opportunity to play and experience (Gehl, 2010). The talk and listen criteria is of course interrelated with what was mentioned above regarding the social field of vision, but this criteria is mainly focusing on the microclimate in which
people talk and listen in public space. Furnishing the public space in a way that encourages social interaction (talkscapes e.g.) and making sure conversations can flow undisturbed by noise pollution from roads or industries.

With play and experience Gehl is promoting creativity in the usage of public space. By making sure public space serves the opportunity to exercise and play and explore, the place will serve jet another purpose of everyday public life. For the users to engage in these kinds of activities they must feel entirely safe, no one would let their kids play in an environment where the risk of getting hurt is overwhelming. Therefore, this criterion goes hand in hand with creating safe public space, because in a safe environment, playfulness and liveliness is encouraged, without even having to design for it. To the right is a picture of an outdoor gym/bike repair station in the largest square in Mexico City, the Zócalo. The site is separated from traffic and used partly as social space and partly as work out space. This is one example of a mixed-use square, combining features and functions for diversity in usage.

Delight

In this last segment, the last category of criterions will be presented. The feeling of enjoyment and pleasure is hard to pin down, it could mean a great many things and it is highly subjective. What Gehl (2010) refers to is thought through architecture and design. This means of course not only the visual aspects of the built forms, but the interaction it has with the surrounding and its inhabitants.

Firstly, of great importance, is human scale. This matters a lot because it means planning cities and public space, so that they easily can be enjoyed and explored by foot. Before the arrival of the automobile the cities were planned for humans; their speed of walking, in their eye level and so on. Naturally, it also ties back to the social field of vision and human interaction with the built environment. This field of research is mainly environmental psychology, thus interdisciplinary work mode is of great importance when planning and designing public space to a human scale. The human scale can be used to guide us in creating urban environments which are measured to fit and is easily and comfortably be used by an average sized person. Täby Torg, with its large dimensions and non-existing vertical elements or change in terrain, is a bit out of human scale. However, reasonably low buildings surround the square and the ground floor are partly active, which makes the square function in comfortable eye-level. The human scale on Täby Torg can be improved, but it is not deemed bad.

In opposition to weather protection,
public space also needs to provide good possibilities to enjoy pleasant weather conditions. In northern climates this mostly means letting sun into the space. Small and intimate squares with relatively high surrounding buildings would be preferable in e.g. Mediterranean climate, where immediate sunshine can be too much to handle, and shade is needed. This could justify some larger dimensions in public space in northern climates, as the hours of sun increases. Täby Torg offers good possibilities to enjoy pleasant sensory experiences, unless the sun is too bright, in that case there are little shade to be found.

Jan Gehl’s last principle, which as most of the 12 criterions matches the municipality’s Architecture Program, regards the positive visual experience in public space. The positive visual experience could mean many things and have different shapes and forms. The overall design should have high architectural quality down to the last detail. It should offer nice viewpoints (overview and intimate sights) combined with greenery, water features or artwork to push the creative and social buttons of the visitors.

A city at eye-level is a city where public life interact with the built environment surrounding it.
Täby Torg Analysis

Presentation of Inventory

This section will holistically present what the square features presently. The inventory document the existing values in the following order: greenery, built structures, activities/play, walkways/paths, seating, bike racks and lighting. The inventory map below shows all the features of the square colour coded, and the roman numbers on the side states the number of floors in the surrounding buildings.
Greenery. There are seven plane trees (Platanus xxx) planted along the northeast facade to the shopping mall, with circular benches around them. The trees are young and still quite small. Other than the smaller trees along the road to the southwest, the plane trees are the only vegetation on the square.
**Built structures.** The northeast facade has three entry points to one of the largest shopping malls in Sweden. The facade is roughly 130 meters long and has two designated areas for outdoor servings of food and drinks (during the observation, only one restaurant had the possibility for outdoor servings). The eastern facade has one entrance to the mall but consist other than that only of a big glazed porch, that belongs to a pub on the ground floor (see below). The most southern facade has a more active ground floor with residents as upstairs neighbours. From a Jane Jacobs “eyes on the streets” perspective these apartments could be crucial for the perception of safety on the square (Jacobs, 1963?)

