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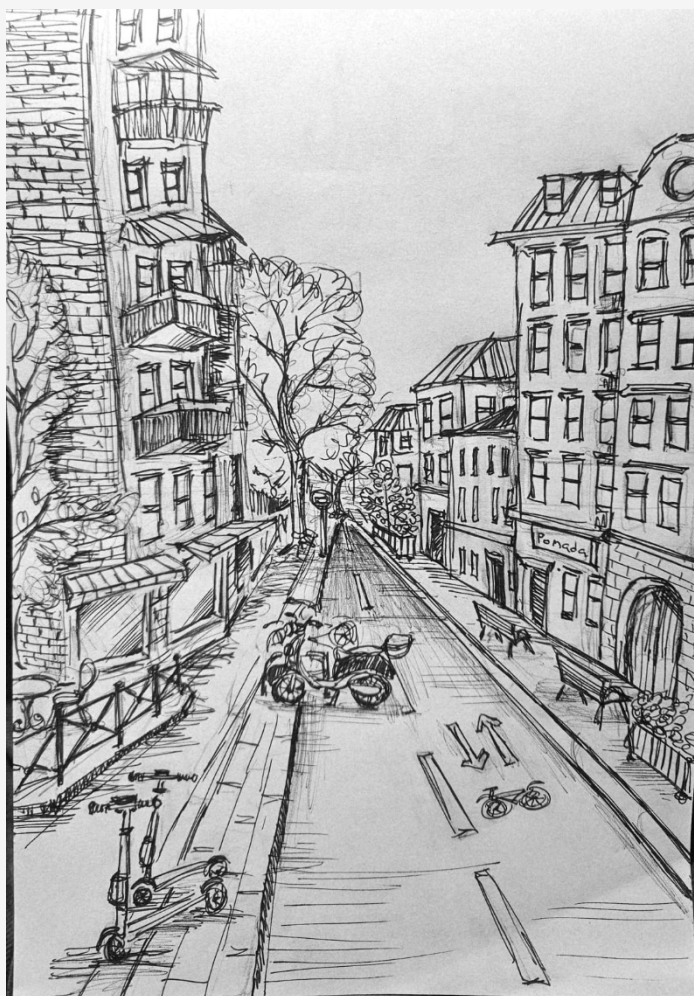
NEIGHBORHOODING DEMOCRACY

A PHOTO ESSAY

Gothenburg Summit 2026

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Ernst Jungens Plats
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Question 1: How is the neighborhood you went to?



Your reflection

At first glance, Ernst Jungens Plats is full of colors, from the vibrant buildings to the various store signs and window stickers, each in a different shade and style. While there was no presence of visible street arts other than a graffiti or two on the roll-up doors of closed shops, the neighborhood was completely dominated by colors, creating a warm and inviting feeling as we first walked around it.

It appears to be a transitional space with the presence of various modes of transportation, from bus and tram routes to pedestrian sidewalks and bicycle lanes. There was a lot of traffic in the area, however, there seems to be fewer car lanes than expected, suggesting a promotion of public transport/walking. We immediately noticed that everyone in the area was constantly on the move, with the exception of those in cafes and a few older residents relaxing on benches. Because of the presence of a constant large crowd, there seem to be a lot of restaurants in the area with cuisines from all over Europe. However, they appear to be a lot more high-end.

As for the infrastructure, many sitting spots were placed all around the junction, not only providing a place for people to take a break, but they also serve as a separation between the busyness of the streets and the peaceful quietness of the shops. We also noticed a lot of greenery around the area, with many large rectangular planters sitting between the benches, further emphasizing this separation. The greenery from

these added planters not only made the place seem more welcoming and calming, it also provides a home for multiple insect species which then attract a lot of birds.

Despite the presence of many different elements, the neighborhood was surprisingly well organized and structured. It was dynamic and lively without being chaotic and overwhelming.

Question 2: What do you assume of the people living there?



Your reflection

We observed that this was a relatively wealthy area with a slightly older population. One of the shop workers commented that the area was too expensive to live in, so she would commute to work from her home outside the city center. The area seemed ethnically homogenous, as we saw mainly ethnically Swedish people there but not many people of color. There didn't seem to be any animosity towards foreigners or immigrants though, as people spoke to us warmly, and proudly described their neighborhood with more information than we asked for. Moreover, there were restaurants representing many cultures on the intersection, though they seemed like high-end restaurants intended for native Swedish patrons rather than those that are more authentic to appeal to patrons from those respective cultures. Based on these factors, we assumed that this neighborhood was economically conservative and socially progressive, though the political leanings seemed moderate.

Question 3: Are people in the neighborhood politically active? Are they socially active?



Your reflection

We find that this neighborhood is socially active without public displays of political expression. On one of the occasions we passed through the neighborhood there was a live band playing in front of the restaurants. People were able to sit on the benches nearby and enjoy the music without being a customer at the restaurants, which is a good community-building event. The area has many cafes, with one particular cafe on the intersection containing plentiful outdoor seating, which was almost always populated. At this cafe, we overheard strangers introducing themselves to each other and adding to each others' conversations. This indicates that residents and those who frequent the neighborhood are socially active and friendly. Residents didn't mention any social or cultural issues, so we assume that social cohesion in the community is high. We didn't notice any open political expression on the street, such as stickers, posters, or art that you might find in other neighborhoods. We interpreted this as a sort of privilege – these people didn't seem to be personally affected by socioeconomic issues, so they had no need to take a stance on them.

