

URBAN HEALTH CULTURE OF THE FUTURE

What is urban health culture ?

2 positions – Christer, Suede / John Pløger, Norway

Date: 20 February at 4-5 pm: Online

Summary

The INTA conference kicks off the 20th of February a series of three meetings on urban health culture.

Helle Juul, President of INTA, emphasizes that the strategy focuses on how the physical environment affects our physical, mental, and social well-being. The conferences will cover mental health and physical well-being (March 20) as well as the role of nature in health (April 23).

Christer Larsson, former city planning director in Malmö, presents his work on socially sustainable urban planning, inspired by Michael Marmot's research on health inequalities. He highlights the importance of a holistic approach to architecture and urban planning, prioritizing quality of life and social cohesion. One of the major challenges is loneliness, which has severe health consequences. Christer Larsson argues that co-housing could be part of the solution.

John Pløger focuses on spatialization: how we experience, create, and attribute meaning to places. He stresses that well-being is a complex concept that depends on both physical and socio-spatial conditions.

He argues that planning is never a finished process but an ongoing development that must consider atmosphere, social interaction, and individual experiences of space.

He also points out that safety is not only about physical design but also about social norms and behavior. He highlights the need for flexibility in planning and the value of diversity over standardization.

Finally, he calls for a rethinking of decision-making processes, encouraging active citizen involvement and a stronger focus on transforming existing urban spaces rather than simply constructing new ones.

The meeting concludes with an invitation to visit INTA's website [LinkedIn page](#), participate in the upcoming meetings in March and April, and to reserve the date of September 12 to attend a full-day event in Copenhagen on September 12.

Transcription des interventions

Helle JUUL

Welcome to this INTA conference.

We are starting the meeting, and I regret to inform you that we will have to conduct it in English. I will ask the speakers to speak slowly so that everyone can follow along. Of course, we will provide participants with a transcript and translations.

Let me briefly introduce myself: I am Helle JUUL, President of INTA Inter since last summer, and I am delighted to welcome new, former, and potential future members of our association.

I served as Vice President for four or five years under the previous presidency of Fernando NUNES DA SILVA.

Today's meeting is the first in a series of three conferences that we are eager to share with you. I will display the invitation so that you can see what it is about.

I will soon come back to our strategy, but for us, everything in INTA's strategy is based on how our physical environment influences our well-being—physically, mentally, and socially.

This is essentially the strategy we will be exploring over the next three months through these conferences.

These three conferences mark our starting point, in addition to the many other initiatives we have launched since last summer.

I am particularly pleased to welcome Christer Larsson, former Director of Urban Planning in Malmö, Sweden, as well as John Pløger, Professor of Urban Planning in Norway.

Both have played a key role in the central project *Future Urban Health Culture*, which we initiated at *JuulFrost Architects* before I became President of INTA.

☞ Link for the background project:

<https://juulfrost.dk/en/publication/urban-health-culture-future>

Christer and John have been invaluable members of a think tank composed of ten experts from diverse backgrounds. Their contributions have shaped and enriched our understanding of the interaction between health, physical environments, and social and community dynamics.

I will return to our two speakers shortly, after a brief presentation of our first three conferences.

For today's first conference, we felt it was essential to begin this series with an introduction to the concept of urban health culture.

Next, we will hold a conference on mental health and physical well-being on March 20, and I hope many of you will join us.

Then, with our third conference on April 23, we will explore the impact of nature on health and well-being. The provisional title for this session is Biodiversity and Urban Nature, a crucial topic within the broader societal agenda we are pursuing.

In the *Juul Frost Architects* project, we studied real-world cases, gathered our think tank, and applied our research to practice. This toolkit has been invaluable in helping municipalities and cities understand how to work towards a future urban health culture.

A quick note on INTA's new agenda: we have formulated a mission and vision, which I have shared with each of you: How to engage communities and territories in a new urban health culture.

I would like to share these insights with you, and I have also sent you a

☞ link to the reference documents:

<https://inta-aivn.org/en/online-lectures-inta-2025/>

HOW TO ENGAGE COMMUNITIES AND PLACES IN A NEW URBAN HEALTH CULTURE

As urban populations continue to grow, health has become a critical issue of the 21st century, influenced by urbanisation, mobility, health challenges, an aging population, demographic shifts, and climate change. These factors highlight that improving health extends beyond traditional policies, impacting cultural, social, and economic spheres, with the urban environment playing a central regulatory role