The western façade holds an office building with banks and a restaurant with outdoor seating on the ground floor. The south west and north west corners of the square each has a stair case that lead to the parallel street Biblioteksgången.

Along the south border of the square, close to the road, there are two permanent pavilions that were meant to host café services. However, due to incorrect assessments in the design, the pavilions do not currently hold the requirements for café operation. At the south west corner of the square is a smaller, similar looking pavilion, which serves as a decent to the underground car park.

The single car road that pass the square, Göran Elgfelts Gata, is a two-way street that runs along the south west façade and then, in the south west corner takes a left turn to Esplanaden. Both these streets are low speed streets (30 km/h).
Activities. In the south east end of the square, close to the glazed porch of the pub, lies a colourful rubber playground. In the middle of the square there is a ballcourt, that is turned into a skating rink during winter. In between these two experiential features, a water play is installed in the paved surface. Due to climate, it is only functioning during summer months.

Walking ways. The paving on the square suggest two walking ways for the visitors. One leads from the connecting road Esplanad to the mall, along the north west facade. The other one follows the car road, from the bus station, parallelly to Göran Elgfelts Gata.

Seating. Along Göran Elgfelts Gata, following the paved walking path, there are eight back-to-back benches with arm and back rest. On the opposite edge of the square, there are seven circular benches around each one of the plane trees. These have neither arm nor back rest. Next to the site casted concrete bench is a sun cellar bench that offers visitors the possibility to charge their phones and to enjoy free wi-fi. Conventional benches offer seating for approximately 120 people, of which 48 have back rest and arm rest (not including semi-private outdoor serving areas).

Secondary seating are elements in public space that are not intended for the sole purpose of sitting, but works as seating, nonetheless. These features will appear clearly during the direct observations,
but the obvious ones will be presented here. The site casted concrete bench (see picture below) that follows the walking path from Esplanad towards the mall, is one structure that could be used for sitting, although it was planned as a parkour device. The steps in the north west corner of the square, close to the mall entry, could also be used for sitting, same goes for the steps on the north east side of the square. There are no bollards on the square, except from some rubber bollards that is part of the playground, these could perhaps also be used as seating devices.

**Bike racks.** On the south edge of the square, there are three double-sided bike racks, in horizontal extensions to the light poles. Each side takes 10 bikes, which adds up to a total of 60 bicycle stands available on the square.

**Lighting.** For the perception of safety, sufficient lighting is highly important, even more so in Täby’s northern climate, where the days are very short during the winter months. Täby Torg has eleven lighting posts along the southern edge, laying a soft white light over most of the square. In addition to that, parts of the square have lights installed into the paved surface. However, due to miscalculations of weight pressure, several of these lights are out of function.
Presentation of Analysis Result

In this chapter the result of the direct observations that were conducted at six different week days at different times of the day, will be presented. In line with the instructions for the observations (‘How to Study Public Life’ by Gehl and Svarre, 2013) the main data collection consist of headcounts (how many people), activities on the square (moving and stationary) and movement patterns (where people walk).

Mapping. The map below presents the stationary activities that were conducted during the direct observations at the square. Stationary activities such as sitting and standing mostly take place around the square’s edges, with the benches around the trees and the site casted concrete bench sculpture as the most frequently used. The back-to-back placed benches are rarely used, and stationary activities are highly concentrated in proximity to the mall’s entrances.
**Counting.** The diagrams below show the distribution among men and women (to the left) and the distribution of people using the square and people that were just passing by (to the right). The bottom chart show the number of people visiting the square (per hour) on different times of the day, also comparing saturday at noon.

![Diagram showing the distribution among men and women.](image1)

![Diagram showing the distribution of people using the square and people that were just passing by.](image2)

![Bar chart showing the number of people visiting the square (per hour) on different times of the day, also comparing saturday at noon.](image3)
**Tracing.** The tracing map below shows the movement patterns on the square. The lines are drawn with different line thickness to illustrate the most used paths (thick line) and the ones that are rarely used (thin line). The tracing map confirms that most activity on the square happens in the outskirts of the square.
In this section the result of the analysis will be discussed and further analysed to find out what general conclusions can be drawn from the inventory and the collected and assembled data.

