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# Urban Social Sustainability - Case Study; Gellerupparken—Denmark

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## Abstract

Urban social sustainability represents a more specific part of urban development. Citizen involvement is a vital element of any future urban social development and helps to maintain the vision of human and diverse cities because it provides vibrant and sustainable cities in which everyone has a seat and can speak. Gellerupparken, as something new, also meets all five criteria for when an area is a ghetto during a given year. The criteria generally consist of income, ethnic origin, level of education, crime, and employment. The study's aim is to present an objective means, to the reactivation of a passive multicultural zone in Aarhus city of Denmark to integrate it in the social life city by using the appreciative inquiry method by an introduction of new city functions. The study will assume the effect of sustainability in an urban social area, in a case study using the application of the pedagogical method, namely, the “appreciative inquiry” method.

**Keywords:** urban social sustainability, attractive public space, space activation

## 1. Introduction

Developing sustainable cities is currently one of the greatest global challenges. Cities face a wide range of social, environmental, and economic challenges that require change. The majority of Western cities possess unique cultural and architectural qualities, strong social inclusion forces, and exceptional economic development opportunities. Cities are centers of knowledge and sources of growth and innovation [1]. As the population influx places new demands on the physical structures, residents, and city management, the need to think across disciplines and sectors arises. At this stage, the use of analytical interpretation is required, which is a sophisticated analysis that inputs evidence for all parameters involved in the investigation process [2]. The keynote speaker “Jan Gehl’s” message was that human beings can only achieve sustainable urban development if we start with the people living in cities. A human being can build high-rise buildings with green roofs, green walls, and high-energy efficiency [3], but that does not necessarily mean that the cities are pleasant to live in [4]. Green sustainability, as a broad concept, must have a strong social element [5]. Additionally, Gehl pointed out that if many children reside in a big city—and you see them in the urban space—it is often an excellent city to live in, a livable city [3, 6]. According to an article published by Emma Lauridsen, there are now 29 residential areas in Denmark that meet the new ghetto criteria, which is eight more than last year. Three of the areas are located in the municipality of Aarhus, which are the same as last year, namely, Gellerupparken or “Toveshøj, Bispehaven,” and “Skovgårdsparken.” One of the

new features of this year's ghetto list is that both Gellerupparken or "Toveshøj" and "Bispehaven" are on a whole new list of "hard ghettos." A hard ghetto area is defined as a residential area that has been on the ghetto list for the past 4 years. It also entails a requirement to submit a development plan by June 1 of the next year that shows how the residential area should meet the need to reduce the proportion of public housing to a maximum of 40% [7]. It is necessary to develop a concept for improving the formation of public spaces, taking into account the complexity of the influential factors. In scientific studies, only certain aspects of this problem are considered. The urban area is the territory where the interaction between space and the person takes place, where the person's spatial behavior is formed, and this largely depends on how the person relates to this place, whether it is emotionally attractive to him.

The city becomes not just buildings, roads, parks, fences, abandoned corners, water pipes, and cable networks, but it grows as an especial interaction among citizens, contacts, social relationships, direct, and indirect communication interactions [8]. Social sustainability revolves around the human factor as a crucial prerequisite for a sustainable city and a sustainable society. The government's sustainability strategy thus describes the concept in terms of everyone participating in social development and possessing real equal opportunities, regardless of background [9]. Focused and sustained work on social sustainability helps to ensure diversity, democracy, and equality in our cities. As urban settlements have grown, the visual environment has become more monotonous and typical (the country has been faced with the task of solving the housing problem). The quality of public space—its architecture, equipment, design, as well as its level of accessibility and openness to the different needs of the residents—has a direct impact on the number of users and the quality of life in the city [9, 10]. Therefore, its features can affect residents' activation. To identify the relationship between the forms of activities favored by city residents and the features of public spaces in which they are undertaken, a binary classification has been made. The first approach divides activity spaces into formal and informal ones, while the second one categorizes the different needs of their users according to their age and physical abilities. Every effort should be made to integrate all groups, irrespective of their social and economic situation, age, gender, cultural background, and physical skills, and find a place for them in urban public spaces. Sports and recreation, thanks to the values they bring, can be a handy tool for social inclusion and integration. The design of physically activating public spaces should also constitute an expression of these values [11].

The current unsatisfactory ecological and esthetic state of many objects in the urban environment reduces the social efficiency of city spaces, which requires professional intervention, especially in the process of forming the subject-spatial environment of actively exploited public spaces [12]. They represent the nodes of the most significant social and communication activity of the population. Such spaces include, first of all, urban squares, which are quite diverse in their functional purpose. As the city develops, their existing spatial and spatial structure becomes less effective in terms of providing a comfortable, ecological environment with positive esthetic characteristics [13]. An urban area for people should be livable, safe, attractive, sustainable, and healthy [14]. This is a city where people often want to be on the street and spend time outside the home and office, where most residents can move freely on foot or by bicycle and other environmentally friendly vehicles, and where it is pleasant and comfortable to be at any time of the day. Classification and operative analysis are the leading instrumental procedures used to determine the critical thinking model, which places expectations into requests to detect whether a given right is factual or untrue [15]. Based on this concept, it is necessary to identify several criteria for a successful and high-quality public space and to lay the foundation of our research and future architectural projects:

- Pedestrian friendliness
- Visual appeal
- Original atmosphere
- The appearance of positive emotions and desire to linger in visitors
- Sociality: orientation to different user groups, a variety of social groups, activities, modes of use, functions
- Open access for all, inclusiveness
- Rich symbolic content

Buildings are profane elements that give rise to social spaces, time as an “event” in the mythological sense. Therefore, space is not exclusively the physical extension but rather the sacred place in which the individual manifests and updates itself.

### **1.1 Why is participative important?**

A participatory or participatory approach implies that experts in public spaces are architects, designers, and their end users, residents. All of them may have a different experience in using the place, habits, needs, and ideas about how this place should be, and these ideas do not always coincide with the vision of the designer. This raises some difficulties: it takes time and effort to determine how each space function, by whom and at what time of day it is in demand, what kind of people are there, and what their needs are and how they imagine the future of this space [16]. The collected data are analyzed, and project proposals are created on their basis. Despite the additional cost of time and resources, the participatory approach has several essential advantages. First, inclusion of the end user in the design process from the very beginning increases the sustainability of the project: it is more likely that people will feel a personal connection with the place and maintain it in good condition—this reduces the risk of vandalism. Second, the joint creative process helps people get to know each other, establish good neighborly relations, and form local communities [17, 18]. Third, in joint design, its participants begin to better understand the decisions that are made; they have an understanding of how the object will be used. In the long run, such projects strengthen the personal connection of people with a city or district: when people know that the city is developing with their participation and taking into account their needs and interests and when they feel a part of the local community, their perception of the whole city changes for the better—activating public space by creating public space to be more attractive. Examples of attractive spaces can be amazing gardens, squares, and museums, as well as monumental heritage buildings, which attract the public through their history but also by what they represent in memory of the city. Unfortunately, however, aggressive or rather desolate spaces are found by the present researchers because of many buildings left in comparison, which are not renovated or not restored.

