

The Danish provincial towns have acquired new and beautiful urban spaces – but are they sufficiently dynamic?

By Gitte Marling and Helle Juul

All over Denmark, the downtown areas have been given a lift. The cars have been driven away for the sake of not only one pedestrian shopping street but for entire networks of pedestrian thoroughfares - with many new plazas, both large and small. New pavements in granite, trees, flower urns, benches and different kinds of illumination all give rise to a comfortable framework around life in the city. Access has been gained to fiords and estuaries and opened up for new recreational possibilities.

Much more urban life has come about. Many cafés invite people to stop by and take a seat and there are a number of town parties, summer arrangements and the like, which serve to gather the city's residents together. In the middle of an ordinary weekday in the month of August, a relatively large number of people are busy shopping in cities like Thisted, Silkeborg, Herring, Skjern and Varde. The children are splashing about in the new fountains. The benches are occupied and even the more unofficial seating places are in use.

We are making an excursion through Jutland with the Center for Byrumsforskning / Real Dania Forskning [The Center for Urban Space Research / Real Dania Research] in order to experience with our own eyes and bodies what it is that has happened on the urban space front in the cities in Jutland. Prior to making our trip, The Center for Urban Space Research sent out a comprehensive questionnaire to all the larger Danish municipalities and followed up the responses with an analysis. It is the results of this investigation, where one can read about the most recent initiatives, improvements and arrangements, which have inspired the organization of our study trip.

Many years of working toward bringing forth better urban spaces and efforts to establish pedestrian zones in the central parts of the city appear to have borne fruits. We meet a satisfied Jan Gehl, who points out, again and again, that the benches have been sensibly placed in relation to the sun, the wind and the view, that trees and flowers create oases and that water creates life. Relying on our own personal inspection, we can ascertain that the sightlines to the fiord and the landscape have been kept open, that the buildings' facades are no longer being cut in half by canopies to any great degree and that considerable sums of capital have been invested in costly pavements, fountains, fixtures and lighting.

In Thisted, the focus has been directed at the axis running along Storegade that extends from the city's old section, with its central open square, down to the harbor. It is there, where the street ends, that we discover the city's harbor square.

With this new open plaza, Thisted has gained a new central meeting place, which has been planned with a great deal of concern for maximizing the potentials for wanting to stop by here, with a successful design of the orientation, the spaces and the surfaces and with a most captivating and beautiful view out across the Liim Fiord to the island of Mors. What has been created here is a modern "commons" at the very spot where the city meets the fiord and where the first pier was once situated.

The open city square and the sequence of streets accordingly play an important part in underlining Thisted's history and urban architectonic values.



Fig. 1
At Thisted's new public meeting place, the atmosphere is relaxed. Tossed salads being served at the café's tables. Bodies basking in the sun, sitting on the stones. Children playing in the water and on the stage.

Further south, in Varde, the whole town is getting ready to receive the Pavers' Guild Prize on the following day for the beautiful pavement on the town's market square, where the church also happens to be situated. Old and new pavements are situated right beside each other and the paving has been carried out in a most professional manner. Altogether, this is an exquisite example of how the urban architectonic cultural legacy can be protected and can promote a general sense of well-being among the city's local residents and those who might be visiting the town.



Fig. 2
At the city's open market square, a fountain spews forth a stream of water down through a winding groove in the cobblestone pavement. The very presence of the water and the direction of its flow underscore the square's gradient – and simultaneously encourage play and stimulate different kinds of experiences.

It's nice here ... and it feels safe

It's nice to be in Thisted and Varde, as it is in many of the other cities we have been visiting. Comfortable city life. No sense of anything being dangerous. Cozy.

The alcoholics and the drug addicts are gone. Evidently, they have found more abject places to gather, places where hardly as many people are visiting. And maybe that's not really so bad because it is often so that they look soiled, miserable and perhaps even menacing.

Gone also are the youngsters making a racket with their roller skates and skateboards. We're not exactly crestfallen about this, either. The skaters ruin the new pavements. For this reason, they are often banished to the parking lots and empty backyards.

On the whole, there's not a lot of obliqueness or very much youth culture that can be spotted in the downtown areas. This causes one to wonder, since the newspapers' columns are rife with dreary accounts about youngsters' problems with alcohol and drugs in the otherwise so child-oriented provincial Danish towns ... and some of these youngsters are only 12 years old! Because the "**small youngsters**" are not welcome as patrons in the discotheques and bars, the consumption of beer is an activity that takes place on the sly, after dark, in parks and on playgrounds. But this is not really so cool and it seems that the youngsters are getting fed up with the situation. They have no real challenges presented to them and there are no opportunities offered for them to gather freely in the public space or for them to cultivate a modern youth scene, especially at a time when young people are being prodded more and more – and earlier and earlier – to imitate the mannerisms of the 18-35 year old urban set.