Firstly, looking at the numbers from the people counting, there is a positive aspect in the high number of women visiting the square. This is proof of a safe and well-functioning place (Whyte, 1980 & Gehl & Svarre, 2013). The advantage in number means that women have found their way to the square and find it a safe place to be. This simple method of measuring safety is used in several public places around the world, including Bryant Park in New York, where park officers count men and women twice a day, to keep track of womanly presence, which ideally is 52%, exactly the same number recorded on Täby Torg during this field study (Gehl, 2013).

The numbers also conclude that passers-by are much more common than staying visitors. People are flowing in and out of the shopping mall, but rarely stop to use the square’s functions. However, one can see increasing numbers of people staying on the square when weather is good, but the number of people using the square for transit is still significantly higher. These numbers can be interpreted in different ways, with both positive and negative aspects. A high number of people visiting is good, the square has potential and no effort is needed to get people to come. Although, a truly appreciated square has people using it in order to create liveliness and atmosphere, why the effort must be directed into making people want to stay at the square, rather than leaving it. This would attract more people, since people are drawn to each other (Whyte, 1980) and businesses and services that would contribute to the vitalization of the square. Gehl complains (2010) that this transit-oriented pattern, where people are generally not tempted to stay in public space, are not dealt with enough in recent years urban developments. Gehl turns to Rome for some positive inspiration – a town where a reasonably low number of people walk around, because of high quality public space and temptation for stationary activities.

The tracing map stresses the same conclusion as the numbers. The most used walking passages at the square leads to and from the entrances of the mall. Secondary passages cross the square but the primarily used walking paths is along the facades in the outskirts of the square. This could be ‘the edge effect’, although it seems likely that the shopping mall with all its pull-factors would have this effect on the neighbouring square – pulling the visitors towards the entry points. The activity map emphasises the same thing, people are, to a large extent,
standing in clusters around the entry points of the mall. Thus, what seems to be attracting most people is not the square itself, but the mall.

Studying the result of the activity map one can see that the traditional benches on the southwest long side of the square are rarely used. The site casted concrete bench is significantly more used, as are the benches around the trees. There could be several explanations to why this is. The traditional benches are placed on the “wrong” side of the square, on the opposite side from where the most activity take place. They are placed close to the southwest façade, which blocks the sun quite a bit, this could also have an impact on the usage. Thirdly, the benches are placed back-to-back, which could affect people’s willingness to use them to socialize. However, the number of elderlies using these traditional benches were significantly higher than other groups. The back- and armrest facilitates the elderly and disabled to use the square – unfortunately few other people would preferably use that part of the square. Different placement of these traditional benches could result in increased usage and a greater diversity and mix of people on the square.

In decent weather, many people come to the square to sit down and socialize. There are a limited number of seating, which not necessarily is a bad thing, few people are attracted by a place that looks empty (Whyte, 1980). However, along the northeast facade, in absence of other seating, people use boxes of rat poison and sand to sit on. Whether this is just unsanitary or in fact hazardous remains a question, but what seems to be quite clear is that secondary seating on the square needs an uplift. The site casted concrete bench is no traditional seating, yet it is very well-used. Steps, bollards and other elements that could enable sitting are missing on the square, which forces the visitors to sit on rat poison boxes (probably not knowingly, they look like a small stone made stool).