A sustainable city is socially linked by the fact that there are democratic spaces where people can meet, regardless of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, and which provide the opportunity for development and accessibility for all citizens of the city [19]. When a city has many offerings for both everyday life and when something unusual happens, it becomes more vibrant and attractive—this can

also help increase the quality of life of the citizens of the city. In addition, a socially sustainable city opens up the possibility that citizens' health is supported in the form of urban spaces designed for physical activity and socializing [20]. For residents, this can help improve health but also cohesion between people who might not otherwise meet. Concurrently, an urban and residential area must be perceived as sufficiently safe and attractive that there is a healthy and natural exchange with the surroundings and that different people want to visit, stay, and settle there. Social sustainability means creating the necessary framework in the city for vulnerable groups, both in the city space itself or in the form of hostels and housing for vulnerable groups [21]. The socially sustainable city prevents the exclusion of the city's communities and ensures that the foundations of social action for vulnerable citizens are present.

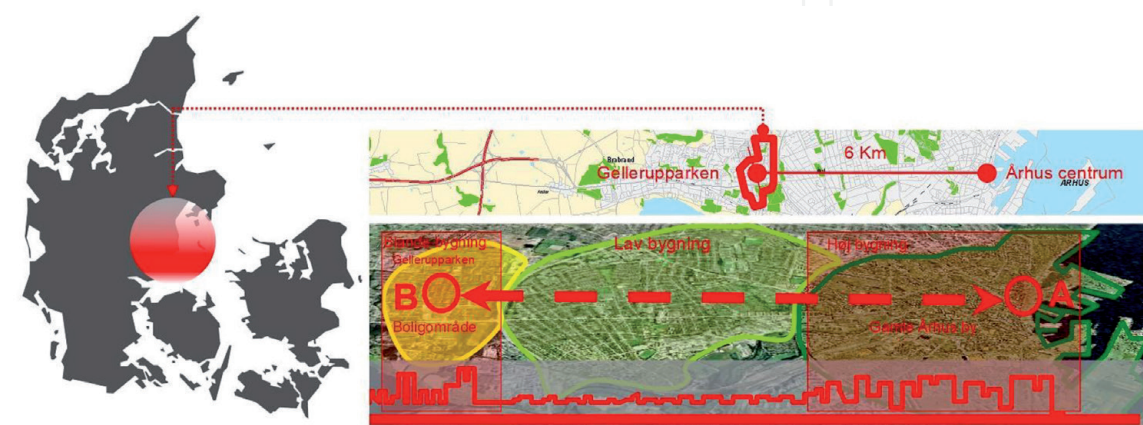
## 2. Gellerupparken zone (case study)

### 2.1 Area description

Gellerupparken is part of the large suburban carpet that surrounds old Aarhus. Its characteristics are the major roads that frame individual neighborhoods in the suburbs. The suburban environment is lost and looser, the orientation of the landscape is weak, and the sense of place is the same [22]. Gellerupparken is characterized by either having an arbitrary landscape between buildings or by having a landscape that is growing and is entirely out of proportion to the buildings. It appears as a densely packed landscape area with far too many small blind pockets and dark hooks. **Figure 1** shows the location of Gellerupparken in Aarhus city.

### 2.2 Integration of “Gellerupparken” on a large green area

Human beings have always wanted to shape nature and to be surrounded by the elements of nature (trees, shrubs, grasses, rocks, water, etc.), to harmonize them and to integrate them into the created artificial environment, which has marked the culture and traditions of the people concerned [23]. Aarhus is the country's second largest city, representing a reliable and positively charged magnet for tourists and residents from all over the region, and it neither can nor should be changed, but Gellerupparken could develop into another positive flagship in the area. Today, Gellerupparken is highly dominated by housing, and there is not much to look for other than the residents. The residents, who have at least one reason to be in the area, are looking for more life and activity over a broad front. Despite the blocks



**Figure 1.**  
*Gellerupparken in Aarhus city and placing in Denmark.*

of flats, Gellerupparken and the surrounding area is a very scenic area with a lake (perhaps with an upcoming bathing beach) and hill scenery. There is a tremendous voluntary commitment and a wide range of different associations and organizations. Additionally, two large and very diverse shopping centers could be conceived into a larger urban life-oriented whole. However, most importantly, like other residential areas, Gellerupparken has the highest strength of being an area characterized by so many different nationalities, languages, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Diversity and diversity seen as a resource are the area's distinctive features (see **Figure 2**). The potentials are thus presented to create an attractive district, where both a resident and a visitor can have many unique experiences.

### 2.3 Gellerupparken: The area's many strengths—The budding potentials

Approximately 7000 people live in Gellerupparken alone and approximately 20,000 in the whole of Aarhus West, which corresponds to a medium-sized Danish city [23]. In cities of this population size, there are far more shops, education, entertainment and entertainment than in western Aarhus, and it is, therefore, reasonable to assume that there will be more urban-like activities in this area. Such development should not be seen as an attempt to compete with Aarhus, but the offers and activities in the Gellerupparken must represent a new and exciting addition to Aarhus. Gellerupparken must utilize its strength by being one of Denmark's largest multiethnic boroughs, and this distinctive character must be exploited and made a landmark. Among immigrants and refugees in general, there is a great desire to establish themselves as independent entrepreneurs, which is also the case in Gellerupparken, where there has been a surprisingly large amount of courage and creativity in terms of entrepreneurship. There is also a tendency for entrepreneurs in Gellerupparken and the surrounding area to start spreading across several business areas so that businesses other than pizzerias and green merchants are also established. It has also been proven that a strength of this area is its different ethnic background than Danish, which can facilitate beneficial collaborations with suppliers in the country of origin.



**Figure 2.**  
*Gellerupparken design, directions, functions, and scale.*

### **3. Description of the problem**

It is essential to ensure social diversity in public residential areas so that citizens with economic, social or integration challenges do not concentrate to a large extent in specific areas or neighborhoods [24]. Therefore, efforts have been made for several years to ensure a better balance in the so-called exposed residential areas, where such imbalance is a reality. The intention of this process, through outreach, is to listen to how the civic groups representing the area believe that a citizen involvement process must take place, partly because they feel invited to have an opinion regarding this issue and partly so that they can see that they have a real impact on how a debate about urban development develops. The experience gained from this process is gathered in a recommendation for how a future process towards a citizen-involved process of urban development can look for Gellerupparken and its surrounding areas. The process must also result in a series of instructions for several specific projects that will be supported and with which people are willing to proceed. A significant factor for a successful strategy to improve the future of citizens in vulnerable residential areas is the involvement of local citizens and local anchoring of the process [25]. It is only possible to find the right strategy by asking the citizens, after which it is only possible to implement the strategy by continuing to involve, motivate, and support the local population. Therefore, it is essential for the implementation of improvements in the housing area that citizens become engaged and motivated to take responsibility for the process, a process that will be new to a large part of the citizens with different ethnic backgrounds in the area and therefore a process with significant challenges, which is very crucial for the effectiveness and sustainability of the change.

