

COMMON COMMUNITY SPACE

Architecture in the intersection of rural decline and integration.



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ABSTRACT

Sweden is a strongly urbanised country. The backside to this is a countryside facing huge problems. The rural decline includes decreasing population, decreasing services and overall reduced life quality in many rural towns and municipalities. In recent years, large numbers of immigrants have come to Sweden. Many of them have come to the small rural towns where there are many vacant apartments. These immigrants often find it hard to become integrated in their new communities. This thesis sees a possibility in combining these two challenges, the rural decline and the integration.

Through the design of a rural community centre, this thesis aims at investigating how architecture can help a local community. How can a building improve local life quality, bring the community tighter together and support social interaction and integration of immigrants? The main question of the thesis is: **How to design spaces that supports a rural community and social inclusion between its inhabitants?**

The location of the thesis project is Virserum, a small town in Småland, south-east Sweden. Even though the project has a specific site, the thesis hopes to show a method that can be used for similar projects in other small communities.

The method is based on a comprehensive community analysis where important aspects of the community are identified and described. By looking at how the aspects are linked conclusions are made. The analysis is then transformed into strategies for the design. Input for

the project has come from meetings with both local associations and immigrants. Research through design has been used as a method. Different design ideas have been tested through sketching and modelling followed by evaluation due to certain criteria based on the analysis. The design has been done with an inside-out approach, ensuring that good spaces for interaction is the main focus.

The design result of this thesis is a community centre that consists of several independently designed volumes. Each volume contains a certain program for activities that can bring the community closer together and support the creation of new social relationships. The spaces are also designed to support good social interaction. Wood is the main material of the building and trees and forest have also been an inspiration for the atmosphere and spatial qualities created. The exterior spaces of the site has been designed to be more defined and to support the inhabitants connection to local community aspects.

The method of a deep analysis of the community through different aspects led to a design that is connected to the community on many different levels. To truly create a community space for the future you need to understand both the history, the present and the people of the place. By including local immigrants in the process, the final result can be seen as a way of dealing with both rural decline and integration through the means of architecture.

STUDENT BACKGROUND

My name is Roberto, I grew up on the countryside outside Virserum in Småland, south-east Sweden. The dream of becoming an architect has been with me since I was a child and I have now finished my education through this master thesis. My interests within the field are vast, ranging from urban planning to interior space configurations and construction details.

Both my bachelor studies and my whole master have been done at Chalmers. During the master I have taken studios and courses about sustainability, housing, healthcare, rural community planning, digital tools and architectural competitions.

From my rural background I have developed an interest for questions concerning rural development. In this master thesis I have chosen to work with this personal interest combined with my architecture expertise.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During this thesis I have had the support of several people who I would like to acknowledge. Without help from these people this thesis project would not have been possible.

First I want to thank my examiner, Dag Tvilde, and my supervisor, Joaquim Tarraso, for giving me valuable input and questions that helped me find the way forward.

I want to thank the community of Virserum, especially the people who I have met or had mail contact with during the process. You have helped creating the foundations for this thesis. A special thanks to Jos, my contact person at home, who have helped me organise meetings and come in contact with the right people.

Thanks to friends at school, especially Erik, who have given valuable input and help with practical things.

Finally I want to thank my family who have supported my dream of becoming an architect already from the beginning. You have also contributed to this project by giving me information and constantly updating me about the development at home. A little extra thanks to Rasmus, my brother, who several times has provided me with photos of the community and the site.

Tack!

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1

Discourse and introduction

This thesis has its background in two contemporary discourses: rural decline and integration. The architectural project of this thesis will be situated in the intersection of these two discourses. To understand this project you need to understand this wider societal background from where the main thesis question originates.

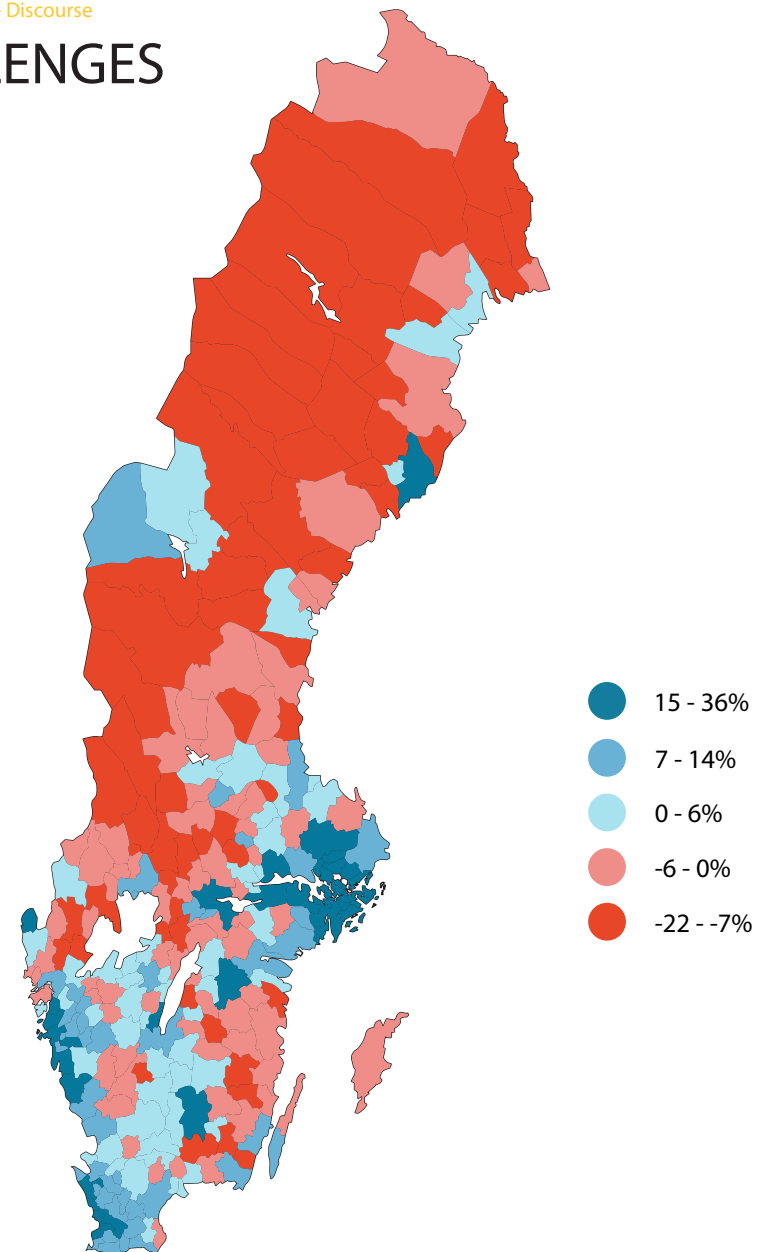
RURAL CHALLENGES

The map to the right clearly shows how Sweden is divided by urbanisation. Large cities, especially the university cities, are growing rapidly while rural areas far away from these hubs of growth are rapidly declining. Worth noticing is that both blue and red municipalities may contain both growing and declining communities. Small villages and communities are often worse off than the municipal centres (Müller, 2017).

A decreasing population means a decreasing tax base followed by cuts in public services. Schools, health clinics and police stations are closed down. Less inhabitants also makes it harder for commercial services such as grocery stores, restaurants and petrol stations to survive. All these things are what makes a place liveable. As these functions are closing down the people that remains becomes more and more critical to the development, the system and the politicians (Landstedt, 2017).

Young people move the most. That gives an extra boost to urbanisation as it is the young who starts families and therefore add extra population to the places which they have moved to (Mellander, 2017).

I believe that for rural communities to counter this negative trend, they must focus on improving qualities connected to rural life. They can never compete with the large cities in terms of, for example, liveliness or commercial service. Instead they must focus on what might attract people from the busy cities to the countryside, things like closeness to nature, suitable environments for children and strong community feeling. This thesis is mostly connected to the last of these aspects.



Population changes in Swedish municipalities between 2000 and 2015 (Mellander, 2017).

INTEGRATION

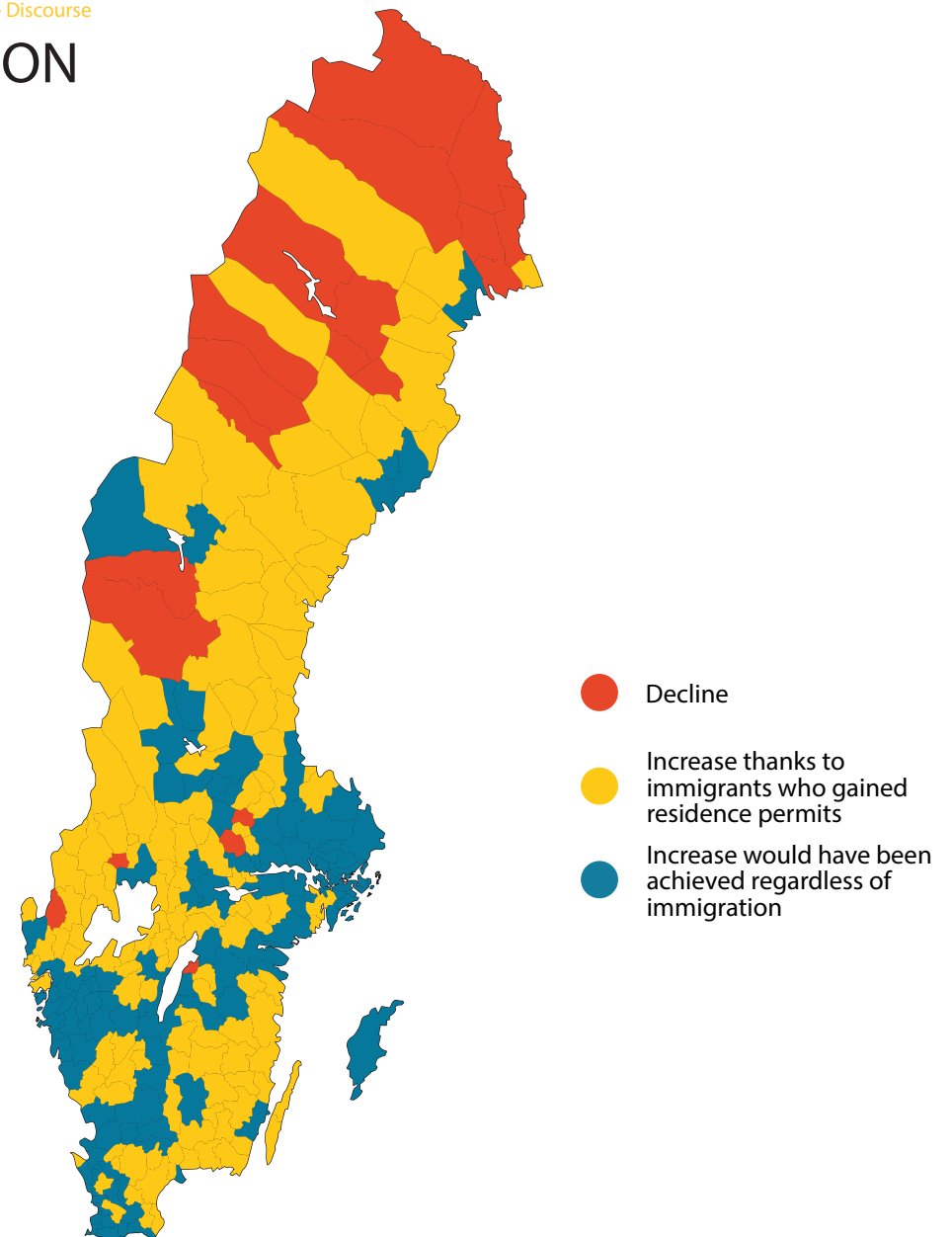
Since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, more than 150.000 Syrians have been granted permission to stay in Sweden (SCB, 2017). The map to the right shows the impact on rural areas. The yellow shows municipalities which population would have decreased in 2016 without immigration from abroad.

Immigrants tend to move in the same patterns as young adults, from rural areas to urban. For a short time the immigration gives rural communities a positive population change and also new jobs as public and commercial services need to expand (Vanhaverbeke, 2016). If the immigrants would stay in the rural places they could possibly be the start of a more lasting positive trend of development.

For me, integration is more than getting a job. It is also about becoming a part of the community where you live. To get friends and start feeling at home. If you feel at home you might want to start a business, join a local association or volunteer in local events.

The countryside offers good possibilities of social integration. Because of aspects like low anonymity and active associations it is easy for immigrants go get in contact with local inhabitants in small communities. Housing segregation is also not a big problem as it is in larger towns and cities (Kihl, 2016).

The idea that immigrants can benefit rural communities and vice versa has led to this thesis's main question: How can architecture contribute to positive development and social inclusion in a rural Swedish town?



Population changes in Swedish municipalities during 2016 (Nordregio, 2017).

THESIS INTRODUCTION

Aim and thesis question

The aim of the thesis is to investigate how a rural community centre can be designed today. This includes finding a method for how to design for social interaction in rural places. The aim is also to give a design proposal for a community centre in Virserum. The main thesis question is: How to design spaces that supports a rural community and social inclusion between its inhabitants?

Why a community centre?

Many buildings or functions gather people depending on age, needs or interests, for example schools or theatres. Community centres are instead known for bringing people together that lives within the same geographical area. In this way a community centre is a good concept for working with strengthening a community and integrating new inhabitants. Also, according to a study, *Orter med befolkningsökning* (places with increasing population), one of five aspects common for successful rural places is a strong community feeling (Myndigheten för tillväxtpolitiska utvärderingar och analyser, 2011).

Method

The method has been to first do a comprehensive analysis of the community. This information has then been concluded in a community diagram, showing important aspects of the community and their links to each other. Conclusions drawn from this has then been transformed into inputs for the design.

The design has been developed through testing of different design iterations, research by design. Between the iterations, evaluation has been done according to criteria based on the community analysis and sustainability. Roughly, the design has developed from the inside and out, starting with designing the interior spaces and finally assembling these spaces on the site.

