

**A Think Tank that promotes
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NEIGHBORHOODING DEMOCRACY

A PHOTO ESSAY

Gothenburg Summit 2026

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Kvilletorget
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First Impressions



Kvilletorget is well-connected thanks to several bus stops and a tram station built above a 2-lane road and a crossroad. However, the ramp to access the tram platform with a stroller or in a wheelchair is not well-signaled. There also does not seem to be an elevator to the tram platform. As the ramp is rather steep, this could be an issue for the accessibility of the neighbourhood.

The central park of Kvilletorget is a 5-minute walk from the tramway station. Yet, its location is not well-signaled either. The streets of the neighbourhood are wide and seem very empty. This could be due to the timing of the visit (Monday and Tuesday in mid-July at 10am), which might coincide with the inhabitants' behaviour. However, besides the central square, many streets lack trees or other greenery, which makes them less of a space to inhabit.

Kvilletorget seems to be a dynamic and multi-cultural neighbourhood that is undergoing change. There are barbershops, restaurants and boutiques from different countries around the world, offering a variety of hairstyles, cuisines, groceries and products. The architecture of buildings and public spaces creates a clear divide between new and old areas, lacking points of connection. While there is a lack of (street) art and signs of political participation, the central square is well maintained (except for the fountain), and there are no signs of vandalism as people leave playground toys and table tennis rackets for everyone to use in the square.

On the one hand, the neighbourhood does not seem as well connected to government services as city buildings are not easily visible. There is also no information on the history of the neighbourhood. On the other hand, the city administration has introduced summer activities such as table tennis and is offering the citizens the possibility to give feedback.

Kvilletorget welcomes a diverse group of people. The different shops show that people from different cultures inhabit this neighbourhood. The central square offers a place for citizens from different generations.

Families should especially feel at home in this area. Kvilletorget is a very calm neighbourhood with facilities such as a kindergarten and a large part of the central square especially dedicated to



children. Toys and books are even left available to be freely used in the park. There is also chalk for children to draw on the floor. Also, older people are able to use the space to their liking. The central square offers a lot of places to sit, with many of these in the shade. Younger children will find activities to their liking, such as table tennis and a football pitch around the corner. However, older teenagers and young adults may find that the area lacks options that target their interests. Nevertheless, they have the option to easily travel to other parts of the city by tram or bicycle.

Nevertheless, Kvilletorget could be more welcoming. It is indeed difficult to find the way to the central square of the district as there are no signs from the tramway station or other parts of the neighbourhood. Both the tram station and the central square have some limitations in their accessibility due to stairs. However, once in the area, the peacefulness of the district and the walk along the Kville river is pleasant.

Public Space & Access



Kvilletorget, a few minutes' walk from the tram stop, is easily missed unless you have a reason to go there. Few people pass through it on their way somewhere else. Instead, it feels like a destination rather than a thoroughfare, making it a space that is mainly used by the people who live nearby. This creates an environment where neighbours repeatedly meet each other in everyday life, something that strengthens local relationships and encourages community interaction.

At the same time, there seems to be a clear divide between the newly built residential area and the older part of Kvilletorget. Most public spaces, such as the square itself, the playground and the boulevards, are located in the older part of the neighbourhood. As you move towards the newer buildings, you are mainly met by walking lanes designed to move people through the area rather than places where they can stop, meet and spend time together. While the newer developments are physically connected to Kvilletorget, they appear less integrated into its social life.

Kvilletorget itself is decorated with interactive games such as Fussballspiels, and people leave behind rackets and balls by the ping-pong table as well as toys in the sand for the kids. A sign of ownership by the citizens.

Traces of Community



Kvilletorget has a clear sense of community and belonging. Despite being one of Göteborg's more diverse neighbourhoods, the square feels shared by the people who use it. The local mosque stands next to the local churches, children leave behind toys in the playground, and people leave rackets and balls by the ping-pong table for others to use. These small details suggest a high level of trust and show that residents see the square as a shared community space rather than simply a public facility.

