

# **“Experiencing and Reacting Upon Social Diversity in Urban Spaces”**

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## Abstract

Living in the city equals constant stimuli of urban diversity for the single individual. In the everyday life the urbanite is continuously confronted with a diversity of life styles and activities as well as ethnic and cultural diversities. Urban scholarship has long analyzed the social life of urban settings with aspects such as the consequences of social density in urban spaces for the individual, the character of social encounters between strangers in urban settings and not least the techniques for avoiding contact when navigating in cities as urbanites. There is a lack of research though on the impact of other people's presence in an urban space on the individual's own experience and use of that very space in its physical and architectural character. This paper seeks to contribute to this field of research on the dynamics between the architecture and the social life in urban spaces. Drawing on case studies of two newly established urban squares in Copenhagen, Denmark, this paper examines the single individual's experience and reaction upon the presence of other people in urban spaces with a particular focus on the impact of social distance. Data inquiry has been conducted using Behavioural Mappings and In-situ interview entailing a qualitative and ethnographic approach to the topic. Firstly the paper analyzes the impact of other people's presence on the individual's experience and use of urban spaces; secondly the paper analyzes the reaction upon social diversity and lastly a distinction between diverse types of social distance in urban spaces is introduced. The analysis demonstrates that social distance can be respectfully motivating or restricting for the individual and that different types of social distance have a varying impact on the individual's experience and use of urban spaces.

**Keywords:** social diversity, social distance, urban spaces, social perception

## INTRODUCTION

Our experience of the architectural design in an urban space is not a static experience (Tuan, 2003). It is well known within urban scholarship that a specific architectural space does not necessarily have the same impact on different people (Gans, 2002; Kusenbach, 2003). The individual's experience of an urban space is contingent upon many factors and in this paper I focus particular attention on the impact of social diversity and social distance on the individual's experience and use of the very design of that space.

Urban literature has long theorized the urban experience (see for instance Tuan, 1977; Milgram & Jodelet, 2013 [1970]; Lofland, 1973). Characteristic for this body of literature though is a dominant focus on either the person-to-place relation or the person-to-person relation in urban spaces and most urban literature maintains this distinction (Lofland, 2007). Drawing on Seamon's (2014) definition of place experience entailing respectively a holistic, dialectical and generative perspective I stress the dynamic element in the experience of an urban space, and I argue that it is valuable to incorporate both the person-to-person and the person-to-place relation in the same analysis of the individual's experience and use of urban spaces. An urban space is not merely a space in its architectural and physical character (Löw, 2008). As argued by scholars such as Bourdieu (1999), Lefebvre (1991) and Gans (2002) the physical space is transformed into a social space as well by its users. From urban literature we are well informed of how the individual experiences architecture and how the individual reacts to social diversity in the social relation itself. Qualitatively we know very little though about the impact of the individual's experience of social diversity in an urban space on the individual's actual experience of and behavior in that physical space. Drawing on the dualistic perspective represented in Marxist spatial theory (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 1990; Soja 1980) and theory on the duality of structure/space (Giddens; 1984, Löw; 2008), it is the aim of this paper to address the interplay between the individual, the social life and the very design of urban spaces in respect to the impact of social diversity.

There are several reasons why urban scholars should be concerned with the impact of social diversity on the individual's experience and use of urban spaces; firstly the distinction between respectively person-to-person and person-to-place is only possible on an analytical level. In addition, the constellation of the user segment in urban spaces is constantly changing and due to that the individual's offset for experiencing an urban space will never be static; secondly for urban scholars and policy makers this is valuable information in respect to designing well-functioning urban spaces that do not only work for the single individual on a descriptive level, but when the individual is actually using urban spaces in praxis with other people.

In the following I describe the key theoretical notions of relevance for the analysis. Then I present the used research methods and the two case studies. Finally, the analysis consists of three parts. The first

part analyses how the presence of other people impacts the individual's experience and use of urban spaces; the second part analyses the individual's experience and reaction to social diversity and lastly the individual's reaction to social distance is analyzed.

## **Social diversity**

As depicted by Sennett 'differences are an overwhelming sociological fact' of cities (1992:129) and today, diversity is a characteristic quality of most urban spaces. Within urban literature the term is applied diverse meanings though from architectural variety and mixed uses to social heterogeneity (Fainstein, 2005). The notion adopted in this study refers to the latter and entails the multiple ways individuals differ within the same culture. I focus on markers of social diversity that are visually available to the single individual, when using urban spaces, which includes aspects such as lifestyles, beliefs, visual appearances and behaviour as well as age, gender and ethnicity.