### **4. The investigative method**

In recent years, in the public debate on urban development and citizen involvement, there seems to be growing doubt as to whether the efforts to date will adequately respond to the challenges that are increasingly faced by larger cities. The criticism herein often focuses on existing efforts being reactive in the sense that they typically focus on solving acute problems, whereby the area's resources are often ignored, and the long-term development perspective fades [26]. It is clear from this debate that this tradition need-/problem-based approach to urban development often has several unintended adverse side effects, whereby efforts often create clients rather than active citizens—thus increasing reliance on external assistance in the district. According to McKnight [27], development assistance based on external assistance is a central part of this negative spiral, because local institutions and organizations are thereby pacified and lose functionality, which means that the district gradually loses its power of action and attracts resourceful citizens. With this in mind, it is therefore essential in urban development to allow the district to revitalize itself “from the inside” through local institutions and organizations actively using their existing resources and anchoring in the area to create quality of life and increase the attractiveness of the area. In this context, this process must take place in an autonomous manner for which the area's institutions are responsible—thus assuming ownership—for its creation. From empirical results, it is a central and well-documented point [27]. The above information is a necessity if the desired development process is to achieve sustainability that goes beyond consultancy assistance. If this is to be successful, then the development process must use an optic with a radically different focus than the problem-oriented approach. In this situation, the resource-based approach to urban development

(asset-based community development) is one of the most well-founded [26]. Suggestions have been proposed for a development methodology that addresses the above issues as well as potentials, such as the method developed by McKnight [27]. Based on comparative studies of urban development methodologies—and their success rates—the following starting point for urban development is employed:

Communities and boroughs can create development themselves by identifying and utilizing existing (but often unrecognized) resources in new ways. This process requires the borough's actors explicitly focus on finding—and using—the area's resources [26, 27].

Thus, according to [26], the resource-based approach to urban development can be summarized in the description below [28]:

- ABCD is an asset-based approach that uses methods to draw out strengths and successes in a community's shared history as its starting point for change (as in *appreciative inquiry*).
- Among all the assets that exist in the community, ABCD pays particular attention to the assets inherent in social relationships, as evidenced in formal and informal associations and networks (recognized in research on *social capital*).
- ABCD's community-driven approach is in keeping with the principles and practice of *participatory approaches development* where active participation and empowerment (and prevention of disempowerment) are the basis of practice.
- ABCD is a strategy directed towards sustainable economic development that is community-driven. The reference to community economic development theory is therefore relevant to ABCD strategy.
- ABCD, as a strategy for sustainable economic development, relies on linkages between community-level actors and macrolevel actors in public and private sectors. In fostering these linkages, ABCD also fosters active citizenship engagement to ensure access to public goods and services and to ensure the accountability of local government. It, therefore, contributes to and benefits from a strengthened *civil society*.

#### 4.1 Appreciative inquiry model

Practical work on urban development from this perspective is based on several methodologies that are defined based on the above basic thinking. In this context, a particularly useful tool must be highlighted, which exemplifies the above starting point and thus can be used in development processes to promote resource-based development. One method of involving and engaging the citizen is, according to the American example, to apply a method called appreciative inquiry. The strength of this approach is that it is based on existing resources and potentials. All areas have positive sides and potentials, but it is often necessary to tend to overlook them and focus on the problems instead. People will naturally feel far more committed and eager to take responsibility if they are met with recognition and an attitude that they are a resource rather than a problem. Simultaneously, an appreciative and curious study of local citizens' experiences and opinions about the area will encourage far more participation than a laid back expert attitude. The proposal for a strategy to improve exposed residential areas, therefore, derives solely from the ideas, wishes, and narratives of citizens who either live or work in the area. Citizens have been asked several times and in many different ways about their perception of the



area and possible proposals for change in the future. No strategy has been adopted without the support of citizens, and it has always been possible to come up with amendments to both the primary strategy and the most concrete sub-proposals. Amendments, new ideas, and criticisms have been taken seriously and attempted to be incorporated. This approach has slowed down the process, but a human being cannot think that it can be avoided in any way—nor the future process.

Another aspect of the recognizable approach is that it encourages seeing opportunities, allowing the process participants to talk about hopes and dreams for the future. People’s need to be recognized and heard, as well as the ability to imagine the best possible imaginable, releases a tremendous amount of energy when given room for it, an energy that is all too often lost in rapid decision-making and political power struggles. This brief presentation of the methodological approach is intended as part of the proposal for a strategy for the development of vulnerable residential areas. It is used extensively in Gellerupparken and other residential areas, and it is no doubt that an appreciative and positive approach will awaken people’s desire to participate, which is an invaluable resource. Without citizens’ involvement and local roots, development cannot be reversed. Additionally, as a basis for this answer, proposals for change lie in the establishment of close cooperation between book associations, business, and local authorities, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Appreciative inquiry (AI)—or friendly conversation—is a critical methodology in resource-based urban development. It is a transformative approach to change that focuses on collaboration and identifying and working with the positive aspects of organizations, or communities, rather than the problems [29]. This method is based on several research findings, all of which demonstrate that our notions about the future are mainly decisive for our present actions. Therefore, it is essential to focus on strengths and successes as a basis for development rather than problems and shortcomings [30]. What the appreciative approach seeks is to achieve the transformation of a culture from one that sees itself in largely negative terms, and moreover, is, therefore, inclined to become locked into its contrary construction of itself—to one that sees itself as having within it the capacity to enrich and enhance the quality of life of all its stakeholders—and therefore move towards this appreciative construction of itself [30]. AI as a development methodology is, thus, as illustrated below, in sharp contrast to traditional problem-/need-oriented perspectives in terms of the resource-oriented starting point. **Table 1** shows the explicative board based on the “release recognition” model.

The world-renowned Imagine Chicago project (see: [www.imaginechicago.org](http://www.imaginechicago.org)) is an inspiring example of how AI and the resource-based approach have been used to revitalize Chicago neighborhoods characterized by ghetto education through the

	<b>Problem and lack of thinking</b>	<b>Resource and value thinking</b>
Focus	Attention to problems, errors, and shortcomings	Attention to resources, values, and dreams
Intention	To solve the problem	Creating the future
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem identification</li> <li>• Cause analysis</li> <li>• Solutions</li> <li>• Action plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the successful and valuable</li> <li>• Creating images of a desirable future</li> <li>• Create common images of an achievable future</li> <li>• Initiate the process to realize the time picture</li> </ul>

**Table 1.**  
*An explicative board based on the “release recognition” model.*

application of the above principles. The experience of this project, which exemplifies the resource-based approach, has attracted international attention and points to the efforts of the future. With the above starting point, innovative research and international experience seem to be promising with respect to working with citizen-involving processes in Gellerupparken and the surrounding area. This means that we see citizen involvement as citizen-driven development processes. In this perspective, the successful citizen engagement process will have two significant benefits:

- In terms of yield, the process metaphorically described results in answers to important questions from the citizens of the area. Thus, the process makes a positive difference in the lives of citizens. Furthermore, this difference must be sufficiently significant that the citizens themselves will take responsibility for the continued sustainability of the result.
- Process wise: Through the process, the involved parties increase their acting competence and position, so that they are strengthened with respect to similar processes in the future.

This understanding is basically in harmony with the city of Aarhus model of citizen involvement:

1. Citizen involvement must be based on the values of the Aarhus municipality.
2. Citizen involvement is a mandatory consideration in the initial phase of a task.
3. Citizens have a minimum right to be heard.
4. If an existing plan is changed, it must state why the “agreement” is being changed.
5. Citizens must have real opportunities to participate.
6. The private involvement in the development of the municipality or local areas must be promoted.
7. Cooperation with councils, associations, and organizations must be maintained and developed.
8. Processes, methods, and professional competence must be continually evaluated and developed.

