

Cobe

OUR
URBAN
LIVING
ROOM

LIBRARY

Arvillius & Orto

million people stop by the area
and Israels Plads every year, making it
Urban Living Room equal to the size
the entire population of Denmark.



More than 250,000 people travel
through Nørreport Station every day.
This makes it the busiest urban space
in Denmark – an Urban Living Room
for the huge diversity of Copenhageners.
Since the renovated station opened, the
number of pedestrians in the surrounding
streets has grown by 57%.



When as book lending in Denmark is declining
one million books every year, the number of
annual library visitors has remained at a steady
million. Today, more than 50% of the visitors
to places like the library in Nordvest not to
check anything out, but to relax or meet friends.
The library offers a shared space, an Urban
Living Room for everyone.





By 2040, another 100,000 children are expected to live in Copenhagen. Forfatterhuset Kindergarten is one of many new large-scale institutions – Urban Living Rooms for the next generations.

This book is about architecture – not just how it affects the development of our cities, but how it sets the conditions for peoples' daily lives.

Our urban culture is rapidly transforming from private to public, challenging our lifestyles by requiring us to negotiate much more frequently between interior and exterior environments. This sets new demands for a successful, liveable city.

The number of urban events today outnumbers the number of home events during an average person's week. This new urban culture sets the agenda for our daily lives and gives rise to new requirements for the physical layout of our cities.

What if the city was your personal responsibility? How would you inhabit it and treat it? What if we applied the social qualities of our homes to the city? We could treat every single public space – every new building, every street and every corner of the city – as an extension of our homes. We could design them with the same care and attention to detail that we in Scandinavia devote to our homes. But instead of private retreats, they would become spaces for social interaction. Perhaps then, our cities would, at long last, function as urban living rooms for everyone.

Our city is our home, and that quality is what underpins the success of Copenhagen today. The more we care for it – as architects, but more importantly as Copenhageners ourselves – the better we will treat it. The better it is designed, the more people will want to live well in our city and take pride in it. This is not a matter of beauty, elegance, or wealth but a story of social liveability and urban democracy. We look to successful interventions like the Copenhagen bicycle lanes, an urban democratic mobility that shapes our everyday lives and thus becomes part of our lifestyle and identity as well as the backbone of our healthy, congestion-free city.

This book is a compendium of what we have learnt from our urban experiments in Copenhagen. To catalyse the transformation process, we often begin with questions. Why does infrastructure dictate the vast majority of public spaces? How can we use cultural interventions as a tool for repairing socially segregated neighbourhoods? Why do we treat old buildings like trash when we could turn them into treasures? How do we accommodate our children in the best possible way? How do we

involve and activate citizens in a way that makes the transformation of the city relevant to everyone? How do we meet the needs of future Copenhageners in new integrated neighbourhoods?

The search for answers to these questions reveals the power of architecture: that the quality of our urban environment is the key to creating a better, healthier, and even more beautiful everyday life.

Welcome to Copenhagen
– Our Urban Living Room

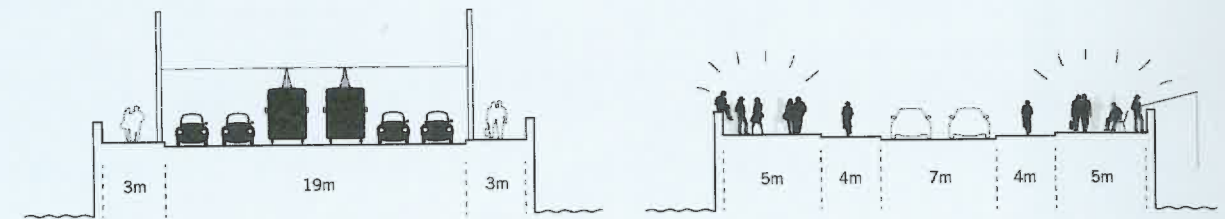
On behalf of Cobe,
Dan Stubbergaard.

**FROM
INFRA-
STRUCTURE**

**TO PUBLIC
SPACE**

Why does infrastructure dictate
the vast majority of public
spaces in our cities?

In the 1970s and 1980s, Dronning Louises Bro was a heavily congested street dominated by cars and trams.



Dronning Louises Bro, 1980s

Dronning Louises Bro, 2015



Today, due to a simple extension of the pedestrian and bicycle lanes, the bridge has become one of the hippest hang-outs in Copenhagen.



Eiffel Tower
300 metres.



Tower of Pisa
56 metres.



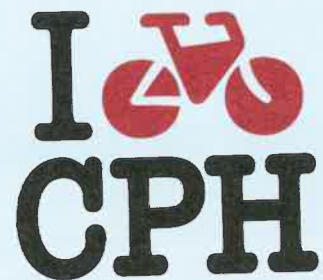
Statue of Liberty
93 metres.



Big Ben
96 metres.



The Little Mermaid
1.25 metres.



Liveability and way of living as a city icon

Copenhagen is a small city with no significant landmark attractions. When tourists visit the most famous landmark, the 1.25-metre-tall statue of the Little Mermaid, they laugh at its petite size. But architectural and artistic monuments are not what draw people to Copenhagen. Instead, a series of successful urban developments has created a new kind of urban attraction. The city has become known for the way it is used and designed, and for its high quality of life.

This phenomenon is not the result of any single factor but of a mix of successful developments in a variety of fields during the last several decades. The Danish welfare model, the healthy food revolution, the bicycle culture and the revitalization of urban space has created a cocktail of liveability and happiness that is now world-famous.

Copenhagen's bicycle culture in particular has caught on as a symbol of modern living. It is the icon of an attractive urban lifestyle that combines efficient green mobility, and leisure. Thus, the main tourist attraction is not a museum or a piece of architecture but an overall urban experience.

The Copenhagen attraction is a way of life – cruising around the city, not on a tourist bus but on a city bike. And it is the ability to enjoy a sunny summer afternoon by jumping into the harbour, our collective urban swimming pool.



The Bicycle Bridge
Dissing + Weitting Architecture

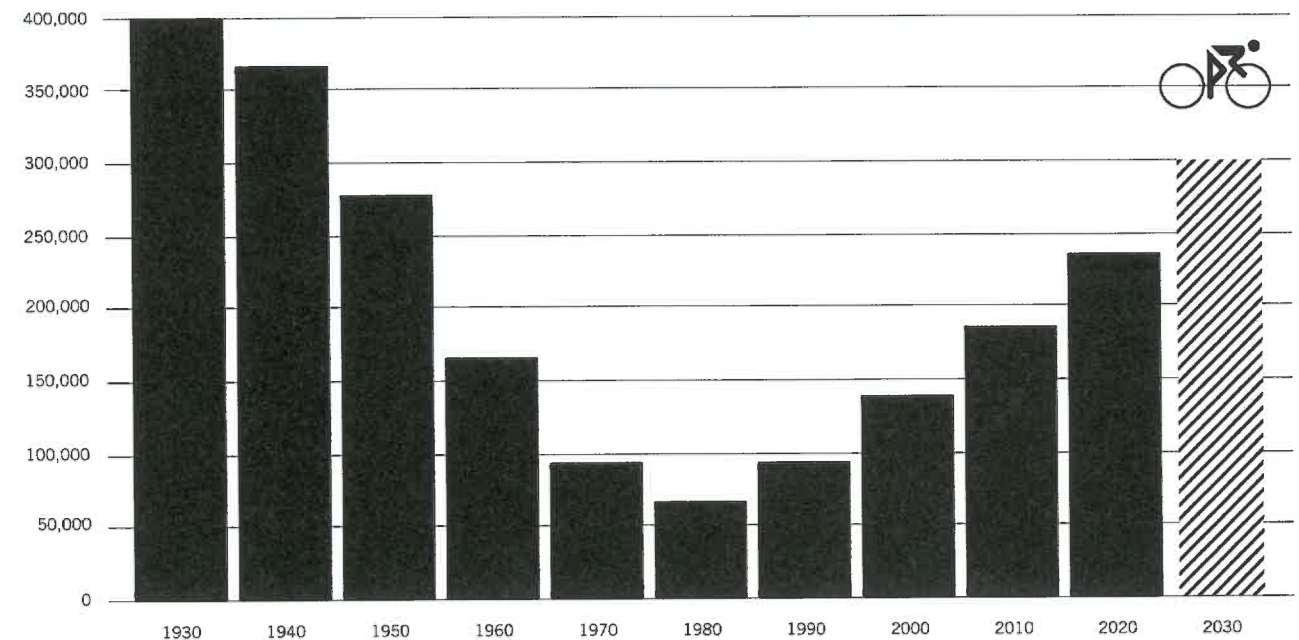
Copenhagen was a city
with up to 400,000
people riding their bikes in and
out of the centre every day.



As a result of the sub-
urbanization of the 60s, cars
became the main mode of
transportation. Bicycle lanes
were cancelled to make room
for car parks.



1960s: The bicycle lanes were
removed from the streets, once
used for separating the bicycles
from cars. This marks the
beginning of Copenhagen's
post-car and bicycle era.



Bicycle traffic in Copenhagen 1930-2030.

Measured in bicycles coming in and out of the city center.

Source: Danmarks Statistik.

The battlefield of the Copenhagen streets and the creation of a bicycle city

Historically, Copenhagen was not designed for cars. The dense medieval centre of narrow streets was created for horses and carriages. In those days, transportation by horse was only available to the rich. Most people moved on foot through the city, and the streets were crowded with pedestrian traffic.

When the bicycle was introduced in the 1890s, it radically changed the way people used the city. The development of new outlying residential neighbourhoods such as Vesterbro and Nørrebro – today the most vibrant and attractive urban areas of the city – was a direct result of the invention and the eventual popularity of bikes. It became possible for working-class people to move out of the old city and beyond the fortification walls, because they could now bike to work in the crowded city centre.

Horse lanes were gradually transformed into bicycle lanes, transforming Copenhagen into a bicycle city.

In the post-war 1950s and 60s, an upturn in the global economy made it possible for working-class people to own a car, and the fabric of Copenhagen once again changed. People no longer wanted to live in the worn-down city centre, which at the time was very dense and in poor condition after the war. The car enabled a new and attractive alterna-

tive: owning a house with a garden in the romantic suburbs and commute to work in the hectic city.

In the 60s, Copenhagen became a city with a car-dominated infrastructure. In those years, the growing density of cars slowly turned public spaces into vast landscapes dedicated to car parks, and urban life suffered. The former horse – and bike – lanes were turned into street-side parking spaces, stifling the street life of the city.