From early accounts within urban sociology to modern classics and to present day, the issue of social diversity has been apparent. Louis Wirth described social diversity as an essential characteristic of the modern city but also a challenge in terms of the reproduction of the city and various members of the Chicago School focused their work on the relation between social differences and functional divisions in space with their human ecological approach (Tonkiss, 2005). In her influential study in the 1960's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs argued for the positive societal outcomes of a design of cityscapes that fostered both economic and social diversity (Jacobs, 1992 [1961]). In urban scholarship there are significantly different perspectives on the issue of social diversity. Some accounts claim that diversity can encourage tolerance, foster creativity and make city officials aware of otherwise unappreciated lifestyles (Fainstein, 2005). This perspective is represented in the work of for instance Florida (2002) and Sennett (1996). A counter-argument suggests that diversity is over exaggerated since there is a lack of interaction between diverse individuals and groups despite of it (Wessel, 2009). On the basis of this, Fainstein (2005) problematizes the present idealization of diversity within urban planning given that the potential outcomes of diversity still remain underexposed.

## **Defining social distance in urban spaces**

Like diversity, social distance is a key characteristic of urban spaces and a successful concept in international sociology (Ethington, 1997). Where social diversity refers to the diverse people the individual effaces in urban life, social distance entails the relation between the individual and other people. The term social distance used in the present study implies the experience of distance on the basis of differences between individuals in the same culture, which is available to the individual visually when navigating in urban spaces. I mainly draw on the work of Simmel, Bourdieu and Sennett in the conceptual

understanding of social distance. In his famous essay 'The Stranger' (1908) Simmel introduced a type of sociality with this specific social type who is geometrically close but not meaningfully part of the group that views him as strange (Ethington, 1997). Simmel characterizes the relation between people as defined by proximity and distance and focuses on an ideal type with the stranger, while Bourdieu distinguishes between different types of people. Bourdieu (1985, 1999) argues that every society is hierarchized, and that every individual holds a position on the basis of the possession of capital. Based on this position individuals can experience a social distance towards other people in society, and Bourdieu argues that people generally do not want to be in physical proximity with people they feel a great social distance to. You might for instance feel more comfortable in close proximity with people you identify with as opposed to people of another social status or people who differ in their behavior from yourself. As Bourdieu, Sennett (1996) underlines that the urbanite is uncomfortable being physically close to people of great social distance. His proposition is, that there is a potential valuable outcome, if people experience a social distance towards others and then have to negotiate and adjust in those situations even though they feel uncomfortable as opposed to only encountering people similar to themselves.

## **Social perception and cognitive adaptation to diversity**

The very process of perceiving other people in urban spaces is a topic highly outlined within urban literature. With his 1903 account Simmel argued that the urban dweller is incapable of responding to all the stimuli it faces in urban settings and adapts to this by applying an indifference towards stimuli. According to Simmel the blasée person is capable of perceiving but for the urban dweller to actually respond to stimuli in urban spaces, it demands over-exaggerated aspects and extremities (Simmel, 1998). Drawing on Schütz, Berger & Luckmann (1991 [1966]) introduced us to a framework for theorizing how individuals actually perceive different types of people in urban spaces, where all face-to-face interaction is according to Berger and Luckmann is patterned by our typifications of other people entailing types such as gender, geographical origin, working function and personal trait. In line with this Goffman introduced the concepts of tie-signs and markers, which entails the very process of visually decoding types of people and their relations through aspects such as objects, behavior and expressions (Goffman, 2010 [1971]).

One aspect is the perception and typifications of strangers in urban spaces, another aspect is how individuals actually relate to different types of people whom they experience more or less social distance to. Sennett highlights that the immediate reaction to difference is to withdraw – a process of neutralization. If we encounter diversity that affects us, we can quickly erase this impact simply by leaving the situation. Sennett characterizes this need for withdrawal as a fear of differences being potentially

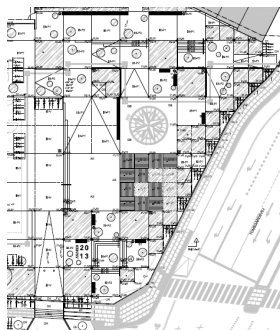
dangerous (Sennett, 1992). Other accounts argue, that the mere exposure to diversity can reduce prejudice, where the experience of different faces can have a normalizing effect (Wessel, 2009).

