

Saving Seats:
How to Improve Outdoor Seating in
Holma and the Western Harbor

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THE BACKGROUND

Malmö is located along the western coast of southern Sweden. It is Sweden's third largest city, boasting at approximately 300,000 occupants. In the past few years, the city has opened a university, grew an attractive business environment, and even won awards for sustainable city development. As the city's website states, it is "a city in transition."¹

The two areas in this transitional city that I will be focusing on are the Western Harbor and Holma. The Western Harbor, once an industrial site has been transformed into a rather beautiful residential space. It is one of the areas that the city was awarded for sustainable city development. Holma, also a residential community, located in the borough of Hyllie. Despite both of these neighborhoods being in the same city, they contain many differences.

The wealth, layout, and demographics of these two communities are almost opposites. By noticing the upkeep and design of the buildings, you can tell that Holma is not as wealthy of a neighborhood as the Western Harbor. Holma also follows more of a grid structure than the Western Harbor. The demographics of Holma and the Western Harbor are even more flipped. Holma, with a population of about 4,000, has 300 more children, from the ages 0-18, than the Western Harbor, despite the Western Harbor having a little over 1,000 more inhabitants than Holma. The children of Holma make up about a fourth of the population of the neighborhood. The children in the Western Harbor only make up a sixth of it. The majority age group in the Western Harbor is people between the ages 25-44. This group totals up to be just over 2,000 with people in the age range of 30-34 making up a third of that total. In the borough that Holma is situated in, the largest group of non-Swedish residents is from Iraq. In the borough that the Western Harbor is situated in, it is Danish. Holma has a much larger population of Middle Easterners than the Western Harbor.²

	Age: 0-18	Age: 25-44	Total Population
Holma	1,074	1,170	3,873
Western Harbor	765	2,163	5,023

	Danish	Iraqi	Total Population
Hyllie (Holma's borough)	817	1,069	11,187
Center (Western Harbor's borough)	1,281	486	10,354

¹ "Medborgare," 1.

² Ibid

THE QUESTION

In this paper, I plan to discuss the outdoor seating arrangements in both Holma and the Western Harbor. The goal is to figure out if these areas have proper seating that provide comfort and enjoyment to all ages and during all activities as well as generate social interaction amongst visitors and neighbors. After comparing both area's seating to one another, I hope to discover what each area can take away from each other's seating arrangements and what both areas are lacking in seating design.

Having well thought out seating can make the users feel welcomed, safe, and connected. When a person is in an attractive environment it can effect their behavior and increase their social interaction.³ So by offering better seating, a person can create a better place of living. Not only can seating give a higher quality of living to the people of the neighborhoods, but it could also raise their perception of themselves and the people around them. In the article, "Social Interactions in Urban Public Places," the author writes that a person's understanding of their community is formed by what they observe around them in public.⁴ So when chairs in a public space neglect the needs of certain people, those people can feel neglected by their community and begin to see their community in a much dimmer light. By creating an accessible and comfortable public seating arrangement, one can improve the bond between tenants and their surroundings.

My research will not stop on how to improve the physical chair. I will also be observing the surroundings of the chair itself. To have a comfortable chair is not enough. It is where it is placed and what is placed around it that make it a key element in improving a public space. I will be monitoring traffic, nature, sculpture, and areas of activity to better understand what makes certain areas better for seating. Because if a bench is positioned in a great way, say towards a spectacular view, it will be favored over one that may even be more comfortable but is facing away from the view.⁵ A person might even choose to sit on something that is less comfortable, like a planter, wall, or the ground itself, if it meant that they still saw the view.⁶

To put it simply, I will be investigating how the seating arrangements in both Holma and the Western Harbor help promote social interaction or community in their neighborhoods as well as provide multiple ways for different types of people to connect with the outdoors. In areas that do not seem well used or placed, I will explore the reason why and how to improve such areas through research and observation.

³ Huang, "A Study of Outdoor," 202

⁴ Holland, *Social Interactions*, ix.

⁵ Ibid, xii.

⁶ Ibid.