<p>VISION</p> <p>To create healthy, sustainable, and inclusive urban environments that enhance the well-being and quality of life for all residents.</p>	<p>MISSION</p> <p>To integrate health considerations into urban planning and development through interdisciplinary collaboration, innovative practices, and evidence-based approaches.</p>	
<p>KEY OBJECTIVES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the Integration of Health in Urban Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with local health and urban stakeholders. Incorporate health-promoting elements into master plans. Build coalitions to elevate the health content of urban plans. Promote Environmental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address environmental determinants of health. Improve urban environments to reduce pollution & chronic diseases. Leverage Data and Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use reliable data to assess health trends. Promote technological innovations in urban health services. Build Capacity and Knowledge Sharing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training for urban health leaders. Share best practices through conferences and publications. Foster cross-sector collaboration at local, national, international levels. Advocate for Policy Change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote health-prioritized urban development policies. Engage policymakers to implement supportive regulations. Advocate for equitable access to health services. 	<p>STRATEGIC ACTIONS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Interdisciplinary Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish partnerships with universities, NGOs, and research institutions. Facilitate interdisciplinary working groups on urban health. Innovative Urban Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote designs encouraging physical activity, social interaction, and mental well-being. Support the creation of green spaces and safe public areas. Health Impact Assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate health impact assessments into planning processes. Evaluate health implications of new developments and policies. Knowledge Dissemination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize international conferences and workshops on urban health. Publish research findings and policy briefs. 	<p>IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Governance and Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an Urban Health Culture Steering Committee. Designate Urban Health Ambassadors in key regions. Resource Mobilisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure funding through grants, partnerships, and sponsorships. Communication and Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strategies to raise awareness of urban health issues. Engage media & influencers to promote urban health culture. <p>EXPECTED OUTCOMES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved urban health indicators and reduced health disparities. Increased community engagement in health initiatives. Enhanced capacity of urban health professionals. Adoption of health-supportive policies in urban planning. Creation of healthier, more livable, and resilient urban environments.

INTA INVITATION LECTURE SERIES 2025
URBAN HEALTH CULTURE OF THE FUTURE registration: intainfo@inta-net.org

Introduction to a Lecture Series on the Future of Urban Health Culture organized by INTA:
Welcome to this lecture series dedicated to exploring the **future of urban health** culture, where we aim to inspire, inform, and engage on one of the most pressing challenges of our time: the health and well-being of urban populations.

As cities grow and evolve, so do the complexities of addressing the physical, mental, and social health needs of their residents. This series adopts a **holistic and interdisciplinary perspective**, recognizing that creating healthier urban environments requires collaboration across fields such as urban planning, public health, environmental sciences, architecture, and social policy. Throughout this **lecture series**, we will delve into key themes, including:

- Designing cities for well-being:** How can urban spaces promote mental and physical health?
- Environmental health in urban areas:** Addressing air quality, green spaces, and climate resilience.
- Social cohesion and equity:** Building inclusive communities where everyone can thrive.

Each session will feature leading experts and practitioners who will share insights, case studies, and strategies for shaping cities that prioritize human health and happiness. We invite you to join us on this journey as we envision and work towards healthier, more sustainable, and more equitable cities for the future. Together, let's reimagine what it means to live well in urban environments. -
Sincerely Helle Juul, INTA president

Date: 20. February at 4-5 pm: Online
What is urban health culture
2 positions – Christer Larsson, SE Former Planning director, Malmo/ John Plegier, Professor of urbanism, NO

Date: 20. March 4-5 pm: Online
Mental Health of cities, loneliness and the urban environment
2 positions / Etienne Lhomet _ Lea Portier, Reciprocity

Date: 23. April 4-5 pm: Online
Biodiversity and urban nature. Investment in a healthy future
2 positions / Emely Wade, SLU/Sweden _ rep. from Id Verde

The core of our mission is based on integrating health considerations into urban planning and development through interdisciplinary collaboration, which is the central topic of our meeting today.

Our goal is to influence the way we plan and live by proactively addressing issues before they become critical.

We have also developed several questionnaires for all members and participants of the extended INTA family.

📄 Questionnaire:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScU_sWEuxeMiAkCRwjiVziQJdcI6ItD-45aqpAoKeYHkAXnDA/viewform

We have created an action plan and are currently mapping our international presence.

Of course, the number of members has declined since the pandemic, but we are actively working to reconnect with them and attract new ones. Jacques is in charge of a periodic newsletter, and I have noticed that our INTA page on LinkedIn is growing and gaining increasing importance.

I strongly encourage you to explore and engage with these communication channels so that we can strengthen our activities together.