Today, the city has transformed once again. Now, many people choose to stay and live in the city centre. The worn-down city that we escaped in the 50s and 60s has transformed into one of the most liveable cities in the world. This second wave of densification has had a unique impact on the way we use and design the city today. Copenhagen has yet again become a city for people.

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est and most convenient bicycle
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ere infrastructure and public spaces
completely intertwined as a single
an organism.

Learning from Copenhagen – towards a city for people

The transformation of the Copenhagen streets and the return of a new bicycle and pedestrian era raises a new set of challenges. How to accommodate the 650,000 bicycles that exist in Copenhagen, without filling public spaces with cramped bicycle parking areas? How to create an inclusive public space for the 1,000 new inhabitants that arrive in Copenhagen each month? And how to interlay all modes of traffic to enhance mobility while at the same time creating beautiful urban living rooms?

The challenges Copenhagen currently faces might be specific to the local geography, but they may still serve as inspiration for solving the global challenges related to mobility and urban space development faced by cities worldwide. Already,

the Copenhagen-style bicycle lane has become a global model exported almost 1:1 to many other cities, but it should not end there.

Public streets must also be urban spaces – places not only for flow, but also for social interaction.

At the same time it has to be as easy to walk, bike or use public transport as it is to drive.

Cities should not only promote the most convenient bicycle routes possible but also provide beautiful public environments where infrastructure and public spaces are completely intertwined as a single urban organism.



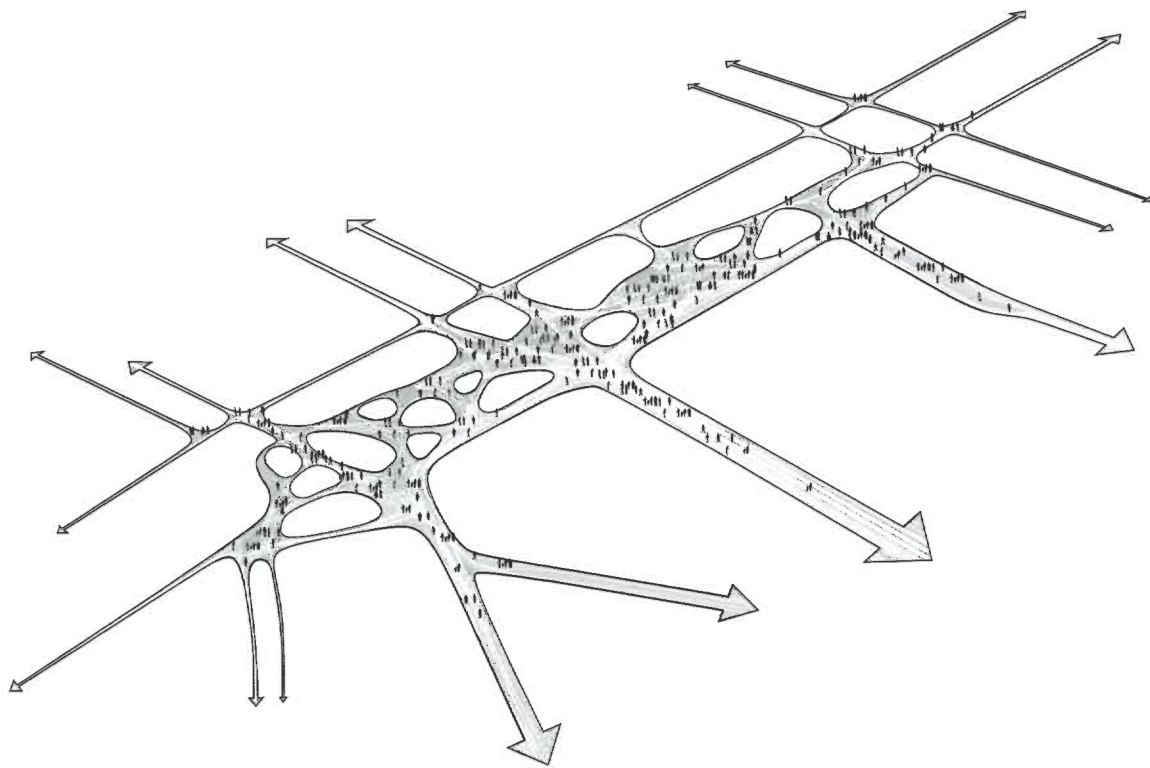
Nyhavn before 1980.

The decentralization of the 60s
created a car-dominated city
throughout the 70s and 80s.
Commuters drove in from the
suburbs every day, generating
heavy traffic all over the city.



Nyhavn 2015.

Today the city looks very
different. Extended pavements
and additional bicycle lanes
have turned the streets into
infrastructure for people.
The transformation of the
streetscape has had a
positive effect, as 45% of
Copenhageners bike to work
every day.

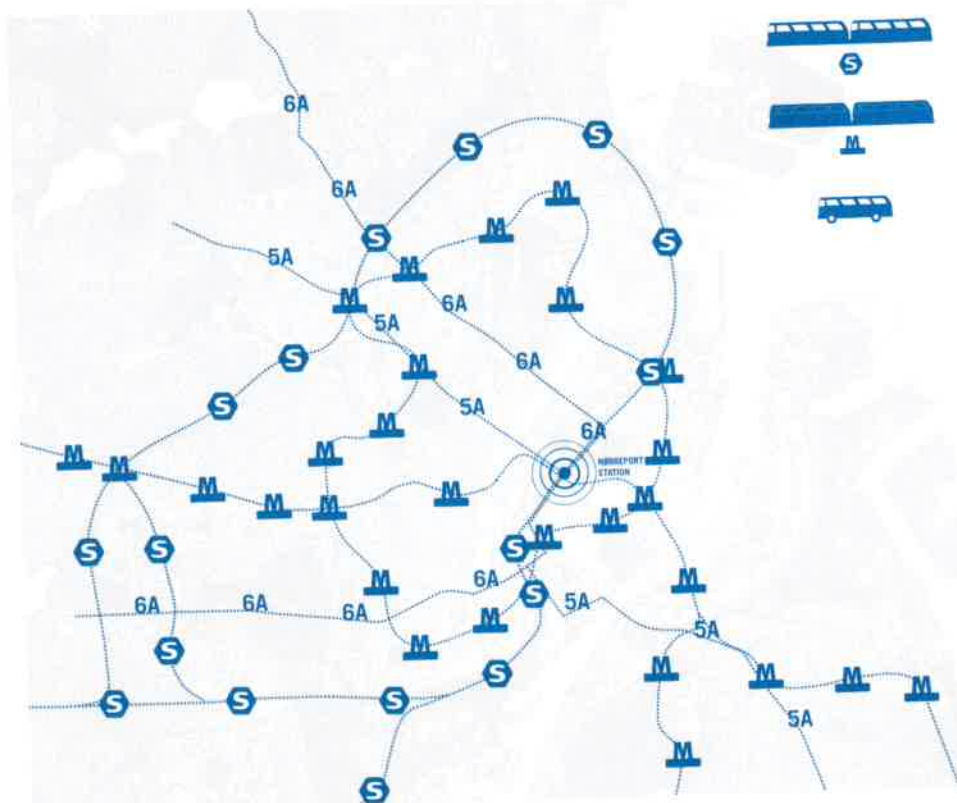


Nørreport Station:

Public infrastructure is public space!

Nørreport Station is the busiest train station in Denmark, with more than 250,000 people bustling through it daily. Since the 60s, the station has developed into a vast and chaotic intersection in the middle of the city. The idea behind the new station was to give Nørreport back to the people by reorganizing the flow and the infrastructural hierarchy of the space. Imagine how people would naturally move if they were released from the constraints of cars, bicycle stands and traffic lights. This study became the basis for the new station, which provides an open and efficient public space designed specifically for the needs of the people using it. The new station is not only a station, but an urban landscape for people. It transforms Copenhagen's busiest space into a single unified flow and becomes an integrated part of the pulsating city around it.

Nørreport Station is a historical public transport hub and the busiest station in Denmark, with roughly 250,000 people and 20,000 bicycles bustling through it daily.



Public transportation: train, Metro, and bus routes.



Cyclist density.



Nørreport Station 1918.



Nørreport Station 1950.

Before the car invasion in the 60s, Nørreport was a lively space for people. The station later became a chaotic distribution line of trams, cars and buses, neglecting pedestrians and cyclists.

Nørreport is a historical part of Copenhagen and is meaningful to many people. The proposal to renew the station sparked a public debate about the structure and modernization of the city in general.



Søren Ulrik Thomsen.
Danish Poet.

"When I see in the plans for the renovated Nørreport that the part of Nørre Voldgade which is closest to the city centre is to be closed off to motor traffic and replaced by a 'safe' pedestrian zone, I fear that the kettle will go off the boil in favour of a lazy fog of people tottering around in flip-flops and soft-serve ice cream."

"It takes some traffic for the great festival of the city to really pick up steam: I love the noisy throng of automobiles, bikes, buses, lorries, taxis – as well as pedestrians running red lights and jumping for their lives. If you're hanging out on a barstool by the window at Café Dolores, you can physically see the release of pressure when commuters just burst out of the underground. And, yes, it smells of urine, and rusty bikes are piling up, and you're constantly accosted by toothless beggars and busybodies world-improvers while fast food wrappers flutter around your feet, of course they do, given that we're in the middle of a hurricane and not in the prim comfort of the parlour. Nørreport is too much, but anything less would be too little. The place is not meant for lingering, just for sensing the rush for the minute and a half that it takes to pass.

When I see in the plans for the renewed Nørreport that the part of Nørre Voldgade which is closest to the city centre is to be closed off to motor traffic and replaced by a 'safe' pedestrian zone, I fear that kettle will go off the boil, in favour of a lazy fog of people tottering around in flip-flops and soft-serve ice cream. And when I read in the same text that the area is to be planted with trees (and moss, go figure) in order to create 'an inspiring city space', all I can think is: Oh, come off it! Nørreport is an inspiring city space, a paved lightning strike of a transit zone in which, thank God, no moss grows and which neither is nor should be recreational, but which is nevertheless only a few steps away from as many as three parks. And if you walk to the platform and get on an S-train, after seven

minutes, you'll be seeing green all the way from here to the west coast. Why is the word 'green' so sacrosanct that all arguments must cease whenever it is brought up, and why can't we have one small piece of compact urbanity in Denmark, a country which, with this one small exception, is already one giant lawn? Remember that in this country we really only have four or five proper cities, only one of which is a big city, and that in this one big city there are only a few places where the energy explodes and the atmosphere is condensed into the truly metropolitan, the way we know it from places like Tottenham Court Road in London, Belleville in Paris, or Union Square in New York. Nørreport is one place like that. As we know now, from other ever-so-well-designed new building projects, an urban atmosphere is not the sort of thing you can plan for, but something which, over the course of many years and thanks to the fortunate confluence of a thousand more or less random factors, might – just might – emerge and grow on its own."