The understanding of citizen involvement on which this report is based can, based on the Aarhus model, be understood as an effort to explain and translate points 5–7 into a concrete basis for action. We strive to develop methods to create real citizen-driven processes, whereby, through interaction with local actors, we establish a self-sustaining practice that continuously promotes the development of local areas. This endeavor requires that, concerning the Aarhus model, we must perceive citizen involvement in a broader perspective. Generally, citizen involvement is perceived as a means of achieving a given content goal. However, this understanding does not include any focus on building the capacity of citizens to be able to handle similar challenges in the local area independently in the future. Ultimately, the development process itself does not then necessarily create more active citizens.

In contrast, development processes in which this aspect is not considered, as pointed out in the above section, entail significant risks for citizens to be positioned

as clients. With this starting point, we, therefore, consider citizen involvement as a process with a dual objective; a result must be created that is an answer to an essential question of the citizens. Simultaneously, the process must develop the trading skills of the parties involved. This understanding is translated into the following procedure for adjacent writing.

#### **4.2 Development of action**

Initially, the process is aimed at engaging in dialog with the various actors who must be seen as part of the area's residents and associations. The goal here is to embrace as broadly as possible to ensure that no one is excluded from this new trust-building process. Our entry into these conversations is partly through existing networks and partly through outreach work. The purpose of the conversations is as follows:

- A. Creating mutual trust, which in this context is understood as follows: the people to whom we talk should feel that we have a genuine interest in listening to what they have to say about the area and what dreams they have for the future.
- B. They are creating and exploring opportunities for citizen involvement processes based on the good experiences of citizen involvement processes of resource persons<sup>1</sup>. As previously pointed out, this focus is essential to ensure that recommendations for future processes are based on structures and processes that have proven sustainable in the area rather than general normative directions.

To ensure these results, the conversations are structured as appreciating interviews. This implies that the focus of the conversation is focused on resources and success based on the assumption that there may be a significant trader's potential. We are investigating what works are doing well to be able to extend these processes even more in the future. With this starting point, the following interview guide is constructed, on which the interviews are based.

#### **4.3 Interview action guide**

What have you experienced contributing to creating successful citizen engagement processes?

- What was crucial to the success of the process?
- What resources contributed?

What have you experienced creating a process that people feel invited to join?

- What in the past has been particularly effective in getting residents to speak?
- How did you ensure that everyone experienced being heard?
- What have you experienced in creating a trust?

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<sup>1</sup> The term "resource person" is used to describe the interviewed persons. The designation emphasizes that these individuals have only been selected to participate because they constitute an essential resource in the area in terms of their knowledge of the area as well as their experience in citizen involvement processes.

How can we use these good experiences to create successful citizen engagement processes in the future?

An integral part of the discussions is also an explicit focus on which actors and groups resource persons find important to involve in the process. In this way, the individual interview generates, so to speak, the next as we subsequently contact the said persons and groups and invite them to participate in the interviews. Alongside the interview process, two meetings are held with city representatives, which are also designed around the above structure. Finally, a joint day is held for citizens, associations and organizations in the Gellerupparken area.

#### **4.4 The data required**

In total, hundreds of qualitative interviews, as well as a group interview, have been conducted through the interview process. In the following section, the central themes from the qualitative interviews are presented. An interpretation of the conducted interviews is based on the themes below, on which the interviews were structured.

- Factors that help to create successful citizen engagement processes
- Factors that create a process that people feel invited to join
- From good experiences to citizen involvement processes in the future

### **5. Factors that help to create successful citizen engagement processes**

Broadly speaking, two key themes from the experience of the resource persons seem to be crucial to the successful citizen engagement process. First and foremost, the subject of the process is concrete and relevant. Second, the process itself is completed with strong local anchorage in the area.

#### **5.1 A specific and relevant topic**

Throughout the interviews, it is pointed out that successful citizen engagement processes are characterized by their being perceived as concrete and relevant to the participants. This means that the topic is not abstract but is based on the daily lives and interests of the citizens. This point is reflected in the observation of the consistent emphasis that residents of the area come to meetings largely because of specific matters that interest them. Thus, the focus of successful processes is directed towards themes that have a significant influence on the daily life of the residents. The question in this context is, of course, what is contained in the specific and relevant process. This question seems to be answered from another perspective. Citizens will greatly assess participation in the process based on whether they can acquire a real, visible, and noticeable benefit from it in their daily lives. The following topics are, by extension, highlighted as particularly appealing:

- Health: How can we live healthily?
- Family: How can we create well-functioning families?
- Leisure time: How can we ensure that children and young people have active leisure time?
- Relationships: How can we create new relationships with each other?

To conclude the interview process, a joint day was held in the Nordgård School hall. Citizens, associations, networks, and organizations in the area were invited. During the day, the following questions were examined: What important questions about the area will help us get closer to our hopes and dreams for the area, are we concerned? The above focus on “the close” topics are supported here by the questions raised by the participants in a future day as crucial for the future of Gellerupparken.

## **5.2 A process of rooting in the area**

In addition to the abovementioned thematic themes, the interviewees pointed to several procedural issues that they perceived as crucial for the initiated processes to gain a foothold in the area. Here, the interviewees point to the following factors as crucial:

- That is, a particular desire is taken from the citizens. Several of the interviewees emphasized that it is essential that the specific wishes of the citizens trigger the initiated processes. Throughout the process, this means that the citizens are willing to take ownership of the process. This is highlighted as particularly important as the interviewees feel that external actors are continually seeking to initiate a large number of projects in the area. The consequences of these well-intentioned projects are general project fatigue, and local players in the area lose the courage to engage.
- As the resources of the citizens are providing a basis, as an essential success factor, it is emphasized that the strengths of the citizens are based on whether they feel at home. People would very much like to participate and contribute if they are allowed to use the skills they possess.
- Existing structures based on existing structures. You gain a lot by connecting to existing structures in the area. It is ethnic associations and formal and informal networks that form an essential part of the social structure of the area. The involvement of these structures is crucial, as the networks partly possess significant resources that can be used to create development in the area. Furthermore, networks have more or less influence as opinion-makers. The assumption of starting from existing structures also highlights the advantageous links to existing activities and offers in this area as well as places where people are already arriving.

## **6. Factors that create a process that people feel invited to join**

In citizen engagement processes, it is essential that people have the experience that they are welcome to participate as well as experience that their participation is significant. This phenomenon is reflected in the following section, where resource persons point to the following factors as crucial.