THE METHOD

In both areas, I walked around the neighborhood, documenting the different types of seating that each area provided. I spent the same amount of time in each area, approximately an hour and a half. When I reached larger spaces, I would stop and observe any activity that occurred. I would stay in these larger areas for about ten minutes, depending on the activity. Since I did my research in November, the weather was not normally the type that roused people to sit outside. It was always overcast when I visited the sites, which caused very few to no people to be outside. My observations were mainly pinpointed at the benches themselves and the surrounding environment rather than how the people used the seating. I would take pictures of all the different types of chairs that each neighborhood provided and then write about or photograph the surrounding landscape of each seating arrangement. Since I have little to no research on how the people of these neighborhoods interacted with the supplied seating, I will be comparing the shape and placement of the accommodations with ones that other researchers have agreed to be productive in creating a pleasant and socially active public space.

THE FINDINGS

HOLMA

When first arriving at Holma, I noticed that the landscape of the neighborhood was much more green and contained more hills than I imagined. The large amount of trees and hills sometimes made it hard to see the benches from the pathways, making finding them almost like a scavenger hunt (see Figure 1). Most of all the green spaces are right outside the apartment complexes. A rather impressive hill along with a walking path lie just behind the apartment complexes. This small path held more traffic than some of the other smaller paths that weave between the buildings. Most of the paths around the complex were made of overgrown asphalt or masonry, making them look disorderly, rugged, and used. A wide main road that ran through the middle of the neighborhood gained the most traffic from pedestrians and cyclists.

The variation between types of seating was much slimmer at Holma than at the Western Harbor. Almost all the seating arrangements at Holma were wooden park benches or picnic tables. Most of their seating revolved around a playground or an outdoor fire pit. Also, most of the benches were connected to or were placed next to matching tables. Despite the poor weather during the winter months in Sweden, almost none of the seats were situated under a covering, even the ones that sat outside the covered front doors (see Figure 2).

The sculptures and water elements in Holma feel separated from the seating and green space. Both of these features were normally placed among a flower bed or on a pedestal, pulling them almost away from the public. Their purpose was to be admired, rather than touched. The amount of water in Holma was also rather sparingly. There was only one fountain that I came across.

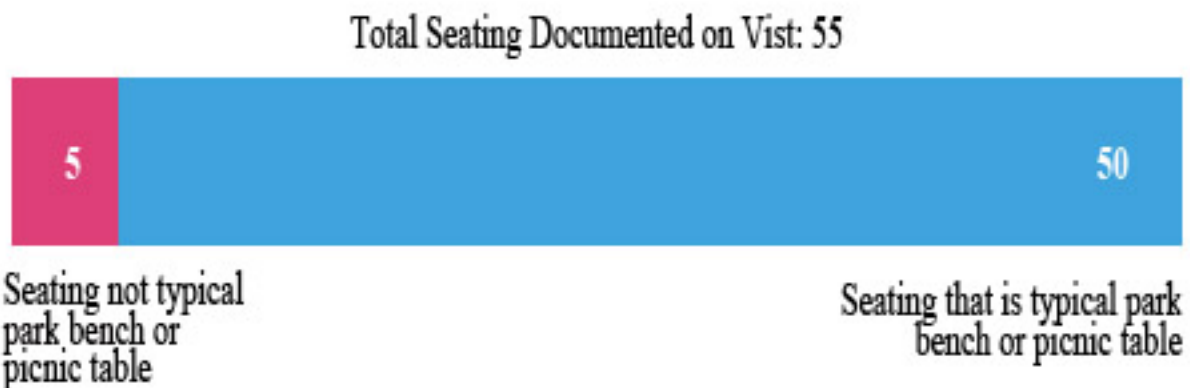




Figure 1: Picnic table hidden from path.



Figure 2: Park bench outside the front door of an apartment building without covering.

THE WESTERN HARBOR

The Western Harbor is much more flat and much less green than Holma. One could see a majority of the area's public space from one vantage point (see Figure 3). Most of the buildings do not open up to a large shared green space like the buildings in Holma do. The green spaces that exist inside the small streets, where the low rise buildings open up to, felt very planned and small or very private (see Figure 4). Most of the streets are very orderly, paved in clean, polished, yellow brick. The main item that most of the buildings in the Western Harbor are oriented to is the ocean, which runs along the edge of the entire neighborhood. Most of the seating is facing this spectacular view. Along with the ocean, there is a small cluster of shops and cafes that open up the public space that is situated up against the sea.