The playground is quite frequently used, both by passers-by with children and kindergartens on the go. In sunny afternoons the colourful playground transforms into a mixed-use zone, where children run around and play, and adults use the soft playground surface for sunbathing. This part of the square is also the part where the sun stays out the longest, and activity dies here later than in other areas of the square. Next to the playground is a wooden decking, which itself is rarely used. Although, parents use it to some extent to sit and observe the children playing. Conventional seating in proximity to the playground would increase longer stays in this part of the square. The second feature to enable play and exercise on the square – the ball court - is rarely used. The few times
it is used, it is not for the intended purpose. Children climb on the fencing to the ball court from time to time, but during the six hours of observation, no ball was seen on the ball court. The artificial grass was, on the other hand, used by some youngsters for afternoon sunbathing. With its wooden fence the ball court becomes secluded from the rest of the square, if sitting down on the ground. These places, the intimate and separate ones, where people go to not be seen does not exist elsewhere on the square. There is basically no vegetation, or any other vertical element to divide the space into rooms and intimate places. Spatial interventions that creates smaller spaces on the square would increase multi-functional usage of the square. A diversity of functions and visual elements could also increase the overall attractiveness of the square.

A notification to be made from the observation is the low number of bikers on the square. On average there where 10 bicycles in use per hour. The square offers, as noted in the inventory section, 60 bikes to park simultaneously, so the lack of biking should not be blamed on the number of bike racks, or the accessibility for bikes on the square. A possible explanation could be flaws in the local and regional bike network.
Formulation of the Problem

Below follows a list of challenges that through the analysis have been made visible, and are judged to be important to deal with, in order to vitalize Täby Torg to its full potential.

- The spatial dimensions are too large. By dividing the square into smaller spaces, and at the same time keeping well-established sight lines and open areas, the square would have both good overview and intimate places.

- People are using the edges of the square – to pass by. To get the visitors to stay, the edges must be more appealing. Primary and secondary seating along the empty facades could be one answer, greenery and other visually exciting elements could be another.

- The square offers no protection against weather. Some sort of sheltering features is needed to give the visitors the option to take cover in case it starts to rain or snow, or if the sun shines too bright and one needs to stay in the shade. It is also clear that in good weather conditions, the square is significantly more used than it is in bad conditions. This might be obvious, however, even in six degrees Celsius and sun, much more people visit than they would if it was warmer and no sun. The square needs to offer more than just sunbathing in order to be used more, throughout the seasons. Public toilets, café operation on the square, weather protection and environments that inspire spontaneous play and social activity, will increase the amount of time that people are willing to spend on the square.

- Stationary activities are too few. Children playing and youths and adults sitting or standing, are the two most common stationary activities on the square. The site needs to inspire a larger range of activities to be able to attract more people from different age groups.

- The square die early. As soon as the sun sets people disperse from the square quite quickly. A square that is completely empty is easily perceived as unsafe, hence the importance of nightly activity and good lighting. Täby Torg would gain from some overlapping daily and nightly activities and a more thought through lighting programme.

- Unsatisfactory visual elements. The ball court in the centre of the square does not look like a permanent structure, but something that would be put up as part of an event or similarly. The unused pavilions are filled with what from the outside looks like clutter. The paving and its built-in lighting is damaged on several places. These are elements that disturb the positive sensory experience. Order and up-keep, detailing and a coherent design need to be more eminent on Täby Torg than it is today. The square
also lacks in amount of greenery.

**General Conclusions on Analysing Public Space Using Direct Observations**

Observing public life from the perspective of the user holds both advantages and disadvantages. In this specific case, the site was a flat square with good overview, which makes the observations easier to conduct than if it was e.g. an entire block or a road, where it would be impossible to observe the whole place at once without moving around.

The direct observation was picked for this thesis project partly for being the least time consuming and most easily used public space analysing tool. These predictions turned out to be correct. Very little time was spent on preparations and the tools needed are basically just a pen and maps over the site.

The negative sides of direct observation are the margin of error, the specificity is not as good as if one would use e.g. GPS-trackers. For this project however, the specificity was not the highest priority feature in the collected data. To understand how a square is used, the specificity of where people for example walk and sit can be quite low – the general patterns will still be clearly visible. Täby Torg is not a crowded place, which also simplified the direct observations. A similar place with more activity would probably not be as suitable for direct observations – at least if it were to be conducted by only one person, as in this thesis project.

Jan Gehl’s and Birgitte Svarre’s method of studying public space (2013) is a simple way to increase the understanding of how a place function. After spending hours on Täby Torg, user patterns, behaviours and what measures are needed for the design to support the use, have become clear.
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