Meanwhile, it is similarly difficult to get a sense of any cultural imprint that immigrants and other "new Danes" are making on the provincial towns' skin. They live here. At least, that's what the statistics tell us. But neither their religion nor their **social culture** are represented in the urban architecture that is presently springing forth in our urban centers. And we have to ask in good conscience: What's the basic reason for this?

In response to the Center's questionnaire, there were only two cities that replied in the affirmative to the question about whether any initiatives have been taken in the past five years to set up activities or spaces for new Danes or minority groups. One of the two cities was Randers, where a domain for "ethnic Danes" has been established in cooperation with artist groups from the city and the creative activity of citizen-associations.

The domain is situated in a central location but it is not directly accessible from any of the city's public open squares, either the older or the newer ones. For this reason, signposts are necessary. Consequently, there are small brass stars in the sidewalk's pavement that guide the way to "Underværket" [The Wonder], a layout that consists of four buildings with workshops, meeting rooms, a small "ethnic" bazaar and a roof-covered plaza.

We don't manage to make our way to Underværket in Randers until after closing time. However, the doors leading into the covered plaza are still open and there are a few families who are seated and eating dinner at tables in their respective shops.

We take an inquisitive look around the building. We had expected to meet an ethnic aesthetic, something distinctly un-Danish in the center of Randers - or perhaps some kind of raw art scene. But there's not much trace of either. It's nice here, but it's also a bit too prim and proper. Most of all, the building reminds us of a municipal workshop, constructed of solid high-quality materials and with items of Danish craftsmanship as the decoration. Could it be that the bazaar atmosphere is more conspicuous when the shops are open, when the booths and the visitors cause the building to recede a little more into the background?



Fig. 3

Underværket [The Wonder] in Randers: Already at this small open plaza situated in front of the building, this place's **fiery soul** can be sensed, inasmuch as it is represented by larger and smaller home-made signs that tell of various arrangements and special bargains, with a rather inventive use of the Danish language.

After our visit to Randers, where we also managed to observe the ongoing wide-scale conversion of plaza areas and street sequences in the central part of the city, our trip continued to Silkeborg. Here, we were scheduled to spend the night at a hotel that has been **remodeled** in connection with the transformation of the city's enormous old paper factory. In addition to the hotel and a number of residences, the new complex also contains a new concert house, **more residences**, rooms for creative activities, architectural offices and municipally operated artists' workshops, a few different cafes and new plaza areas.

New plans to expand the sphere of activities, including an educational institution for dance, theater and music have recently been announced. The new educational institution will be called *Performance House*.



Fig. 4.

Silkeborg's new culture Mecca, The Paper Factory, is situated on the banks of the rolling River Guden and a few large lakes and serves to underscore, with utmost clarity, Silkeborg's localization in the very middle of the overwhelmingly beautiful Søhøjland region. Water forms an integral part of many of the city's spaces, among these being the roundabout close to The Paper Factory.

In connection with Performance House, a proposal has been introduced to commission the creation of an interactive fountain by the renowned artist, Jeppe Hein.

In addition to Thisted, Randers, Varde and Silkeborg our tour also wended its way through Nørresundby, Skive, Ikast, Herning, Skjern, Tarm, Ribe, Vejle, Haderslev, Kolding and Sønderborg. Significant undertakings have been made in all these places and on the basis of our own observations we can ascertain that the cities in Jutland have made a valiant effort to create new, better and more beautiful urban spaces.

In our delight about all the attractive urban spaces, the sensible layouts, the history that emerges so clearly, the nature, the water and the green areas, what also comes eventually to be joined with our response is a certain dismay that it all seems to be so very prim and proper and sometimes downright uninteresting and so lacking in dynamics. There are no scratches in the varnish! Neat rooms, well-groomed people, unobtrusive behavior and no provocation; nothing that is shouting or screaming – **nothing crying out that we can hear.**

In so many different spots, we are running into the very same kinds of spaces. That large open market square with the new pavement. Was that the square in Esbjerg or in Herning?

Notwithstanding some relatively inconsequential salient features, the plazas and the urban life are very much alike. It is the Danish middle class folk's urban spaces that are unequivocally stamping the picture.