From the essay "Tribute to Nørreport" from photographer Klaus Holting's book, "Nørreport Station".



Ritt Bjerregaard.
Former Lord Mayor of Copenhagen.

"The area around Nørreport is in need of radical revitalization in a process that tackles bicycle parking and traffic issues to create a train station and an urban space that is a pleasant experience for people to use on an everyday basis."

Statement from the competition brief in 2009.

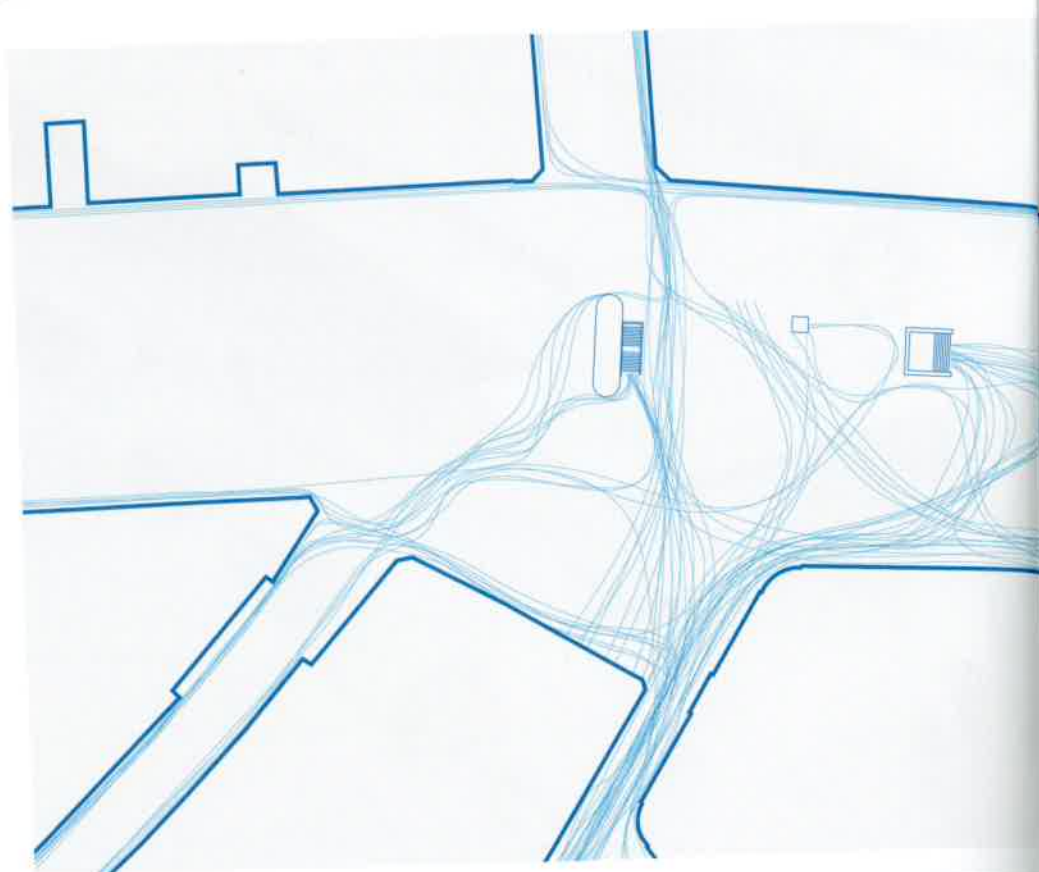


Nørreport Station, 2007.

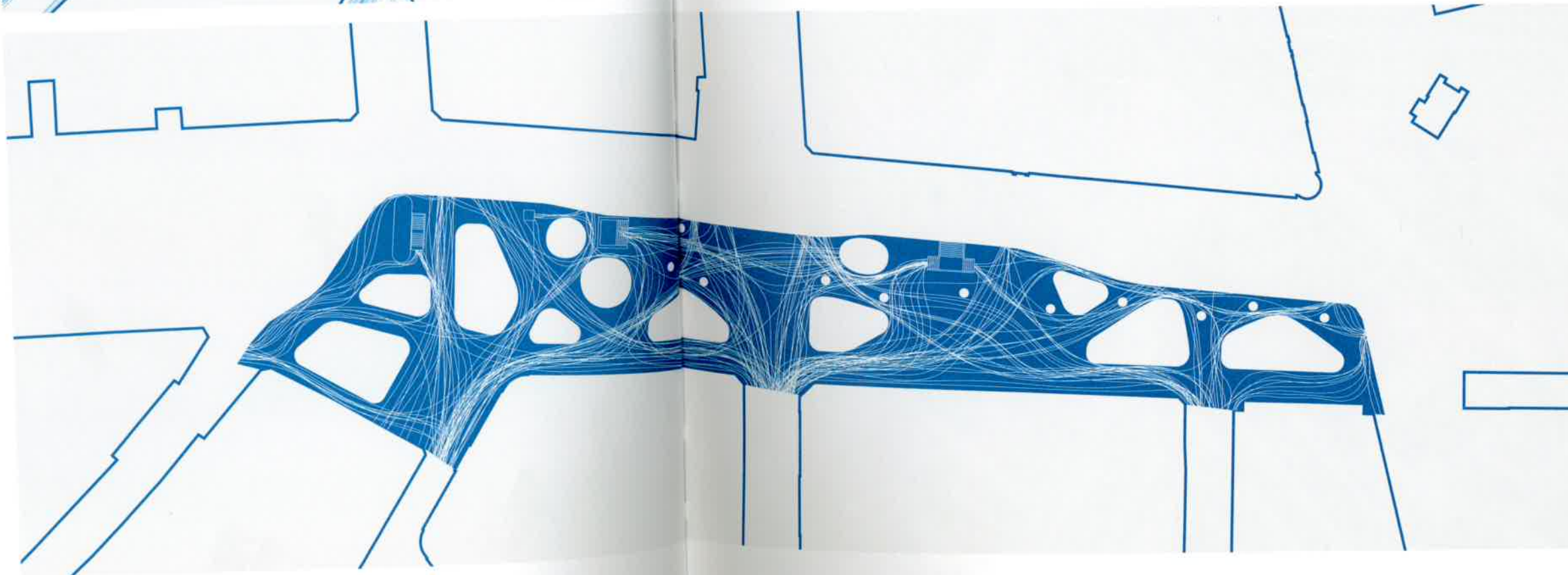


In wintertime, the station showed that it has a voice and a life of its own by revealing the organic pathways drawn on its snowy surface. The pathways, created by people's movement in and around the station, clearly showed us where there was a need for passages, shelter and bicycle storage.

pedestrian flow was the design parameter for the Nørreport Station. The distances to the underground forms became the starting point of the new station design, they were fixed and could not be moved. A study was conducted to determine how people moved to and from these entrances. When mapped, the movements formed organic curves of flow across urban space.

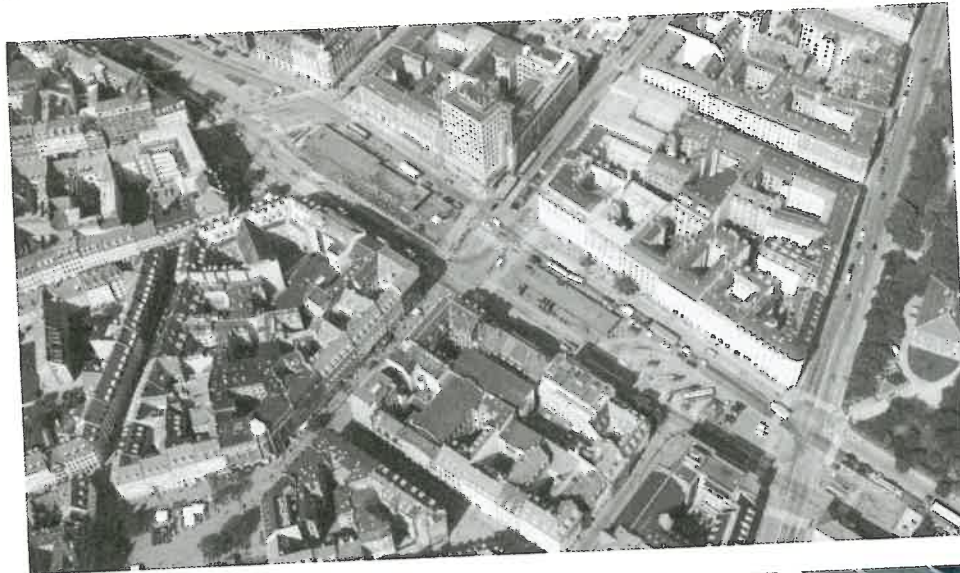


The station elements were arranged in between the main flow lines to make the best use of areas with heavy traffic. This provides optimal access to bicycle parking, kiosks, toilets, and ticket stands without disrupting the natural flow of movement.