📄 INTA Website: <https://inta-aivn.org/en/>

📄 INTA LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/106006927/admin/page-posts/published/>

I will now give the floor to Christer. Christer Larsson is the former Director of Urban Planning in Malmö and was Sweden's only Riksarkitekt.

Christer LARSSON



Thank you very much for inviting me, and I look forward to hearing your reactions after my presentation.

I want to start by clarifying that I am not necessarily a health expert. However, I have worked for many years on urban planning issues, and my vision of architecture and urban planning strongly incorporates social aspects—health, of course, being a fundamental part of this approach.

I will begin by presenting a timeline of my work, hoping that it will be relevant to you. However, my perspective will not be limited to health alone.



I would say that my belief in architecture is almost comparable to a priest's faith in religion. As urban planners and architects, we have powerful tools. I am convinced that we can be part of the solutions needed to address the challenges our world faces today.

When I took on the role of Director of Urban Planning in Malmö, I was also involved in the Commission for a Socially Sustainable Malmö. This commission was inspired by the work of *Michael Marmot*, who conducted a global study on health inequalities. You have probably

heard of his report, *Closing the Gap in a Generation*, which examines health disparities on a global scale ^(*).



This approach—focused on inequalities—provides a valuable tool for analyzing various issues, including differences in life expectancy, disparities in education, and many other factors.

For example, life expectancy varies by 50 years globally. In some regions of Africa, it can be as low as 32 years for women, while in Japan, it reaches 82 years. This is not only unjust—it is staggering. Even within major European cities, life expectancy can differ by ten years depending on socioeconomic status.

Michael Marmot once said that if we had to focus on just one thing, it should be to give children a good start in life. It is hard to argue with that.

In Malmö, we applied this approach in a report that was awarded the Swedish Urban Planning Prize. This report also marked a turning point in Sweden, as we were the first to integrate this perspective into urban planning.

Later, when the government tasked me with proposing a new architectural policy, I adopted the same comprehensive approach. I emphasized a holistic vision of architecture, one that goes beyond design and considers its broader social implications.



I submitted my report in 2015, and it was adopted by parliament in 2018. In Swedish, it is titled *Gestalt av Livsmiljö* ^(*), which translates to *Gestalt of Habitat and Living Environment*. This report placed a strong emphasis on a holistic, human-centered approach, a vision that continues to shape my work today.

In the introduction, I wrote that we must create a society in which we all want to live, using architecture and design as tools. It is fascinating to see how our perception of architecture has evolved. Today, we no longer simply ask: What does architecture look like? But rather: what does architecture do? How does it contribute to solving the challenges we face?

The key principles of this approach include equity, democracy, and long-term planning.

^(*) Closing the Gap in a Generation: <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/69831>

Recently, a book in Sweden titled *The Stones of Cities*^(*) explored how the built environment distributes different forms of value—quality of life, economic value, and social value. I hope it will soon be available in English, as it provides essential insights into the impact of urban development.



For me, this work is about interpreting values and translating them into spatial forms. But we must always ask the essential question: Who are we doing this for?

As municipal planners, we have all the necessary tools at our disposal. We create prototypes, but the central question remains: how do we design cities as interconnected systems while always keeping in mind for whom these spaces are

created?

Planned spaces define relationships—they shape how people interact. This is a crucial issue because spatial structure can either foster connections or, conversely, create segregation. This is why I strongly believe in the power of urban planning.



We witness these challenges every day. Space is always contested, and someone will inevitably prevail. Unfortunately, it is rarely the children. Studies show that today's children have lower bone density than previous generations due to reduced play areas and smaller schoolyards. This will have long-term consequences.

I am a strong advocate of the *United Nations Sustainable Development* Goals (SDGs), particularly the idea of inclusive cities that leave no one behind. In Malmö, our work has always been rooted in these global objectives.

I also find the theme of the *Venice Biennale*^(*) highly thought-provoking: How will we live together? This is precisely the question we must ask ourselves.

Looking ahead, we must be aware of blind spots—those elements we fail to anticipate. Take the proliferation of cars in cities, for example. When urban planning started favoring automobiles, we did not fully grasp their long-term environmental and social consequences.

Similarly, we did not foresee the growing issue of loneliness. Loneliness has become a major societal problem—more dangerous than obesity. Some studies compare its impact on health

(*) <https://arkitekten.se/nyheter/gestaltad-livsmiljo-detta-innehaller-utredningen/>

(*) <https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2025>

to smoking 20 cigarettes a day. In Sweden alone, there are 700,000 single-person households, and half of these individuals report feeling isolated.