Fig. 5.
 Skive, Esbjerg, Herning, Nørresundby and Haderslev. The Danish middle class folk's urban spaces ...

The city as a scene for the social and cultural meeting – for the exchange of perspectives

Is it a problem that the urban spaces are so decent and so insistent on respectable behavior? We actually think that this it is. We find that it is a problem that in our movement in the city, we do not run up against anything unpredicted or unexpected or run up against anything that might challenge our everyday existence and customary way of thinking ... anything at all that might incite us to reflect on our own perspectives on this or that anything that might inspire us to come up with new notions.

Seeing as the urban spaces so are unequivocally addressed in their elaboration, their functions and their design to middle class people, it is clearly *this* group's tastes and aesthetics that are represented in the urban architecture.

It is also middle class folk who, to a great degree, are being entrusted with setting up the arrangements that transpire in the city's space. Of course, there are a whole lot of us in this very wide category, so there's nothing intrinsically wrong with the situation that we set our marks on the urban scene. But it is important that the city, as the scene for social and cultural exchange, also provides room for wider diversity and for meeting the "stranger" and the unexpected.

According to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (see his work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, from 1995), cultural and societal renewal do *not* actually emanate from the middle class. In his theories about life style, Bourdieu advocates the position that the middle class is preoccupied with the bourgeoisie's art forms and life styles. Imitations. But for the most part, they confine themselves to what is known and what is certain; they confine their interest to the approved designs. Similarly, there is a prevailing attempt to behave in the correct manner and to distance oneself from anybody who does not follow the codex for behavior and attire. One turns his/her back on whatever is alien and feels that it is peculiar or strange. Ugly. In other words, one always remains cautious about falling through the cracks or stepping outside the prevailing norms and rules.

When all the Danish cities and all the city's spaces are targeted at the respectable and decent middle class, the dynamics disappear. And as we fade away as a side effect of our own sense of boredom, the cities continue to fight their mutual battles about getting their own position on the map.

We know well that the Danish cities and their downtown areas are under constant economic pressure. Competition among the cities is hard, not to mention the competition among the shopping centers and theme parks found on the cities' radial roads that are shooting up with greater and greater frequency. With their wide offering of commodities that are often being made available at favorable prices, these new centers are attracting an enormous public with great purchasing power. Super-saver bargain offers can incite the Danish middle class to drive far. When the Bilka supermarket in City Syd in Aalborg announced its most recent anniversary sale, there were 25,000 North Jutland residents standing in queues at the checkout counters for up to three hours to buy items like inexpensive soda pop (source: *Nordjyske*, August 14, 2006). So, there is something that suggests that there certainly is "drive" in inexpensive soda pop ...

At the same time, there is much that suggests that the entropic differential between the shopping centers' bustle and special offers and the urban center's city life and special offers is actually on the wane, inasmuch as *both* of these shopping milieus are aspiring toward the same thing: featureless chain shops, a few cafes and unthreatening mainstream entertainment = one and same type of "fun shopping"!

The various old city centers' struggle to survive as the city's identity-forming brand is being hindered and meanwhile, the traditional economic dynamos are being phased out. This has been the case for some time now. Small businesses are disappearing. The harbor industry is succumbing. And so forth and so on. These driving economic forces are going to have to be replaced by cultural life and new experience-oriented economies. How is this **going to be accomplished** in Esbjerg, Skive, Herning and Haderslev? Can nice and neat urban spaces and shopping carry the cities forward? We doubt it. We think there has to be *more*.

Strategies and programs related to urban space that ensure cultural dynamism and development

But what is it exactly that this “more” could consist of? What is that we feel ought to be the coming years’ tasks for urban design?

What we have found is that working with vitalizing the city’s spaces and scenes has to take the next step forward from creating beautiful frames to supporting strategies for city life. Our research and professional practice serve to inform us that there is a need for strategies that take their mark in the local players who can contribute to creating new hybrid urban spaces with wide-range and diverse urban activity.

We are talking not only about the players who are connected to the boutiques and the shopping milieus but also about local players who are participating in the music scene, in sports clubs, in institutions of higher learning and science, in other kinds of schools, in associations, in the youth environment and in the business world.

The challenges laid down before the provincial cities have to do with the development of sturdy strategies that have the capacity to regard the city in a totality-oriented perspective. They have to do with being pro-active in relation to openness, dialogue and calling into play several different kinds of players in the planning process; this will ensure ownership of the process and the result. The demand does not involve viewing the city spaces exclusively in terms of the center/suburb complex of problems but also involves regarding the city spaces as identity-carriers of the city’s overall neighborhood profile.