This feeling became especially clear when we spoke to a group of pensioners who visit the square every day to play boule before having lunch together at the nearby East African restaurant. Having lived in the area for decades, they know Kvilletorget's history well and clearly feel that they are part of it. They enthusiastically told us about the Girl with a Seashell statue while unclogging the fountain beneath it and decorating the statue with a bucket and spade. Their willingness to care for the space without being asked reflects a strong sense of ownership and civic responsibility.

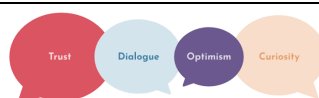
However, while these residents clearly feel connected to the story of Kvilletorget, very little of that story is visible to newcomers or visitors. Making the area's history more accessible could help create a stronger sense of belonging across the whole neighbourhood. This could be done by expanding public art, installing signs that tell the story of Kvilletorget and its residents, or creating community-led projects where long-term residents share their experiences. Highlighting the area's history and diversity would help strengthen local identity while making it easier for new residents to feel that they are part of the community. This also offers opportunities of sustainable tourism and integrating Kvilletorget with the rest of Göteborg.

Power & Decision-Making



The district appears to be well-maintained by the municipality of Gothenburg, as confirmed by the inhabitants themselves. For instance, a tree was being cut down by the municipality because it had died and represented a risk for the safety of passers-by. Yet, some inhabitants indicated the park was not as regularly maintained during summer months. In particular, a group of older men playing boule in the park got frustrated that the fountain park was clogged and decided to unclog it themselves. When asked about this civic action, the boulist group explained that they had missed the sound of the water when playing boule and began explaining the history of the fountain. They clearly seemed fond of this place, which they believed they belonged to, to the point of taking care of it when necessary. This observation was confirmed by the cleanliness of the streets. It seems that most inhabitants do not litter their cigarette butts but throw them in a bin, even when the infrastructure has not been thought of for that particular utilization.

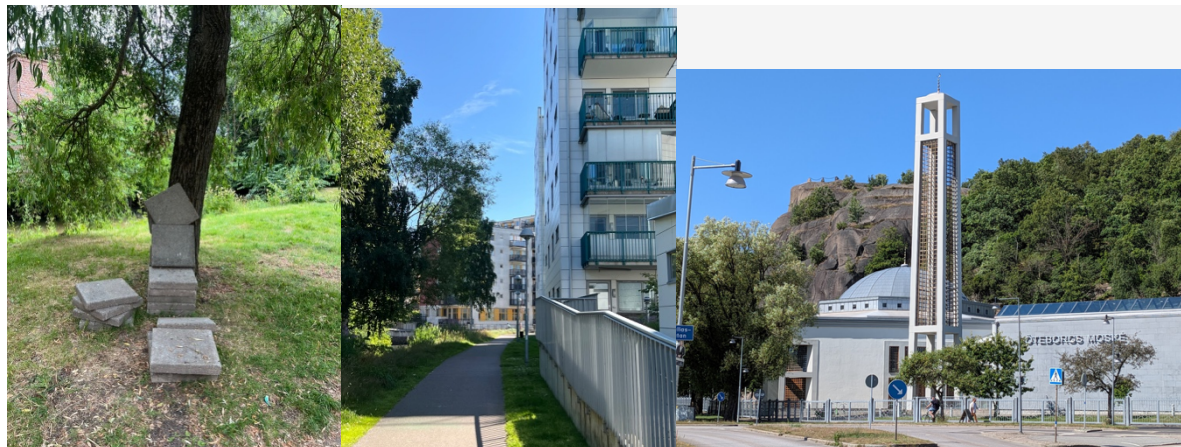
Inhabitants of Kvilleorget are given the opportunity to express their opinions on the planning of their district thanks to a survey organised by the city of Gothenburg. It is accessible via a QR-code put up



on many signs around the neighbourhood. The slogan of the survey (“Ta plats”) is a wordplay that illustrates the will of the city of Gothenburg to consult its inhabitants as well as to foster inclusion and democratic engagement.

However, the city’s official buildings are somewhat hidden. The only public sign acknowledging the presence of administrative buildings is a map located immediately next to those buildings. There is no incentive for newcomers to know about the city’s social and cultural programmes.

