

Building Communities in High-rise: New conceptions for stairwells and hallways in apartment blocks

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As urban populations continue to grow, the social cohesion of cities appears to decline rapidly, leading to fragmentation, mistrust and loneliness. To overcome these problems, it is crucial to re-think the functionalist designs of stairwells and hallways in high-rise apartment blocks that make it difficult for residents to relate to their neighbors.

COMMUNITIES BY THINGING

The research project *Fleksible Fællesskaber*/Flexible Communities has uncovered how residents' mundane, objects, such as potted plants, garden lanterns, outdoor figurines, door mats and holiday decorations, have immense importance in the establishment of strong residential communities on Danish social housing estates. As residents arrange their things on building facades or around their front doors, they hope to bring joy to their neighbors and make the estate agreeable to themselves and the other residents. We call such community making through things, *thinging*.

PROBLEMS OF FUNCTIONALISM IN HIGH-RISE

Most *thinging* takes place in the transitional zones between private apartments and spaces residents use or pass by in their daily comings and goings. However, high-rise staircases and hallways are often designed as functionalistic narrow, minimalistic transportation zones. Due to their shape and size, fire regulations leave no room for residents' private things and decorations. Given the importance of things to the community and relations amongst residents, high-rise architecture must prioritize *thinging* environments.

ROOM FOR HIGH-RISE THINGING

Combining anthropology and architecture we have developed several spatial models for *thinging* in high-rise. These focus on the indoors transition-zones between residents' private apartments and public stairwells or hallways. We suggest that elements such as niches facing the hallway or enjoyable common spaces in stairwells may enhance residents' opportunities for community making by *thinging*.





MODEL-BUILDING HALLWAYS AND STAIRWELLS

As a method for investigating residents' ideas about the potentials for new community-making spaces in high-rise, a series of twenty 1:20 scale apartment modules were developed by the research team. By utilizing existing architectural conditions in two social housing estates as a starting point, the modules proposed alternative designs for community spaces in transition-zones between private and common space.

The modules remained abstract in terms of material, and removable illustration panels of various interior functions provided a visual representation of the different living spaces inside the apartments.



The first set of modules were designed with different facade conditions to test possibilities for thinging spaces in the hallways. These modules were free to be moved and combined in potential layouts, granting workshop participants the freedom to 'build' their thoughts.

The second set saw the addition of stairwells as a focal point for thinging spaces and concentrated on the vertical connections, enabled by stair, and landing layouts. Balconies connected to stairwell landings were also added as potential communal space.

An accompanying set of scale figures and furnishings inspired residents in ways they might utilize the proposed communal space.



USING SCALE MODULES AS ARTEFACTS FOR RESIDENTS' DESIGNS

Using the modules, two 3-hour workshops were held addressing residents at two social housing estates with a high-rise typology including hallways and stairwells respectively. Conversations with residents took their point of departure in arranging the modules.

Discussing and building abstract model-scenarios, the modules were used as physical and visual tools to concretizes residents' imaginings of new spaces and spatial coherences and how they might affect their everyday practices. Thus, the models were used to provoke concrete discussions around the potential for creating thinging community in high-rise housing.

Interestingly, the model-scenarios most abstracted from residents' present situations, allowed for the most creative engagement with new spatial scenarios. Scenarios close to residents' present situations only reminded them of rules, regulations, and limitations of their current living conditions.



FINDINGS

From the workshops it became clear that residents saw use for expanded transition-zones between their private apartments and hallways or stairwells. Using the modules and scale figures they furnished spaces with plants, café tables, chairs, rollators, shoes, baby prams, shooters, e-bikes, doormats, pictures, and childrens' toys and shooters. Residents proposed utilizations fell into two categories:

Practical:

- Room for prams, walkers, and shoes to avoid bringing dirt and rainwater into the apartment.
- Room for charging handicap-shooters and e-bikes close to the home.

Community:

- Decorating in front of one's apartment to make and share an inviting and enjoyable indoor environment.
- Supporting relations with neighbors by having indoor common spaces, that encourage residents to take stay and strike conversation.

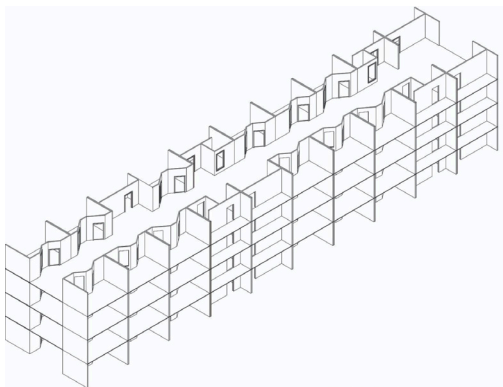


Figure 1: Hallway scenario in high-rise typology



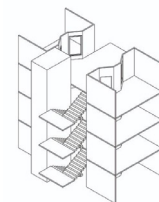
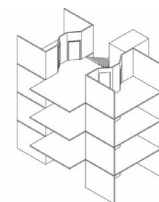
Figure 2: Stairwell scenario in high-rise typology

FUTURE SPACES IN HIGH-RISE

Based on the findings from the workshops renderings of potential future spaces were developed:

Figure 1, is a hallway scene, focusing on creating space for the furnishings of residents within the hallway. Deep niches become areas for the charging of electric bikes or for parking prams and walkers. With chairs and tables, these spaces might also provide opportunities for residents to linger in the hallways, decorate space and interact with neighbors.

Figure 2 focuses on expanding the circulatory space (the landing) of a stairwell to include a common area between the two apartments. In addition to supporting walkers and other objects, this communal space encourages casual occupation amongst residents and spontaneous interactions on the stairwells or by the elevators.



Flexible Communities

One of the largest challenges of our time is the generation and implication of sustainable urban development. Especially challenging to urban planners, developers and researchers is the question of what it takes to create sustainable city development for growing populations. Populations progressively challenge the social fabric of cities as well as their infrastructures.

The challenge is to develop cities in a way that considers both architectural and technological challenges. This is compounded by the need to incorporate the massive social resources for sustainability that are immanent in citizens' self-organizations, initiatives, and local knowledge. Dealing with this challenge requires knowledge of both technologically and socially sustainable ways of living in urban environments.

So far, there is no established tradition of integrated interdisciplinary collaboration in city development. Thus, new robust methodologies must be developed that combine cultural history and architecture to establish fundamental knowledge about the relations between social life and the built environment. In a collaboration between the Aarhus School of Architecture and the National Museum of Denmark, *Fleksible Fællesskaber* explores how this can be realized in praxis.



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