References

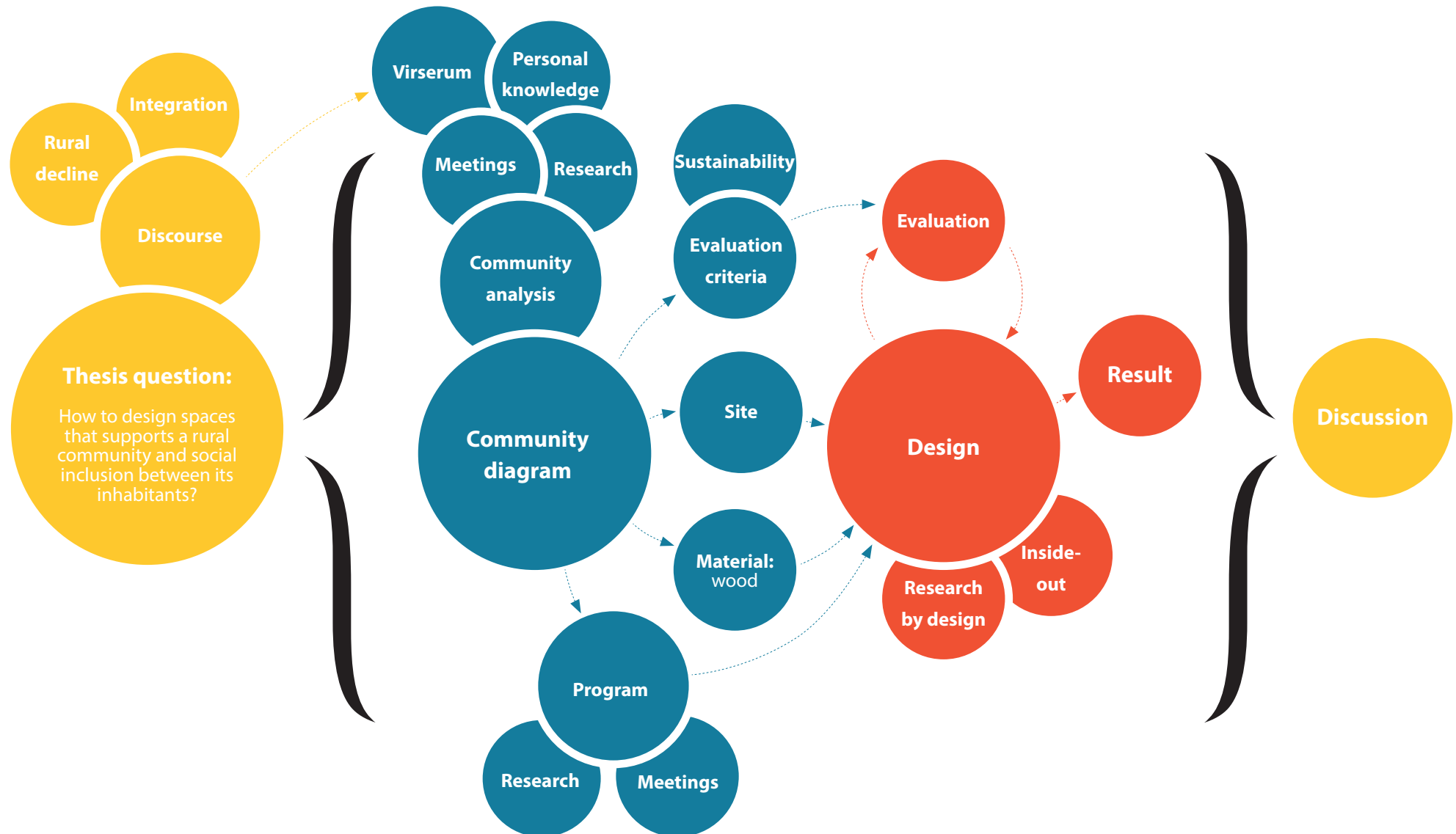
References of community centres, both internationally and in Sweden, have been researched to find inspiration and for better understanding the typology. But as community centres are a result of the needs of the community in which they are situated it is not possible to find all answers for my project in other projects. The question of program and design have to be answered by the specific community, in this case Virserum. When it comes to image references in the thesis, all illustrations are created by the author if nothing else is specified.

Focus and delimitation

A rural community centre might feel like a quite small project but without limitations it can become an infinite task. The focus of the research has been architecture for social inclusion. Other aspects of rural decline and integration has not been touched upon.

Program, sense of space and materiality have been focus points of the design research. Some other aspects have also been worked with to a smaller extent, for example: economy, construction and building details.

Thesis method diagram



2

Community analysis

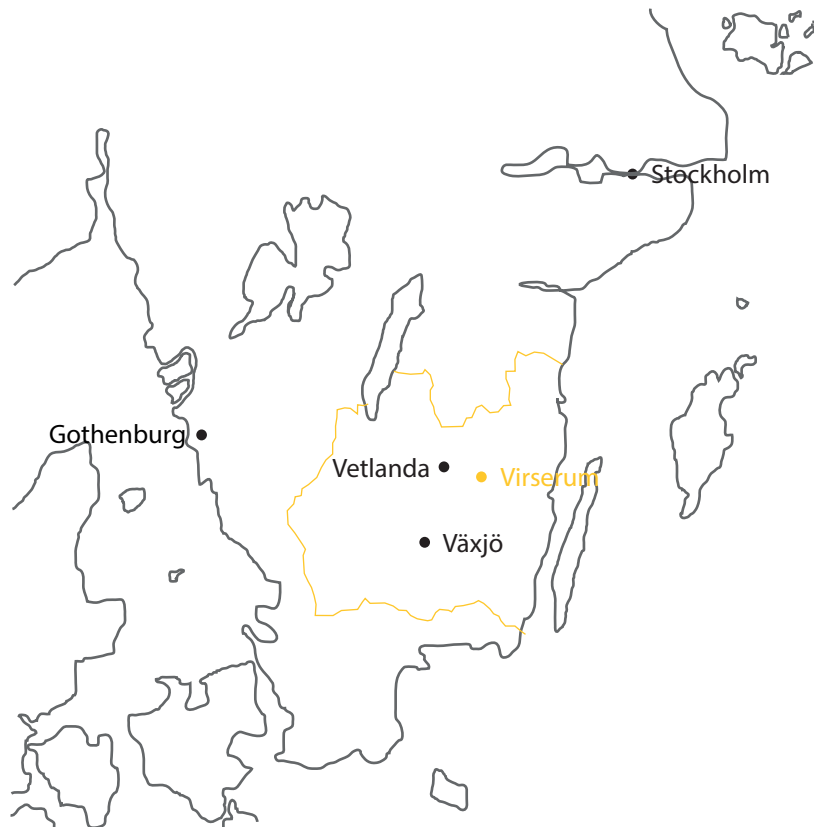
Virserum in Småland, Sweden, is the location of this master thesis. The small town has about 2000 inhabitants. It is a good place for this thesis as it has recently had a quite large influx of immigrants. There is also a strong will among the local people to develop the community. The rich history of the place creates good possibilities to get inspiration for the design part of this thesis.

In this community analysis, important aspects are identified and described individually and then connected to each other in a “community diagram”.

LOCATION AND ANALYSIS INTRODUCTION

Location

Virserum is situated in the region of Småland in the south part of Sweden. It is the second largest community in Hultsfred municipality. Vetlanda is the closest town with substantial commercial service while Växjö is the closest city. The community is placed in a valley next to a lake.



Analysis introduction

Virserum is like all communities a complex structure of people and many other aspects. This analysis is made as a list of aspects that are important for the community in different ways. Some of them have played a more important role for this project than others but they all contribute to the community as it looks today. For clarification the aspects are divided in three categories:



People

For the sake of the project, the old inhabitants and the immigrants have been divided and analysed individually. Tourists are also its own aspect.



Active aspects

Active aspects include associations and museums. The active aspects are defined as aspects that needs peoples involvement for their existence.



Passive aspects

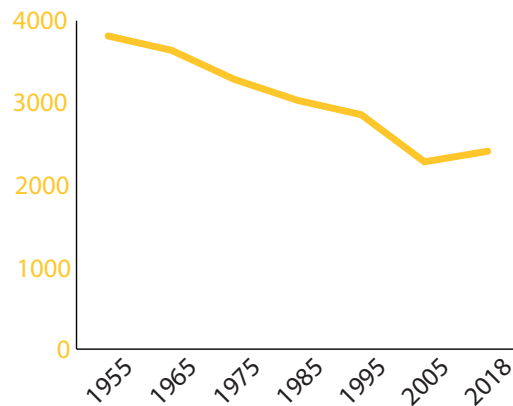
Passive aspects are things like local history and craftsmanship. The passive aspects are just as important as the active in shaping the identity of the community but they are harder to define.

COMMUNITY ASPECTS

In Inhabitants

Virserum has about 2400 inhabitants, including about 500 people living in the surrounding countryside. During the industrialisation the community grew rapidly as people moved here for jobs. Since the closure of the furniture industries in the 70's, the population has steadily decreased. The Syrian immigrants who have come in the latest years marks the first larger population increase in a long time.

As in many rural places, the population of Virserum is older than the Swedish average. There are also less than average people with an academic education. The population of Virserum can sometimes be a bit conservative but there is also a creative spirit and people are often willing to fight for their community.

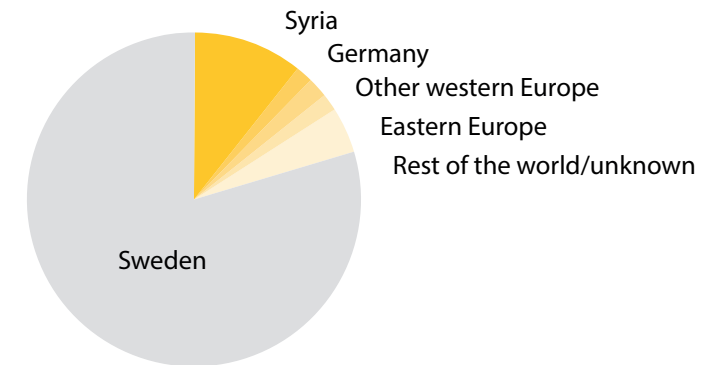


Population development in Virserum and surrounding countryside (numbers from SCB).

Im Immigrants

During the last few years there have been a huge increase in immigrants settling in Virserum. These are mostly Syrian refugees who have chosen to stay in Virserum after gaining Swedish citizenship. In one way the Syrians in Virserum have created their own community within the community. The immigrants are not as connected to the different aspects of the community as the old inhabitants. To feel as integrated in the community as everyone else they need to establish links with more of the local aspects. Some immigrants I talked to said they like Virserum and want to stay.

There is also an increasing immigration of German, Danish and Dutch people to Virserum. People from these countries often buy empty houses to have as holiday houses. Some move here permanently or for extended periods during the summer.



The 2410 inhabitants in Virserum and surrounding countryside divided by place of birth in 2018 (Rosander L, personal communication, 2018).

To Tourists

The culture and tourist industry has evolved rapidly in Virserum during the latest years. It is especially Swedes, Danes and Germans who come to enjoy the beautiful landscape and cultural institutions of Virserum. Much more tourists come in the summer than in the winter creating annual cycles of liveliness in the community. The tourists are important for the local economy but are not directly connected to the inhabitants or the community life. In this project the tourists are deliberately disregarded as the aim is to do something directed towards the local people.

Se Services

As the population basis has become smaller the amount of public and commercial services has adjusted to this. Still, there is a complete elementary school, a preschool, a retirement home, two supermarkets, two banks and some other shops still existing. This is more than in many other communities of similar size. A reason to this might be that Virserum is situated quite far from other larger towns.

Bu Businesses

There are almost no large businesses in Virserum today, but many small. These range from manufacturing to retail. In the town centre some shops exist, a couple are newly opened by Syrian immigrants. Many shops are also empty, the jeweller and the last floral shop are among the most recent to close down. Most people work within public service or commute to nearby communities or as far as Växjö (75 km).



This photo is taken from the old square in front of the church, showing the most central part of Virserum (author's own photo).

As Associations

Virserum has many local associations active within different fields of interest. VSGF is the local sport and gymnastics association activating both children and adults in different sports. Hjorten SK runs the local ski slope in the winter. Hembygdsföreningen (the local folklore association) runs a folk museum park and are active in preserving and documenting the local history. Blanda&Ge (mix and give) is a theatre association that holds annual plays at the cinema. Other associations includes the PRO (pensioners association), Lions club and the Red Cross.

The associations are important actors in the community life. Through their social importance and their fight for the community, the associations are identified as a key aspect for this project. The associations could play an even bigger role as a social connector if they were more well known and more open to the public.

Co Community association

The community association works with developing the community, for example through different projects. For example they organise the annual fair and they have set up welcoming signs to the community along the main road. Their ambition to develop Virserum and the fact that they have a facility on Strömsholmen (the project site) makes them important for this project.



This photo shows the "Bolaget" area. This was the site of Virserum's largest furniture industry but is today a centre for associations and museums. To the left is the art museum and in the centre is the Pythagoras bridge with bearing structure of massive wood (wikimedia commons, 2017).

Ev Events

Several annual events are held in the community, for example: a music festival, a Christmas market, Valborg celebrations and the large fair, Virserums marknad. At these events people gather and socialise across borders of interests, background, gender or age. Community events are an important aspect that brings the community together.



Example of advertisement for events on a local pin board (author's own photo).

Ma The fair (marknaden)

Virserums marknad is an annual fair that every year attracts around 50.000 visitors. The market includes a vast number of traveling salesmen and a funfair. By the time of the fair, many people who moved from Virserum come home to visit families and friends. At the same time as the market, the first weekend in August, the local motorcycle club organises a gathering of up to 2.000 motorcyclist.



The fair, Virserums marknad, (Steinvall, 2009).

Mu Museums

Virserum is rich on culture and there are several museums. The art museum is the most well known but there are also a heritage park museum, a furniture industry museum and a telephone museum. The old railway station is listed as a national cultural heritage and today works as a museum. The museums are often run by enthusiasts but are not so strongly connected to the community at large.



The heritage listed railway station is now a railway museum, (author's own photo).

Ar The art museum

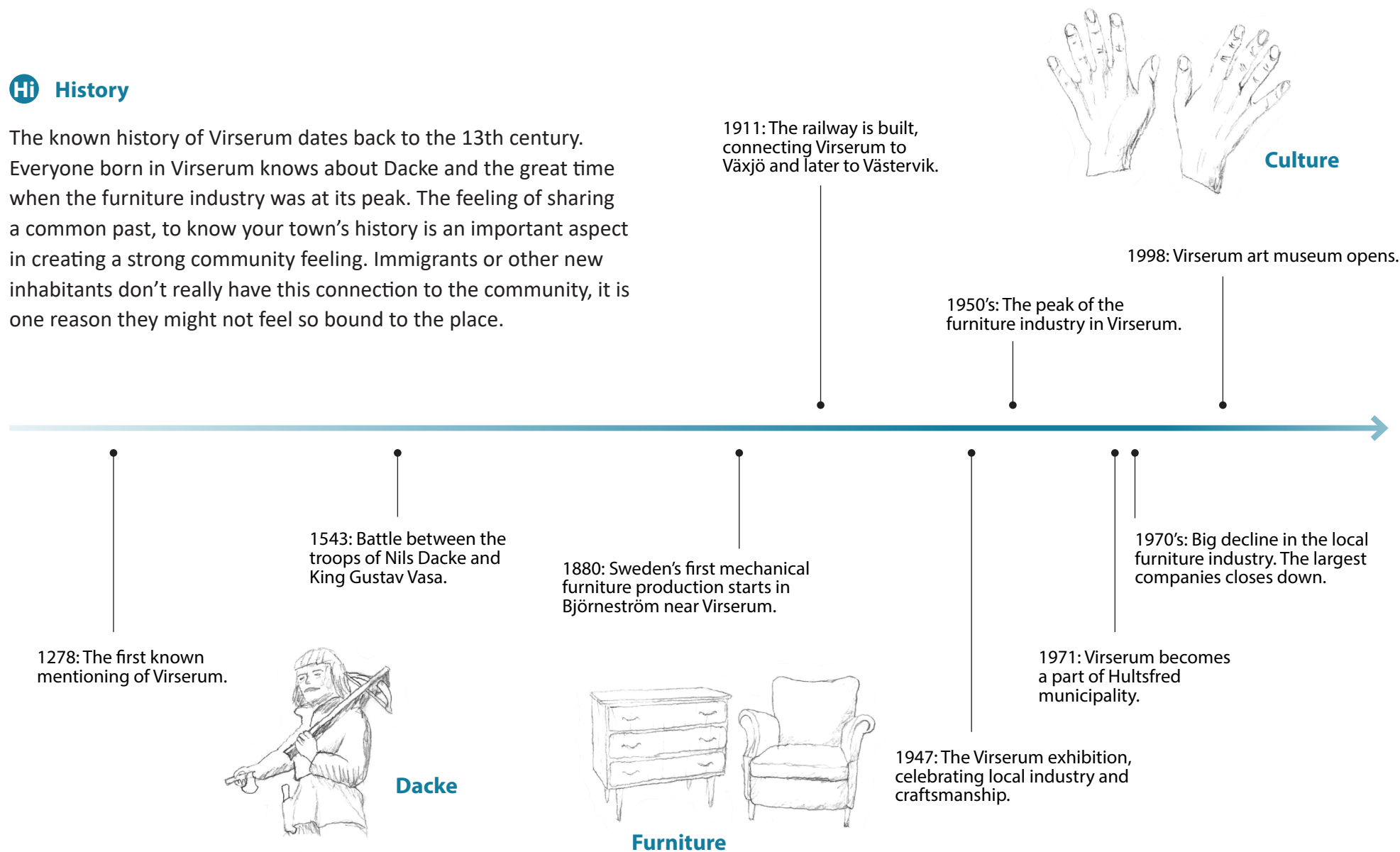
The art museum was established in 1998 in the abandoned facilities of a furniture industry. Today it has an international reputation and has moved to a new built exhibition space. The art museum works with subjects close to common people; democracy, wood and textile. Even though the museum works with its connection to the local community it might find it hard to raise an interest for art among all the inhabitants.