It also has to do with our conception about creating a new dynamics among different foreign cultures and lifestyles, effected through the establishment of new urban scenes for cooperation between cultural institutions, businesses and educational milieus and through bringing forth events that can move things around and offer new perspectives – and in the smaller cities as well.

In what follows, we will point out a few central areas of endeavor in this connection:

1. The cities’ self-image and branding:

For the time being, a number of cities are working with *branding* strategies. In this connection, it is typical to see the emergence of certain questions regarding *how* the city understands itself. There is a wide disparity between concentrating the work around representing the city in an ideal way, as a product that can easily be sold to business enterprises, tourists and potential middle class newcomers (this means to say, emphasis is placed on presenting the city in the way one imagines the target group *wants* it to be and views as being positive) and the contrary situation, where efforts are concentrated around finding the way toward an understanding of the city’s historical identity and charting it out, along with a newly germinating sense of inquisitiveness about who we really are and who the city’s users and players happen to be. It is, of course, the latter approach that we would like to plead for. It is only by including the breadth, the **lopsided** and the raw that one can really bring forth a new and dynamic platform for working with cultural development. An example from Aalborg might serve to illuminate this: Aalborg is a city that, like so many others, is undergoing a process of transformation from being an industrial city to becoming a city of knowledge/learning and culture. Virtually all the vast workplaces of the former industrial age are gone by now. Instead, the university is expanding, as are the higher technological businesses. The well educated and those who are

seeking admission to the educational programs have begun to set their mark on the city's life and are posing demands for a different kind of cultural life and for new leisure offerings. This is a line of development that the university and the municipality are inclined to support. This is also why in Aalborg there is a move to brand the city in a new way. In the midst of all the work with giving Aalborg a new brand, Jacob Ejersbo's novel, *Nordkraft*, appeared in bookstores. Shortly thereafter, the novel was made into a movie, which depicts the drug scene in Aalborg in gray pictures. The industrial milieu. The **reverse sides**. Here, aspects of life are being presented that we would just as soon forget aspects from which we would like to turn away and avert our gaze.

The film aroused conflicting feelings among the viewers. "It's catastrophic", wrote some of the city's "standard-bearers" in their articles in the local newspaper. "It delineates a negative image of the city." "It shows the ugly industry we've always loathed for its hideousness."

Others focused on other aspects and thought the film was exciting, especially because it focused on what is unique about Aalborg. Their point of view didn't necessarily reflect a response on how the narcotics milieu was being treated in the film but was concerned more with ruminating on the potentials in the raw industry-architecture and in those areas that haven't yet been invaded by middle class tastes and lifestyles. Aalborg still has fissures where something alternative can begin to sprout. The film set its focus on an identity that can be utilized in future cultural development.

Today there is a lively discussion going on in the city about whether the old industry buildings should be torn down to make room for new homes and offices and to lay out attractive urban spaces – or whether the huge building volumes should be preserved, instead, and be made to function as catalysts for a creative development with the establishment of meeting places and spaces that could be run by a collaborative effort shared among art, culture and commercial interests. The ongoing conversion of the disused Nordkraft power plant to a cultural center is part of such a strategy and Aalborg still has several industry-cultural areas like this: the East Harbor, the large area near the Eternit Factory, not to mention the wonderful area around the cement factory, Portland, where production is still going strong and where the chimneys are still smoking. Concrete. Rusty iron. Wild nature. Fantastic idioms and building volumes. Can the spatialities and the aesthetics here be brought into play, so that Aalborg will have something to offer which, in a Danish context, will be unique?

Our point, then, is this: it is crucial to have an eye peeled for aesthetic potentials that are different from the traditionally respectable and decent.

2. A delicately well-balanced and democratic city:

As Jan Gehl so astutely suggests, people attract other people. His point, moreover, is that it is important to concentrate and gather the forces around central thoroughfares and regions in the city in order to create an active zone.

We would add that it is important that what is being collected should not merely be more of the same but that there should be a conscious programming of a varied offering and also that what we would call "public domains" are being brought forth, i.e. places and spaces where different cultures converge and exchange perspectives.

It is important to inscribe the "new Dane's" cultures into our urban life along with that of the young people, the marginalized and people who are thinking in a different way if the city centers are really going to function as cultural melting pots and shared domains that the citizens can identify with on the broad level.