The seating in the Western Harbor is incredibly diverse. There is polished marble blocks, wooden decks, park benches, boulders, flat wooden slabs, and concrete steps. The only thing that is lacking in the Western Harbor is the classic picnic bench. Very few of the benches and chairs are attached to or are placed near a table. However, the area does offer a coverings for a few benches.

The sculptures and water elements in the Western Harbor are very intertwined with the public space (see Figure 5). The fountains are right up against the seating. The sculptures turn into seating or playgrounds for children. They are very involved with the public.

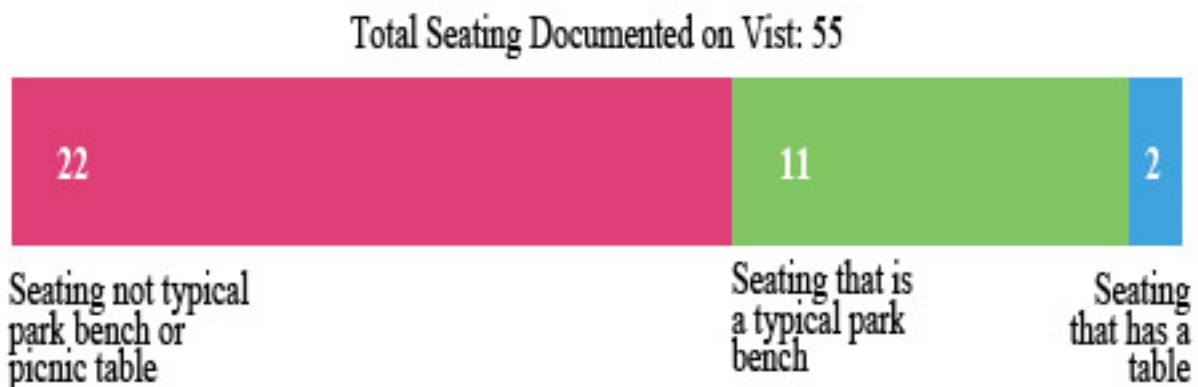




Figure 3: Wide view of main seating area in the Western Harbor.



Figure 4: A garden along a small street.



Figure 5: A water fountain that intertwines with concrete seating.

THE IMPROVEMENTS

HOLMA

Seat Design

Since the seating in Holma is mostly made up of wooden park benches, the best move for the neighborhood would be to diversify the seating designs, like the Western Harbor. By adding in a wider range of seating choices, the public space can become more welcoming allowing people to connect with the environment over a favorite chair. To make it even better, one can allow the residents to choose a variety of seating to place in their common area. When the people who are affected by the decision are involved with the process, they are more likely to enjoy the results.⁷ By letting people pick their favorite seating, it makes for a guaranteed acceptance and enjoyment of the space.

The lack of a covered seating area is rather upsetting, especially when poor weather is expected in parts of year. The benches that are near the front entrance to the apartment complexes should be the ones that are the most covered. When a person chooses to sit outside when the weather is poor, they are expecting it to be poor and know just what they are getting into and if they feel at all displeased with what they are going through they can leave very easily.⁸ When a person is waiting for someone, they are forced to stay in whatever environment they are in. They cannot leave, so they must tolerate the poor weather which then makes their mood much less agreeable.⁹ People who are visiting the residents of Holma will most likely have to wait outside for the person to either open the door or to arrive home. Making this person wait in poor weather would drastically decrease the person's mood. A covering could help relieve some of the annoyance of the harsh elements.

Landscape Design

Stated earlier, the landscape of Holma's public space is very green and hilly. This made some of the benches hard to find. One of the reasons people felt attached to or enjoyed a certain space is because it appeared familiar to them.¹⁰ This was usually caused by them walking by and seeing the certain space many times.¹¹ There were only a few benches that were clearly visible from the most trafficked street in Holma. Bringing a few more seating arrangements into view might help people feel more connected and maybe even comfortable, especially for the elderly who

⁷ Abu-Ghazzeh, "Communicating Behavioral Research," 798.

⁸ Nikolopoulou, "Thermal Comfort," 98.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Abu-Ghazzeh, "Communicating Behavioral Research," 793.