The art museum 20 years anniversary, (Steinvall, 2018).

Hi History

The known history of Virserum dates back to the 13th century. Everyone born in Virserum knows about Dacke and the great time when the furniture industry was at its peak. The feeling of sharing a common past, to know your town's history is an important aspect in creating a strong community feeling. Immigrants or other new inhabitants don't really have this connection to the community, it is one reason they might not feel so bound to the place.



Da Dacke

One of the final battles of Dackefejden (Sweden's largest civil war) happened just outside of Virserum in 1543. A statue of the rebellion leader Nils Dacke stands in the centre of Virserum today and many places and businesses in Virserum and the surrounding area are named after him making the whole area locally known as Dackebygden (The Dacke district).



The statue of Nils Dacke in the centre of Virserum (author's own photo).

Fu Furniture industry

During the industrial revolution, the area around Virserum became a centre for furniture production. The poor people were skilled in wood craftsmanship and there was good access to water power in Virserum and other surrounding villages. Some of the small workshops expanded and became large companies. In the 1950's the industry was at its peak with over 40 furniture factories in the town. Due to different reasons most furniture companies closed in the 1970's. This was a shock for the community but the memory of the furniture industry is still very important for the local identity.



The waterwheel of the furniture industry museum, (author's own photo).

Wood/Forest

“Virserum is forest. Virserum is wood.”

This is the words of former director of Virserum art museum, Henrik Teleman, in his introduction words of the book *Om vi vill - if we want to* (Virserums konsthall, 2010).

Virserum is closely connected to the forest that surrounds it and the material that can be obtained from it. The furniture industry thrived in Virserum due to the good quality local wood and the craftsmanship of the people. The art museum has built on this tradition, for example by every third year organising a large exhibition around the themes of wood and sustainable architecture.

With these things in mind it felt obvious to me to work with wood as a material for this project. No other material has this strong connection to the community. Wood would reflect the local history and enable the building to be built by local people.



Pine, spruce, birch, maple and oak are among the most common trees around Virserum.

Forest, (wikimedia commons, 2015). >

Wa Water

The force of the river used to power the factories. It runs through the town dividing it in a south and a north part. Along the river and lake there is today a public park, the water is mostly used for recreation. The picturesque location of Virserum by the water has probably contributed to its success as a tourist destination. The natural aspects of water and topography also help shaping the identity of the town.



Virserum from the top of the ski slope in summer, (author's own photo).

Cr Craftsmanship

Local knowledge in wood craftsmanship might have faded since the days of the furniture industry but some people still retain this knowledge, not at least within the field of fine carpentry. Also some local immigrants have skills in working with wood. This can be a common ground for integration. By building the community centre of wood the construction process can become an integration project.



These Virserum-made furniture on display at the furniture industry museum shows the local craftsmanship of the past (Garnfeldt, 2018).

St Strömsholmen

Strömsholmen is an island in the river in central Virserum. It is a public park where both new and old inhabitants feel welcome. Its central location makes it easy to reach from most parts of the community and the fact that it would need some kind of activation makes it a good site for a community centre.

The history of Strömsholmen

Before Virserum became an industrial town, Strömsholmen belonged to one of the large farms in the village. The farm was called Strömsholmen or just Holmen and the residential house of the farm was situated on the island.

In 1932 the house was transformed into a hotel, “Hotell Strömsholmen”. The hotel was open until 1965, after that the building stood empty until it was demolished in 1973. At this time the site was owned by an association planning to build a “Folkets Hus” (people’s house) on Strömsholmen. As they did not manage to gain financing for the project the plans were never realised (Petersson S-Å, personal communication, 2017).

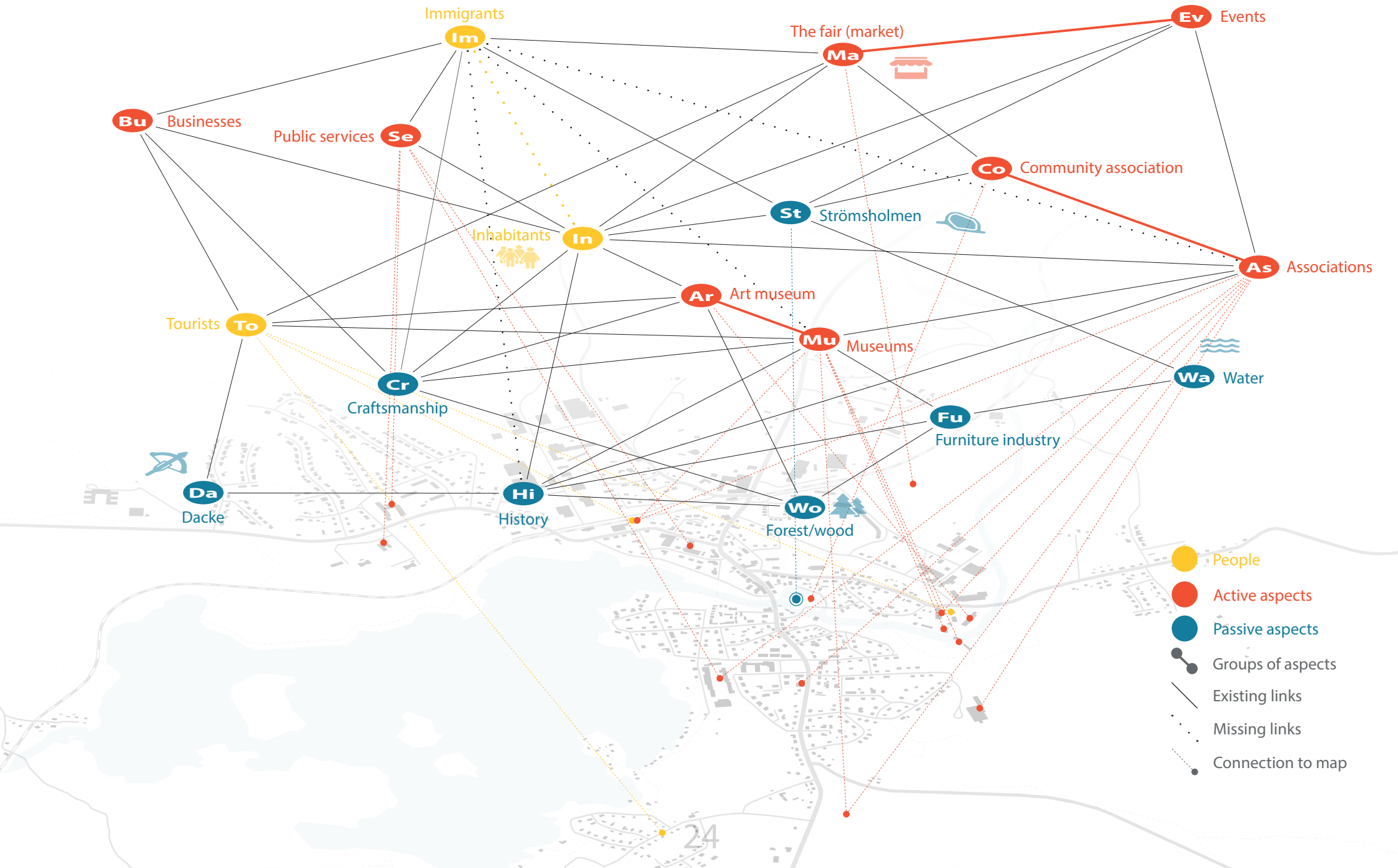
Since 2013 Strömsholmen is owned by the community association (Madestam, 2013). The small building called “Annexet” (the annex) is today the meeting place for the community association and can also be rented by the public. It is a nice old building but its not optimised for its purpose - its a bit large for meetings and a bit small for other events.

There is one more built structure on the island - a public stage. During the annual music festival in the summer there are sometimes performances at the stage. The local school celebrate the beginning of Christmas holidays with a march from the school to Strömsholmen where speeches and performances are held on the stage with parents as audience. The main annual event on the island happens on the 31st of April each year when there are Valborg celebrations with a bonfire.



The now demolished hotel at Strömsholmen (Petersson, personal communication).

COMMUNITY DIAGRAM



3

Strategies

This chapter includes the building programme, sustainability approach and design approach. These things are done as the bridge between the community analysis and the design. Based on the community analysis - used as a base for the design.

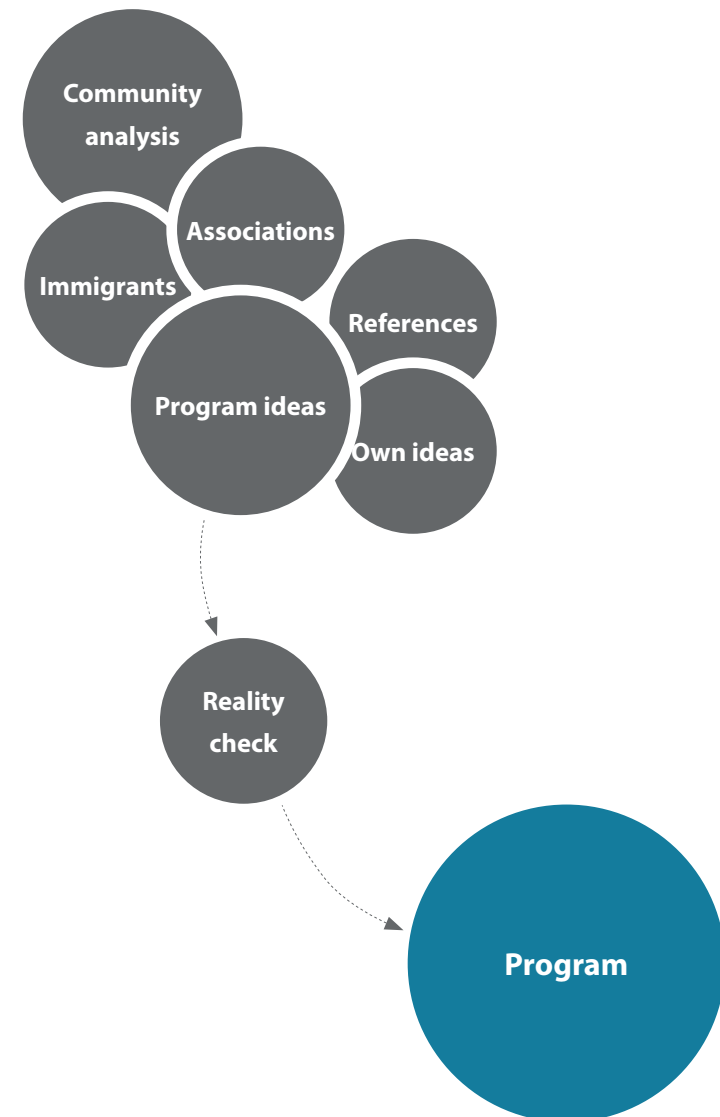
FINDING A PROGRAM

The method for finding the program of the centre has consisted of both some reference research and meetings with local people.

Meetings were held with representatives from local associations and immigrants. The immigrants are important to work with because of the aim of this thesis. The associations emerged as an crucial actor in the social life of Virserum and are therefore also important in connection to the aim of social inclusion.

The main reference for the program has been the Swedish bygdegård concept. Some example of international contemporary community centres have also been examined. After tips I got during my meetings I also researched Fryshuset in Nybro, a youth centre working against alienation.

My personal background of growing up in Virserum has of course also affected my work with the program. 20 years of personal experience gives me knowledge in what would work in Virserum and what would not.

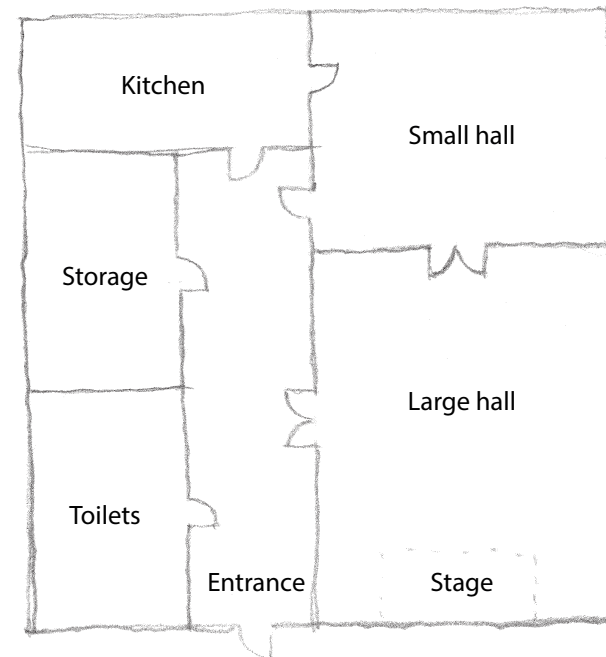


The “bygdegård” concept

Bygdegård is the traditional Swedish version of community centre. They are often run by volunteers, organised as an association that everyone in the community can join. The bygdegård is run by and for the community. According to Bygdegårdarnas Riksförbund (the national organisation for community centres) a bygdegård shall give possibilities to sense of community, knowledge and culture. It shall also contribute to the development of both people and the community as a whole. Today there are over 1400 community centres in Sweden connected to the national organisation (Bygdegårdarnas Riksförbund, 2018).

The facility usually contains one or more general spaces that can be rented by private persons or other associations. Events taking place in a bygdegård can for example be; meetings, lectures, dancing or other festivities (Bygdegårdarnas Riksförbund, 2018). The floor plan to the right is a principal plan of how a bygdegård often looks like. Smaller ones might only have one hall but often there are two, one larger and one smaller, for activities of different scales. The larger hall sometimes contains a small elevated stage. There is often a small kitchen as a support function as well as toilets and storage for furniture and equipment.

What I mostly take with me from the bygdegård concept is the general spaces that can be used for very different activities. A challenge is to design the community centre in a way that makes the general spaces feel public for everyone to rent and use.



This plan is a principle plan of a bygdegård, based on different plans I've researched.

Meetings

The meetings presented here have been the main input for the program of the community centre. To get in contact with local people I have had help from a contact person in Virserum. His name is Jan-Olof Svensson but is known as Jos. As a retired electrician he has a vast contact network, he is also a member of the community association and a driving force in local development.

Associations

Jos helped set up a meeting with representatives from local associations. There are many associations in Virserum with a good spread in interests. The associations contribute to the social life and could be a way for immigrants to get to know Swedish people. To talk with the associations and get their views of what a community centre in Virserum could be was an obvious way of getting knowledge of local needs and wishes. The meeting was held in Annexet on Strömsholmen.

Associations represented:

- Samhällsföreningen, the community association
- Hembygdsföreningen, the local heritage association
- PRO, the pensioners organisation
- Lions Club
- Möbelindustrimuseet, the furniture industry museum
- Smalspårsföreningen, railway heritage museum association
- Hjorten SK, sport association that runs the ski slope
- Ekeberskyrkan, local free church



Meeting with immigrants.

Immigrants

Through Jos I got in contact with Alaa, an immigrant from Syria working at the local school. He kindly helped setting up a meeting with some local immigrants at a local pizzeria. The questions for the immigrants were about what they think is missing in Virserum, what can make them want to stay and what activities they think are good for getting to know Swedish people.

Red Cross

In addition to the meetings with associations and immigrants I also did a study visit at the local Red Cross and their 'Swedish for asylum seekers' activity. This was to get an idea about how local associations are working with integration today.