This can occur by setting up the city's open plaza areas and publicly accessible spaces in such a way that they will invite different cultural milieus and lifestyle groups to stop by and to stick around for a while – winter, spring, summer or fall, in the day, the evening and the night. This can also occur by working with “event spaces”, where different kinds of arrangements can be organized that make their appeal to a shifting array of target groups.

Our focus in this connection, then, is that people really ought to work consciously and deliberately with creating spaces and events for the large multiplicity of people.

3. The instructive city spaces:

Entertainment has conquered the cities, for better or worse. When we have time off from our jobs, when we are shopping and when we are spending time with our children, we want to be amused and entertained. Chambers of Commerce all over the country have now figured this out. As a consequence, different kinds of activities are being arranged than can turn the shopping jaunt into an adventure: “Open by Night”, “Crazy Days” and “Shopping Sundays” allure The Family Denmark. But the question that was raised earlier remains an urgent one. Are hot dogs, beer, music, dancing and the fun of the fair ... and other special offers on sale items ... *really* going to bring about an exciting and challenging city that offers any genuine wealth of experience?

There seems to be a rising interest in combining experience with learning something new, whether it touches upon historical relations, technology or different circumstances of production. On the whole, there appears to be a rising interest in gaining insight into some of the processes that are normally concealed from the public eye.

Now that we have obtained all these fine and beautiful urban spaces, there is still a question about whether they can be used as scenes for meetings among its commercial activities, its institutions of higher learning and knowledge, other schools and the public life in general.

One pithy example is provided when the school moves out into the city. “With the whole school as classroom”, read the headline of an article that appeared in the daily newspaper, Politikken, on October 14th of last year. The article offered an account of a course of instruction that was offered by a school in Copenhagen last autumn, where students in the ninth grade were given different assignments in the city's space, to the great amusement and curiosity of the city's visitors. Another example is provided by a case when, a few years ago, the Aalborg Cathedral School's music students took up positions in a number of different shop windows and performed their music programs before the eyes and ears of the city's surprised residents. Every year, on “Culture Night”, architecture and design students from Aalborg University invite the city's residents to come inside and watch exhibitions and performances at the premises on Gammel Torv (the city's “Old Square”). The event draws a great many visitors, especially because it can successfully be combined with other educational institutions' and associations' creative arrangement in the city's space.

Technology- and nature-festivals are other examples of the educational and research milieu's appropriation of the rising interest in “edu-tainment” in the urban space. The municipalities have been quick on the uptake. Even something as unusual as a visit to a waste-processing plant in Hjørring was a new tourist attraction this summer, with a great many customers. However, these examples are only incipient advances. We believe that the whole spectrum of activity can be vastly improved and can be much better targeted and become more purposeful. There are many local forces and many new interests converging in the field between knowledge and experience. Future efforts are going to have to focus on turning these ideas

and activities into an even steadier firmament of programmed city life in order to reinforce the content in what it is that we wish to gather around in the space of the city.

4. Everyday life's urban spaces:

What kinds of city spaces are we talking about? We think that it is right that the forces in the provincial cities are being gathered together and integrated, with the emphasis on the cities' central areas and waterfronts - in just the way that it has been happening. But it's also important that this transpire in the smaller cities. However, it is important to focus not *only* on the city square. It is equally important to call the train station, the bus terminal and other transit spaces, intermediate spaces and other everyday spaces into play, since it is here, through these spaces, that many people pass every day.

We hold that it is profitable to think in terms of new hybrids of space: for example, spaces that combine functions like waiting for the bus or the train with the dissemination of information, amusement or the creation of an unexpected experience.

The city space of everyday life should also be coupled to the "**healthy-city**" concept, to motion programs and to activities that can incite people to get up off the couch and move out into the city's space. The active urban space has come to stay. The many centrally placed **skating rinks** have become a sensation.

It is crucial that design strategies not only take annual arrangements like the marathon and the various "runs" through the cities' streets and the various skiing and bicycle races into consideration but *also* think along the lines of more permanent strategies for moving sports and physical exertion into a status of first priority and turning these activities into visible and important functions of urban life.

There is no reason that the schools' running tracks or the clubs' training areas should be hidden away behind buildings and closed fences. We would like to suggest that from here on in, people think along lines of greater transparency and **consider the routes of motion** as integral aspects of urban-space planning policy.