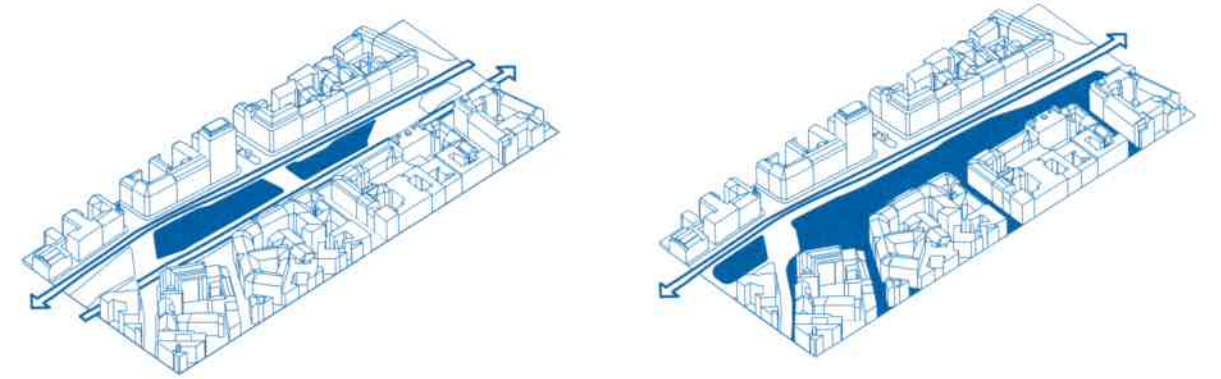
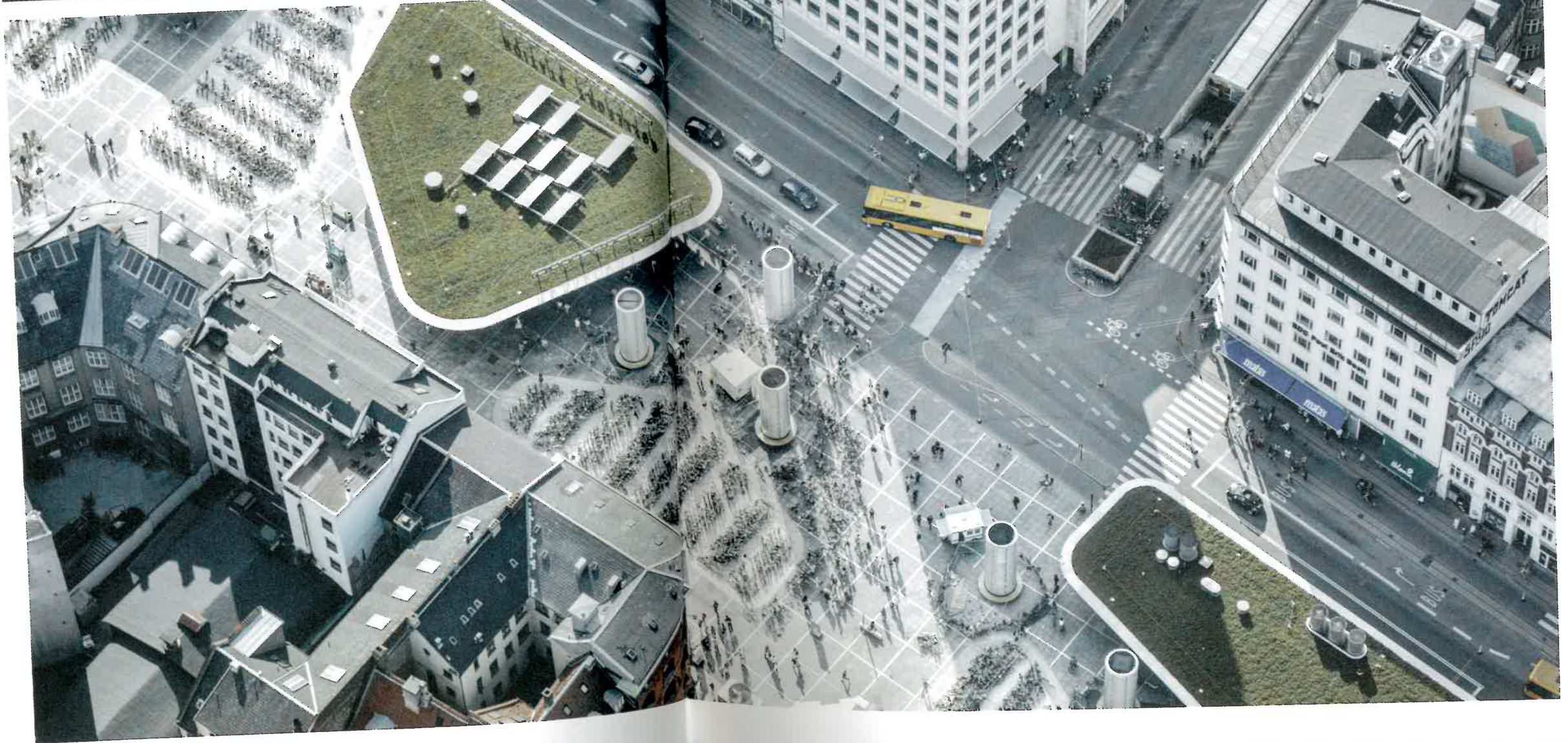




Two busy roads used to seal Nørreport off from the rest of the city like an isolated island in a chaotic traffic space.



Reorganizing the traffic of cars towards the north provided the station with an extended public space and a new connection to the medieval city to the south.



Nørreport before.

Nørreport after.



A station becomes an urban space

Nørreport Station is an anchor point for infrastructure in Copenhagen, but it does not have a spectacular tower, a clear centre, or a main entrance. It is a different kind of station – a completely open space consisting of variations of organic suspended roofs and pathways that fluently integrate with the city around it. It is a space of constant flow that one gradually becomes part of as one moves

with the stream of people to and from the many underground platforms.

The transparency and clarity of the station is created by lowering the bicycle parking into the surface and by emphasizing the ventilation towers as free-standing light sculptures and information columns. All functions and stairs related to the platforms below are placed together under large, hovering roof structures.

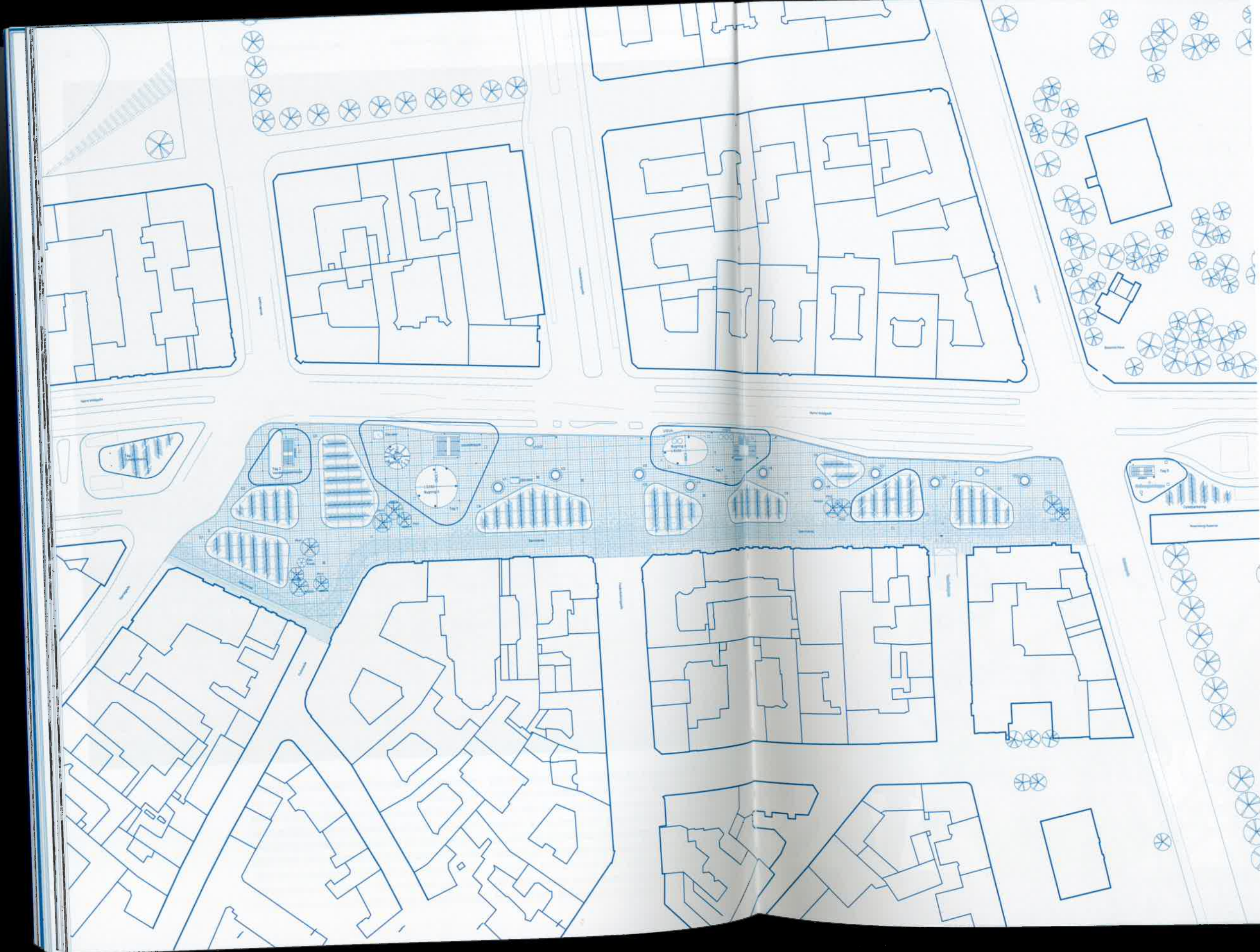


The compact city blocks on both sides of the station clearly define Nørreport as a public space. It is a much-needed open expanse in one of the densest parts of the city. The views along the tree rows, the underground infrastructure, and the interlacing urban spaces invite people to flow through the station and out into the city. The programmatic elements on the surface are strategically arranged and designed to provide unobstructed

movement throughout the urban space and down to the platforms.

The roofs hover like a cluster of clouds atop the individual station elements. In some places, they provide cover for round glass buildings containing kiosks and public toilets. In others, they shelter the staircases leading down to the underground platforms or cover some of the many bicycles parked at the far end of the station.

Nørreport was once a difficult place to navigate – a traffic junction where one had to wait patiently for all the cars and buses to pass. Now it functions as an important public space where pedestrians have reclaimed priority, and the cars have to drive around.





Lars Brandt.
Daily manager at Nørreport Bodega since 2013.

"Nørreport is a place where you're in transit, in motion, and people tend to be very purposeful when they come here, but if Nørrebro is to be perceived as a city space, you need places to sit down and watch life pass by."

"Generally, we've been lucky with the transformation. Nørreport works well as a whole, and the choice of materials is amazing. I like the simplicity of the project, and I think it shows a lot of solidarity that they have chosen to preserve some of the history of the place, with the old telephone kiosk and the original typography.

The renovation itself has been hugely chaotic. It was a rough period, but all is well that ends well.

Nørreport is one of Denmark's main traffic hubs, and for that reason, the people who come here are a mixed bag. We have a lot of regulars, but we also get a large number of passers-by.