The program



Im In

Leisure space

Both the immigrants and the associations raised the idea of something like a youth centre but for adults. A place where people can go to meet friends and strangers to casually hang out. "Games need no language" is a good argument given by the immigrants.



In Im As
Ev Co Mu
Ar Bu Hi
Cr Wo Fu

General spaces

Spaces that are general and thereby suitable for many different activities to take place. For example: workshops, courses, lectures, dancing and festivities. Some rentable spaces exists in Virserum today but only for larger events, not for more spontaneous or regular events.



In Im To
Bu

Café

Cafés are good spaces for relaxed social interaction. There is no real café in Virserum today where you can sit down and take a coffee. A language café is a good way of practicing language. The existence of a nice café is also a quality that can help attract new inhabitants.



In Im As
Ev

Social kitchen

Cooking is something all cultures do and it is therefore an activity that can be used as a way of integrating new Swedes. Within the right facilities, cooking can become a way of getting to know new people as well as recipes.



As Co Se
Bu Im In

Showcasing associations

There are many associations in Virserum within different fields of interest. But for new people moving to the town it can be hard to get an overview of the associations. To clearly showcase the local associations would benefit everyone.



Co As Bu

Office

In an office, equipment can be shared instead of all associations having their own, for example a printer. Specially the community association could have the community centre and this office as their base.



Ar In Im
To Wo Wa
Cr St

Sculpture park

In a world of selfies and hashtags, visual things attract visitors. A sculpture park can both attract people and make the park along the river more interesting. This is also a good connection to the local culture life and the art museum.

DESIGN EVALUATION CRITERIA

These three criteria are based on the thesis question and the community analysis, they are also connected to the three parts of sustainability (social, ecological and economical). The criteria are numbered one to three in order of importance to be used for evaluating different iterations during the design process.



Create spaces that support social interaction

As this thesis is about creating spaces that supports integration and social interaction this is an important thing to research. How can spaces be shaped to best promote social interaction between people? This is the most important design criteria.



Showcase wood as material

Wood has a deep connection to Virserum, both historical and today. This building can be a celebration to this local and renewable material. A wooden structure also enables the building to be built by the inhabitants. By using local materials, craftsmen and techniques it will feel even more connected to the site at the same time as it is a good choice for the environment.



3. Design high quality with low cost.

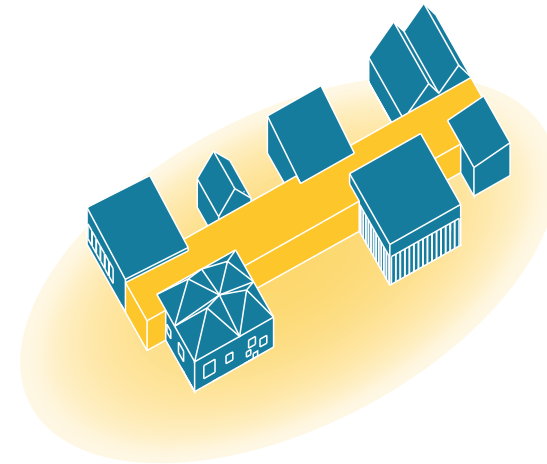
Smålandians are known to be thrifty. Virserum is also not a large community, making any big or costly proposals unrealistic. This does not mean to only choose the least costly alternative but rather to think of quality and value for money. Also ask questions: what can be built by local voluntary craftsmen and what materials can be donated by local companies? To have the ambition of creating something economical can lead to interesting design choices as well as a realistic result.

DESIGN CONCEPT



1.

The chosen design strategy for this project is divided in two steps. The first step is to design the interior spaces individually around the different parts of the program. In this way the design criteria can be implemented more effectively, with less compromises due to site or building composition. The spaces can all be made specifically for their function and they can also be given individual characteristics.



2.

The second step is to put the volumes together into one building on the site. At this point a first iteration of each space is already finished. The building composition is done with regards to both inside spaces between the independent volumes and how the whole community centre relates to the site.

In this report the process might seem very linear, especially with these two steps. In reality the process has been more circular. After entering step two I have gone back several times to do changes in step one. Both because of new fresh ideas but also to make things work better in the building composition.

SPACE BUBBLE METHOD

Space bubbles is a way of working in the sketching phase of an architectural design process. The method is described in the book "Den sökande skissen" by Arne Branzell.

In this project, this method is used as a tool for exploring spatial qualities. Both when designing interior and exterior spaces. Specially for the first design criteria; design for social interaction, space bubbles is a effective tool for understanding how spaces will feel, both in plan and section. By imagine a spatial feeling or atmosphere that might evoke good social interaction, space bubbles can be drawn that explains that feeling. Spaces of walls, floor and ceiling can then be created around those bubbles.



4

Design process and proposal

In this part of the report the design process is presented together with the design result. Because of the way of working it is hard to present the process and result individually. First the interior spaces are presented one by one and thereafter the composition of the community centre on the site. In the end of the chapter are some perspective images illustrating what the project could look like if built.

LIVING ROOM

Program

The living room is to be seen as a public extension of people's private living rooms. A place where you can go to casually socialise.

The program is inspired by ordinary youth centres that exists around Sweden but that are only open for people under the age of 18. These places often contain pool tables, ping-pong tables and other games together with space to sit and socialise.



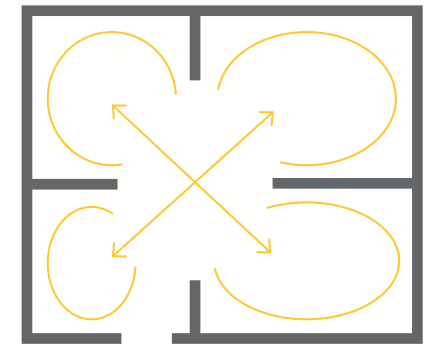
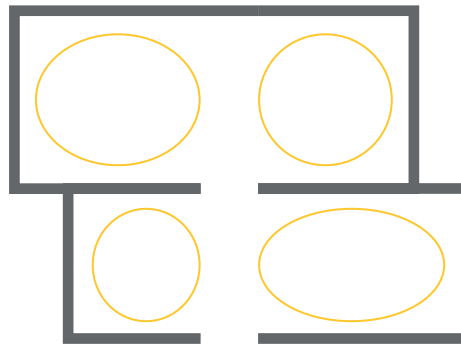
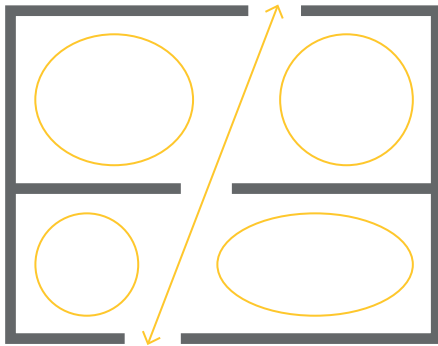
Architecture

To feel safe in social interaction with new people it is good to be in smaller groups in a relaxed environment. Dividing the space into smaller corners of one larger space has therefore been the concept of the living room.

Spruce trees have been the inspiration. Maybe the most common tree in Småland, the spruce is characterised by its heavy branches that stretches down towards the ground, creating intimate spaces beneath. The playful and protective feeling of these natural spaces have been interpreted in the living room.



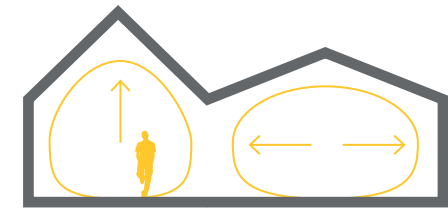
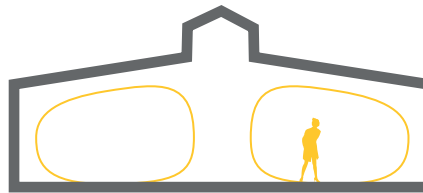
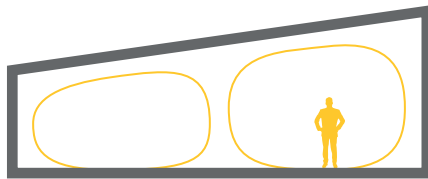
Space exploration



Initially the idea was to have a direct connection from the living room to the café and therefore having a path through the living room that could be used as a space divider.

The different activities demand differently sized rooms that in this iteration would be reflected also on the exterior. In relation to the other buildings with more clear shapes this did not feel right.

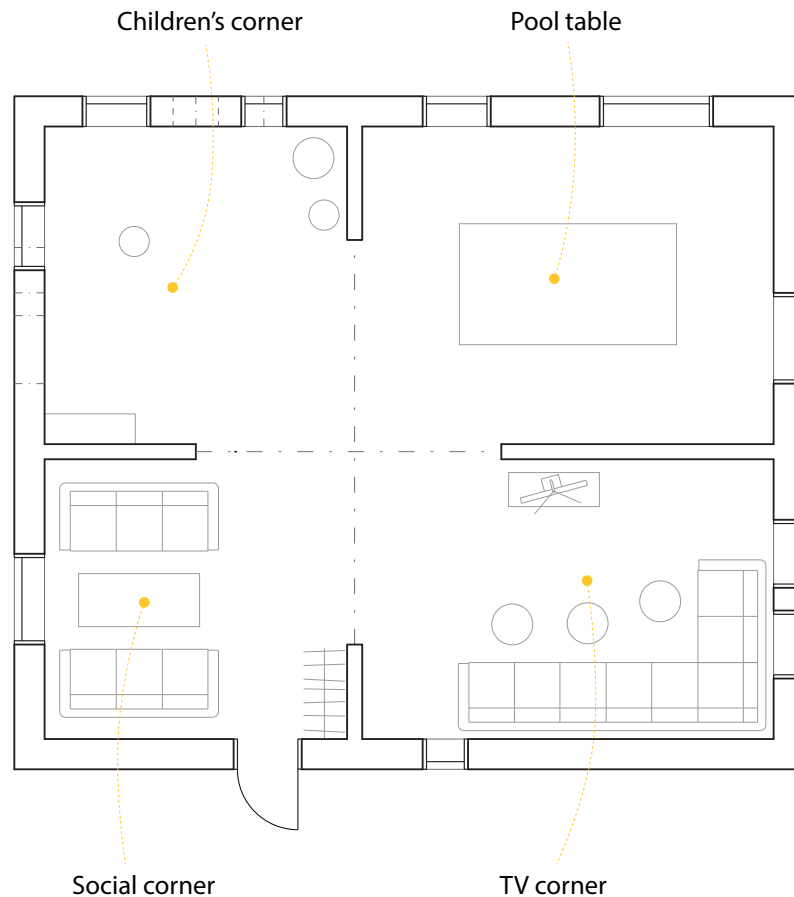
The final plan is a large space with four corners clearly defined, both by walls and the ceiling. The spaces are open towards each other for the sake of interaction and supervision. The enclosure is for a more intimate sense of space and a feeling of safety.



From the beginning experiments like these where made in search of a way of defining the interior spaces through the shape and height of the ceiling.

The enclosed cone-shaped spaces of spruce trees gave the final shape of the section. Most children growing up in Sweden have probably at some time played under the hanging branches of a massive spruce tree. This cosy feeling works well in a space that must feel safe for strangers to comfortably interact with each other.

Proposal



Scale 1:100

Games need no language

A pool table was an idea from the local immigrants. “Games need no language” was their argument for leisure spaces. That is also the idea behind the social corner where people can sit and play board games or just have a conversation. Watching TV is also something that you can do without understanding each other. It might not be as social as playing games but instead of watching the football match at home you can do it here and maybe find new friends at the same time.

Children integration through play

The children’s corner creates many benefits. One is that it enables adults with young children to come to the community centre without the need for a baby-sitter. But the biggest benefit will probably be the integration between children of different backgrounds. If children have friends of different background they will probably have easier to respect different people when they get older.

Outdoor games

When the weather is good people might not want to sit indoors but the community centre will still be the place to meet. In the living room you should be able to find some outdoor games, for example “kubb” to take outside and play.



Concept section showing the living room in scale 1:50.

CAFÉ

Program

The program of the café is nothing special. It should provide Virserum with a space for socialising while taking a coffee and fika. As there is no place like this today, it will probably become very popular among both old and new inhabitants. When different groups from the community come here they might also interact with each other.



In Im To Hi St As

Architecture

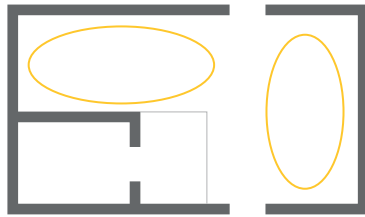
While having a fika, people concentrate on the group they are in. Their table becomes an undefined social space. Because of this there is no need to create physical spaces around each table. The café can be an open space.

Traditional Swedish glass verandas have been an inspiration because of their often similar program, a space for socialising and eating/drinking. They also give a nice connection to the exterior.

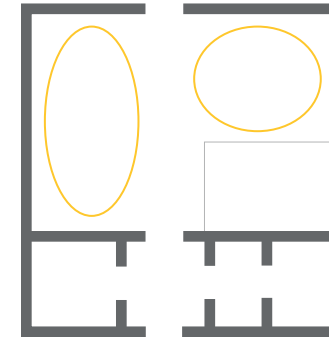
Birch trees are light and airy, just as a veranda and their twigs are thin and brittle like the mullions of windows. These similarities led to the use of birch as an inspiration for the café. The colour scheme is picked from the birch barks strongly contrasting white and black colours.



Space exploration



The first sketches of the café included a small enclosed kitchen in one corner. Together with the counter, this inserted volume created two spaces for seating which feels more intimate than one large. It was later concluded that a café of this size works without a secluded kitchen making the counter the only space divider. From the beginning there was also an idea that you could enter the café both from the community centre, through the living room, and directly from the exterior.

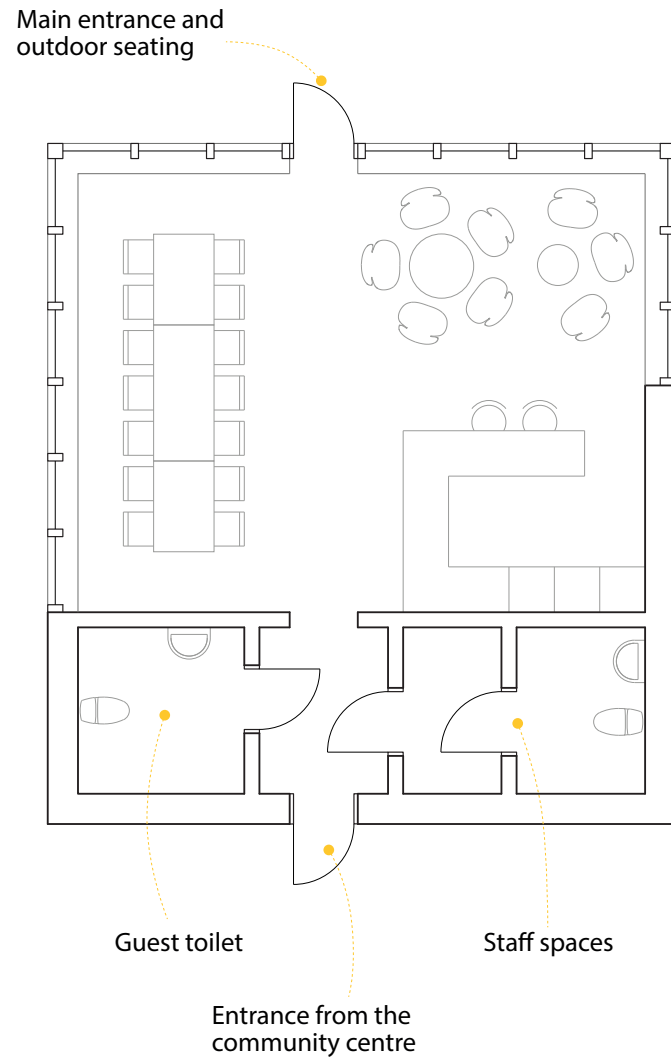


As the final building composition was decided the café was placed as a separate building volume giving it a need for a toilet for visitors. This together with staff changing room was placed as addition on the side towards the rest of the community centre. In this way people from the living room can use the toilet without disturbing the café.



