

RESEARCH PUBLIC CONDENSER IN VESTERBRO, COPENHAGEN
Reflection on the research done of what a public condenser should
achieve in the neighbourhood of Vesterbro in Copenhagen.

Student

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Chair of Public Building

Thesis Public Condenser

I THE PUBLIC CONDENSER

Personally I have never really critically reflected on my own way of conducting architectural research. My way of approaching a design and thus the research I conducted varied all the time while at the same time remaining the same in a way. I used the same methodology, however in every new project I did them in a new order or discovered a new methodology to conduct research and added it to my pallet of methodologies if it gave me valuable results. After all the lectures the first lecture of Jorge Mejia Hernandez (2019) stuck with me the most as he had an overall talk about what a master in the science of architecture should be capable of. He made me realize even more that the way you do research affects your results and therefore it is very important to be aware of the research you are conducting. This made me realize that maybe by writing this paper I will discover how I could improve my way of doing research and thus improve my designs in the future that result from the research.

My thesis topic is the Public Condenser. Out of the Public Building chair the question arose what a Public Condenser is nowadays and what it's significance is within the built environment. For this project two sites were given to investigate. One site is Vesterbro in Copenhagen and the other is Escamp in The Hague. The goal was that after the research one could choose their preferred site. From within the studio four options into which to research were given, namely City, Connection, People and Power. The goal was to answer the question: *what can a public condenser contribute on the given site?* These subjects were divided over research groups. Our group has done research into Power, from within the studio certain sub categories were given within Power. These categories are: Top-Down, High Culture, Economics and Politics. These categories could all be researched on different scales, the research matrix below shows the overview of what our studio expected from our research.

Research Matrix

		History	Future	Built matter	Program
Group 1 & 2	City Urban Formation Urban Textures Urban Spaces Urban Architecture				
Group 3 & 4	Connection Urban Mobility Urban Networks				
Group 5 & 6	People Bottom-Up Low culture Demographics Society				
Group 7 & 8	Power Top-Down High Culture Economics Politics				

Expected scales:

- XL DK Denmark
- L CPH Copenhagen
- M VB Vesterbro
- S SBH Skydebanehaven

Figure 1 Research matrix provided by studio

As a group the following research question was formulated: How will the elements of power (economics, high-culture and top-down) influence the areas Vesterbro and Escamp? I did my research into top-down policies that are of influence on the project sites now, in the past and in the future and what chances or barriers these policies give. To research this I formulated the following research question: What policies influenced Vesterbro and Escamp over time and how will they influence the development of Vesterbro and Escamp for the near future?

With all groups having their research finished a complete overview of both sites has been made. This gives insight in challenges and opportunities that are relevant for the sites. This could also help to answer the question given from the studio: *what can a public condenser contribute on the given site?*.

Alongside the site research, case study research was performed for buildings with a public function, this gives references and understanding how they work. This can be a big help in the design phase. From this point onwards the individual part of the thesis begins. This is done by choosing a preferred site and taking a position by using the conclusions of the research done. For me the most important features are the approaching incoherence of Vesterbro by new social housing developments in the neighbourhood and simultaneously the strength of the site which is the oasis of peace it is within the neighbourhood. To strengthen my position I started doing my individual research and developed a personal research question: How can the public condenser, without detracting the current qualities of Skydebanehaven, improve the social cohesion in Vesterbro and nearby neighbourhoods?

II APPROACH

Since I chose Copenhagen as my site I will elaborate on my approach for Copenhagen, the research for The Hague was done in a similar matter. My Approach has been focused on what kind of policies the municipality of Copenhagen implemented over a relevant time period and why the municipality has implemented them and what the results have been of these policies. This meant diving into documents of the municipality with in the back of my mind the site so that the policies I researched are relevant for my research question. I divided the research in four scales, a neighbourhood scale, a city scale, the Oresund¹ scale and on a national scale because these are scales on which policies relevant for the site are made. The goal of the research is to find out how the current state of policies came to be, what the results are and what the policies plan for the future to anticipate on possible changes in the future.

As a technique to understand these policies I mapped them or put the most important policy subjects in diagrams as can be seen in figure 2. As the municipality aims in their policies to only build social housing in districts that currently have 0-20% social housing until 2027 it is to be expected that the amount of social housing in Vesterbro will increase. I chose this approach to understand the upcoming developments in the neighbourhood of Vesterbro. As a methodology this can also be seen as an statistical analysis (Lucas, 2016). After looking into all the policies they implemented I reflected on the actual outcomes of these policies to understand what influenced the development of the site, the neighbourhood, the city and eventually the country.

¹ Oresund is the region that is formed by the two big cities Malmö and Copenhagen and their surrounding municipalities. Together they form an economic metropolitan area. They are connected via the Oresund bridge.