Nørreport is a place where you're in transit, in motion, and people tend to be very purposeful when they come here, but if Nørrebro is to be perceived as a city space, you need places to sit down and watch life pass by. Our bodega is one of the few places with outdoor seating, and when the sun is out, people come pouring in. At the moment, most people drift over to Israels Plads, if they're planning to stay out a little longer. I often find that people have some waiting time between trains, and they're looking for a place to kill that time.

One of the strengths of the new Nørreport is that no matter where you stand, you can get a sense of the entire area.

Therefore, we're a little worried about the current situation, where people are starting to set up stalls, cluttering the city space. It's a little too much county fair for my liking. What's next? Are we going to have a carousel or a roller coaster? I'm surprised that more thought is not put into the temporary stalls. Everything was just beginning to

look so nice and suddenly, some guy comes along and sets up shop, a straight-up eyesore which ruins the whole idea of transparency in the city space.

I don't really feel that anything from the old Nørreport is missing. It had gotten much too run down. Copenhagen has changed – a lot more of us are taking the bicycle, and you had to address that situation. It's a completely different time than it was back in the 60's when I went to school here. You had to make some changes.

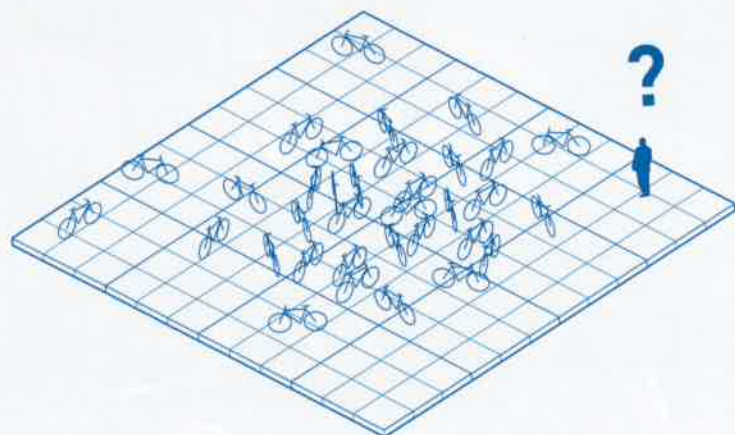
Earlier on, they tried placing the bike racks one on top of the other, but it eventually became clear that the upper rack was never used. It was a genius move to lower the racks instead, as it's created a lot more space and a better view.

We still have a problem with traffic, however. Both motorists and bicyclists have a fairly anarchistic approach to traffic and the way you get around. They park wherever they want to and they drive against traffic in one-way streets. Maybe people haven't fully adapted to the idea of Nørreport as a city space. People get that you're not allowed to park on Strøget (pedestrian zone and the main shopping street in Copenhagen), but they don't understand that this place has, in fact, also become a pedestrian zone.

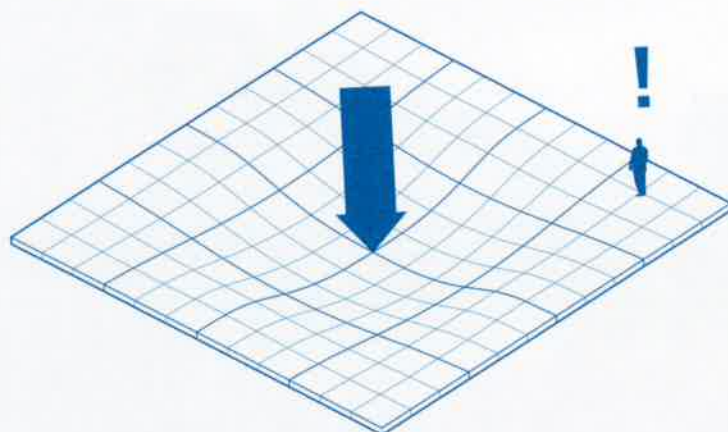
It is a good thing that they're trying to limit car traffic in the city, but it's a difficult balance to strike. Some of the area's residents can't even park their own cars in the streets where they live, and I think that's where things are starting to get a little problematic."



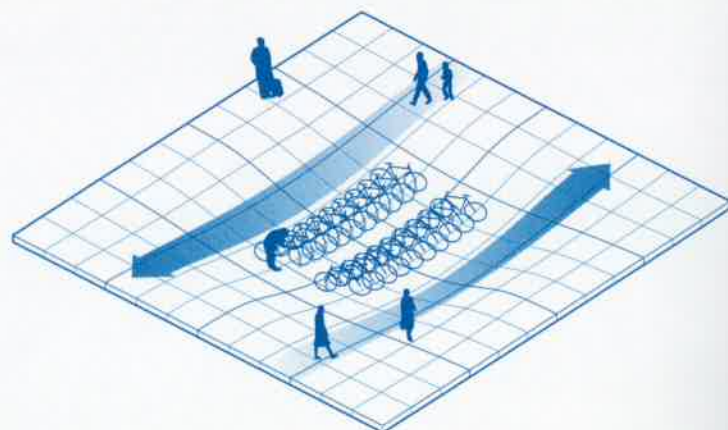
organize thousands
cles in a dense urban
while avoiding clutter
esores?



solution was to place
bicycles in well-defined
s slightly lowered into the
nd, as sunken "bicycle
s".



in this way, the bicycles have
their designated space and are
less visually obstructive. The
stands keep the bicycles con-
tained and discourage the users
from expanding the outer edges
of the parking areas.



Lagoon:



2500 bicycles circular set-up
- tube circles.



265 bicycles
325 square metres, 1.2
square metres per bicycle.

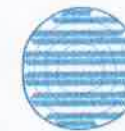


293 bicycles
327 square metres,
1.1 square metres per bicycle.

Lagoon depth: 0.5 metre.



2568 bicycles circular set-up
1368 - perpendicular
1200 - mixed



293 bicycles
327 square metres,
1.1 square metres per bicycle.

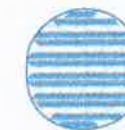
Tilt and steps:



2500 bicycles, circular set-up
- peak islands



230 bicycles
327 square metres, 1.4
square metres per bicycle.



290 bicycles
327 square metres,
1.2 square metres per bicycle.

Ramp depth: 0.2m



180 bicycles
211 square metres,
1.3 square metres per bicycle.

Ramp:



2432 bicycles, perpendicular
- tube strap.



170 bicycles
211 square metres, 1.2
square metres per bicycle.



180 bicycles
211 square metres,
1.3 square metres per bicycle.

Variation: short and steeper ramp.
Depth: 0.2 metre.



2503 bicycles,
angular set-up - row.



201 bicycles
296 square metres,
1.3 square metres per bicycle.

Multiple options were tested for
how to efficiently arrange bicy-
cles and still create high-quali-
ty urban spaces around them.

The bicycle beds are arranged to accommodate the flow of people passing through Nørreport every day.



From bicycle parking to "bicycle beds"

The cyclists are a high priority at Nørreport Station. In the stream of people passing through the station area, efficient and orderly bicycle parking is situated in small clearly defined islands. These areas are strategically placed according to the flow of bicycles from the surrounding streets. Bicycle parking is not tucked away out of sight but forms a beautiful and integrated part of the streetscape.

The bicycle parking area at Nørreport stands out as a cluster of dense gardens of small light columns. These provide natural pauses in the passage across the dynamic landscape. Like flowerbeds in the park, the bicycle parking is lowered 30–50 centimetres into the surface of the ground. They appear as little pockets on the square, where one can easily and comfortably park a bicycle before moving on.

When the bicycles are parked in the sunken bicycle islands, they offer a clear indication of where to park and where to walk. At the same time, the lowered bicycle section provides a calm visual expression; the bicycles become less dominant, and one has a clear view across the entire plaza.

The bicycle stands are singular, free-standing columns that are placed into the pavement of the overall grid. The circular columns mirror the rounded expressions found in the rest of the station design. The bike stands are arranged at varying distances to make room for the diverse selection of bicycles used in the city, from slender racing bikes to larger Christiania cargo bikes.



Nørreport is designed specifically for people – based on observations of the users' movement patterns. But how do these same people experience the results? What is the public verdict for our public space?



Magnus, 19 and Gro, 23.
Going on a student trip.

"It's nice that there are more exits and more space. Back in the day, it could get a little claustrophobic during rush hour, when everyone was packed in, nose to elbow. The spreading of the various pavilions across the area makes it much more transparent and easier to get around, and it has also made Nørreport softer and more open. The space has opened up, and that makes Nørreport a pleasant place to be."

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The design of the new Nørreport stands in contrast to the beautiful old buildings around it,

but it would have been strange, anyway, to design Nørreport to blend in with the old buildings, since you'd never be able to capture the soul of the old stuff. The new Nørreport is starting to develop its own soul and personality, and it feels like a natural part of Copenhagen.

We often use Nørreport as a meeting place and a place to hang out, and we have had a hard time finding a place to be, when so much of the focus is on commuting and transit."



Gunnar, 84.
Just arrived from the S-Train.

"I think it is truly lovely what has happened at Nørreport. They should have done this a long time ago. You've got plenty of space, and it's good to move some of the traffic away. It is much easier to find your way around and it looks much better. I really think the place has been done justice."

Nørreport may look a little futuristic, but when it has been done this well, I don't mind."



Noël, 60.
Passing by on the way to Torvehallerne (covered market a block away from the station).

"There is a tendency all over town to build everything in concrete. It looks nice here but also uniform, and the materials are cold and stand-offish. It needs some greenery. [...] I think we were much better at building in the old days. The historic neighbourhoods have way more charm with their beautiful details and warm materials. Today we build too fast, and everything is about money."