Inclusion & Exclusion



In Kvilletorget, there is clear evidence of coexistence. While all government signage is in Swedish, indicating a strong, unifying Swedish identity promoted by the city of Gothenburg, shop signs include English, Arabic, and Chinese, among other languages. Old and young coexist in the summer square, as evidenced by the families and the boule players. On separate occasions, we saw someone in a walker and someone with a wheelchair. This is evidence that the heart of the community is still accessible to those with limited mobility. Additionally, the mosque in close proximity to Christian churches further demonstrates a coexistence of cultures and backgrounds.

While there seems to be a mingling among these identities, we noticed a sense of isolation between the old and the new. Whereas newer blocks looked cleaner, older sections of the neighborhood were less unkempt and sometimes had abandoned garbage or litter. Many apartment buildings had courtyards, which created smaller microcommunities within the larger neighborhood. New-build apartments seemed to prioritize enclosed courtyards over public gathering spaces, creating a barrier between people. Some walkways, such as the one pictured above, were tucked behind new apartment buildings. A barrier blocks the courtyard from the walkway, casting the walkway in shadow. For residents, the walkway is a temporary space as they make their way to another location, and there are no “sticking points” along the way. Isolated, dark walkways like this may feel unsafe for families or people walking alone at night.

Overall, the evidence found in Kvilletorget reflects a theme of inclusion for various cultures, ages, accessibility needs, and religious backgrounds. However, the presence of diversity does not mean diversity is accepted. Has the transition toward a more diverse neighborhood been frictionless? Do all residents feel welcomed? Open-mindedness and pluralism are vital to the health of a democracy. From the evidence gathered, we are hesitant to make a broad assumption that all people in Kvilletorget, especially marginalized communities such as immigrants, feel included. For people to participate democratically, they must feel that they can safely access and contribute to the public forum. Even simple barriers to contribution, such as lack of public art or private courtyards that limit cohesion, could perpetuate exclusion.

Our Recommendations



During our exploration of Kvilletorget, we imagined several ways the community could feel more welcoming and conducive to democracy.

We suggest signage that welcomes residents to Kvilletorget and provides a history of the neighborhood/summer square. Signage could promote a unifying community identity for both new and old residents by helping them to understand the significance of the square. Additionally, signage could integrate a map of the Summer Square and nearby government offices. This could include a QR code or virtual option for language translations, improving access for newcomers and visitors. In addition to the public seating and green spaces, we also believe an accessible, easily visible bridge close across the river would benefit the. This not only brings focus to the river, which is historically significant, but extends the public gathering space and uplifts shared respect for the environment. The sports area and playground are particularly important for community building. In these places, children develop teambuilding and communication skills as they play, while parents can create new connections with neighbors. For the comfort and ease of families and residents using the sports areas, we suggest a water bottle filler/public water fountain. This will improve access to drinking water, but also make the area more welcoming. Furthermore, a shade sail could increase the functionality of the playground sand pit during hot summer days.

Finally, after encountering overflowing cigarette bins, we believe the community may benefit from new bins in the form of polling stations. These Ballot Bins ask lighthearted or community-related questions, creating a casual, small-scale public forum while reducing litter.

Kvilletorget is a homely place. However, it takes a little while to recognise that. At first sight, the wide and empty streets do not show a lot of signs of life. However, if one looks beyond that, spends some time in the central square and takes a closer look at the inner courtyards of the house blocks, one realizes how this place is a welcoming neighbourhood for a multi-cultural and inter-generational diverse group of people.

Nevertheless, there is also a large potential to improve the neighbourhood further to ensure that it remains a liveable place and allows the citizens to build a stronger community. Outdoor spaces require shade and access to water in order to be climate adaptive. Spaces for art and political exchange allow people to express themselves and communicate with one another, a necessary condition for a democratic society. Bringing city services closer and offering historic information for locals and tourists connects the citizens to the city at large. Making these investments now will pay off in the future.

The peaceful and diverse neighbourhood is a good sign for a passive democratic spirit in Kvilletorget. However, the active expression of living democracy as a community remains limited. Therefore, we give Kvilletorget a "democracy score" of 6 out of 10 points.





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