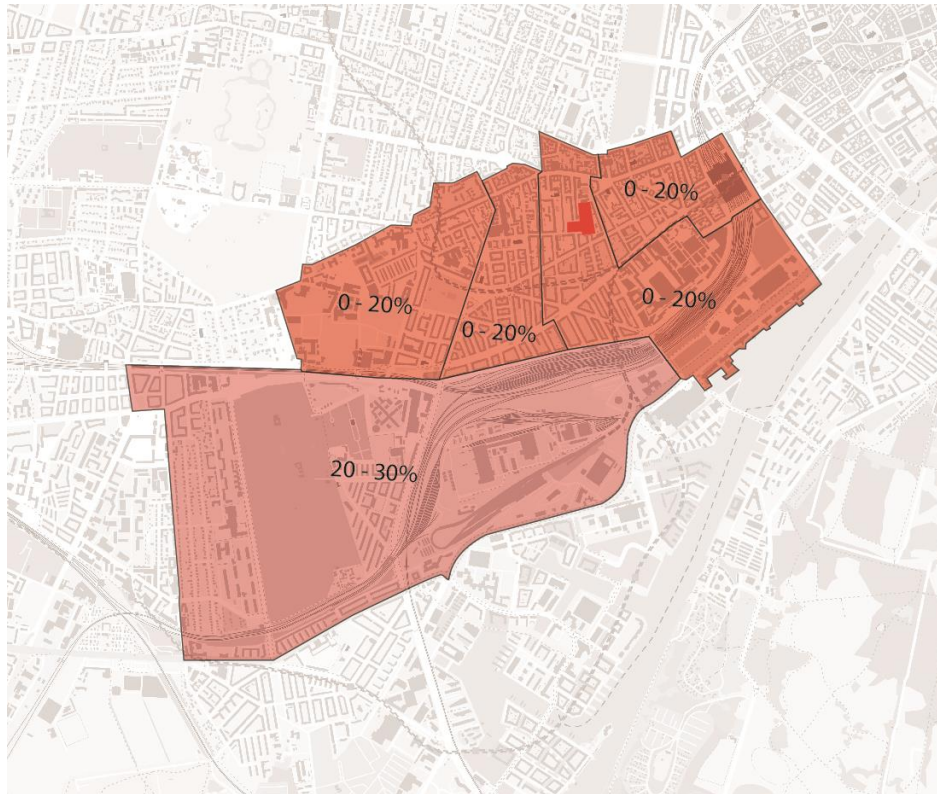


Figure 2 Percentage of Social Housing in school districts in Vesterbro in 2015

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This way of conducting research is mainly literature research on social aspects within policies. Therefore for this course I started to look into social research methods since linking this specific approach to architectural methodologies was difficult. Bryman mentions that an interesting point of departure for the investigation of a research question are developments in society (Bryman, 2012 (page-5)). My research was preliminary before the research question looking for these developments. By finding these developments it made it possible for me to formulate my design research question: How can the public condenser, without detracting the current qualities of Skydebanehaven, improve the social cohesion in Vesterbro and nearby neighbourhoods?

As a way to understand various possibilities of what a public condenser can be, several case studies have been conducted on different public buildings. These buildings have been selected on a similar amount of square meters as the desired public condenser in Copenhagen. They also have been selected on the programme which is focused on connecting people. The case studies have been researched on context, programme, spatial concept, construction and circulation.

III CASE STUDY AS A COMBINED RESEARCH METHOD

For the continuation of my personal reflection on research methods I will focus on case study research. I find case study research helpful for designing public buildings, because typologies for public buildings are hard to implement since such a thing as a basic public building typology is hard to come by. Of course one could see library as a typology, or museum, these are all forms of public buildings so public building is not a typology but the subcategories are. Also since the public condenser is a relative new subject for me but also as a rediscovered typology in Western countries it is useful to do case study research. The first form of case studies appeared around 1900 within the field of anthropology. Not only in anthropology case studies were used as a research method, in medicine a form of case study arose with descriptions of individuals often called "case work" or "case history". These were the "first generation" case studies as Johansson describes it, the "second generation" case studies were the next step. These "second generation" case studies were introduced by Robert Yin, he transferred experimental logic into the field of naturalistic inquiry and combined it with qualitative methods (Johansson, n.d.). Why the case studies were performed is explained by Robert Yin. Yin says that case studies arose out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. This is not only a desire in the field of architecture but also for psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, community planning and even economics. Yin's definition of a case study is: A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2009). Since my focus is primarily on the social aspect of Copenhagen on a neighbourhood and city scale the choice for case study research seems like a valid one considering Yin's statement. So the case study methodology was developed in the social sciences. In the field of architecture and planning, in contrary to the social sciences, case studies are usually performed on "artefacts" (for example houses or housing areas) (Johansson n.d.).