In recent years the topic of cognition has experienced an increased interest in urban scholarship (Davis, 2014). This is a current topic within psychology, where Crisp & Turner have addressed the positive outcomes of actually perceiving social and cultural diversity and adapting to these differences (2011). Crisp & Turner argue, that this can lead to a resolving of conflicting stereotypical expectations and with that a higher degree of tolerance. This is in line with Sennett's proposition of the possible outcomes of people having to negotiate situations when encountering social distance. Fainstein (2005) argues that the relation between diversity and tolerance is not clear though given that the mere exposure to 'the other' might foster tolerance but lifestyles might also be incompatible, where this would only increase prejudice.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This paper is based on data from a qualitative and ethnographic study of how individuals experience and use urban squares with a focus on the dynamics between the architecture and the social life in urban spaces. The analysis is based on case studies of two newly established urban squares in Copenhagen, Denmark, respectively The Library Square and Israel's Square. The two urban squares are both designed with activity and recreation as the primary purpose, but vary greatly in scale, architectural design, budget for establishment and location. I use architecturally diverse urban squares to capture diversity in both urban design and user segment to include potential differences in the experiences of urban spaces. In the following the two squares are briefly characterized.

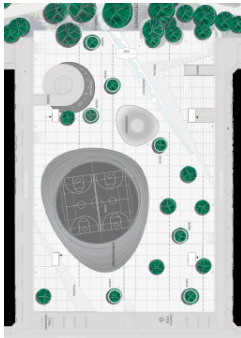
### The Library Square



#### CHARACTERISTICS

Total budget: 1.088.110 Euro  
Size: 2500 m<sup>2</sup>  
Location: Northwest of Copenhagen  
Form: Irregular  
Cubistic expression  
Level difference in terrain  
Purpose: activity and recreation  
No specific target group

## Israel's Square



### CHARACTERISTICS

Total budget: 16.993.324 Euro  
Size: 12500 m<sup>2</sup>  
Location: City centre of Copenhagen  
Form: regular  
Lifted 30 cm from the ground as a 'flying carpet'  
Purpose: activity and recreation  
No specific target group

Data inquiry was conducted from May-September 2014 using Behavioural Mappings and In-Situ interview as well as my own field experiences. In the initial phase of data inquiry Behavioural Mappings was conducted on both squares every hour covering both day and night and with mappings both weekdays and weekends. The Behavioural Mappings entailed a registration of user segment with data on respectively age, gender, the given activity and the individual/social character of the activity. In addition the specific location of each individual was registered to obtain knowledge on given spatial patterns throughout the day as well as nighttime.

Based on the knowledge obtained through Behavioural Mappings, In-Situ interview were conducted on the two squares, where users of the squares were approached and asked to participate in an interview at that given moment. In total 50 people were interviewed in 35 interview distributed over 22 interviews with single individuals and 13 group interview with two-four participants. The common denominator between all the interviewees was their choice of using the urban squares. Besides that, they differ in aspects such as age, gender, social status and ethnic background. The interview were semi-structured since I wanted the interviewees to reflect on their experience and use of the urban design of the given square as well as the other users on the square at that given moment of the interview. Questions on these aspects were posed at all the interviewees, but whenever the interviewees introduced a new topic or angle related to the interview, I encouraged them to elaborate on it, as I was seeking a detailed knowledge on different experiences and spatial trajectories in urban squares from the user perspective.

## BEING IN THE PRESENCE OF OTHER PEOPLE

The way people perceive the architectural design of an urban space is very much informed by the social life present in that urban space at that given moment. People do not go to urban squares to be alone. The

findings show, that urban squares are considered social spaces, where people go to be in the presence of other people. Furthermore the presence of other people is considered natural, which has an apparent influence on the individuals experience and use of urban squares in general. The individual's experience is in not static. It is dynamic and changes in respect to many factors. And how you perceive and experience the presence of other people in urban spaces does not only vary between individuals but also changes from time to time or even from situation to situation for the single individual as underlined by a user of the Library Square: 'Sometimes I like if there aren't any people, and some times I find it very cosy, it depends... it depends on where you are, what situation you are in at that moment'.