5. Pockets of unpredictability:

If we turn our glance to Malmö, we find this kind of transparency. The Swedes have a long-standing tradition for open dialogue-oriented cooperation with the added bonus that strategies are also developed for the open areas which are not being put into play, **strategies that are** simultaneously pro-active with respect to the organization of the urban section's future urban life.

In connection with the decision to place Malmö Högskola on the islet of Universitetsholmen in 1997, what was initiated was an extended process of transformation from industrial city to university town. Universitetsholmen is a part of the **western harbor area**, where the **Kochum shipbuilding plant** has stood as the prominent profile for a good many years.

The city of Malmö grabbed hold of the chance to look for a concentration of prospective urban growth that adhered closely to the inner city through the establishment of the four "Q-books", which laid out principles for the future development of Universitetsholmen. At the same time, there were a number of areas that were kept clear of development.

The result of the process was the four Q-BOOKs, which set forth certain guidelines: Q-BOOK 1: *Overall urban strategy*, Q-BOOKs 2+3: *The city's floor* – Open spaces, squares, public/private,

infrastructure, the meeting with the water, etc. and *The city's structure* – architectonic guidelines for the design of building structure and finally, Q-BOOK 4: *Art in the public space*.

Sturdy planning brings into being the preconditions for the unpredictable pockets. Midway between the Västra Havnen [**the western area of the harbor**] and Universitetsholmen (which contains, among other buildings, the region's most impressive high-rise buildings – “Turning Torso” and “Boo1”) there is also another attraction today that causes Barcelona's skateboard tracks to pale by comparison: a white concrete field measuring approximately 100 x 100 meters, an inverted egg carton, which creates a unique and different kind of gathering place.

The reason we are missing diversity, the unfamiliar and a place for the stranger in the Danish milieu **and yearning for them** is that we regard the open and ambiguous as modern urban space's most salient and distinctive feature.

People have to be challenged. Even more especially, a sense of tolerance has to be brought about so that fear of whatever is different will be reduced to a minimum. The city of the future has to be open, inviting and adaptable in the face of changes.



Fig. 6. The skateboard track in Malmö is of a high European standard and establishes a unique and new gathering place in the city scene.

6. Materials and architectonic expressions

Let's make this clear right away: we have nothing against cobblestones or other kinds of natural stones. Quite the contrary, we think they are beautiful. And they only become more beautiful when they are put to use. But we would like to raise our voices here and exhort the Danish provincial towns to take heart and start experimenting with other kinds of materials, contingent upon the site and the architectonic context. Lights and electronic media have apparently come to stay in the public space. As links in strategies for stimulating experiences, disseminating instruction and creating events, these kinds of media are now indispensable implements. It would be exciting to see more of the electronic universe in cities of the future ... even in the small towns in Jutland.

The Danish provincial towns have something to offer

The larger Danish provincial towns are active on the cultural front. Rock concerts, festival weeks and the like generate attention and energy.

The smaller provincial towns are having a more difficult time of it. It might be so that visits from avant-garde artists and other creative individuals are rare. It might be so that it is hard to present a flow of events that generate attention and stimulate economy in the town. In that event, it is necessary to work with what is present.

Even in the smaller towns, measures have been taken to silence vehicular traffic. There are new open plaza areas, new networks of pedestrian streets, new waterfront areas, well preserved sections of the old city and small patches of green parks.

The investigation that has been carried out by the Center for Byrumsforskning / Real Dania Forskning also substantiates that all over the nation we have a great many annual festivals, summer celebrations, city parties, culture nights, bicycle races, guided tours in the city and in nature, "**healthy city** arrangements" and arrangements for children. The list of different events that even the smaller cities manage to mount is a lengthy one. In other words, the activity level is high. And there are branding processes underway that revolve not only around selling the city as a commodity but also have to do with creating an internal identity, with promoting the city's understanding of itself and with giving rise to a discussion about what directions the city should working toward.

From the international urban scene, there are a great many examples of the application of new types of materials, of designs of interactive urban spaces, lighting and seasonal variation in the use of the urban spaces.

What we have before us, then, are spaces, energy and myriad sources of inspiration. So there is something to build further on. It will be exciting to see whether people will succeed in creating urban spaces that have a mentally and socially stimulating effect on the residents and visitors, urban spaces that will encompass the whole city's diverse multiplicity. This calls for a conscious urban space policy and design strategy, which should encompass public meeting places that can be enjoyed, offer chances for people to exert themselves physically and provide opportunities for learning and for effecting cultural exchange, not only among people from the middle class but also among older folks and new Danes, among people of different generations and different life styles.

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