Question 4: Does the neighborhood seem peaceful or there seem to be frictions and struggles?





Your reflection

As outlined above, while walking around Ernst Jungens Plats, we heard many different sounds that made the neighbourhood feel lively. That included trams and buses passing frequently, people walking and chatting, and birds singing in the trees. Despite this activity, the area seemed quite peaceful, perhaps partly due to its central location.

We did not identify any clear signs of friction or struggles around the square. With the well-known Haga Street a few steps away and the Skansens Kronan overlooking the area, Ernst Jungens Plats seems safe during our visit, which took place both in the morning and the afternoon. However, it would have been interesting to observe the square at night as well, to confirm or revise our observations.

We believe that the absence of tensions could also be related to the recent urban developments in the square. More specifically, we observed that the new green areas and the bike lane contribute to the transition from a public space to a public place.

To further explain this concept, we can think of *space* as abstract and rooted in geometry, an idea that allows us to represent the physical world. By contrast, *place* is more personal and is deeply tied to our lived experience.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that the new green areas, the benches and the new bike lane are contributing to a stronger sense of belonging and to the square's peaceful atmosphere. These changes encourage people to experience Ernst Jungens Plats in a more active and meaningful way, by sitting, walking and spending time in an area that was previously occupied by a traffic lane.

Question 5: Does people seem calm and trustful or upset and afraid?



Your reflection

People lingered on the public benches, met friends, stopped to exchange greetings, or paused for a conversation before continuing on their way. We repeatedly observed people sitting on the benches interacting with those at the cafes, creating a shared environment where commercial and public spaces blended naturally.

The space was also used by older residents, many of whom spent extended periods sitting and observing the activity around them. Although not always engaged in direct conversations, their presence reflected another form of participation in public life. The ability to leave home, spend time outdoors, and be surrounded by other people in a welcoming environment can help reduce social isolation among older residents. These quiet forms of engagement such as people-watching, being present among others, and sharing a common space show that social connection does not always require active interaction. Simply having a welcoming place where people can spend time around others can support a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Overall, the continuous presence of different groups throughout the day, from commuters and cyclists to families, cafe visitors, and older residents, suggests that the space functions as more than a route for movement where different people can use the space alongside one another and coexist comfortably.

Question 6: How talking to the people in the neighborhood change your perspective about the place?





Your reflection

Speaking with people in the neighbourhood changed our perspective of Ernst Jungens Plats by showing that the space is not only defined by its physical design, but also by the relationships people have with the place over time. The person working at the flower shop explained that businesses and residents were consulted throughout the process of changing the area. This highlighted the importance of involving the people who already have a connection to a place, rather than introducing changes without understanding existing needs and experiences.

An older woman who has lived in the area for many years described how the character of the neighbourhood had changed, particularly with the increase in car traffic over recent decades. For her, the renovations made everyday activities, such as walking to nearby restaurants and shops, slightly easier. Her perspective showed how changes that may seem small from a planning perspective can have a direct impact on how residents experience their daily lives.

One woman who grew up near the area had not initially noticed the renovations until we pointed them out, but supported the changes once she became aware of them. A younger restaurant worker who was newer to the area also appreciated the pedestrian-friendly environment and enjoyed being part of the neighbourhood. These conversations showed that people do not always consciously notice urban interventions, but they can still shape how people use and experience a place.

An older man living directly at the intersection connected the changes to the wider history and identity of Haga, the surrounding historic district. He felt that the changes had made the area quieter and calmer. He also shared his experience of a nearby area affected by drug-related issues, explaining that while he would feel unsafe walking there, he feels comfortable walking around Ernst Jungens Plats at any time of day. This conversation challenged our initial assumptions and showed that safety is not only determined by physical design, but also by the atmosphere, activity, and sense of care present in a place.

Overall, these conversations shifted our understanding of the project from simply being a redesign of a traffic junction to an example of how public spaces are continuously shaped through everyday use, relationships and collective experiences. They also raised a broader reflection on how the creation of good public places is not only about fixing spaces when they are already failing, but about nurturing them before problems become deeply rooted. A public space becomes a place through the sense of belonging, memories and interactions



that people develop within it. Once trust and connection between people and a place are lost, rebuilding them can be much more difficult. Maintaining environments where people feel comfortable, included, and connected is therefore an important part of creating resilient and democratic urban places.

Our recommendation

While Ernst Jungens Plats appears to be very harmonious and well organized, certain elements could still be improved, including the potential addition of a few chess tables around the area instead of just more benches. While benches are a great element to the space, they don't necessarily promote conversations, and instead only serve as short resting stops. We believe adding chess tables or similar structures could promote more interactions between the residents, especially among the elderly, allowing them to create more connections with one another, and therefore enhancing their sense of belonging. Additionally, the neighborhood could benefit from more interactive art installations around the tram stop for different age groups, especially for the younger residents. Sidewalks could also have art on them to make them more fun and inviting, such as hopscotch squares.

We believe that the addition of these interactive infrastructures could help with the transition of Ernst Jungens Plats from being simply a junction and a transitional spot to a place where people stay and interact with one another instead.



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