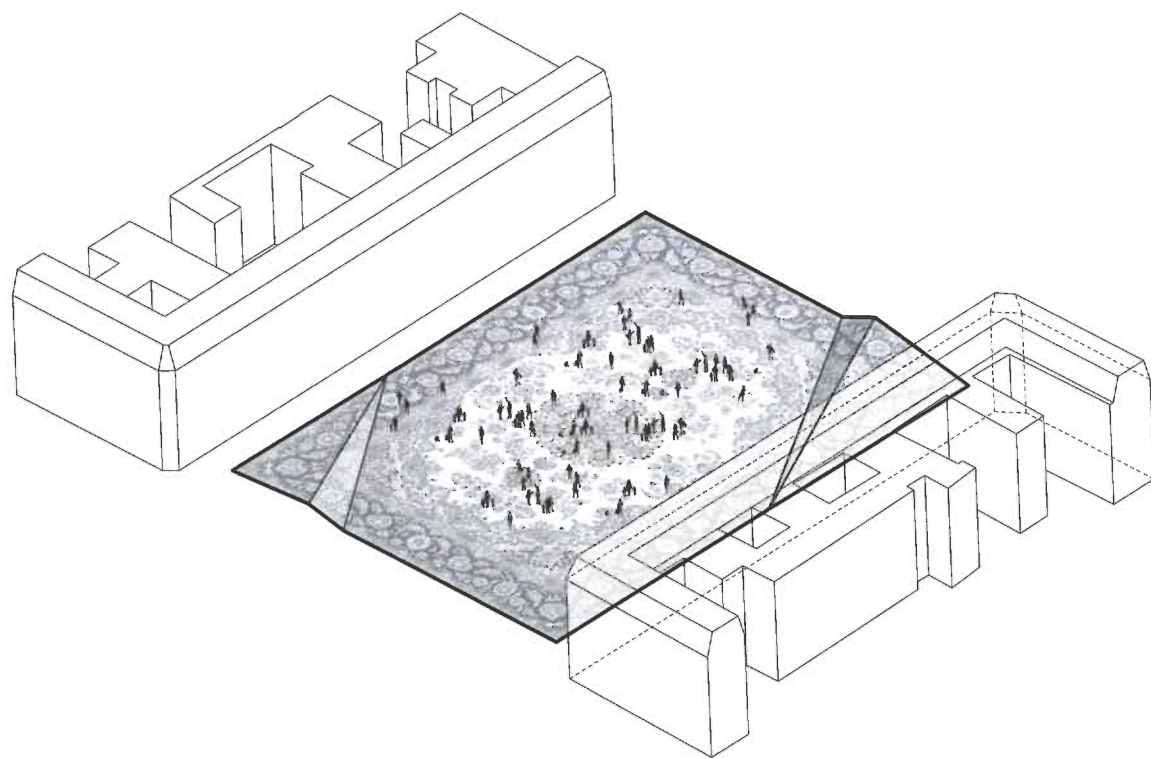


Kenan and Oliver, 35 and 9 months.
Enjoying the sun while waiting for mom.

"Nørreport has a spaceship-like quality and there is something futuristic about the place. But these are the things that make it feel lighter. The roofs are raised high and the façades are made in glass. This makes Nørreport seem open and gives it a certain lightness and brightness. It's really not bad."

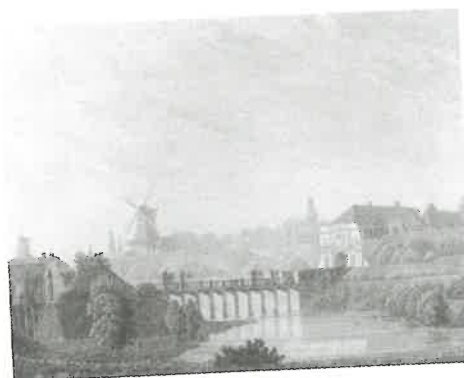
I can barely remember what Nørreport used to be like, but then I didn't spend much time here and only saw the place in transit. Back then I couldn't see Nørreport as a place I would have wanted to spend any time in, but now I can and I do, sometimes. Nørreport has opened up, and because there are few walls blocking the eye, I have a good overview and I can see what's going on."

"I can barely remember what Nørreport used to be like, but then I didn't spend much time here and only saw the place in transit. Back then I couldn't see Nørreport as a place I would have wanted to spend any time in, but now I can and I do, sometimes."



Israels Plads: Copenhagen's biggest urban carpet

The history of Israels Plads reflects the history of Copenhagen's transformations. This central plaza was once where the city ended in a ring of protective fortifications. As the city gradually extended, the plaza became a vibrant market square – until the 50s, when it was turned into a lifeless car park. With the renovation the idea is to celebrate the significance and the history of Israels Plads and revitalize it, turning it into a vibrant, diverse plaza for all kinds of people and activities. The surface of the new plaza is elevated above the existing street like a new urban carpet. It hovers over the many cars that used to dominate Israels Plads and are now placed in the basement. The cars are literally swept under the rug of the new urban living room.



City fortification 1200–1857.



Grønttorvet Market Square 1889–1954.



Parking 50s–90s.

From fortification to public plaza

As Copenhagen extended beyond the original ring of fortifications, Israels Plads was defined by a structure of city blocks that separated it from the Botanical Garden and a continuous green structure of embankments.

Since then, the plaza has changed function several times. Until 1958, the plaza was home of Grønttorvet, Copenhagen's lively vegetable market. When the market moved away, a number of smaller vegetable and flower stands remained. But with the changing mentality of the 50s and 60s – when droves of people who had moved out of the

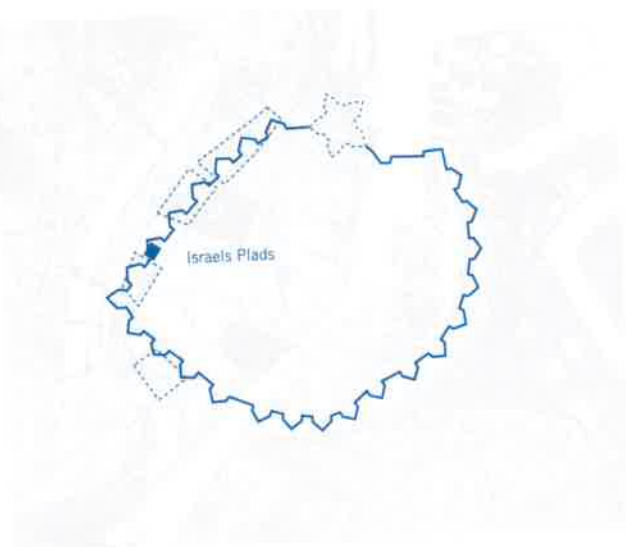
began to commute by car – the pressure to find parking spaces for the many new cars increased, and eventually, Israels Plads was turned into a huge lifeless car park.

In 1973, the car park on Israels Plads was turned into an underground parking facility, and the plaza was transformed into a football field. In 2011, there was another initiative to revitalize the square. Two covered market halls were opened in the northern end of the plaza, revitalizing the historical role of Israels Plads as a modern, trendy vegetable market. The market returned to its origins.

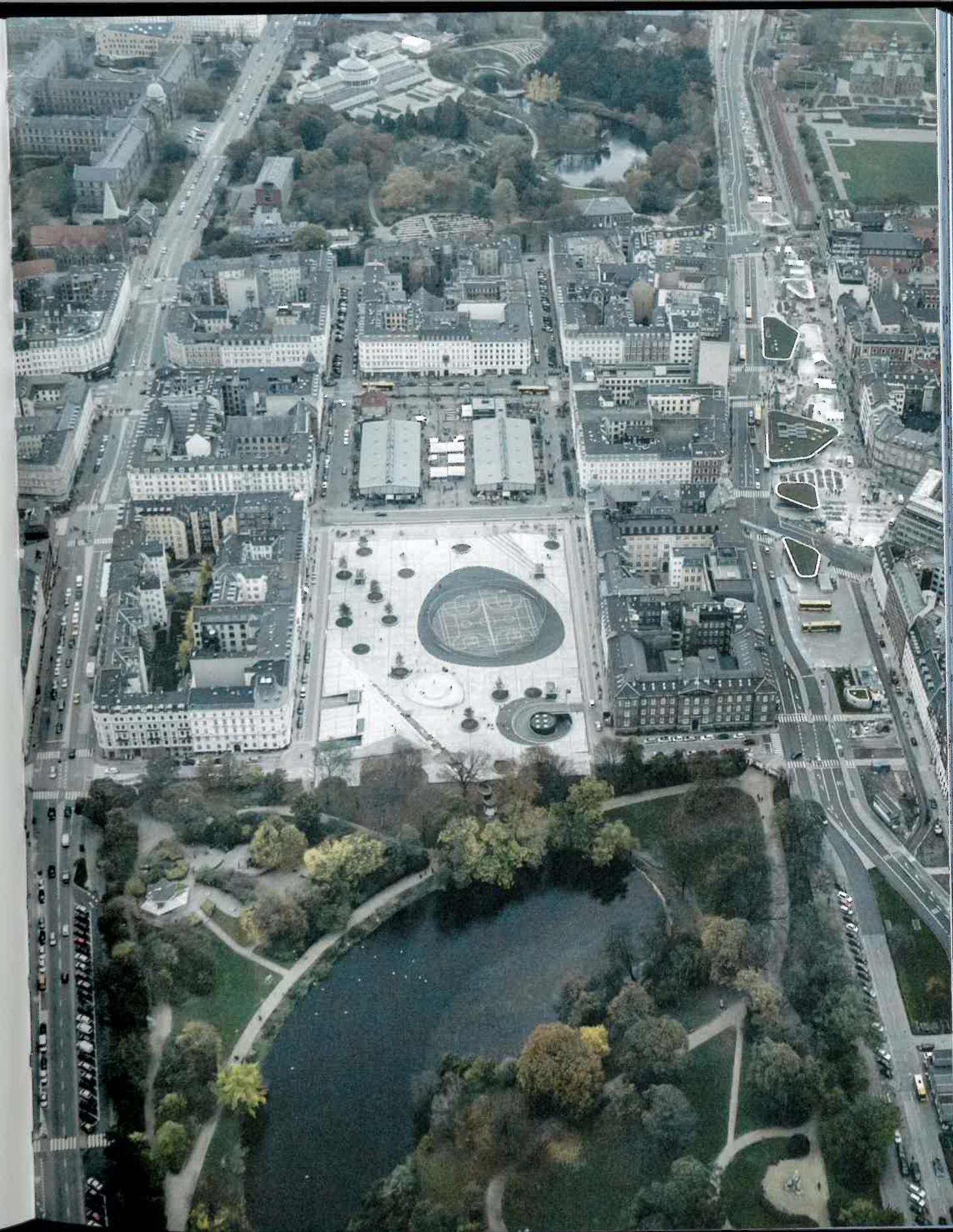


Plaza for leisure and sport 2015.

Seen from above, the historical layers of the city are revealed. Israels Plads was once a part of Copenhagen's sculptural ring of fortifications. Today some of them are revealed as distinctly shaped parks and hills dotted around the city as parts of a historical puzzle.



The three-dimensional elements of the new design are a reference to and a modern interpretation of the green sculptural remains from the historical fortifications.