### **6.1 Knowledge required for the investigation process**

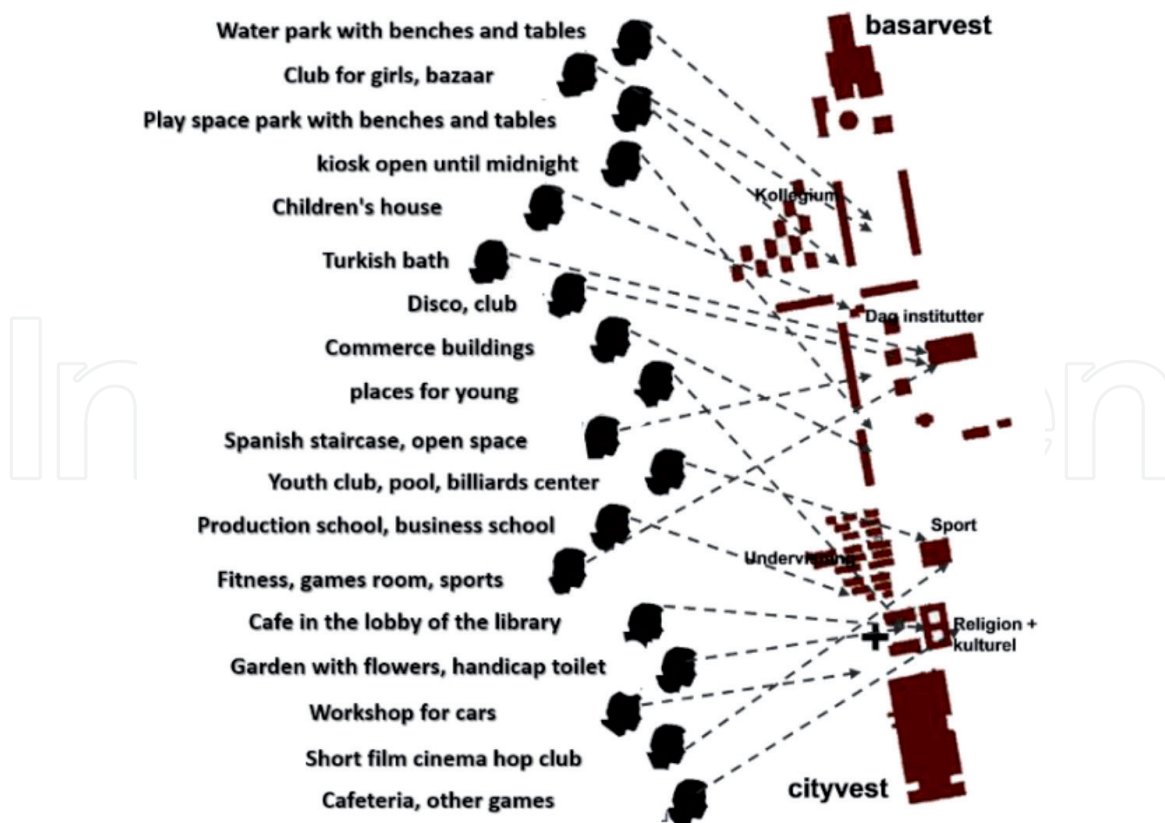
To ensure participation in the citizen involvement processes, the citizens must be aware of the possibility of participation [24]. In this context, the interviewees focus on several areas they perceive as crucial for ensuring connection to the respective processes. In general, written communication is emphasized only as an enterprise when it is linked to local resources. This can be, for example, through pamphlets distributed

by staff at the health and local center or library. Likewise, the residential magazine, *The Spellbook*, can be highlighted as an information channel that, in the interviewees' opinion, reaches out to many residents and creates a dialog. Finally, there is also good experience in communicating through notices in the rises. Additionally, immigrant television is mentioned as a medium that has an impact on the area. With the above exceptions, the interviewees' experiences fundamentally deviate from the use of broadly written communication as the core communication strategy. This means that it is generally considered most productive to avoid traditional broadcasts of information leaflets, etc. In line with this assertion, the use of quantitative questionnaires is also not recommended. Conversely, it is emphasized that successful communication in the area requires time and effort over some time so that people can adjust to any eventuality. Interviewees' experiences indicate that using direct face-to-face contact is most effective. This is best established by seeking out key people and spreading the message through the word-of-mouth method of their network. The same method applies to established associations and institutions in the area, which already have citizens' trust. In addition to oral communication through the area's many formal and informal networks, direct outreach work is also highlighted as active. This can be done by tuning doorbells, talking to people in their hallways, as well as by making themselves visible/known in the local area and making face-to-face contact with people, e.g., by standing in front of the City West or Bazaar West. This direct personal contact is experienced as alpha and omega for establishing trust in communication. It is the experience of the resource persons that the residents appreciate this direct contact and significantly want to participate in the dialog when it takes place in this way. The value of personal contact is also reflected in the fact that several resource persons point out how several associations have been successful in reaching out to people rather than vice versa. For example, table tennis has been set up in the library, and footballs have been brought into the community hall.

## 6.2 A progressive investigate process (everyone is heard)

An essential theme about citizen engagement processes is whether the citizens feel invited to participate in them. A key prerequisite for this is, according to the resource persons, that citizens understand what the process is about. Here, direct contact also proves crucial. Concerning activities for young people under the auspices of the association, this means in particular that the actors must assume some form of a supervisory role. The guidance counselor takes the young ones by the hand and accompanies them to the association for the first time. The parents are invited; they are presented to the coach and the association. The possibilities that exist in the associations, how an association works, and the applicable rules are explained so there is no fear of the unknown. In this context, the importance of the direct meeting between the association and the young person is again emphasized with a focus on the concrete benefits of being active in associations. Concerning any language barriers, it is pointed out that the use of interpreters is a significant factor that enables the participation of groups of citizens who have difficulties with Danish. This institution allows the involvement of people who would otherwise have said nothing. Furthermore, good experiences with the involvement of bilingual resource persons with immigrant backgrounds are highlighted as necessary for contact with citizens. They are good at outreach and have their fingers on the pulse of what is occurring.

Part of the strategy is to transform some homes into different types of occupations. For example, the ground floor of a residential block could be arranged for small shops, cafes, or workshops, which may create some new jobs. However, first and foremost, it will soften the massive housing block and create a whole new social life (see **Figure 3**). Another way in which the housing blocks could be used



**Figure 3.**  
Concrete ideas of inhabitants with indication of the potential position.

to attract other citizens is to furnish luxury apartments or hotel rooms on the upper floors with views of the city and the lake. In the long term, luxury holiday stays in Gellerupparken could be arranged with bathing and sailing on Lake Brabrand, as well as food and culture from all over the world. The idea of making a hotel in Gellerupparken has met with great optimism from both the “Brabrand Business Association” and the “Brabrand Housing Association.” There are several larger companies in the area, which also have branches and employees from many other countries. These companies could benefit significantly from the proximity of a high standard hotel with a burgeoning international business and research environment.

### 6.3 Confidence in the process

Resource people emphasize, in light of the above, that it is essential that citizens have the necessary confidence in the process. In this context, this can be observed as the belief that the process ultimately results in something good. The most important factor for gaining the trust of citizens in the area is by showing that, through their dedicated work, you are passionate about doing good for the people.