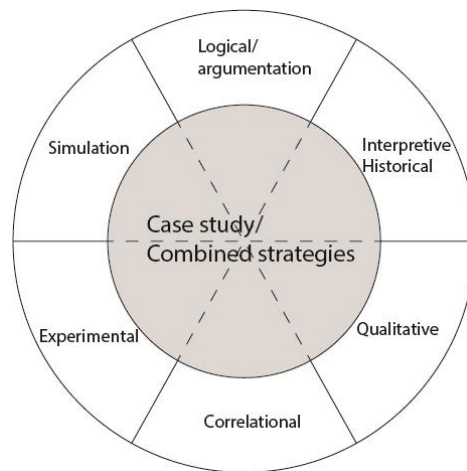


Figure 3 Conceptual framework for research methods (Johansson, n.d., based on Groat and Wang (2013))

Performing a case study one researches several aspects of an “artifact”. To study the chosen aspects different strategies may be applicable, therefore Groat and Wang position case studies as combined strategies. According to Ray Lucas (2016) research can be done by an etic approach or an emic approach. Etic being an approach with an outside look on the matter and emic being the opposite of looking from within/being a part of it. My way of conducting case study research was an etic approach, I looked at floorplans, sections and pictures. Along looking at pictures and drawings I looked into the historical context and the reason why it was built to understand the architects’ design decisions. For a clear overview to see if the design decisions had the desired effect an emic approach would have been chosen. An emic approach for case study research would be to conduct interviews among users of the building or to reside for a certain amount of time in the building and observe peoples behavior.

Using case studies is a valuable approach for my design topic since the research focusses not only on the design of a building and it’s functionality but also on the historical and social context. Therefore I can link the spatial concept used in the case study to social problems and/or historic context in which it was built. This gives me an understanding how architects have made design decisions for comparable questions to mine.

IIII THE VALUE OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH

In the lecture series case studies was not covered as a research method, which is understandable since several methods are used in case study research according to Groat and Wang (2002). For me personally doing case study research always asked for a case specific approach. However reading Robbert Yin's position on case study research it made me aware that using a specific approach will help you a great deal in conducting the research. He says case study research is distinctive but also covers procedures central to all modes of social science research (Yin, 2009). The notion of these procedures central to all modes did not occur to me before. According to Groat and Wang (2013) the case study strategy implies more than simply studying a phenomenon in the "field". The research should also encompass the complex dynamics in which it was built and the context which it cannot do without (Groat and Wang, 2013). I did cover the historical context and the situation in which it was constructed and therefore I agree with this notion. What I did not do is explain what my methodological path was in a clear way, nor did I write this down, nor did I think of it for myself of how to conduct my case study research. I just formulated that I wanted to research the circulation, structure, spatial programme and the context. Certain ways of formulating these kinds of research could be described as "field work" or "literature review". Often it is misunderstood that some of these research methods are more important than other research methods (Groat and Wang, 2013). I think each research method has it's own value and for a certain subject they could be more applicable, but if you want to get the most complete research result one should apply as much methods as possible. In the social sciences it is believed that case studies are only appropriate in the exploratory phase of an investigation (Groat and Wang, 2013). I strongly disagree with this when it comes to architectural design and the relevance of case studies. You could have done your research based on other research methods and come to the point that you would like to see what the possibilities are for a certain design problem, or how other architects have interpreted the same design problem and came up with an answer.

Eventually to answer my design question: *How can the public condenser, without detracting the current qualities of Skydebanehaven, improve the social cohesion in Vesterbro and nearby neighbourhoods?* I can use my findings from the general research into City, People, Connection and Power. Combine these findings with the knowledge gained from the case study researches and my personal research into the subject and come to a design that answers the design question.

In my personal opinion the approach given by the studio was too general to be of real value for the eventual design. Because of the research method a lot of subjects were covered. However they were not done in depth. Also the group research took too much time, this led to a shortage in time to develop your own research and thus your own position on the subject. In my opinion in your graduation studio it's best to do research by yourself and discover for yourself what interests you. Despite all this I do agree with the studio's position on what role architecture could play in the public realm. However I think it would help if they let it up to the student to develop their position in their own way of doing research.

So the question from the studio was: *what can a public condenser contribute on the given site?* To answer this question the research done by groups was actually helpful despite my critique in the previous paragraph. This is because of the broad scope it gave on both cities and the sites. The research made me realise that segregation is a growing problem in Denmark and especially Copenhagen. This gave me the position of what the public condenser should do in Copenhagen and the site, namely: *How can the public condenser, without detracting the current qualities of Skydebanehaven, improve the social cohesion in Vesterbro and nearby neighbourhoods?* However, after following the lecture series, I think it could have saved a lot of time if I was more aware of my way of conducting research as well as improve the quality and/or amount of my findings. What I did find a shame is that all my research was done with an etic approach, which is not that weird considering my topic was power. The group that covered research of people had a more emic approach with conducted interviews of users of the site. Thus my eventual design does have emic research results provided by another research group.

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Illustrations

- Figure 1. Research matrix provided by Public Building graduation studio (2019)
- Figure 2. de Kuyjer, I.A. (2019). Own work
- Figure 3. Johansson, R. (n.d.). Case study Methodology. Royal Institute of Technology