But loneliness is not just about social isolation; it is also a lack of belonging. Research shows that the feeling of belonging is one of the most crucial factors for overall health. Therefore, it must become a priority in our urban and social policies.

And it is even more dangerous than obesity. Someone once said that its impact on health is equivalent to smoking 20 cigarettes a day. In Sweden, there are 700,000 single-person households, and half of these individuals consider themselves isolated.



I would argue that loneliness is not just a health issue or a specific illness, but rather a growing societal problem. Many people stay at home feeling disconnected, as if they are no longer part of the community. Yet, the feeling of belonging is one of the most crucial factors for good health, making this issue extremely complex and urgent.

Currently, I am conducting research on loneliness and its link to health and housing. I am collaborating with a social entrepreneur who has developed a concept called *One Roof* (*Ett Tak* in Swedish). The idea is to connect people who want to live together and share a living space, using co-housing as a solution to combat loneliness. This project explores how shared living arrangements can address both housing and health challenges.

Since we must avoid excessive construction, we need to focus on optimizing the existing housing stock. This means redistributing and making better use of available space, rather than always building more. In this context, we are studying how existing housing can facilitate cohabitation, as we must use our spaces more efficiently than we do today.

To be honest, some of our recent projects are not particularly relevant to this discussion. On the other hand, I believe that large-scale housing programs are much more effective, as they offer flexibility and adaptability.

We have developed a four-step approach to tackle this challenge:

1. Ensure better housing distribution – for example, by optimizing apartment occupancy and adapting housing to the real needs of residents.
2. Implement small-scale modifications to improve the functionality of existing spaces.
3. Introduce structural changes within the building to adapt housing for co-living arrangements.
4. Consider adding new elements to the building itself, if necessary.

This approach maximizes efficiency and space utilization while addressing the housing and health challenges related to loneliness.

If we integrate participatory processes into these steps, we can strengthen the sense of belonging, enhance democratic engagement, and improve the connection between the community and its built environment.

Shared housing is often discussed in terms of specific demographic categories—for example, a senior sharing their home with a student. A senior living alone in a large apartment after the loss of a spouse could welcome a student as a roommate.

However, this approach is too narrow. The need for shared housing can arise at any stage of life—due to divorce, the loss of a partner, relocation for a new job, or simply the need for temporary accommodation. Young adults, for instance, often seek greater independence as they start their careers.

I am convinced that shared housing is a vital and pragmatic approach. It must also be factored into housing demand projections. In reality, we do not need to build as much as we think.

Of course, there are different forms of co-living, from collective housing to high-end co-living solutions. However, promoting shared spaces would be a significant step forward in improving people's daily lives.

We are also working on developing methods to measure the impact of shared housing. Although most of this research is in Swedish, it is entirely possible to quantify these benefits.

Ultimately, if we optimize our existing housing stock and reduce new housing construction, we will see lower healthcare costs, reduced social spending, and decreased construction expenses.

This would mean less tax pressure, lower CO₂ emissions, and an overall improvement in quality of life. In short, the benefits of shared housing go far beyond affordability—they are directly linked to well-being, sustainability, and social cohesion.

This is a complex issue. We need to adopt a broader perspective, which requires a deep transformation, as we are entering a new era of urbanism.



I recently came across a quote from Buckminster Fuller that I find particularly relevant in today's context:

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the old one obsolete."

This is exactly the approach we must take to reinvent our cities and our way of life.

Helle JUUL

Thank you very much, Christer, for this incredibly rich and profound presentation, which has touched on all aspects of health.

Before John takes the floor, I think it would be interesting to open up the discussion. I'll start with the first question.

I have always been a strong advocate of *Politik For Kristaldelugemiljøet - the policy for creating urban environments*, or whatever the exact translation may be.

I believe we are constantly striving to bridge the gap between ambition, vision, and political decision-making.

I heard that between 2015 and 2018, this policy was introduced in the Swedish Parliament. However, I often hear that it is nearly impossible to integrate holistic approaches into political debate.

How do you think this was made possible in Sweden?

Christer LARSSON



It was possible at that time, I should clarify. However, we now have a right-wing government that approaches these issues differently.

That being said, this policy cannot be undone, as it was adopted by parliament, which serves as a valuable safeguard in the current political climate—especially with the influence of the Sweden Democrats and what I would call the brown market.

As a result, the policy is still in place and continues to play a role. Just last week, a new strategy was introduced by the Minister for Living Cities, and I must say that it is quite good.

The big question now is this: with a government that heavily relies on market-driven solutions, we will face new challenges. We still lack effective methods of cooperation.

Urban planning is about creating long-term value. However, the market extracts its profits very early in the process, whereas societal benefits only emerge much later.