The idea of a soft an flowing ceiling comes from the birch trees hanging branches. The birch tree has sharply contrasting colours but its shape is very soft, appropriate in a café which should feel calm and friendly. The ceiling also helps dividing the space into areas of different atmosphere.

Proposal



Scale 1:100

A social café

Three ways of seating to increase social interaction are proposed. The long table is the main sitting area. Here you might be forced to share the table with some strangers and that is the idea. The more cosy corner is to attract people to socialise a bit longer and the bar chairs are for people who come alone so they can chat with the staff.

The café as an extension of the living room

The back door is close to the living room. Just because you are playing games or watching TV does not mean you can't have fika.

The café as a branch of the existing Bakery

There is a bakery in Virserum today, selling both cakes and smaller pastries, but it is neither centrally located or has a cafeteria. One possibility is that this café can be run as a branch to the existing bakery. In this way it could add value to an existing business instead of creating unwanted competition.

Recycled windows?

The café is designed like a large glass veranda. A possibility is to use old recycled windows for this. Many old and neglected factory buildings in the area have this kind of windows.



Concept section showing the café in scale 1:50.

LARGE HALL

Program

A large, general space that can be used for many different purposes, for example: workshops, lectures, performances, meetings, yoga and festivities. The large hall is often the heart of a community centre. The idea is that this space should give people in the community a place to do things together that they have not had space for before.



Architecture

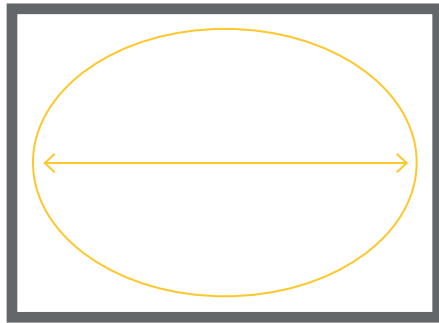
This is inevitable a large space so the focus of the design has been to make the space feel intimate, making people feel more safe to interact with others.

Pine forests have been an important inspiration for the room's walls. The way that group of trees can create a distance between people by creating a semi-transparent wall of trunks. This can be used to make people inside feel private while the activity going on is still visible from the outside.

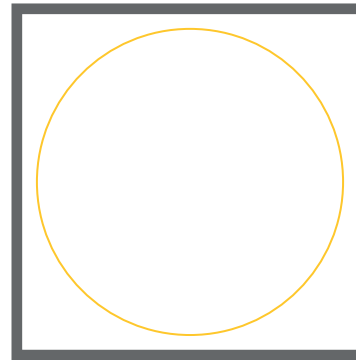
Pine is a common tree around Virserum and when the sun sets or rises the pine forests glows in a magical fire-like light. The actual pine wood also turns orange over time. This is a colour that many swedes connects with social interaction as many homes have a social space (gillestuga) that is often clad in pine.



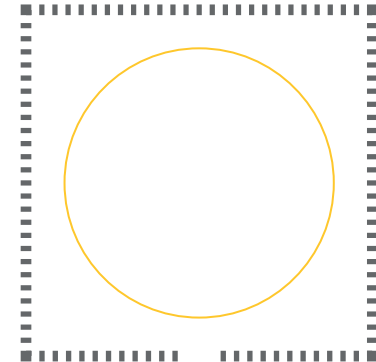
Space exploration



A room that is rectangular in plan automatically gets a feeling of direction towards the short sides. This is good for things like lectures but less good for activities where everyone should be active.



A square room feels more democratic as there is no clear direction. People will gravitate towards the centre instead of two opposite ends, making it better for social interaction.



By making the walls of deep wooden studs a semi-transparency is created making interior life visible from the outside. This also makes the walls less comfortable to lean against forcing people together in the centre. Placing the entrance centred on one side gives a feeling of dignity when entering.



Initially the idea was to have a ceiling that directs people towards the centre. When the pine inspired walls became the "showcasing wood"-thing of the space it felt more right to have a plane and more anonymous ceiling.

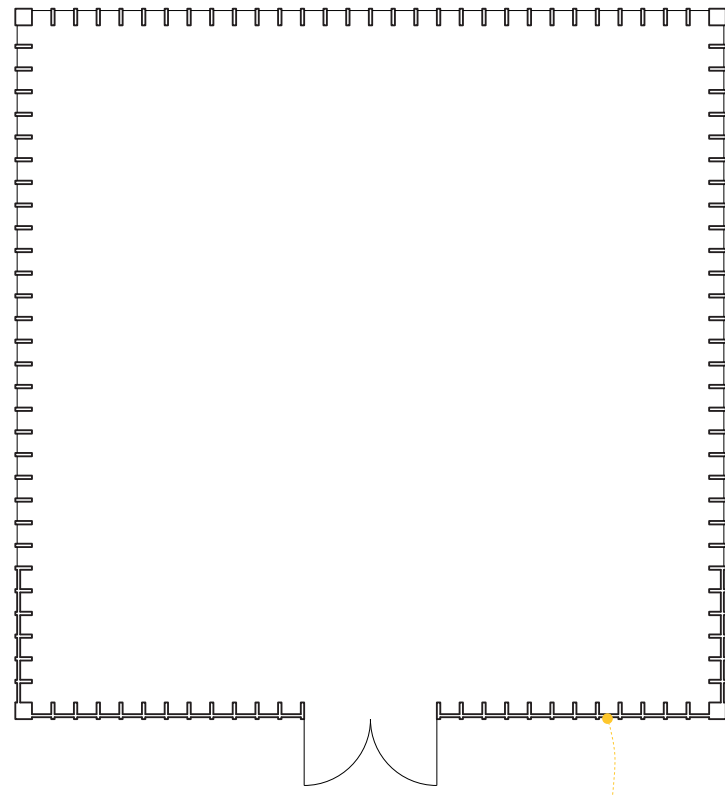


Normal ceiling height would make the hall feel both tight and wide at the same time due to the proportions.



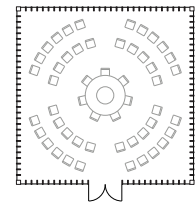
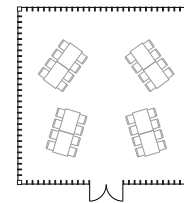
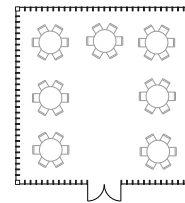
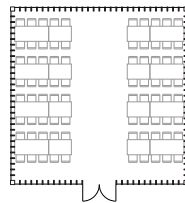
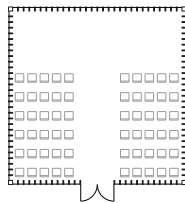
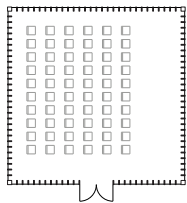
Several test were made to find the ceiling height where the space did not feel too wide or too spacious for good social interaction.

Proposal



Scale 1:100

Closed walls towards the foyer to avoid disturbance



Lectures about local history

One reason you might feel a strong connection to a place is that you have grown up there and you've been told all the interesting stories from the past. A way to give new inhabitants this same connection is to let local historians tell them all the interesting local history.

Filmtegration

By watching classic Swedish films, immigrants can get an understanding of Swedish culture and language.

Local democracy

In the book *Den Första Samhällsnivån* it is proposed that small communities can have a local committee consisting of locally elected members. Some responsibilities of the municipality can be transferred to this committee, for example school, elderly care and comprehensive planning (Herlitz and Arén, 2017). This could be a good idea in Virserum where there is a general view that the municipality is disconnected from the community and bad at supporting local development.



Concept section showing the large hall in scale 1:50.

SOCIAL KITCHEN

Program

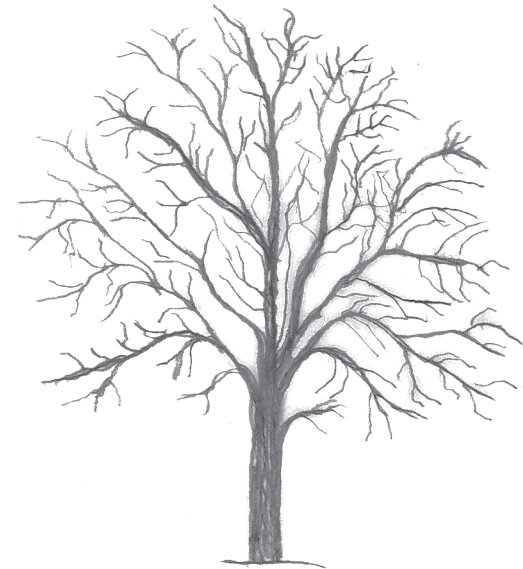
Kitchens in community centres are often small and optimised for preparing food for the activities taking place in the centre. This kitchen should have that function but also be large enough to be used for cooking as a social activity. Groups of up to 10-15 people should be able to be here at the same time.



Architecture

It is important that you can move around easily and that it is spacious enough for several people to work here together. It should also be open so you can have an overview and engage in conversations between everyone in the room. As you might come here to meet new people it is important that the kitchen feels safe.

Maples are trees seen as robust, strong and safe. They are also associated with vibrant colours, just as food often is. The maple wood itself has a light and neutral colour.

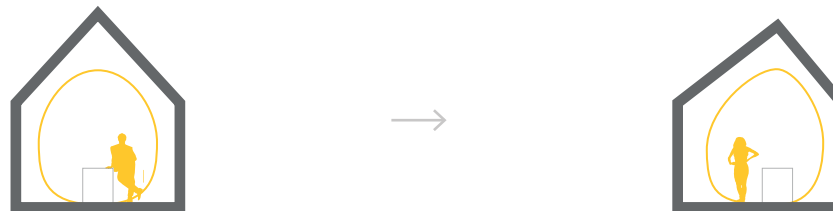


Space exploration



The first floor plan idea of the social kitchen was to have a centrally located kitchen island, reminiscent of the stow as the centre of a viking cottage or similar old structures. To make room for everything, a wall of technical functions could be placed to the side making the island free and open for food preparation and socialising.

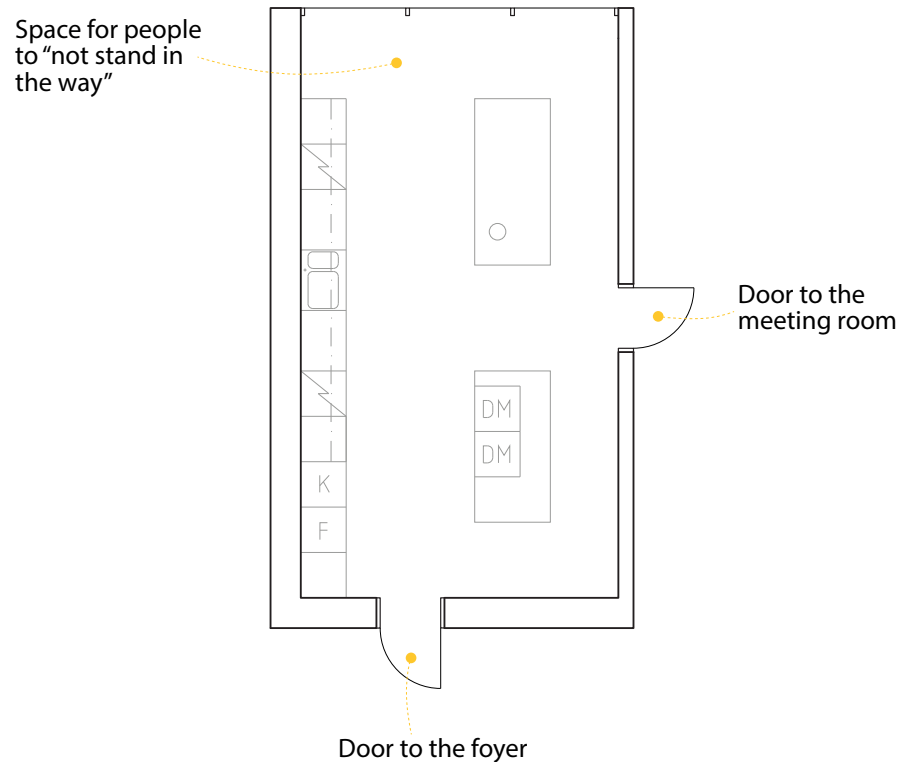
A door to the meeting room/dining room gave the idea of two kitchen islands. This also makes the kitchen more flexible as it gives more workspace that can be divided. For example, some might prepare the desert on one island while others are working with the main dish on the other. In one way the islands define social spaces around them but the whole kitchen is still a single space, easy to supervise. Making the whole short end glazed reinforces the feeling of being in a robust and enveloped space, a tube directed towards the tree crowns outside.



A pointy ceiling highlights the area under the tip, in this case the kitchen island that is the social centre of the kitchen.

As the kitchen island moved to the side the ceiling simply followed, creating an irregular section. The asymmetric section improves the feeling of a tube or a folded space open towards the nature.

Proposal



Scale 1:100

A social kitchen

Cooking is an important aspect in every culture. It is also often an activity you do together with family or friends. This kitchen enables larger groups to cook together as a social activity.

Immigrants + Seniors

Seniors often have an interest in cooking or baking. They also generally have more spare time than other people. This makes them a group of people who are likely to use the social kitchen. Seniors are also the best people to teach newcomers of the town's past, as they often have lived in Virserum for a long time. Mixed groups of immigrants and pensioners could make the social kitchen a hotspot for integration.

A place for women?

In Sweden cooking is of quite equal interest to both men and women. In many other cultures the women are more familiar with the kitchen than men. Both men and women are of course welcome to use all the functions of the community centre but while men might be more attracted to the living room, the kitchen might be the thing that attracts women more.



Concept section showing the social kitchen in scale 1:50.

MEETING ROOM

Program

The meeting room is a general space that can be used for many different kinds of activities. The community association can have their meetings here, as well as other associations. Knitting clubs, book clubs or similar can meet here. This space is for smaller gatherings than the large hall. By having a direct connection to the social kitchen the meeting room can also be used as a dining room.



As Co Ev Bu In Im

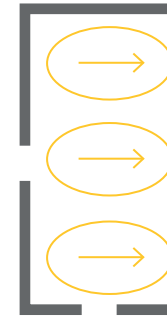
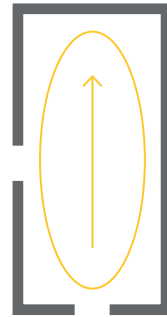
Architecture

This space needs to be possible to furnish according to the variety of activities that might occur here. If the room is used for a small lecture it should have a clear direction while it should be able to offer intimacy when people dine around separate tables.

Oak is a tree strongly connected to Virserum through the furniture industry which often produced heavy and luxurious oak furniture. In this room where the furnishing often will be changed, oak will add a symbolic value. The darker colour of the oak wood will give the room a cosy feeling.