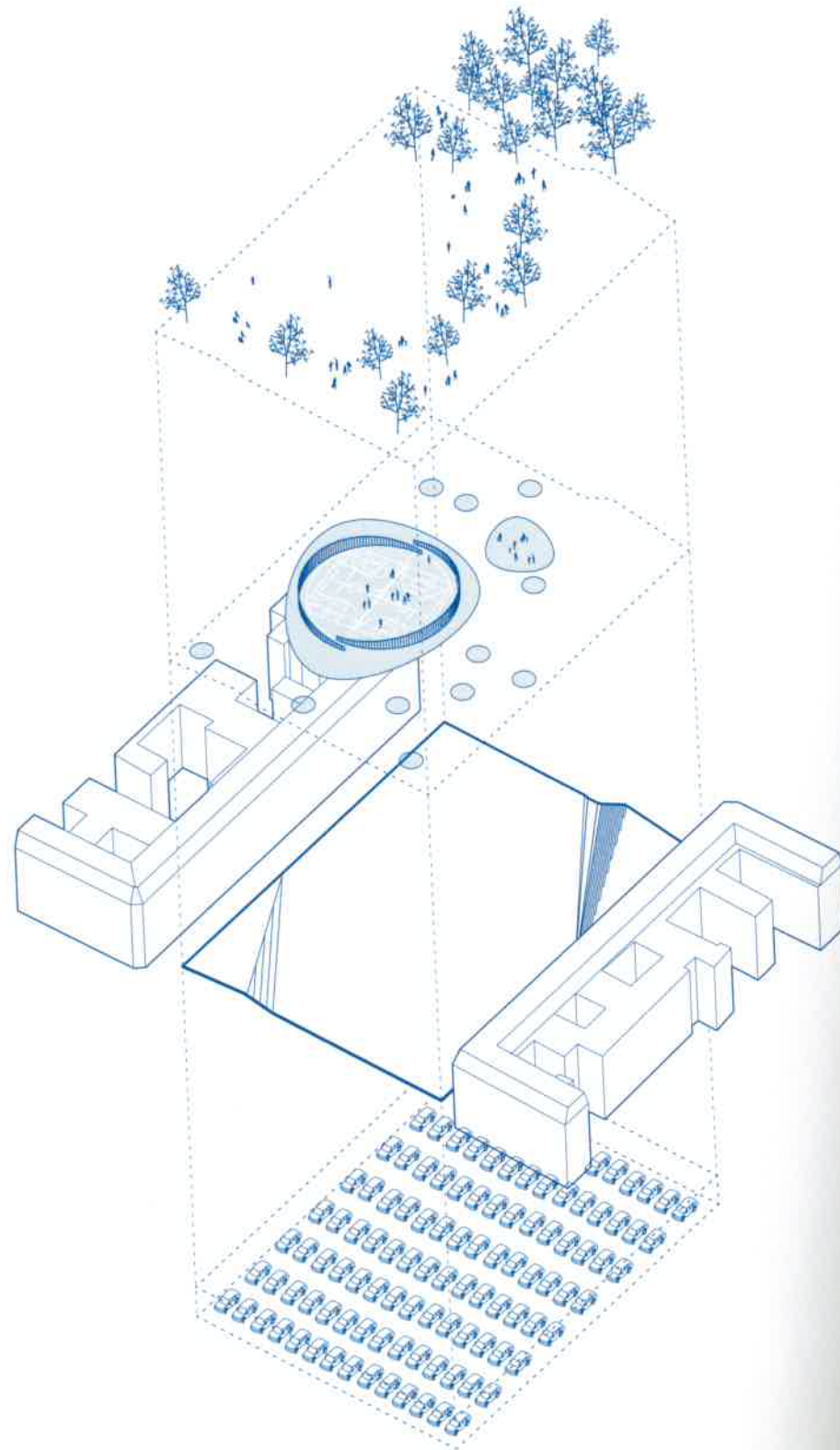


A few of the large trees from the neighbouring park continue into the plaza, creating a transition between city and nature.

The plaza is programmed as a diverse public space for leisure, culture, activity, and public events.

A new urban surface is folded over the former car park to define it as a new public plaza.

The cars that used to dominate the area are placed in an underground car park, leaving the street level free for people.



Israels Plads: an urban carpet of activity

Israels Plads is Copenhagen's new plaza, a place that unfolds and invites people in. The plaza is designed as a folded urban surface floating above ground and thus defining the public space. The plaza works as a transition between two worlds, the city and the park. The landscape character of the neighbouring park continues into the plaza in the form of organic patterns of trees.

Towards the east and west, the plaza is raised up and folded to provide niches. In addition, the plaza has a sculptural expression that refers to its historical past as part of the fortifications.

The surface or carpet functions as a large urban playground and a space for activity. On the surface, unique facilities have been created to generate inspiration and space for many different kinds of activity. For example, the cut-outs feature round bench formations under the tree crowns, where people can observe the life unfolding on the plaza. There is a green oasis next to the neighbouring school, and generous lowered areas for ball games and play are designed in rounded formations.

past, Israels Plads was a market square – a social place for all Copenhageners. Today it has once again become a public place and the playground for three different schools.



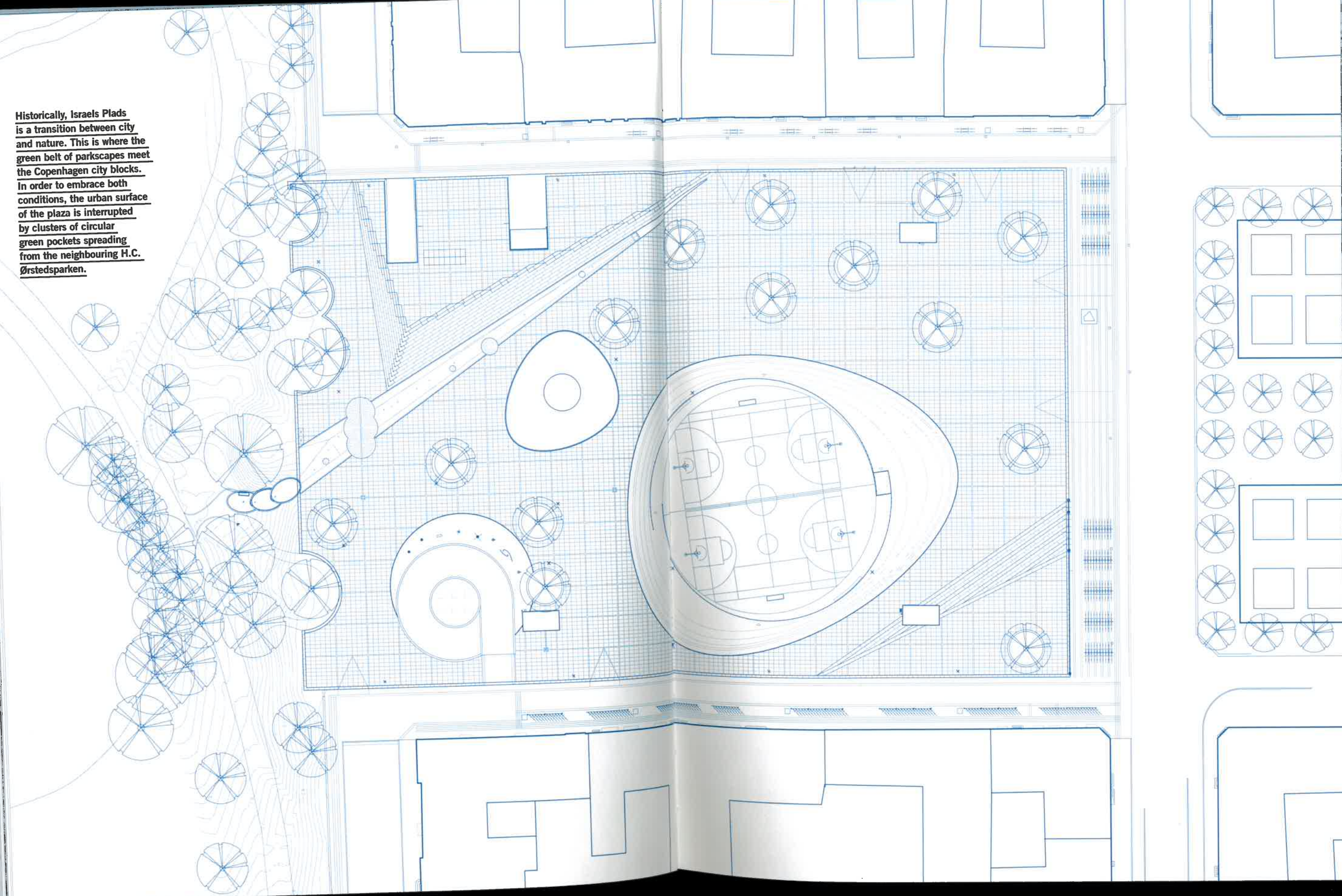
Folk dancing at Israels Plads, 1975.