As a result, society always bears the costs of long-term efforts, while the market secures its profits upfront. This is a problem that absolutely needs to be addressed.

We need new planning methods, new tools to assess and measure long-term impacts, and new strategies to integrate these factors from the outset of projects.

This is a critical discussion that we must have.

Helle JUUL

Yes, this gives us a lot to think about.

Next time, *Étienne Lhomet* will speak about mental health in cities; but perhaps we should also delve deeper into the issue of loneliness.

This was a topic we explored extensively in our think tank for the *Juul Frost Architects project*. At the time, we were not fully aware of its severity—we did not consider it on the same level as obesity or smoking, for example. We would have never imagined that it could become such a major issue.

Today, I saw that Jacques shared an alarming post on LinkedIn: 17% of the French population, across all age groups, report feeling lonely. This is a particularly concerning development.

Christer LARSSON

Some countries are taking the lead on this issue. The United Kingdom, for example, has appointed a Minister for Loneliness. I believe that the Netherlands and Japan have also taken similar initiatives, and they have gathered excellent statistical data on the subject.

I am not sure about the situation in other European countries, but in Sweden, we lack comprehensive statistics on loneliness. When we try to quantify this phenomenon, we often have to rely on British data or other European sources.

This is a crucial issue to address—establishing a solid statistical foundation is essential, as it would provide valuable insights and help implement effective solutions to combat this problem.

Helle JUUL

In Denmark, the discussion is intensifying around a proactive approach and the potential economic savings it could generate. Loneliness is not just a social issue; it is also an economic concern. We need to rethink our planning strategies to integrate this dimension from the very beginning in policy and infrastructure design.

Yes, of course, there will always be new challenges that we cannot yet foresee. The real question is: how do we prepare for them?

Ismail HAKI

What were the priorities of the Malmö municipality in terms of urban planning? Were the plans aimed at attracting residents from Copenhagen to settle in Malmö due to its proximity, or were they designed to encourage Malmö residents to move outside the city in order to reduce congestion and preserve green and open spaces?

Crister LARSSON

That is an excellent question—actually, several questions at once.

Of course, there is a certain level of competition with Copenhagen. However, in reality, we are not in competition; rather, we collaborate and complement each other in a highly constructive way.

Thus, attracting residents from Copenhagen was never the main reason behind our planning and development decisions. Our goal has always been to create a functional and beneficial city for all its residents.

When I was still working in Malmö, we focused on removing barriers, many of which were historical remnants of car-centric urban planning. It was necessary to eliminate these obstacles inherited from the automobile boom.

For example, we had an eight-lane highway cutting through the city. We worked to reduce it to just two lanes while simultaneously developing new residential neighborhoods along this restructured road.

This approach involves many aspects. I also firmly believe that urban planning should promote broader participatory processes, actively involving citizens and allowing them to contribute their ideas. This is essential because encouraging civic engagement strengthens democracy. When people feel that they are part of a larger society, they are much less likely to express their frustration through destructive means, such as vandalism or riots.

For me, good urban planning must always serve the city as a whole and benefit all its inhabitants. That is my core principle.

I am not sure if I have fully answered your question, but I would be happy to discuss it further.

Helle JUUL

I think it is time to give the floor to John Pløger, as promised, by introducing him in more detail.

We have collaborated on numerous projects for nearly 20 years. His contributions have been invaluable—not only for research projects within our office but also in broader academic and professional contexts.

John Pløger is Professor Emeritus at the Universities of Kristiansand and Oslo.

He is a specialist in urban planning and urban sociology and has been both a close colleague and a collaborator on many urban research projects, in Denmark as well as within our office. He has also played a key role in the think tank of the JuulFrost Architects project.

I believe John always brings a unique perspective. When preparing for today's session, we decided to title it Two Perspectives because it is always fascinating to explore a subject from two distinct angles.

I am certain that Christer and John offer very different perspectives, yet both are equally valuable in enriching this discussion.

John, the floor is yours. Welcome.

John PLØGER



I would like to begin by highlighting some differences in perspective, to create a bit of tension.

Today, I realized that my talk would focus on spatialization. Spatialization is about how we construct meaning—how we experience and assign significance to places.

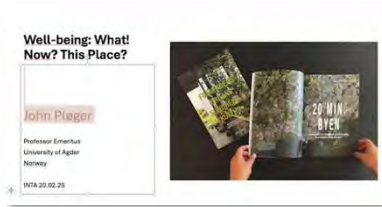
Perhaps in our next discussion, this will be framed under the term *the mental space*, but for me, it is a complex subject, largely because it is tied to language. And language is a fundamentally imprecise tool that we use to make sense of our world. However, I will not dwell too much on this linguistic aspect.