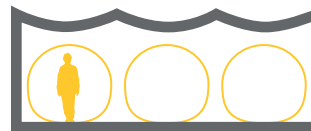


Space exploration



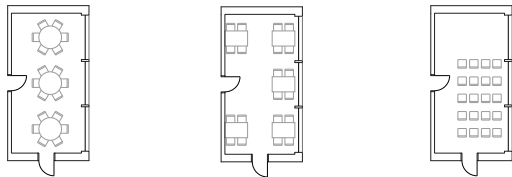
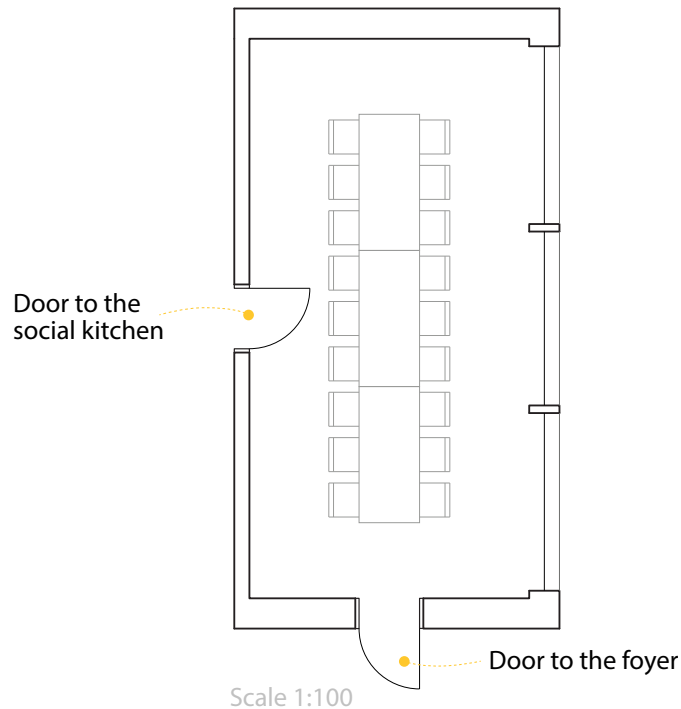
The meeting room should complement the large hall by being suitable for smaller gatherings. By placing it next to the kitchen it can also be used as a dining room. This gave the space its two entrances, one from the foyer and one from the kitchen. The narrow shape comes from it creating a single building volume together with the kitchen. This is a good space for a small lecture or a meeting around a long table.

The long shape of the space creates a strong direction that is not optimal for social gatherings such as dining. Placing three large, clearly defined windows along the long wall reduces the strong direction and creates perceived spaces within the large space. This, together with the ceiling helps bringing down the scale of the room to a level where even small group meetings can take place.



The inspiration from the ceiling comes from the oak tree. Its heavy branches often extends out parallel to the ground in comparison to other trees where they extend upwards or hangs down. The curtain-like ceiling helps breaking down the strong direction of this room and creates space bubbles underneath.

Proposal



Meetings, presentations or fika

The meeting room can be used for many things by just changing the furniture. The design is made to make it work even for groups of people that are too few to fill up the whole space.

Association meetings

Most associations holds meetings. Some of the associations in Virserum have their own facility but not all. This room can be used by the associations. The community association use Annexet at Strömsholmen as their meeting place today. It is working but Annexet is actually unnecessarily large for that sort of meeting while this meeting room has a more suitable size.

Functional ceiling

The flowing inner ceiling can be more than a nice architectural feature. The space above the ceiling can be used for hiding technical equipment like a projector, speakers and a screen. Solutions like this demands some extra effort by craftsmen but it makes a big difference to the overall experience of the building. The idea is that the community centre shall be a building to be proud of and a place where local skills are showcased.



Concept section showing the meeting room in scale 1:50.

OFFICE

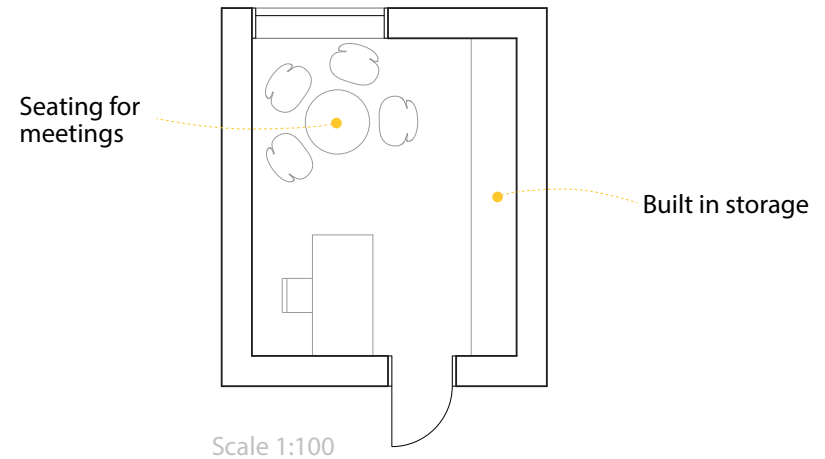
Program

The office would be a space optimised for the associations to use as support for their work, specially the community association. Equipment like a printer, a book binder and maybe also a computer can be shared between the associations. Some storage might be needed. The office could also be the workplace of a “föreningslots”.



Architecture

Cherry wood is a possible type of wood for cladding the inside of the office. It is often used for nicer furniture like office furniture. The colour of cherry wood can be quite dark red which would give the office an interior that is clearly different from the other spaces.



Föreningslots

A föreningslots is a person who works with matching people's and specially immigrants', interests with associations. This concept was tested in Västervik municipality in hopes of improving integration (Harrysson, 2016). In Virserum this could be one or more volunteers from the associations being at place in the office for a specific time each week, helping people find an association matching their interests. The idea of having a föreningslots was raised at the meeting with associations.

Web page

During 2018 a web page gathering the associations and businesses of Virserum is being created. Such things demands administrative work that could be carried out from this office.

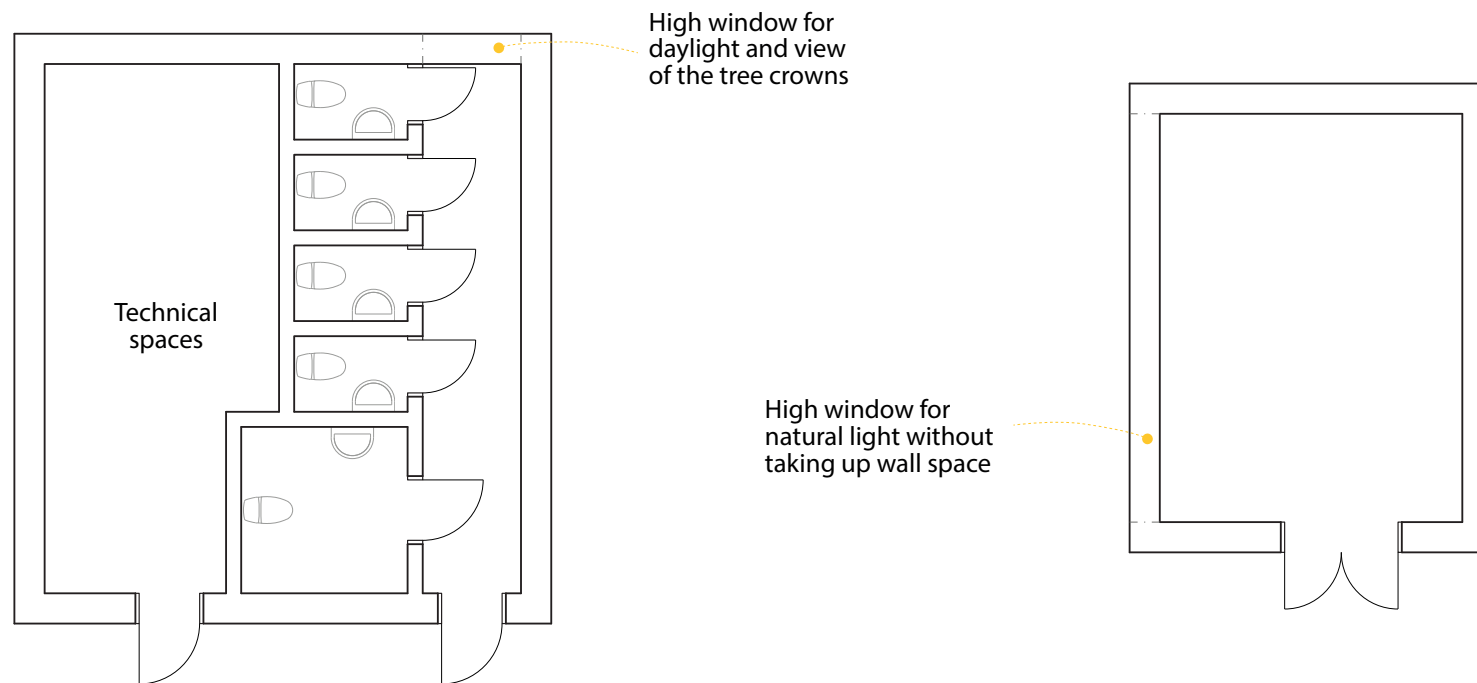
SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

Toilets and technical spaces

When larger activities are organised in the centre there is a need for some toilets. The toilets are placed together with the technical spaces in direct connection to the foyer. Wood is not the optimal material for wet rooms. It is therefore proposed that the toilets are clad with tiles. There is a quite well known tile store on the countryside close to Virserum who could have the chance to showcase themselves here.

Furniture storage

For the large hall and the meeting room to work as the flexible spaces it is intended there is a need to store different kinds of furniture somewhere. The furniture storage is a small but important building volume.



THE BUILDING AND THE ISLAND

Building composition as a part of the landscape

Because of the chosen design process, to work from the inside and out, the assembling of the building volumes into one coherent structure is a very important part of the project. The island of Strömsholmen is also a very special site, its public atmosphere needs to be preserved at the same time as its park qualities needs improvement. To solve this design problem it felt important to design the building composition and the landscape simultaneously. In this way the building can be used as a way of defining the outdoor spaces, the public feeling of the island can be transferred to the community centre and the building will feel well connected to the site.



Landscape outside Virserum, open space surrounded by walls of forest (author's own photo).

Program

Strömsholmen is today a part of a public park area that stretches along the lake and river. To attract more people and make the park more interesting it was proposed by the associations that something visual should be added. The existence of the art museum gave the idea of letting the park become a sculpture park, a small addition that can create a big change. An arboretum can be added to help educate new inhabitants about local trees and nature. The function of an outdoor stage should be kept. Also the central open space that is used for Valborg celebrations is a program to keep and define further.

For the building composition the program is to connect the separate volumes by a common foyer where people can mingle and meet other community members.

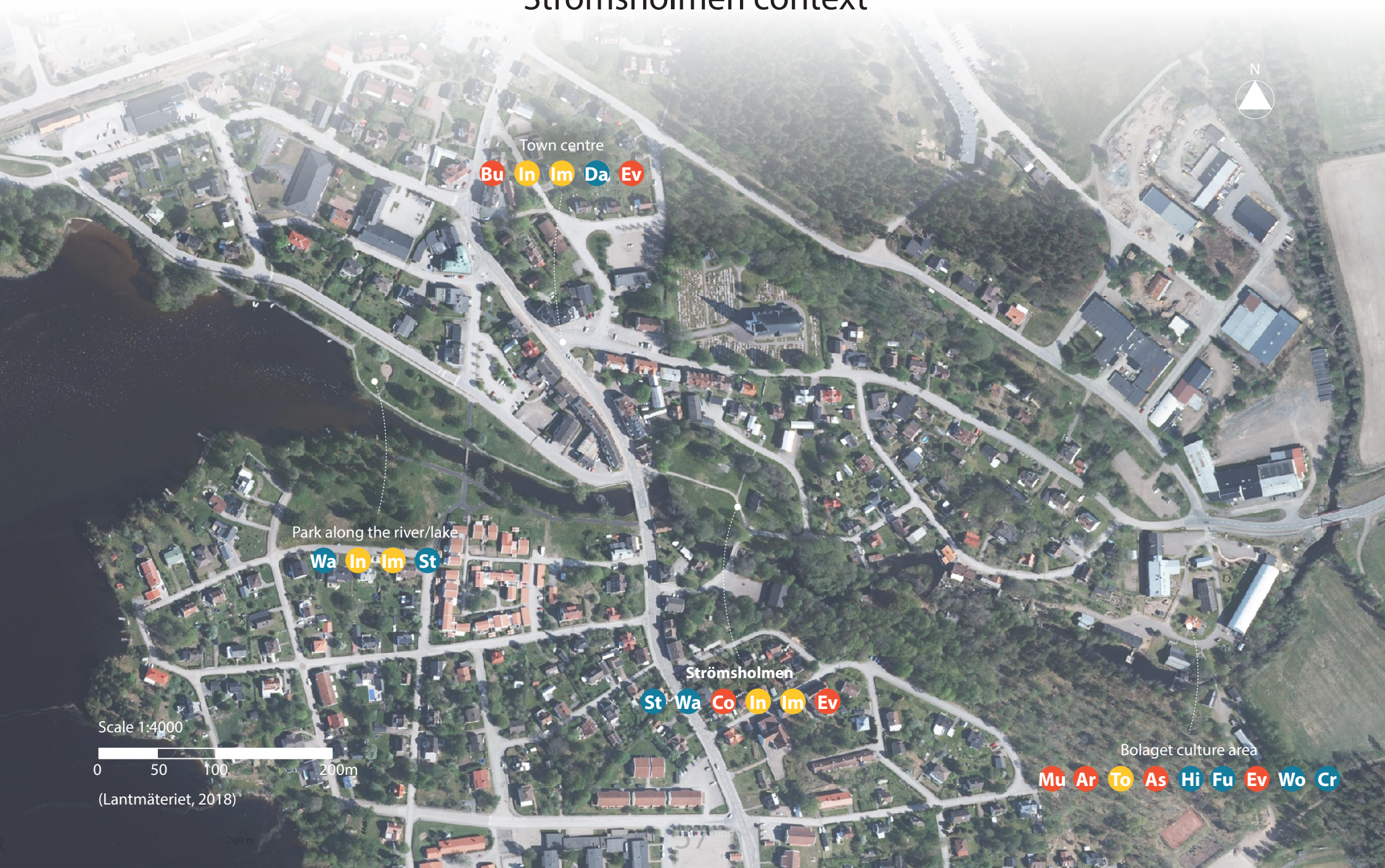


Architecture

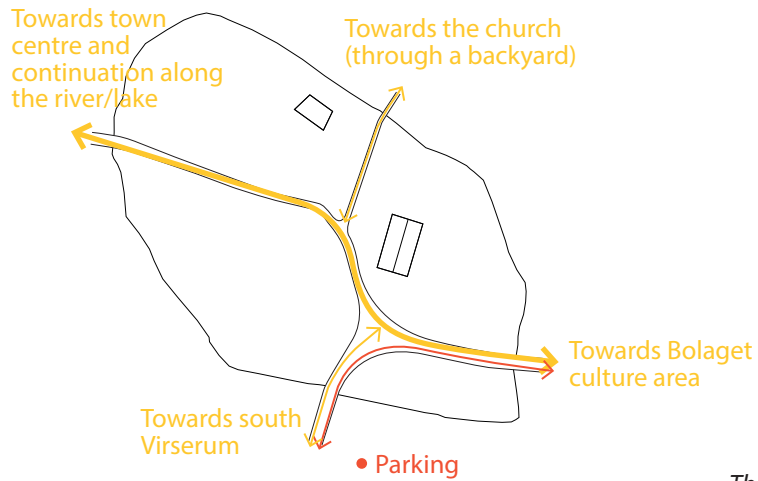
The community centre should be open and inviting so it attracts people to come and use its spaces. The different volumes should be clearly shown on the exterior.

The typical Smålandian landscape is the inspiration for the park. The Smålandian landscape is a dense forest with clearly defined open spaces within. More enclosed spaces like this would benefit Strömsholmen as its outdoor spaces today are badly defined. The river, topography and buildings can be used as space defining elements.