## 7. Results

### 7.1 An attractive Gellerupparken district by activating the urban area

Residents from the urban zone desire more opportunities for activities and social gathering, especially in the evening hours, when Bazar West and City Vest are closed. These two very different shopping centers provide the framework for a large part of the social life in the district. The requirements are as follows:

- A pedestrian street in the middle of Gellerupparken
- Many enjoyable activities for the citizens in the area
- Gain better knowledge and more relationships with outside citizens

Urban zones evolved through dialog in several different contexts. They must have the courage to dream and see opportunities: a strategy to control and regulate citizens' opportunities to settle wherever they want. Through physical and social changes in the residential areas, which build on the citizens own ideas and commitment, the residential areas must be changed so that they become better places to live and move to both for residents and others. Public spaces are also useful as sleeping areas because they create new scenarios for spending time in the area, make it multifunctional, and make living there more intense and exciting. To solve the problem of alienation, the dullness and uniformity of the urban environment must be addressed by saturating it with colors, events, and emotions, creating places for communication and interaction with others and thereby helping to expand the network of acquaintances among neighbors. Thus, instead of a city for cars, it must assume a new understanding like a city for people. Additionally, public spaces solve the monocentric problem: when there are leisure opportunities right next to the house, there is no need to search for them in the city center. Simultaneously, it attracts the interest of residents of other parts of the city and tourists to the district, subsequently attracting investments in the form of small businesses. The idea is to transform the requirement for a functional space into an attractive and activate urban space, where the following table shows the meaning of the two concepts (see **Table 2**).

## 7.2 New urban creation by the courage to dream and comprehend opportunities

In Denmark, there is a particular risk that increasing population segregation will have severe consequences for the development of society. Some residential areas have such high concentrations of contact beneficiaries and people with ethnic minority backgrounds that they are almost small isolated communities. A strategy to reverse this tendency may, in various ways, be an attempt to control and regulate citizens' opportunities to settle wherever they want. This strategy will, of course, be able to change a certain percentage of the population composition in the exposed housing areas, but for the many children and young people who will continue to grow up without knowing any ethnic Danes, without knowing someone who has a Danish education and perhaps without knowing anyone who has had a job for a long time, this strategy will not suffice. Children and young people, who make up

Attractive urban space	Functional urban space
I like public spaces in Gellerupparken	I feel safe
It is so beautiful	I can find the way easily
It excites me	I can use urban furniture safely
It relaxes me	The urban open spaces are excellent
I feel exactly that I am in my home	I can enjoy my time in green areas
The city gives me a good temperament	I can access all the spaces in a wheelchair

**Table 2.**  
*The different understandings of functional and attractive urban spaces.*



approximately 40% of the residents in the exposed housing areas, need to be a focus when designing a strategy against ghetto isolation. These many children and young people must feel that Danish society takes them and their future seriously and wants to give them more than a hand in their efforts to become better at Danish, attain an education and secure a job. Through physical and social changes in the residential areas, which are based on the citizens' ideas and commitment, the residential areas must be changed so that they become better places to live and move for both residents and others. Based on stories and ideas from the citizens of Gellerupparken, this chapter will present a strategy to improve the future of residential areas, which aims to make Gellerupparken an attractive district for the people who live, work, and move into the area and for all others. Outside people may never have been to Gellerupparken but nevertheless have a negative image of the residential area. For a long time, our group has worked and stayed in the area and talked to many of the area's residents and fire souls. The principal idea is to exert a determined effort to make the residential area attractive neighborhoods with far more activities and functions, which are based as much as possible on the area's distinctive character and the citizens' initiative. Researchers believe that this strategy will positively impact residents' everyday lives and views of themselves, but it is equally important that the neighbors of Gellerupparken and all other citizens in the area will observe a changed and attractive neighborhood. BL has already shown an interest in investing in the transformation of housing into, for example, commercial premises, public service functions, or cultural purposes. In this chapter some of the suggestions will be presented received by the research group from the citizens of Gellerupparken concerning how to create more urban life in the residential area. A strategy for improving exposed residential areas must be broad and multifaceted, but it must simultaneously also be carried out in the right way to obtain the best possible effect. It must be believed that it is essential to examine the resources and positive aspects of the residential areas and allow them to serve as the basis for a process of change.

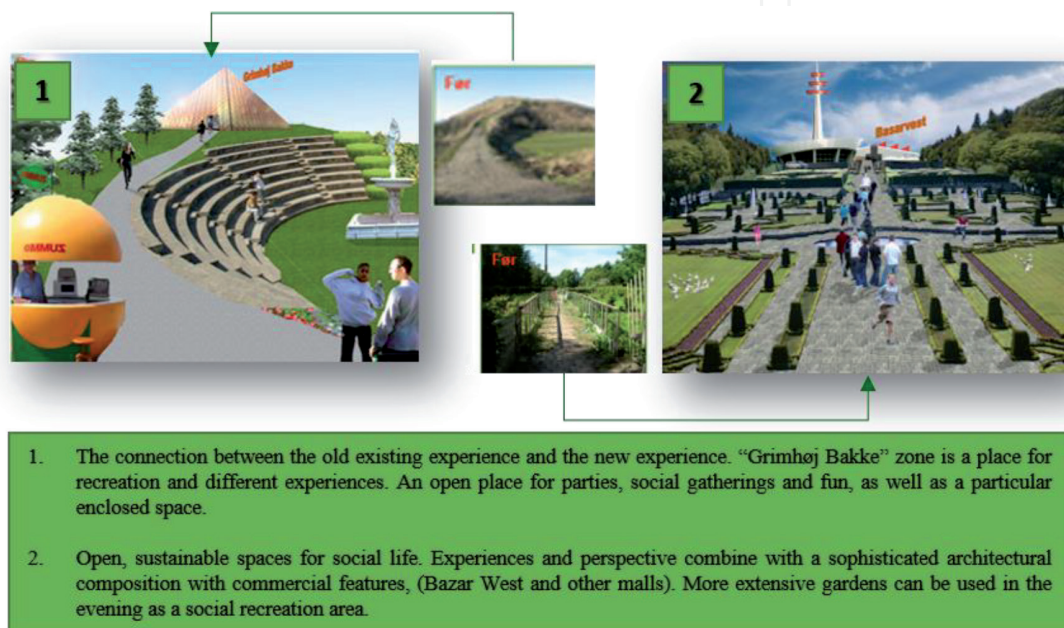
### **7.3 New city life in the residential area**

The exposed residential areas are typically located just outside major cities: cities with lots of life, rides, functions, activity, and diversity. Many people are attracted to the city in connection with either work or leisure. They meet in the city, get to know new people, have fun relaxing, or take advantage of the city's numerous opportunities for shopping, education, and work, among others, and the existing vegetation, geology, and topography all engage in recreating a part of a unique microclimate for every site [31]. It is in the city you are social and show who you are. In an area where there is nothing but housing and very few city's features and opportunities, a man is private, himself, and has no reason to leave home unless it is to leave the area. **Figure 4** embodies an architect vision of creation activating areas in the north part of "Gellerupparken." This is where inhabitants spend their free time but typically not with new people.