Instead, I will focus on socio-spatial relationships. In this sense, I see Helle as an architect who seeks to bridge the gap between the social and the spatial. We have experimented with this approach in several projects, including the one we are discussing today.

That said, I am not an urban planner. I have no formal training in physical planning. My background is in sociology and psychology.

However, through my collaborations with Helle and others, I have learned a great deal about the intersection of space and social dynamics.

Today, I would like to explore how we can develop a more precise understanding of this relationship and how it can contribute to studies on well-being, both from a physical and socio-spatial perspective.



We all know that well-being is multidimensional: it encompasses the body, the social environment, and, as Christer pointed out earlier, it is also connected to economic and political structures.

When we talk about physical space, we often relate it to the body—how the body interacts with and perceives its surroundings. But in reality, this cannot be separated from spatialization, which is the act of assigning meaning to our environment.

We are constantly trying to understand, recognize, and define the spaces we inhabit. This interaction between perception and meaning is fundamental. The question then arises: Does meaning follow the body, or does the body follow meaning? Or are they intrinsically linked?

One crucial aspect to consider is presence.

Our ability to perceive and attribute meaning happens in the present moment—as we interact with a space, we experience it in real-time.

To me, space is a fusion of sensory experience and meaning making. It is both a sociological and socio-spatial construct, shaped by the physical world we move through.

Thus, well-being must be understood as a dynamic interaction between space, time, and subjectivity. It is just as much about lived experiences as it is about physical structures. It is not only about what exists, but also about how people experience it.

Take Mathias, sitting next to Helle—he is a young man. His attitude and perspective will be very different from mine on almost every topic because I have already retired and accumulated a lifetime of experiences.

But this is what spatialization is about—the act of entering spaces, feeling them, and assigning them meaning. It is also about politics, planning, and architecture, all of which are fundamentally linked to well-being.

However, these disciplines approach well-being differently from the direct immersion into a specific context and the experience of its complex forces.

At the same time, we must acknowledge our own mindset—our mental attitude toward space. A key part of this is atmosphere.

Atmosphere is widely recognized as essential in how we experience architecture and the built environment. Yet, we often forget that human beings themselves are "atmospheric beings."

We perceive and experience our environment atmospherically. If our first interaction with a space occurs through atmosphere, then our way of engaging with it is radically different from a purely physical experience.

Going back to the question of mindset, a quote from the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre comes to mind: "*To have a future in the present.*"

Because if we lack a future in the present, we will always carry a sense of unease—about ourselves, our lives, our families, and so on.

Similarly, I recall a thought attributed to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. I cannot verify the exact source, but as Helle once told me, he supposedly said: "*Everyone wants development; no one wants change.*"

This phrase captures something fundamental about human nature. We are inherently conservative. We fear change. We are afraid of the unknown—whether it be situations, people, or unfamiliar environments.

This creates a form of distance or withdrawal between ourselves and our surroundings.

My objective, then, is to explore different ways of seeing—how we formulate and conceptualize the relationship between urbanity and well-being in cities.

We have moved beyond a time when well-being could be defined by a single outdated formula. As Christer mentioned earlier, there are always multiple forces at play.

The challenge, therefore, is to continuously map these forces in order to better understand the complex dynamics that shape well-being in a given place, at a given time.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a crucial issue, but perhaps it is more than that—it is part of a broader reflection on how we experience the world today. We may feel lonely because we struggle to find a future in the present, as Sartre described.

However, well-being is often perceived as the absence of negative conditions, as a state to be attained when we face difficulties. But we need to change this perspective. Through

planning and architecture, we must transform well-being into a positive concept—one that fosters an enriching and emotional connection with our socio-spatial environment.

This approach can enhance both our subjective mental well-being and our lived experience of places.

It is a complex issue that we are trying to address, and that is why we must continue to inspire, debate, and develop new ideas, concepts, and tools to move forward.

So, it was to introduce this topic



Mark Isik, who moderated the book launch we are discussing today, said in an interview here in Oslo that for architecture to be successful, the architect must show care.

I would add that this care must be attentive to differences—not to what makes us equal, but to what makes us distinct.

Helle mentioned that we have collaborated on several initiatives. One of them was "*Open Spaces*", where we aimed to develop new tools to help municipalities analyze and better understand their urban spaces—their squares, public areas, and so on.