### **Feeling social while being private**

The majority of my interviewees articulate that they experience being with other people in urban spaces as a positive, while emphasizing the importance of not actually engaging with other people. This was articulated by a user of the Library Square when explaining her choice of positioning: 'Well, I saw that there was one person sitting there and another one sitting over there (points at two other benches close by), so I thought that it would fit very well (here) because then you could sit by yourself here, right? And still be together in that way...'. This entails a concept of feeling social at a distance, which raises an interesting perspective on, how the mere presence of other people has an impact on the individual's experience and use of the physicality of urban spaces. In this study the feeling of being social is defined by the mere visibility of other people for both the single users and the people using the squares in small groups as none of my 50 interviewees engage in actual interaction with other users they are not already acquainted with on the squares. The importance of seeing other people on an urban square was especially apparent one weekday afternoon at the Library Square, when one of my interviewees addressed the lack of social life in the urban square: 'There not being people makes it (the square) less inviting, since you are the first to enter and sit down. If there were lots of people sitting around the square, it would be more inviting'. In this excerpt the presence of other people is underlined as having a major impact on the individual's experience of an urban square, when the physical space in itself is considered less inviting if there are no people.

### **My own little space in the urban space**

The users of the chosen urban squares were generally highly aware of the presence of other people and their specific positions in the squares. The majority of the interviewees had selected their own positioning deliberately on the basis of the positioning of other people with the purpose of defining a personal space in the urban squares as expressed by a user of Israel's square: 'I like other people, and I also like if there are many people, but I also feel like, if it is strangers, I like if you have your own [bench] and you can sit



there, right?'. This underlines Jane Jacobs's definition of city privacy as being one of the most precious aspects of city life for urbanites. Jacobs argues (Jacobs, 1992 [1961]), that privacy is a key characteristic of city life given that the anonymity of urban life enables the individual to keep information to itself and to control, who gains access to personal information, which is a valued attribute for urbanites no matter social status. The importance of privacy in urban spaces is stressed throughout the data as a dominant factor in how individuals choose to use urban squares in relation to the other people present in an urban square at a given moment. Across the data two different aspects defined this state of city privacy in the urban squares respectively information privacy and terrain differences on the squares.

The Library Square is constructed as a mosaic of different levels of varying heights on the square creating small rectangular fields in the square. Contrarily Israel's Square is characterized as being an open one-levelled square but with two opposing corners of steps that rise as huge staircases. In both urban squares the level difference was underlined as a potential for creating the experience of a personal space in the urban square. When asked why she considered The Library Square cosy, Gitte responded:

'There is a difference in the terrain...it does not seem quite as open as grand squares can seem. It is like, you can feel, that you have your own little group...I think you relate it to being cosier, when it is something you can easier grasp in fields, right? Vast open squares are very much like, you can quickly feel, that it becomes infinite and where do you position yourself in relation to other people watching you, right? You do not do that here for instance –here you can sit without feeling stared at'.

Other users of the Library Square expressed a similar experience of the level differences, where plateaus were experienced as creating small oases, where you can feel, that you have your own personal space, and where you for instance don't have to be afraid of other people grapping your bag when putting it besides you on the bench. Pernille, a user of Israel's Square, underlined the combination of sitting at the staircase above the ground level and the fact that people would not be able to hear what she and her friend were saying as creating privacy: 'You wouldn't pass us here and hear what we are talking about. I think that's nice... It's more private up here'. Here it is the fact, that other people on the squares are incapable of listening to conversations that creates the feeling of having your own physical space on an urban square.

## Thinking about other people's experiences

An interesting finding in this study is, that the individual's reaction to the presence of other people is not only related to the individual's own objectives and interests as outlined above. Several of my interviewees positioned themselves in the urban square based on what they thought would make the other users of the square comfortable, when trying deliberately not to sit too closely to them like Freja did at Israel's

Square: 'Personally, I would think more about what other people thought, if I sat close to them, and not so much about what I did myself or how I acted. Since I would have the thought 'Why are they sitting this close to me?' then I am guessing, they will be thinking the same'. This is very much in line with Goffman's distinction between eight different territories of the self in particular his notion of the personal space and the stall (Goffman, 2010 [1971]). As expressed in this excerpt the users of the squares have a clear conception of appropriate positioning in relation to other users on the squares with the purpose of respecting both the personal space around other individuals and their immediate 'stalls' in the urban space such as the bench, a small plateau in the Library Square or a certain part of the greater staircases in Israel's Square. The following excerpt likewise underlines the importance of two other types of territories introduced by Goffman respectively the information preserve and conversational preserve in respect to the individual's own positioning in the squares:

Freja: ...we didn't sit just next to the others

Interviewer: Why is that?

Pernille: For the privacy...