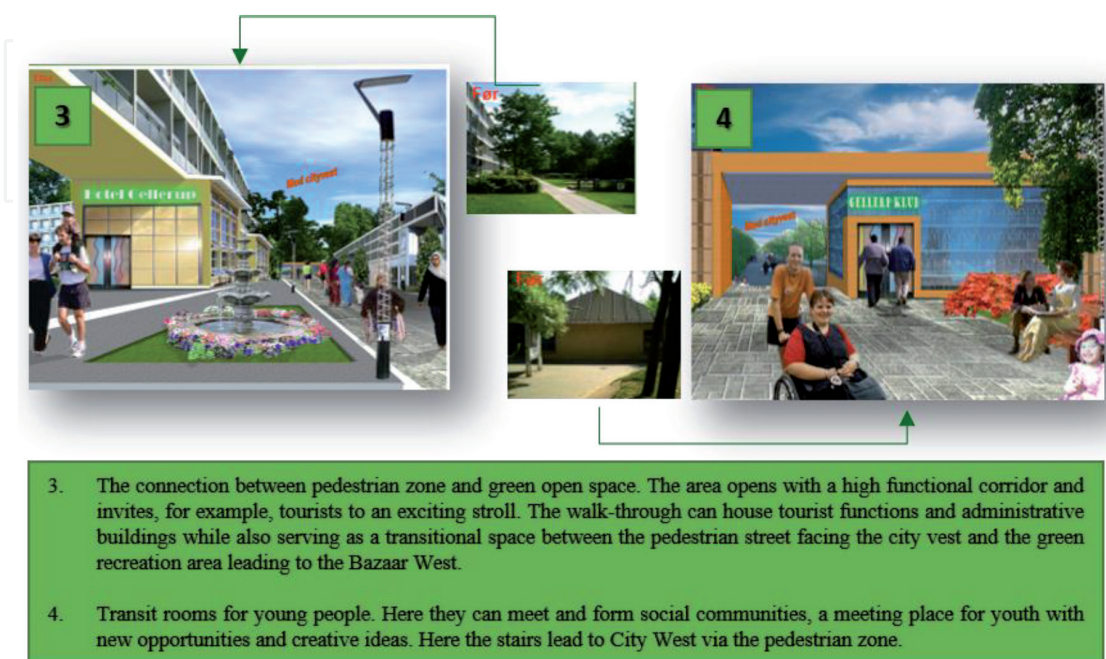
By drawing inspiration from the pulse, energy, and life of the city, residential areas can be made more attractive and given an identity that will affect both the residents and citizens living nearby. It is far from only the commercial part of the city, which is interesting and which can create positive development as a concept [32]. An increasing number of educational institutions, culture, and arts, as well as alternative venues and social spaces adapted to different age groups, genders, and interests must also be wholeheartedly devoted. How can it be, for example, that in Aarhus you will find cafes that make money by standing out from the crowd with hookahs and Persian rugs? In many residential areas with a very diverse resident mix, much more can be done to create a different atmosphere of security and togetherness

derived from the residents' own countries of origin. For example, a coffee shop could be made with coffee and tea from all over the world (see **Figure 5**).

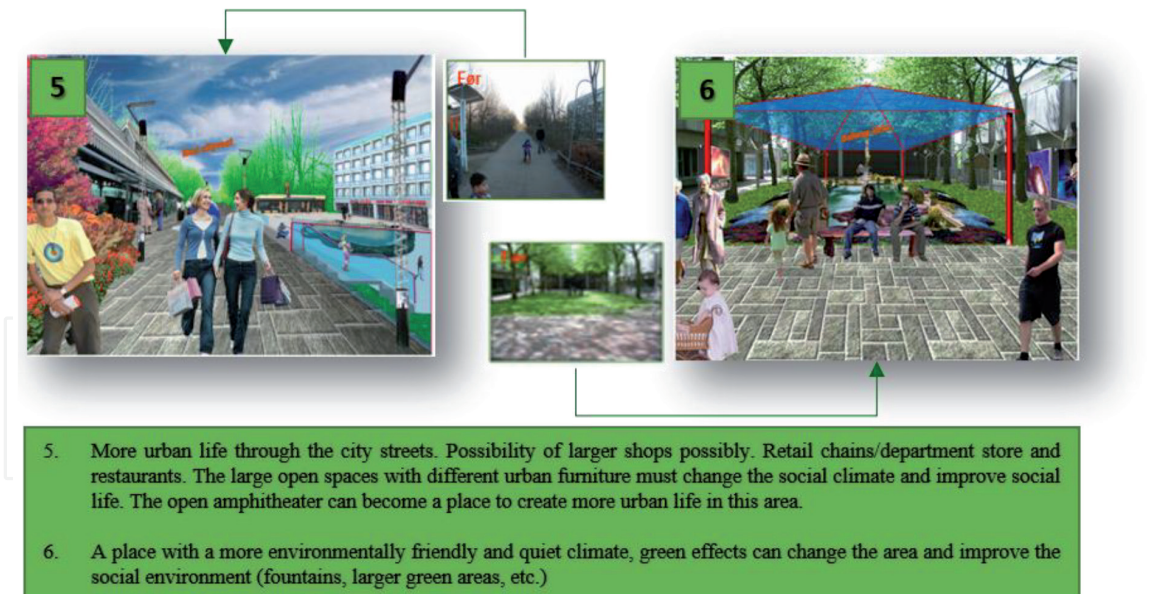
The city's many spaces in the form of parks and squares provide intensity and security that is lacking in the residential areas, where there is often too much space between blocks because nothing is invited to stay. The whole city needs to be brought into play, not just the demarcated residential area. The residential areas must be opened up both physically and mentally to become attractive, welcoming and part of a larger whole. The residential area must be able to offer more than just one dwelling. The features and opportunities must be made visible and make the residential area a place where citizens of the city center and other suburbs can also experience something different and exciting (see **Figure 6**).



**Figure 4.**  
 An architect's imagination of creation activating areas in the north part of "Gellerupparken."



**Figure 5.**  
 An architect's imagination of creation activating areas in the central part of "Gellerupparken."



**Figure 6.**  
*An architect's imagination of creation activating areas in the significant part of "Gellerupparken."*

Diversity and diversity are and will become even more of the future's most valuable resources and potentials for development and innovation. Companies that live by innovation know that a mixed staff is crucial to the company's ability to think in new and creative ways. In residential areas with a more significant proportion of citizens with different backgrounds than Danish, there is excellent potential for establishing networks for the development of new ideas. In this context, devising several specific suggestions on how to create more urban life in residential areas is required. This will be based on Gellerupparken and the opportunities for change offered in this area.

#### 7.4 New "Gellerupparken" pedestrian axis with attractive urban spaces

There is a desire from several local citizens, housing, and business associations for more opportunities for activities and social interactions, especially in the evening hours when Bazar West and City West are closed. These two very different shopping centers provide the framework for much of the social life in the district, but after 10 p.m., they are closed. When the centers close, it is almost impossible to just buy a cup of coffee without having to go to Aarhus C. An obvious place for these city life activities is on the stretch between City West and Bazar West, where there is already a well-traveled footpath, but another location could also provide the same result. These thoughts of more urban life have led to the idea of developing a pedestrian street in the middle of Gellerupparken, which on the one hand can create life and activity for the citizens of the area, but on the other hand, it can attract people from the outside. In this way, there are several enjoyable activities available to the citizens of the area, which is especially important in the evening hours, where for many people there is a kind of void. Furthermore, it will be possible for citizens in the area to gain better knowledge and additional relationships with outside citizens and vice versa. As the idea has evolved through dialog in several different contexts, a working group has emerged that is still growing. In particular, some voluntary architects have shown great interest, and they have been of great help in the idea of development and visualization of the group's and citizens' proposals for urban development. The citizens who have been presented with the idea have welcomed it and have shown a great desire to contribute their suggestions and wishes. The urban area is not comparable to the area in Aarhus. It is more about creating a basis for life and security, squares, squares, shops, and cafes in selected sections, perhaps a concept

area, association rooms, workshops, and institutions, among others. The proposal is intended as a holistic and pervasive effort over a long period, bringing citizens, housing associations, local associations, business, and public bodies together, with the common goal of creating more urban life both physically and socially. However, it is also an obvious opportunity to start with something slightly smaller and perhaps to bet on one of the following concrete proposals. Green open spaces promote a sustainable development process [33]. In this area, the elderly and the young can meet and get to know each other better. Together, they can harness the potential of the area. Moreover, a hub, a city street, can be established. Around this are placed several functions (public and private). These features can be established and rented out on different terms. Our mission is to improve the business and social life of Gellerupparken, generate a more functional and urban area, and develop a more attractive connection along with the new Gellerupparken pedestrian axis.