In this project, we defined four key concepts: form, the city, space, lifestyles, and the body. The idea of care should apply to all four dimensions, but it manifests differently depending on places and contexts.

Thus, we need to map how these dimensions connect to real life—how they interact with everyday experiences, values, social structures, and bodily interactions.

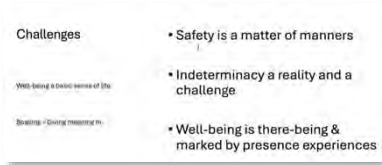
This brings me back to my previous point: the concept of atmosphere plays a key role in this discussion. However, atmosphere should not be understood only in a physical sense, but also in a mental and human sense.

Our experience of atmosphere is deeply shaped by our lived experiences, social identities, and even the way our bodies interact with space.

If we accept that well-being is a fundamental aspect of life, we must also recognize that it is not limited to a bodily experience or a mental attitude.

Well-being is a way of perceiving, understanding, and feeling the world—a way of interacting with our environment not just through our physical presence, but also through the language we use to interpret it.

Another one of our recent reflections was influenced by Helle's involvement in Denmark, particularly in urban planning aimed at crime prevention.



I would argue that safety is not just about the physical environment.

Security is fundamentally based on social behavior, on the expectation of non-violent interactions in public spaces.

We must also take into account the concept of interneurality as a reality—it is difficult to define anything outside of the connections between various forces. There is no single cause that can definitively guide us in a given direction, nor an absolute factor that dictates the course of planning or decision-making.

This inherent uncertainty—this complexity of interactions between different forces—makes the work of politics and urban planning particularly challenging, as both often seek to control and direct the development of our environments and our lives.

Thus, when we talk about well-being, we must also consider the concept of being-there (Dasein), as introduced by Martin Heidegger—a form of existence deeply connected to presence and place.

This being is, of course, shaped by personal experiences, social structures, and ways of life, but our perception of it is always rooted in the present, even as it carries the weight of past experiences.



It is only by bridging the gap between the physical and the social—by addressing both social space and human relationships—that we can truly respect the diversity of individual experiences, which urban planning often tends to generalize.

One approach is to prioritize functional proximity in daily life. Another approach explores the role of informality within formal spaces, using it as a tool to foster community engagement and social interaction.

However, it is just as important to focus on the qualities of presence, as these highlight the differences in how spaces are perceived and experienced.

The perception of a place's atmosphere can vary as much as the number of people asked about it.

So, the question is: Is it possible to develop planning strategies that focus on places—on their ability to adapt and accommodate change—rather than relying on rigid long-term predictions? Yes, I believe so.

And not only I believe this, but also sociologist *Richard Sennett*, who speaks of "spatial disorder" as a necessary element of urban life. Similarly, in discussions within our working group for the book we are referencing today, *Peter Hanke*—who comes from a musical direction background—introduced the concept of polyphony.

Both of these aspects were explored in our book through the example of Gilead Square in London, where we studied how a flat surface with movable elements could continuously adapt to the needs and desires of people at any given moment.

I believe this represents a form of flexibility that is relatively easy to implement, yet it can be challenging to gain acceptance for—not only in politics but also within urban planning offices in our cities.

Perhaps I'm mistaken, but at least, this is my current perspective.

Helle JUUL

Alright, thank you very much. We have covered so many topics through these two presentations.

Ismail HAKI

When does planning become a strength for a city, and when does it become a weakness?

Is there a difference between planning and landscape?

John PLØGER

We always need planning. But we must also recognize, as a student once told me, that: "*Planning never truly begins and never truly ends.*"

More precisely, planning is a constantly evolving process—it has no real conclusion.

This means that we must always think about both the present and the future.

And when we project ourselves into the future, we must respect it as a reality deeply connected to past generations, to life, values, and the meaning we assign to things. We cannot expect future generations to share exactly the same perspectives that we have today.

In fact, I am currently working on a text on decision-making.

We need a new way of making planning decisions. We must rethink the types of activities, tools, and processes we use to develop a plan—whether for my own territory or for any other.

And I believe that one of the key elements—the one that makes networks like INTA so important—is not just about improving the way we think, but also about strengthening the link between thinking and spatialization—between understanding spatial relationships at a micro-social level and integrating that knowledge into urban planning.

This is a continuous challenge, an ongoing dialogue in which we must actively participate.

At the same time, this requires municipal planning to adopt a different approach—one that is more open to self-criticism and more willing to explore how we can create adaptable spaces. Instead of being trapped in rigid formal discourses, urban planning offices should be equipped with resources that allow for greater flexibility, responsiveness, and change.