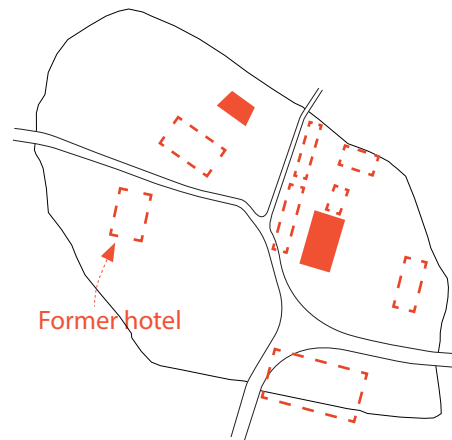
Strömsholmen context



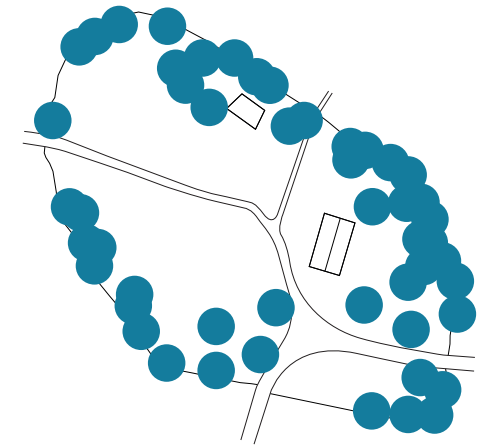
Site analyses



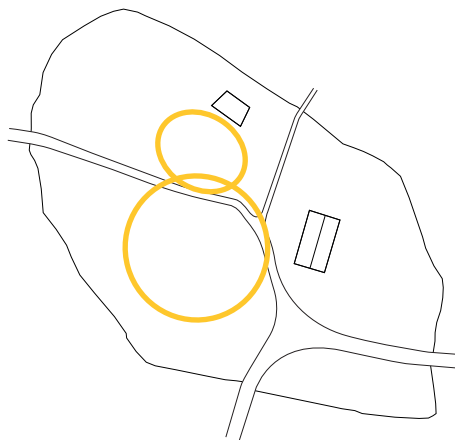
People flow in yellow and cars in red.



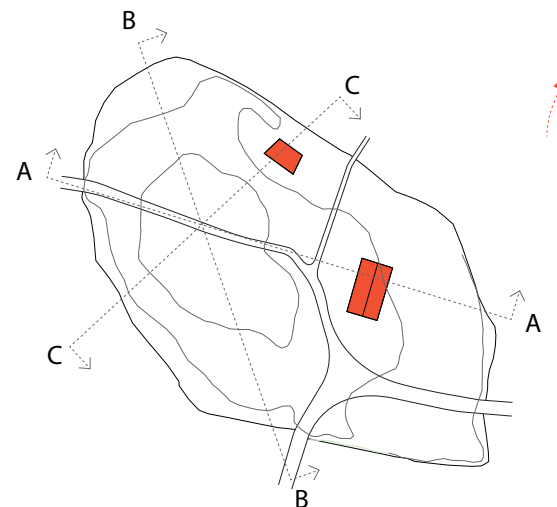
The two buildings on the island today, the outdoor stage and "Annexet". Also marked are the locations of former buildings.



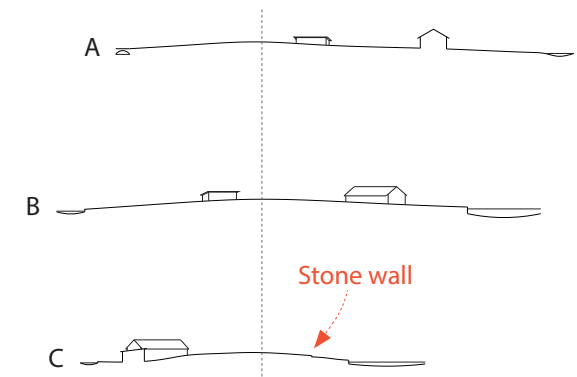
Trees on the island are mostly along the river. Many of the trees are quite old or in a bad condition overall.



Vaguely defined spaces are the slope towards the stage and the open green used for Valborg celebrations. The rest of the island is undefined and mostly unused.

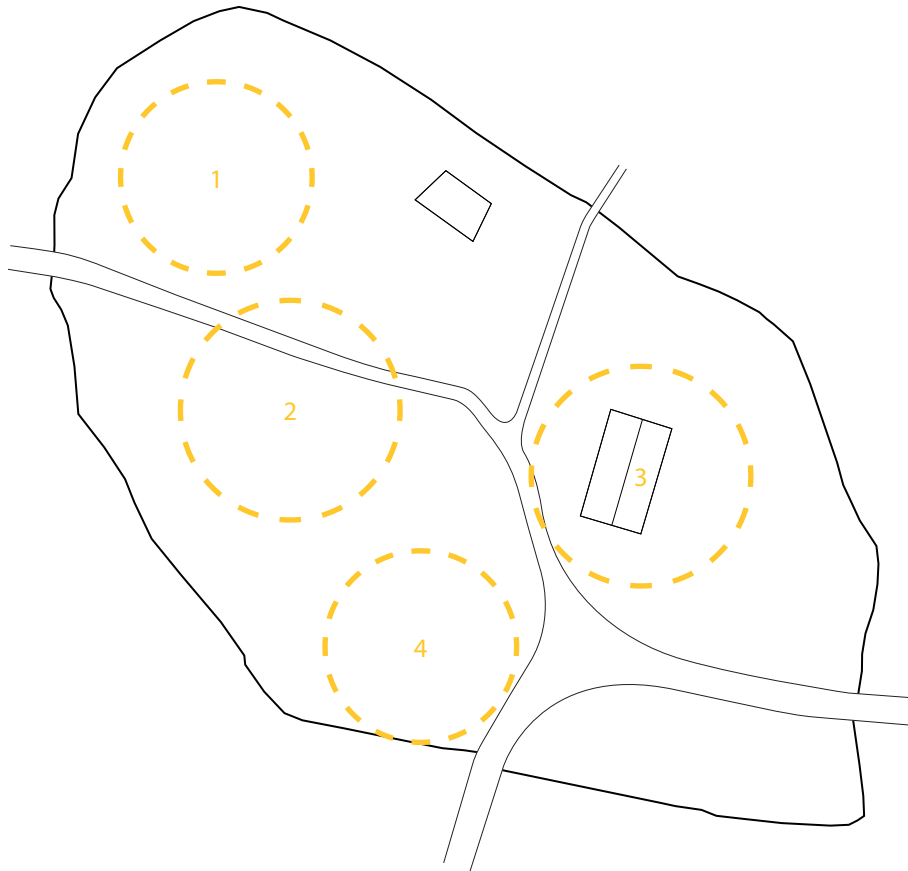


The topography of the island consists of a clear hill. Contour lines in the diagram symbolises one meters high difference. Strömsholmen has a size of roughly 7800 m².



To the south-west of the hilltop there is a small steep of less than half a meter made up of a stone wall.

Placement of the building

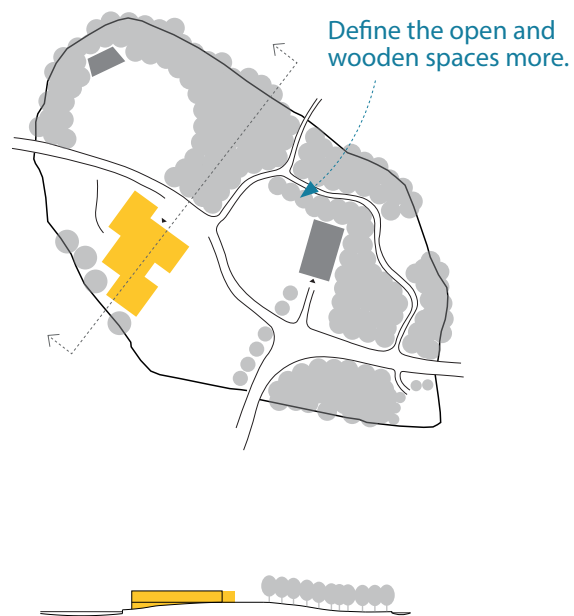


The four possible sites are: 1, the unused northern corner. 2, on top of the hill. 3, On the site of "Annexet" or as an extension to the building. 4, South of the hill by the road. Other areas felt to distant from the centre of the island to be considered.

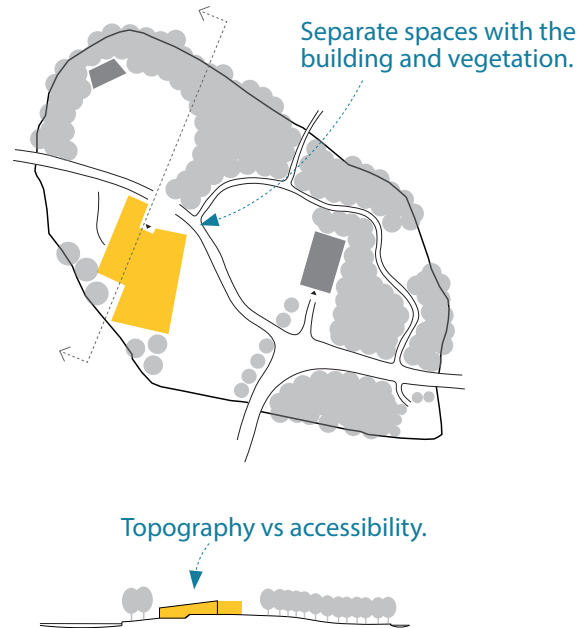
	1	2	3	4
Connection to entrances and paths.	++	++	+	+
Relation to topography.	-	+++	++	-
Relation to existing buildings.	-	++	-	+
Possibilities for outdoor spaces.	+	++	++	+
Closeness to parking and transport.	-	-	++	+++
Total:	0	+8	+6	+5

The four sites were rated from one minus to three plus in five different categories. The grades have been given according to the design criteria. Site 2 becomes the winner because of its visibility on the top of the hill. This site along the main path gives the building a good possibility to interact with people passing by. The central location also enables the building to work as a divider between different outdoor spaces.

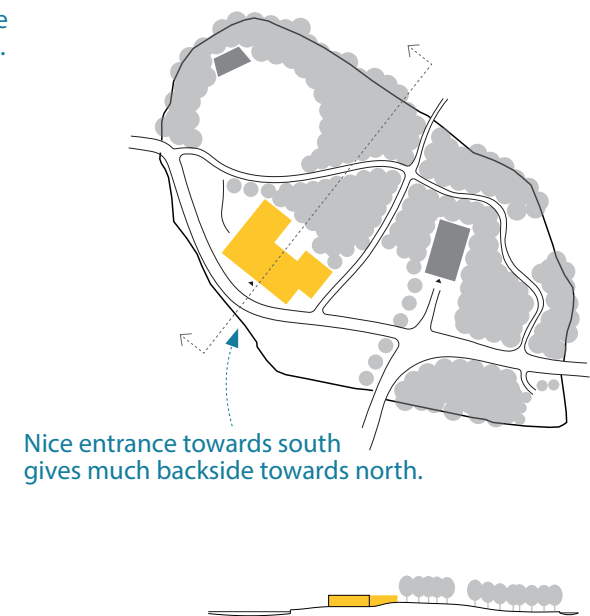
How to place the building



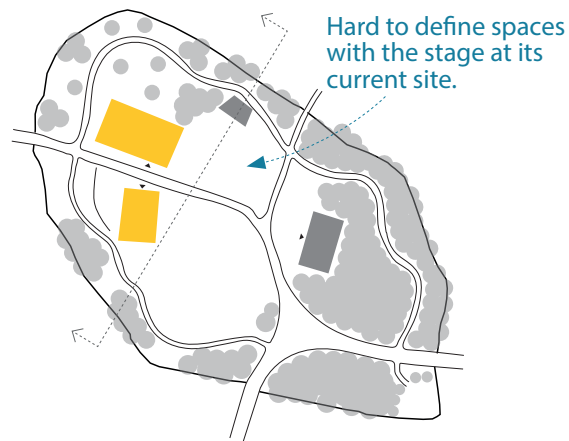
This iteration shows the first ideas of how to place the building on the site. Through experimentation it was found that the stage is a good way of activating the dead corner in the north-east with the slope as a natural audience space. An entrance square on the top of the island opens up towards the large open green, a space that can be used for different events. The café can have an outdoor seating area by the stone wall. The building takes up more space than originally expected and almost reaches the water. Relation to the topography and the sun is not optimal.



This iteration was explored more in detail. The internal layout of the building worked very well. By giving the building two different internal levels it follows the topography better. The big challenge in this case is to make the building work according to accessibility. A ramp will not fit in a nice way and a lift creates demand for maintenance and also makes it hard for disabled to use the spaces effectively.



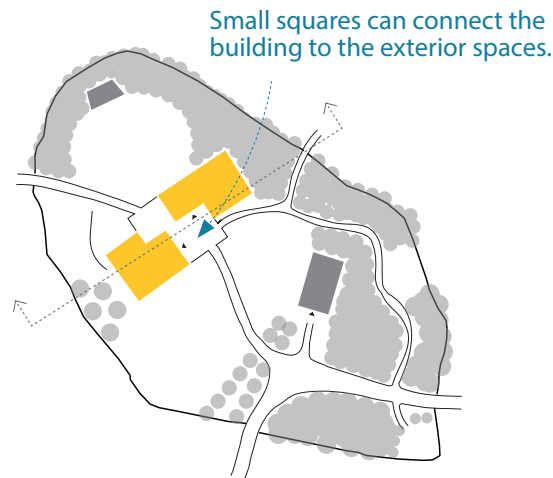
In this iteration it was tested to flip the building, placing the entrance to the south-west, facing the sun. The building becomes somewhat pushed into the hill making it hard to place windows all around. The use of the hilltop as a space divider is lost when the path follows the same level along the shore. This placement of the building makes it harder to activate the whole island, large parts becomes a backside.



Divide the building to fit it better on the hill.



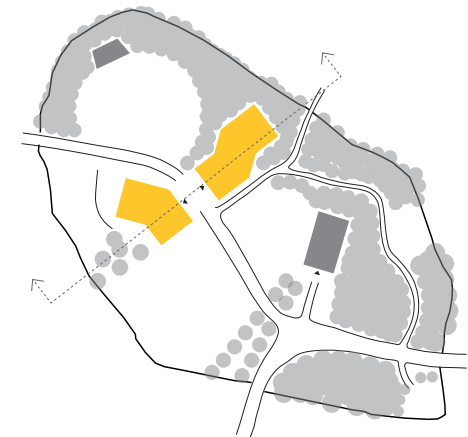
By dividing the building in two parts it is possible to keep it more on the same level on the hill. While interaction between spaces and activities might be reduced, the community centre becomes more flexible. If, for example, a loud party is organised in the large hall, the spaces in the other building can still be welcoming to the public. Two building volumes also opens up more possibilities for creating a defined entrance square and for dividing the outdoor spaces. In this iteration the stage is kept on its current location. Its audience space is only divided from the open green by the crest of the hill making the two outdoor spaces quite undefined.



Small squares can connect the building to the exterior spaces.



In this iteration the two buildings are placed more angled, directing the east entrance square more towards the open green. The green also becomes more directed towards the south and the river. The small gap between the two "squares" makes a clear transition between spaces but might also give visitors an uneasy feeling - am I supposed to walk here?