Freja: It can seem quite intimidating to sit down like that... They would look askance at it, if I just sat down next to them...Because if someone came and sat down like that next to us, I would also be thinking 'Well, that's because they want to talk to us' ... because there is plenty of space there and there (pointing at other benches). Why do they have to sit just here? And of course it wouldn't matter, but I guess I would be thinking 'Hmm...What's their objective?'

Here the users of Israel's Square addresses which types of behavior and distances that are experienced as natural between strangers in an urban setting which illustrates that there is a social cohesion order in urban spaces by the maintenance of certain distances.

## THE EXPERIENCE AND REACTION UPON SOCIAL DIVERSITY

In the former section of this paper we analyzed the impact of other peoples' presence in urban squares on the individual's experience and use of urban squares. A common denominator for the included data is, that the interviewees generally reflect upon other users of the squares as 'people' and in that sense an abstract group. In the following we will be analyzing, how individuals experience and react upon diverse people when using urban squares.

## Heterogeneity of users

In the interview and during my own fieldwork it was very apparent that heterogeneity of users was considered a clear positive in urban squares. The very presence of a variety of individuals in an urban space affects how people experience that space and their own behavior in that space, as I learned in the very beginning of my fieldwork:

### **Own field notes: Israel's Square a summer weekday afternoon at 2.30 pm**

It is the first time I visit Israel's Square after the opening.

The first thing I notice is all the people- the square is packed with people doing various activities; children playing, teenagers skating, young people drinking coffee, families hanging out, people bicycling across the square, people walking across the square in all directions. The square is raised one step above ground level and when stepping up onto the square I am walking across the square freely watching all the people. I eventually sit down on a round bench in the middle of the square finding it very comfortable and natural being there. I end up staying about half an hour.

When experiencing the heterogeneity on Israel's Square that first time, it made me feel at ease. When other people have already taken the physical space in use and chosen to use different parts of the physical space to perform certain activities, this legitimizes behaviour and it establishes a type of anonymity since it removes the focus on your own behaviour as expressed by a user of the Library Square: 'I think it is the crowd mentality. Once you see other people do it, it feels easier to do it yourself'. The heterogeneity of users entails a diversity of activities but with that also follows a diversity of people. When being on the square the presence of a diversity of people has partly an entertaining quality as expressed by a user of Israel's Square: 'I think it creates an amazing urban life, that you have these diverse activities... This creates some diversity and some different ways that people act in the square, which I think adds some liveliness'. It is interesting to watch different people do different things and because of that, it has an entertaining value, which influences the individual's experience of urban spaces. In addition, it has an impact on how we behave in the physical space. This study shows, that you can experience great social distance towards other users of an urban square and because of that find it interesting to watch them from a distance. I suggest, that heterogeneity can be viewed as a motivating social distance since it has a positive influence on the individual's experience and behaviour in urban spaces.

## Homogeneous groups

The impact of diversity was also very apparent in those situations that lacked diversity during my data inquiry, where the given urban squares were dominated by the presence of homogeneous groups. Where

heterogeneity generally is viewed positively by users of urban squares, the sole presence of homogenous groups of people, that you are not a part of yourself, is generally perceived negatively and has restricting consequences for your behaviour in the urban space, as I experienced during my fieldwork:

**Own field notes: Israel's Square a summer weekend night at 10.30 PM**

I am approaching Israel's Square and it is just getting dark. It is pretty dark but the square is lit with light under the entire square, and there are many light poles across the square, which means I can still see the entire square. Even before stepping up on the square I am very aware that there is only one large group of people on the square right now in the opposing corner from me; they are all young guys and they are all skating or hanging out with other guys who are skating. I am not feeling unsafe on the square, but I am not feeling comfortable either. I am very aware that I am the one that differ from the rest of the users given that I am the only one on the square not being part of that group and their skating activities and I am the only girl. I am actively considering my own behaviour when walking around.

This experience illustrates, how the mere presence of a homogenous group of people, that I feel a social distance to has an impact on respectively my experience of and behaviour in that urban space despite the fact, that I have not engaged in any direct interaction with the group. The impact of their presence stems from the mere visibility of the group and the meanings I personally apply to their behaviour. The impact of being in the presence of a homogeneous group of people and differing from their behaviour was also stressed as having a huge impact by my interviewees as expressed by a user of Israel's Square: 'In Blågårdsgade [a street close by] there is also a skater square, but there I wouldn't feel like it's nice to sit down, because it is very much 'the skater's place'. Then it would be like 'What the ... are those two girls doing there? They're just sitting and staring!' Here [at Israel's Square] we might as well be watching the buildings. It is a bit more open for everybody, I think'. In line with this another user of Israel's Square explains how he reacts towards differing from a group: 'If there are types of people, that you don't feel safe around or don't feel similar to, then what happens is, that you somehow want to either force them out or leave yourself'. This highlights how the individual user of urban squares quickly perceives strangers as 'types' of people highly in line with Berger & Luckmann's work on typificatory schemes (1991 [1966]).