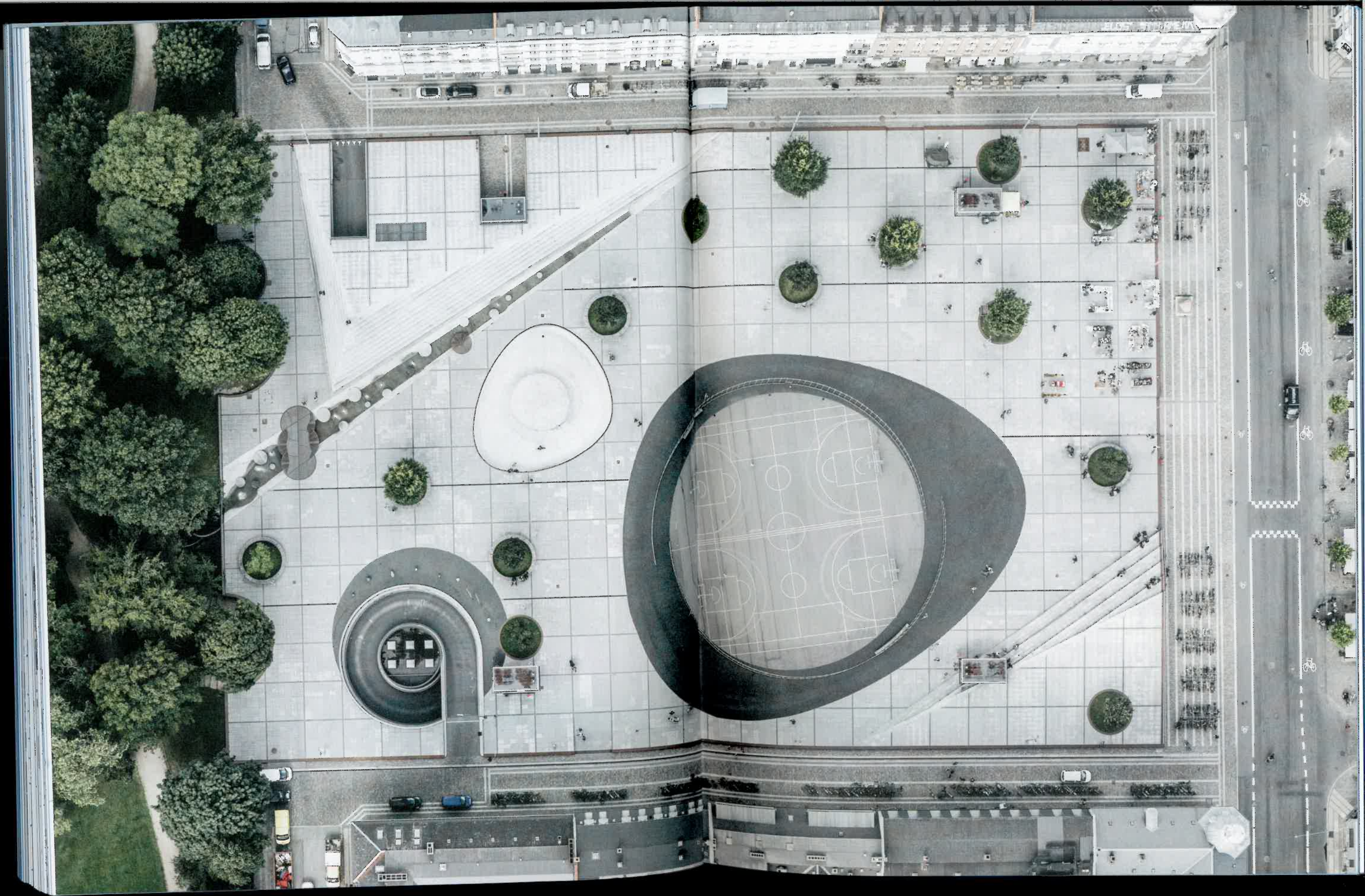


Vegetable market at Israels Plads, 1952.

In the 1950s, hundreds of vegetable stands occupied the plaza. Grønttorvet was the busiest grocery market in the city – a very lively place.

Historically, Israels Plads is a transition between city and nature. This is where the green belt of parkscapes meet the Copenhagen city blocks. In order to embrace both conditions, the urban surface of the plaza is interrupted by clusters of circular green pockets spreading from the neighbouring H.C. Ørstedsparken.





For architects, social media have become an important tool for self-analysis. Is the architecture working as intended? Are people occupying it as imagined, or have new and surprising uses taken shape? This enables a wider evaluation than that provided by a distinguished architecture critic in a newspaper.



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A DIALOGUE

**WITH
JAN GEHL**

We want a city like this one!

A Dialogue with Jan Gehl

We want a city like this one!



Jan Gehl is a great inspiration. His 40 years of extensive research on life in public space offers rich insights into how to create cities for people by focusing on the relationship between the built environment and quality of life.

Gehl Architects offers expertise in the fields of architecture, urban design, and city planning based on analysis driven by Public Space Public Life Strategies, Public Space and Street Design, and Master-planning Frameworks.

Gehl Architects has participated in projects in over 50 countries and 250 cities around the world. Clients include the City of Copenhagen, New York City Department of Transportation (DOT), Melbourne City Council, Energy Foundation China, Brighton & Hove City Council in the UK, Christchurch City Council in New Zealand, and Genplan Institute of Moscow, among many others.

"We think in pictures, but pictures are two-dimensional. Their appeal is sculptural. This, however, has nothing to do with architecture. Good architecture reflects the interplay between form and life; and life is much more difficult to study than form. In a manner of speaking, you cannot simply put it on a formula. Decent architecture will only emerge when life and form merge in an appropriate manner."

DS: A lot of people still view the architect as an artist, the aesthete who knows what is attractive and what is ugly. You, however, have taken an analytical approach through the years. You consider the concrete needs of the site and the city. You look at the specifics and what is individual, something that has inspired me personally and us at Cobe as an architectural firm. Shouldn't architecture, as a whole, move away from the artistic and more toward the concrete?

Jan Gehl: There are two things that influence contemporary architecture. One is globalization and everything that comes with it. We are able to transmit pictures of what we're doing to the whole world whenever we want to, just to impress each other and to get awards or recognition. The other is the social changes we are seeing: explosive urban growth along with the demand for more housing of better quality that should preferably combine the functional with the aesthetic – though I might say, the picturesque. But it's true, that architecture has been way too focused on form. It also has something to do with our modes of communication; as an English architecture critic once put it: the photo. We think in pictures, but pictures are two-dimensional. Their appeal is sculptural. This, however, has nothing to do with architecture. Good architecture reflects the interplay between form and life; and life is much more difficult to study than form. In a manner of speaking, you cannot simply put it on a formula. Decent architecture will only emerge when life and form merge in an appropriate manner.

DS: A lot has happened during your more than forty-year career as an architect. At the start you were an outsider viewed with some degree of skepticism, because you insisted life should be studied, and that there should be a scientific, analytic approach. Nowadays a lot of people have seen the light, those who once clung to isms and viewed architecture as a strictly aesthetic discipline. Now you and your approach have been recognized around the world. But how can we take a measure of architecture, of urban space, of city planners? Evaluate life within and around buildings? How can architecture be backed by evidence used to convince our politicians that if they do things the right way, we will get better housing, institutions, towns, and even happier children, teachers, citizens? After all, what it boils down to is them.

JG: What we now know from countless studies – and I have been involved in some of them – is that the physical framework plays an incredible role in how these lives will unfold.

DS: That's why we architects play an important role, even though our profession is feeling a squeeze and the economic boundaries are getting more and more narrow.

"Today, Copenhagen is held up as a model all around the world. Many other major cities talk about Copenhagenizing themselves, even if many won't admit it. I had a visiting delegation from New York and as they were leaving they whispered: 'We want a city like this one!' Later they moved traffic away from Times Square and made bike paths."

JG: Absolutely! There's an old quote by Winston Churchill: "We shape our buildings, and thereafter they shape us." First we shape the cities, and then they shape us, to paraphrase him, but the message is still the same. In short: everything we build has significant influence on our lives and daily routines. Influence on our and our children's contentment and development. Also, on the increasing segment of elderly, who form a whole new focal point within architecture and urban planning. There were very few elderly in the towns of yesterday, but if we take Japan as an example, they account for nearly fifty percent of the population. In other words: architecture is continually confronted by new challenges we must address and find appropriate solutions for. It is every bit as dynamic as the world around us. As part of the profession we must constantly ask ourselves whether we address the problems society confronts us with.

DS: We shouldn't be too pessimistic, though, because many contemporary architects will agree with your analysis, especially here in Copenhagen, a city that in my lifetime alone has seen colossal change – for the better.

JG: This transformation happened mainly due to qualified feedback on the things that were built. It's a fact. A former Copenhagen mayor once wrote: If we had not had surveys about the life of the city, from schools of architecture and others, we politicians would never have had the inclination to modernize Copenhagen towards becoming one of the best cities in the world. Surveys about what has worked and what has not have given them the tools for making bold decisions. When some have opposed them and said we should have more roads and cars in the city, politicians were able to put analyses on the table, offering documentation that biking and mass transport make traffic more efficient. These types of surveys are an absolute necessity for our politicians. It enables them to weigh options against one another and carry out what could be called enlightened politics. This practice has also spread to other parts of the world.

DS: I think there's something striking about Copenhagen. If you've seen the Acropolis in Athens once, then you've basically been there. Copenhagen, on the other hand, wants people, especially tourists, to return and experience the life and atmosphere of the city. It's not just one structure that's iconic or the main attraction of Copenhagen; rather, it's the city as a whole.

JG: For many years there have been two ways to market – or brand, as we now call it – a city. One way was to get a celebrity architect to design a characteristic or unusual building, a signature structure.

DS: Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, for instance.

JG: Precisely! The Bilbao Effect. The other way is to focus on the city as a whole. It's been the case in Barcelona, Lyon, Strasbourg, Copenhagen ... To put it bluntly: Bilbao got some nice postcards out of it. Residents of the city might go to the museum once a year; tourists spend a couple of days there; whereas in the cities that have focused on the larger whole, architecture means something to everybody, every single day. The transformation stands out in Copenhagen, but it is the result of a long struggle involving traffic versus urban lifestyle. Today, Copenhagen is held up as a model all around the world. Many other major cities talk about Copenhagenizing themselves, even if many won't admit it. I had a visiting delegation from New York and as they were leaving they whispered: "We want a city like this one!" Later they moved traffic away from Times Square and made bike paths. Now New York has established more than 50 spots with new urban spaces to allow more room for an urban lifestyle.

DS: Why is it important for architects to become involved in these kinds of processes?



Gehl Architects case on Times Square – from traffic jam to open plaza for people.

JG: Because in addition to all the changes we encounter in society and as people, there is a lot that is constant and permanent, things we architects know quite a bit about. Many times I have browsed through my book, *Life Between Buildings*, which is more than fifty years old, and in which I give an elementary depiction of homo sapiens – humans – and comportment in the city, where we like to be ...

DS: The eye needs something to look at. I remember that sentence as if I'd read it this morning.

JG: ... Exactly. I've often leafed through what's now a fairly old book to determine whether anything should be updated or added, and frankly: there really isn't anything. That's because we're talking about homo sapiens. You find the same species that is about this tall and has these-and-those senses manoeuvring around the city. Sure, there are different forms of cultural expression; some women wear head scarves. But when it comes down to it, we all share the same biological history, from one corner of the world to the other. So there are lots of things that are elementary and universal, the same in Japan, Greenland and down in Australia. Many people claim digital developments will change all that, that cyberspace will make public space obsolete, and that in the future we will manoeuvre through the city with our faces glued to our smart phones. But all studies from all parts of the world indicate the opposite; that is, that in the thirty years we have been witnessing digital developments, we have also experienced an increased focus on public space.

DS: So physical closeness will become even more important in the digital age, as a counterweight to increased insular behaviour?

JG: To be sure; much much more important. The mayor of Bogotá once said to me that it was a bit absurd how we know more about the living conditions of mountain