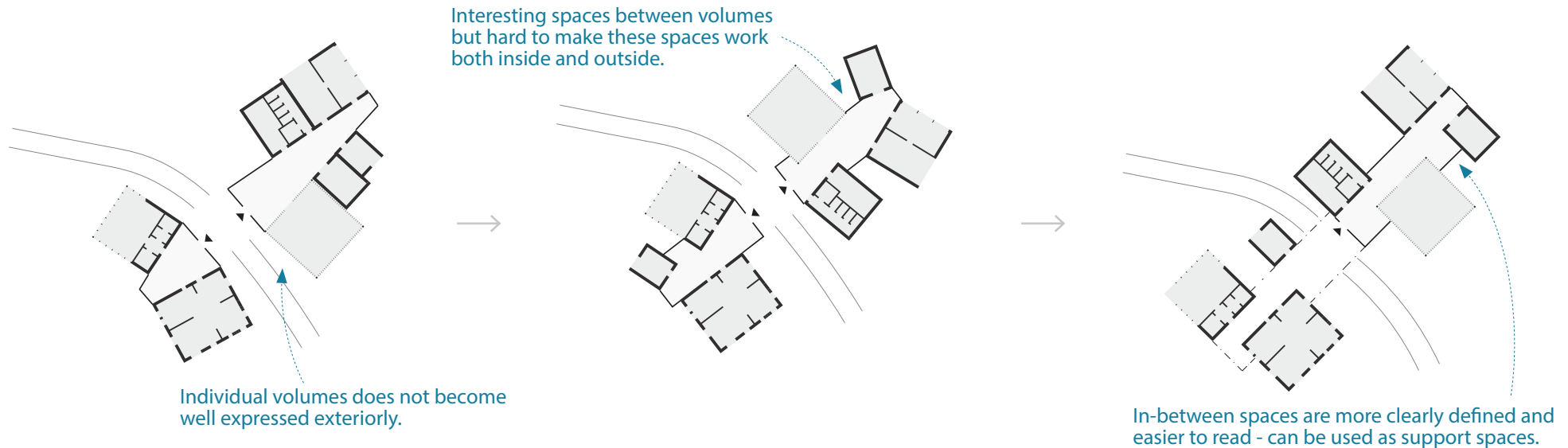


One passage where you are in the public space but lured inside.



This is the iteration that was reworked into the final design. It uses two buildings to divide the island in two areas. The curvature of the path also contributes to brake sight lines and make the sequence of spaces more interesting. A small entrance square is created between the two buildings. The square is open and inviting from both directions. A sparsely planted orchard between the south building and the river defines the outdoor spaces without blocking the sun to much.

Floor plan development

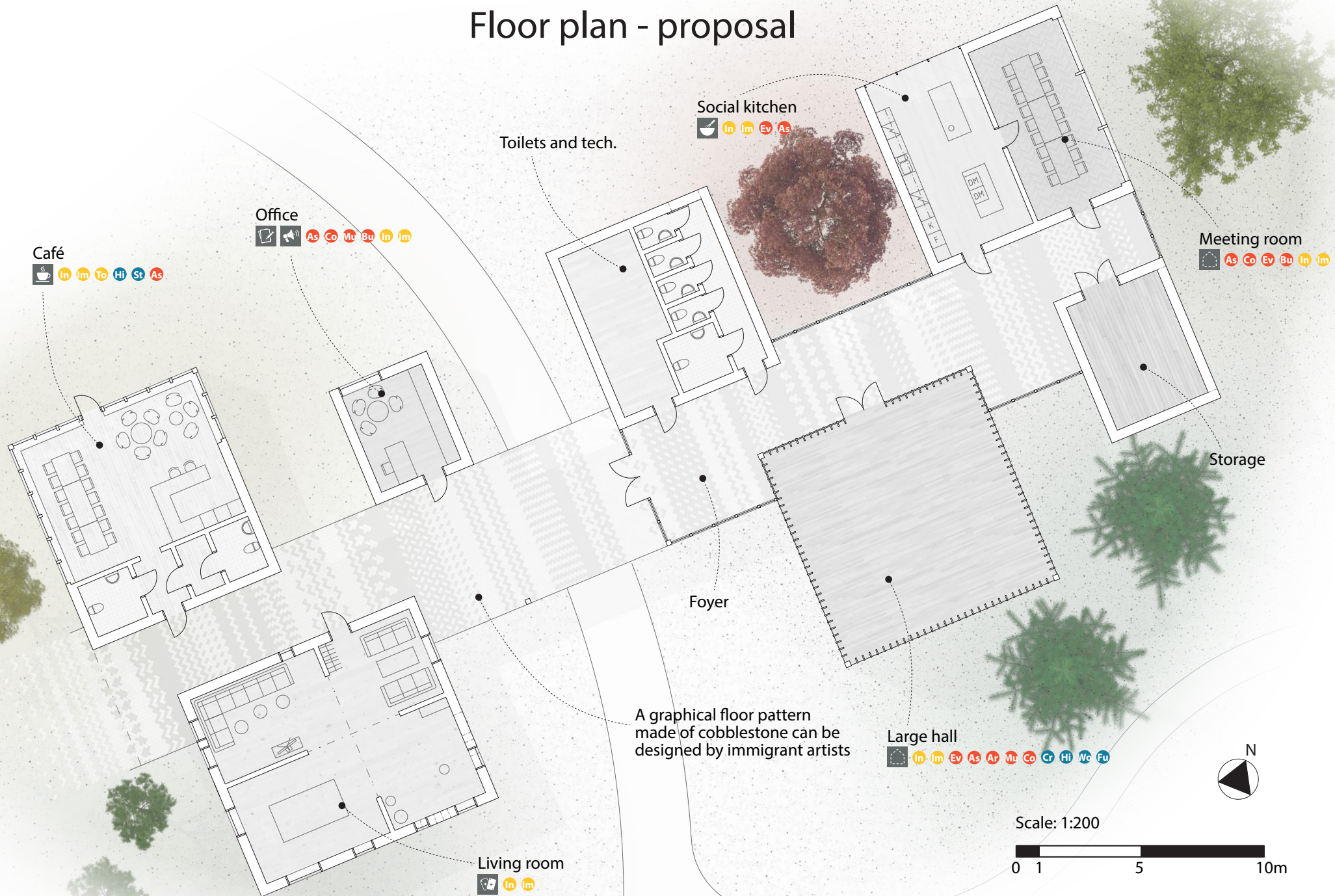


When looking more into detail on the floor plan it was obvious that the exact building shape presented on the previous page could not be created, but the site and division in two was explored further. The first tests of the floor plan investigated how the different volumes could fit together in a quite compact way. The two foyers became unnecessarily large, which was hard to avoid with this sort of composition.

The testing continued with a more exploded structure. In this way the separate volumes are more expressed exteriorly. The foyers becomes a sequence of strangely shaped spaces, the in-between spaces of the volumes. In plan you can see that the foyers are rectangular with the other volumes pushed in. The original shape of the foyers follow the same simple logic as the volumes. Many iterations were made on this theme but it proved close to impossible to get both nice foyer spaces and nice exterior spaces/ directions when the volumes are all differently placed. When one space becomes really good there is often a very bad backside somewhere else.

To make things more simple, the different angles of the volumes were abandoned and instead the foyer becomes an axis of spaces only by letting the volumes be more or less pushed in to the foyer space. To reduce the foyer there is only one indoor climate foyer north of the path. This is possible because the volumes in the north contains the programs that really need an indoor mingle area while the southern volumes are more independent. The southern volumes will be connected by a floor and a canopy matching the indoor foyer.

Floor plan - proposal



Strömsholmen - proposal

Stage



Orchard



Pavilion



Open green



Sculpture park



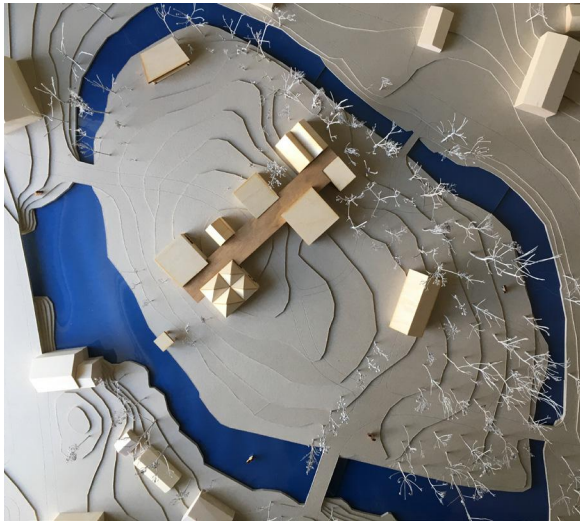
Arboretum



Scale: 1:800



Physical model



Top view.



View from the main road bridge.



The maple tree in the gap between the kitchen and the toilets.



The entrance side from the east.



The community centre through the woods, from the north-east.



The north facade with a view through the corridor.

POTENTIAL USE AND DEVELOPMENT



BUILDING AND RUNNING THE CENTRE

Building

As members of both the old inhabitants and the immigrants have skills in working with wood it would be a missed opportunity to not let the construction process of the community centre be an integration project in itself. By working together people would get to know each other and the immigrants would be able to show their skills for potential employers. Using volunteers for the construction would also reduce the building cost. Another way of reducing the cost would be to let local companies and producers of building materials sponsor the project. As the project is much about integration, it might also be possible to get some public grants.



Enthusiast, eldsjälur in Swedish, are very important for making projects happen in rural places. These people often have a drive to make a change and they also enjoy the support of the community. Also among groups of immigrants there might be someone who are a bit extra energetic. By letting these people be a part of projects it can make other immigrants feel invited as well.

Running the centre

It is important to have a simple and effective administration behind the community centre when it is up and running. Having one person who is the contact person for everything concerning the centre would be optimal, this could maybe be someone involved in the community association. At the same time it is important that all local associations feel involved in the running of the centre, in that way they will also feel welcome to use the spaces. This could be done by having a yearly meeting for taking decisions regarding the centre.

By only having one person responsible for the centre it becomes easy for people who want to book spaces. It might also be possible to have some sort of digital system for booking. In some way the system needs to work when people want to book spaces in advance but also allowing casual use of spaces when they are free.

Yearly costs for running the centre includes electricity, water, heating, maintenance and cleaning. These are costs that don't have to be very high but for the associations to finance it by themselves might still be hard. Because of this it might be needed to take rent from people using the general spaces.

PERSPECTIVES



It is the associations' day and people are gathering at Strömsholmen to take part in activities organised by local associations. By having a day like this, the inhabitants can get to know more about what associations there are and what they are doing, hopefully more people will become involved. When entering Strömsholmen from the west the view does not directly give everything away. Glimpses of the other side of the island can be seen between the volumes. The café is clearly visible but also the main entrance to the community centre can be seen directly from the bridge. The building volumes closest to the path are closed. In this way there is no risk people will feel interfering when passing by. By the crest of the hill you cross the axis of the centre and the threshold of entering the centre is minimal.



The bonfire at Valborg attracts the inhabitants to Strömsholmen every spring. Open, but clearly defined, the open green area is a perfect space for community events. The community centre opens up towards this area and invites to the use of indoor spaces as well. The cosy light from inside becomes even more appealing as it is contrasted by the grey façades. Lights make the large hall shine like a pine forest sunset during evenings. To the east a wall of poplar trees creates a portal between the open green and the more wooden part of the island.



It is summer and the annual music festival. A performance in the large hall has just ended and people are mingling in the foyer. The foyer can be used to support activities taking place in the large hall, social kitchen or the meeting room. The small niches in the foyer can be used for serving food, exhibiting art works, showcasing associations etc. The floor and ceiling continues out and ties the whole centre together. The pattern of the floor can be designed by immigrants, maybe in cooperation with the art museum, to help them bring something to the community. There is a local immigrant who has worked as a sculptor and someone knew someone who had done street art.



Saturday afternoon, a group of friends are entering the living room. People are hanging out and kids are playing. The living room is a space for casual socialising and everyone in the community is welcome, it is always open. The ceiling and walls divide the space into cosy corners while the openness invites to interaction between different groups of people. The square windows are placed to give views and daylight but overall this space is less open to the outside and more directed inwards than other spaces. This is to make the space feel enclosed and safe, focused on the interaction that takes place. By placing historical images and things, such as furniture, here and around the centre, people can get deeper understanding about the history of the community.

5

Discussion

The main question of this thesis was how to design spaces that supports a rural community and social inclusion between its inhabitants. In the thesis this question is answered both through the method used and a design proposal. Both these things are discussed in this chapter. The chapter can be seen as a written conclusion of the thesis - an answer to the stated question.

METHOD

Analyse - find important aspects

**Create design strategies and
program built on the analysis**

**Design with the aim in mind
(in this case: social interaction)**

This simple diagram explains the conclusion of the method developed in this thesis. It is possible to use this as a framework when designing public spaces in rural communities.

During the project a method was developed for analysing a community through its different aspects. This analysis was translated into strategies to bring things from the analysis into the design. During the design I also implemented a method of working with space bubbles to create spaces with desired atmosphere and feeling.

For the analysis part, the method of this thesis has been to identify important aspects of the community, in this case Virserum. These aspects were divided into passive, active and people. The difference between the passive and active aspects is that the active in some way involves people taking action. For people aspects, this thesis made a division between inhabitants and immigrants, to see how their connections to the other community aspects differ. All aspects were placed in a diagram where connections between them were made visible. In this way it became clear what aspects are more important and what links are missing.

A deep understanding of the different aspects was needed later when strategies were developed from the analysis. I had a big advantage of working with my hometown when identifying the community aspects. For someone working with an unfamiliar community this analysis would probably demand more meetings with local people.

From the analysis it became clear that the immigrants were missing some important links to the community that the old inhabitants have. This was not very surprising as the immigrant have only lived in the community for a short time and they are not yet totally familiar

with the Swedish language. Another conclusion from the community diagram was the importance of local associations. Their importance for the social life and their connections to different community aspects make them a possible key actor for community development and integration of immigrants.

For the development of the program of the community centre, I organised meetings with both immigrants and representatives from associations.

I also set up design criteria based on the analysis. Criteria that was used when evaluating different design iterations. Also the idea of using different types of trees as inspiration for the design came from the analysis.

The fact that all rural communities in Sweden (and the world) are different makes this method useful. It makes it possible to see what aspects that are important to work with as well as what design criteria and materials to use. When you have gone through this method you can be sure that the architectural design that follows will be connected to the community on several levels, both visible and invisible. The bridging between the analysis and the design is important. I did this in several ways, the development of the program and the design criteria. In other projects there might be other relevant ways to explore this connection. You might have been given a program in advance or the community has no strong connection to a specific material, then other strategies can be explored.

Because of the thesis' ambition to propose a way of strengthening social inclusion between people in a community, I let the most important design criteria be that the spaces should support social interaction. This led to an exploration of spaces through "space bubbles". Social interaction between strangers often demand that the surrounding environment invites to interaction. I therefore looked at each interior space individually, to see what was needed from them to support social interaction. My conclusion was often that intimacy and feeling of security would be beneficial. Initial sketches started with the people who should interact and how a space surrounding them in the best way could be shaped to create the feelings of, for example, intimacy and security. This search was mainly done through sketches in plan and section, using the space bubbles as a tool. To create the final design of the spaces I also introduced spacial qualities I found in different common trees. The space exploration continued through digital 3D-models.

When each interior space was designed the building still needed to be assembled on the site. Also for the outdoor spaces I was sketching with space bubbles. Because of the complexity of the site it was hard to create a good building composition of the separate volumes.

The inside-out approach to the design led to, I think, an architecture that is close to the spacial needs of the people using it. The aesthetics of the architecture has not been my main concern. Instead I have focused on the feelings and atmosphere evoked by the architecture.

CONCLUSION OF DESIGN PROPOSAL

The design proposal is a community centre on Strömsholmen in Virserum, Småland. This is one way in which you can design a rural community centre today, but of course it could also be done in endless other ways. When it comes to the original thesis question I think that the design provides an answer. The interior spaces are designed both to be interesting and unique and to support social interaction. Also the outdoor spaces are made to improve their usability for social activities and events. The way the building is divided into several volumes visualises the inside-out approach of the design process but also the fact that Virserum is a community with many aspects and this community centre is a place where these aspects will be connected.

The final design does not look like what I had imagined before I started to work on this project. I guess that shows that the design has been shaped by the method. As the method builds on a comprehensive community analysis that would mean that the design is based on the community itself.

6

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This chapter lists the references used in this thesis, both written and images/illustrations.

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