A better connection between the two only commercial centers in the district could create a whole new area, where people from the more traditional Danish shopping center City West will feel more invited to experience more of the district and perhaps meet at a cafe midway with some of the residents or other merchants from the more Middle Eastern Inspired Bazar West (see **Figure 7**). This shopping center is seen as a way in which the area's closure can be broken. Some traffic already exists on the path between the two commercial centers, but more area needs to be opened up so that more outsiders acquire an interest in what is happening between the housing blocks. In addition to housing, there are several other features of the line that are proliferating and need more and new premises and facilities. There is a school, a sports hall, a local center, a resident's house, and a library, which has already been expanded with numerous side features such as health information with midwives and dentists, public information, a job corner, and a contact point for young people, among others. Furthermore, in the area around the bazaar, there are



**Figure 7.**  
*An overview of a new pedestrian axis with open activity space potentials.*

a large number of companies with a total of approximately 4000 employees. This business area has the potential to develop in the future, and more exciting urban life could contribute positively to this development. There are endless opportunities and synergies in creating a common strategy for residential, commercial, and urban areas. Here, a small selection of the wishes and ideas that have emerged in dialog with the citizens is presented. There is broad support for establishing several places with the opportunity for friendly and entertaining leisure activities. The appendices present the answers to this question, illustrating the opportunities in the area and encourage people to dream and think differently.

## **7.5 New educational offerings in the residential area**

Another part of the strategy is to place both existing and new public functions in the area so that more people who do not live in the area enter the area daily, such as educational institutions.

One of the main reasons many of the residents of vulnerable residential areas do not have a job is that they have no education or leave school very early. Some explanations for the lack of education are that the young people in vulnerable housing areas lack knowledge about the available modes of education and someone to tell them what it is like to study. Many young people do not know anyone with a more extended education and, therefore, do not have anyone to ask for advice. Education becomes something foreign and unknown. When neither family nor friends have experience with the education system, it is difficult for the young person to hold onto an education in which everything is foreign and new. It is very likely to open up a new group of young people in education if they can choose the student life without having to altogether leave the safe and familiar environment in the housing area. This phenomenon also applies to a host of other public functions. However, it must be pointed out that further research of the subject is required to answer whether integration is improved by allowing residents in the exposed housing areas to stay more within the area—some researchers will think the opposite.

### *7.5.1 Why not try it out?*

The research, therefore, proposes that several relevant educational institutions can be placed in residential areas, thereby increasing young people's knowledge of education and reducing fear. One could imagine many forms of education that could be advantageously placed in exposed residential areas. In particular, there are new opportunities in investing in programs that have an international character. It could be an international high school specializing in languages and foreign cultures. One could also imagine that a department of the School of Business for International Trade, Export, and Entrepreneurship could find a new target group in Gellerupparken.

## **8. Prospects for the future**

First and foremost, it is expected that the citizens of residential areas will benefit from a strategy that aims for more urban life, as it will be more interesting to live in a neighborhood with more amenities and a more expansive social life. Next, the place identity will change so that citizens acquire a more favorable impression of their area. In the longer term, there is tremendous potential in making residential areas such as Gellerupparken a neighborhood with attractive offers for residents, visitors, and tourists, on the one hand, and students, researchers, and business, on the other hand. The greater urban life created in Gellerupparken can make it a gathering point



**Figure 8.**  
*Views of Gellerupparken imagined by a group of architect companies.*

in Denmark for trade and exchange abroad. In connection with the business park and an upcoming hotel for business travelers, a particularly attractive college could be implemented, focusing mainly on international students. It is required to envision an environment where companies, educational institutions, business associations, and housing associations work together to create several exciting educational and internships across all nationalities and utilize the many contacts it will provide to the world. Much can be done to create more favorable conditions for businesses and educators in the area, including various kinds of modern facilities such as suitable cheap premises, IT, and quick access to the highway [34]. Additionally, companies could assume a particular form of the social contract, where, for example, the housing association provides premises, parking, canteen arrangement, and other features for the company to create new jobs or internships for citizens of the local area (see **Figure 8**). Furthermore, contracts can be made with students at colleges, which offer several benefits towards assuming greater social responsibility for the area by, for example, offering homework help, legal aid, help with job applications, etc. It is crucial to create positive stories about the district, highlight the successes, and build on the area's unique characteristics and potentials, which in the long term will make Gellerupparken an attraction and thus give its citizens the pride that comes with living in an area that is known for something special.

Thus, an integrated approach to design is essential, which includes a detailed, comprehensive study of the territory; work in an interdisciplinary team consisting of architects, city planners, sociologists, anthropologists, and other specialists; and, finally, “participativeness” in the form of the participation of local residents in the research process and design, taking into account their interests and needs. The creation of an objective sustainable public space requires recognition of the significance of the space, such as follows:

- Space as practice: the most important side of Heidegger's specialty, of “being-in-the-world,” is the practical one. Therefore, each individual is capable of producing spaces daily, depending on the concrete situations they encounter, culture, and predisposition [35].
- Space as a possibility: the hermeneutics of space developed by Heidegger in “Sein und Zeit” is an attempt to escape the classic alternative objective space/subjective space.

- Space as an event: depending on the activities it encompasses, the character of a public space can be changed—a place of revolts, place of ceremonies, place of democratic meeting, etc. [36].
- Space is considered to be the limited three-dimensional space in which all objects are located and in which all events take place.

## 9. Conclusion

An attractive public space becomes an essential issue in the city design process, where the requirement to create high-quality public spaces does not boil down to ordinary beautification, as is often understood by the city administration and developers. Based on qualitative interviews with resource persons in the area, the following themes can be highlighted as crucial for creating successful citizen engagement processes. Fundamentally, it is crucial for participation that the subject of the process is concrete and relevant. Here, it is the close things that count.

Furthermore, people must have the experience that they are welcome to participate as well as experience that their participation is significant. Resource people emphasize that, in light of the above, it is essential that citizens have the fundamental confidence that the process will lead to a real and noticeable result. Furthermore, emphasizing the resources of the citizens involved is a critical success factor. The resource persons consistently point out that these elements can be ensured by the process being rooted in the local structures and based on the area's resources. For such a goal to be realized in Gellerupparken, it will be essential to create a framework that ensures that actors in as well as outside the area are involved in resource-based interaction with each other. The development of improvement courses for these parties is proposed to create a holistic and robust process in the area. These experiences indicate that, concerning the efforts of external teams, the focus shifts from the subject of the process to instead supporting the process itself. The ultimate goal is that the parties involved build up competencies that generally increase the area's capacity to independently create a development. The aim of this type of development process is thus to create a framework in which the local actors develop independent acting skills by working on themes that they find essential.

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