This is why being part of the networks initiated by Helle has been so enriching—because we meet people who, at first, do not agree with each other, but through dialogue, always manage to find common ground.

Perhaps this is what true participation is about. It is not just about consulting the public, but about nurturing an ongoing conversation on how people experience and invest in their spaces.

In today's digital world, this process should be more accessible than ever.

Étienne LHOMET

Thank you very much for your brilliant and thought-provoking speech, Mr. John Pløger. Your insights are truly inspiring. I particularly appreciate your idea that planning is an endless process—a process to which we must constantly adapt.

Could you elaborate a little more on your definition of spatialization?
What does spatialization mean to you?

Is it about assigning specific functions to different spaces, or is it more about how human beings relate to and interact with these spaces? Could you expand on this idea?

John PLØGER

For me, spatialization is above all a question of meaning-making.

The key question, then, is: How do we assign meaning?

And this meaning is not solely an intellectual process—it is also deeply embodied.

We don't just think about the meaning of a place; we feel it with our bodies. Anxiety, for example, is a bodily reaction that conveys meaning, even if it is sometimes difficult to articulate or rationalize.

This also connects to the concept of atmosphere. As I mentioned earlier, if we are atmospheric beings, then our relationship to space goes beyond its purely functional aspects.

The way we perceive and interact with a place is inseparable from how it makes us feel.

Thus, at its most fundamental level, spatialization (*mise en espace*) is a process of assigning meaning.

From there, we must explore all the forces that influence this meaning-making—whether they are physical or mental. These two dimensions are always interconnected in our perception, even though they are often difficult to analyze or isolate precisely.

In summary, we could say that spatialization is the act of giving meaning to a place.

Christer LARSSON

Yes, thank you, John. That was truly fascinating.

I picked up on two key words *care* and *reflection*. I think these are essential elements that should always be present in planning.

I also completely agree that planning is a continuous process—it never really stops.

A legal plan or an agreement within a project is nothing more than a snapshot in time, a formalization of a particular moment.

Yet, there is always something that comes before and something that follows.

We must adopt a broader perspective—an approach that recognizes:

- The involvement of citizens
- The very role of citizenship in the planning process.

As planners, we must approach this work with thoughtfulness and sincerity. We must actively engage with different meanings and perspectives, making a conscious effort to understand them. If we fail to do so, we risk losing all legitimacy in the role we represent. To me, this is an absolutely crucial point.

John PLØGER

I completely agree with you, Christer. The real question, then, is: how do we move forward from this understanding? This is where we still have a lot to explore and experiment with.

You mentioned children, and I think that is a crucial point. Children are just as capable as adults of shaping their environment. However, they do not conceptualize or accept a skyscraper in the same way we do. They do not perceive high-rise buildings the way we do, but they have their own strengths, their own skills.

Every individual has a unique expertise, and we must respect that—not reduce people to mere statistics in a system.

This is why decision-making fascinates me so much. It is deeply connected to the issue of difference and diversity, especially in physical planning.

I also believe that instead of constantly building new structures, we should focus on utilizing and transforming existing buildings. These structures are already inhabited by people who have an intimate knowledge of their spaces, and we should value this local expertise to develop successful planning strategies.

As you mentioned, there is the well-known concept of the "8-80 city": If a city is designed to be accessible and functional for both an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it is a well-planned city.

Helle JUUL

I can't help but think how unfortunate it is that our political decision-makers are not present today. They would have so much to learn from this discussion.

Both of you have provided such a broad and insightful perspective on these issues. It makes me want to consider another research project to further explore these white ghosts—those unresolved or invisible dimensions of planning.

I believe this has been a fantastic start to this experiment of presenting two perspectives and discussing health in urban planning. It is crucial to continuously consider how our physical environment has a tangible impact on our quality of life and overall well-being.

I look forward to continuing this discussion on March 20th and April 23rd. Additionally, during our last meeting, Sabine, Étienne, Jacques, and I decided to organize a one-day mini-congress-conference on September 12th in Copenhagen. Of course, everyone is invited!

Please mark this date in your calendars—we will follow up to ensure that we can all be physically present for what promises to be a truly enriching and dynamic exchange of ideas.

I am truly pleased with how today's session went. Thank you very much, John and Crister; it was a pleasure to see you both, as well as the rest of the participants.

We must now conclude by saying our goodbyes and expressing our gratitude. I look forward to seeing you all very soon.

If you would like to receive a personal invitation, simply send me your private email address, and I will make sure you are included.

For anyone else who is interested, just visit INTA's website and follow the instructions—we will take care of the rest. I am sure Jacques will handle it!

Thank you all.