¹¹ Ibid.

frequently look for available seating when walking. Having rest stops along paths also helps ease traffic and generate social interaction.¹² Although, you do not want to through out the hidden seating just yet, considering that Holma has a large population of children. Youth tend to meet in more secluded and separated places, so they do not have to worry about how a large group of youth in a residential area will be perceived by onlookers.¹³ But it is not only the youth who enjoy their privacy. Based on Louise Mozingo's study in San Francisco, women tend to enjoy more "backyard" style areas rather than "frontyard" style areas.¹⁴ There's also a more cultural reason why keeping more private areas in Holma might make the residents feel more comfortable. Considering that a large amount of the occupants are from the Middle East, it might not be uncommon for them to want some sort of visual privacy as most of the homes and gardens in Middle Eastern countries tend to emphasize visual privacy in consideration of the women of the household.¹⁵

Sculpture Design

In the Western Harbor, the sculptures and water elements are weaved into much of the seating in the public space. This integration of sculpture and public space is what sculptures have become in the past few decades.¹⁶ Sculptures are no longer becoming center pieces of public areas, rather they are focusing on what sort of experience they can evoke in their audience.¹⁷ They are making the public the center piece of the sculpture.¹⁸ By using these types of sculptures in a public space, it shows thought in how the users will react or if they will enjoy the art. They are built with the audience as the key element. By making the public number one in the design, the thoughtfulness might show through in the work and create a more user centered environment. Having sculptures that focus on the residents may make the public space more personal and stimulate social interactions. Sculptures and water elements add visual interest to their environment and entice people to stay and converse.¹⁹

THE WESTERN HARBOR

Seat Design

¹² Huang, "A Study of Outdoor," 202.

¹³ Holland, *Social Interactions*, x.

¹⁴ Mozingo, "Women and Downtown," 46.

¹⁵ Al-Kodmany, "Residential Visual Privacy," 285.

¹⁶ North, "The Public as Sculpture," 861.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 869.

¹⁹ Huang, "A Study of Outdoor," 202.

Holma has a large amount of picnic tables, while the Western Harbor has only a couple. Having a table available for use outdoors might make residents stay outdoors longer. They would be able to interact in different ways because new activities would be possible for them. Having a table with seating also gives off a more permanent presence than just seating. A table shows a longer stay, a possible meal. They allow the user to move a little piece of their dining room out to the outdoors. When people are more comfortable and stay outdoors longer they are more likely to interact with others around them. A table can promote more social interaction amongst neighbors and promote community.

Landscape Design

A majority of the Western Harbor's available seats are in a large public area that runs along the shoreline. This area is rather flat and one can see almost all seating arrangements from standing on the edge of the public space. It is very unlike Holma in that there are not many hidden benches covered by trees and hills. It is very visually accessible. But just like why Holma should keep its hidden seating arrangements, there is a reason the Western Harbor needs more. Most seating in the area is on display and easily found. There aren't many benches tucked away from prying eyes that people can retreat to and because of the more visitor-friendly atmosphere that surrounds the Western Harbor, I find it more crucial that there should be a hide-away area that the residents can run off to away from the busy, visitor-packed public spaces, such as along the canal or shoreline.

Another landscape issue that the Western Harbor has is that most of the buildings do not flood into a shared green space like the ones in Holma do. Most of the buildings empty out into their own private yard, a yellow brick lane, or a very public, visitor-friendly area. There is no common space that is largely used by the residents and by the visitors. Having a green space right outside of the housing units can increase social interaction amongst neighbors.²⁰ Creating an area that is just outside the buildings can allow residents to connect with one another and create community.

²⁰ Sullivan, "The Fruit of Urban Nature," 679.

THE CONCLUSION

By observing the seating arrangements in both areas, it was easy to find what each neighborhood needed to improve their accommodations. Both areas seemed to have one thing that the other did not. There was not one element that both of the areas were lacking. By observing the seating of a public space, one can guess how the people interact with each other. With this knowledge, a solution on how to make those interactions better can be developed.

Even though I was not able to study how the tenants interact with the provided seating, I was still able to learn and hypothesis what could be added or taken away to improve the public space. When it comes with seating, the more variety the better. Providing seating that includes as much people as possible can help in increasing social interaction within all the residents of a complex. Making sure that there is not one type of seating, view, or area to seat at will make for a more welcoming environment.

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