The data material reveals the complexity of, how individuals establish their subjective identification or lack of this with other users of urban squares. In the Library Square I interviewed a couple, that was drinking beer, while I interviewed them, and who informed me, that they used the square on a daily basis having specific routines. They drank a beer on the square early in the afternoon on their way to an activity and then used the square again later the same day while drinking a beer on their way back home. They pointed out that, at Møntmesterpladsen [a square about 100 meters from the Library Square] there are alcoholics sitting on the benches everyday that are dominating the square leaving no space for others.

It was clear, that they did not identify with this group of people, and they felt a great social distance to them even though they were drinking beers themselves in public everyday and because of that, they chose to use the Library Square. This is an interesting finding, because based on their own activity of drinking beers on a daily basis at the same spot in an urban square, they potentially could be identified as alcoholics by strangers, but their own feeling of social distance towards that group of people underlines the complexity of social distance. It also clearly establishes that the feeling of great social distance has a direct impact on actual behavior, given that they chose not to use that square.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL DISTANCE WITH VARYING IMPACT

In this section the interviewees' specific experience of social distance will be analyzed, and I will introduce a distinction between different types of social distance with varying impact on the individual's experience and use of urban spaces. The data material from the two urban squares revealed an interesting ambivalence between respectively being curious and finding social distance for the purpose of mere entertainment to feeling a profound social distance towards other people that causes feelings of being unsafe or uncomfortable. This analysis outlines four specific types of social distance with varying impact on the individual's use of urban spaces, which is illustrated in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1. Social distances and their impact

Type of social distance	Motivating	Restricting	Emotional Impact	Behavioural Impact	Spatial Impact	Time Impact
Strangers	X			X	X	
Multiculturality	X		X			
Social status		X	X		X	
Deviant behavior		X	X	X	X	X

In Diagram 1 four different types of social distance and their respective type of impact on the individual's experience of and behavior in the urban spaces is illustrated. On the basis of the first two parts of the analysis, I propose that these four different types of social distance can be viewed as being motivating or restricting and having diverse types of impact on the individual's behavior in an urban space. In the following each type of social distance will be analyzed further.

## Strangers

The most general type of social distance that was underlined in this study was, that other people are strangers. This study shows that being in the presence of strangers is generally perceived as a positive quality of urban spaces that people specifically seek when choosing to use urban spaces. Being in the presence of diverse strangers entails both an entertaining aspect of having diverse activities to watch while staying in urban spaces and the opportunity to openly watch other people without feeling uncomfortable. Drawing on this I would characterize the social distance between the individual and strangers as having a motivating impact on the individual.

While being in the presence of strangers is generally outlined as a positive throughout this study, the degree of physical distance is likewise underlined as having a vital influence on the individual's behavior in urban spaces. The entertaining aspect of watching strangers only remains, if a given physical distance is maintained as stressed by a user of Israel's Square:

'I would not sit closely to people I do not know... if I could choose, I would not... I think it depends on your personality...I prefer to sit with people I know... It is also a feeling of safety... sitting with people you know'.

Due to this I argue that the social distance between strangers has a spatial and behavioral impact on the individual's use of an urban space. The feeling of social distance to strangers in urban spaces can result in people simply choosing not to use urban squares at given times, if it is not possible to position yourself in a certain physical distance to strangers.

## Multiculturality

A specific kind of heterogeneity that was underlined as a positive for the interviewees' own experiences and use of the Library Square was the multicultural user segment on the urban square and in the area surrounding it. The square is situated in the north of Copenhagen, an area that is highly diverse culturally, ethnically and socially. Throughout my data the presence of people with differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds is highlighted as a positive aspect of the Library Square by my interviewees. Multiculturality is generally typified in this study using categories of skin colour, clothes and language. When asked if she felt welcome, a female user responded: 'Totally. I simply love this place. I was also raised in Nørrebro [an urban district close by]. I think it is so cool, that there are so many different [people]... I would be bored crazily in Østerbro for instance [an urban district commonly associated with the upper middle class]. So I think it [multiculturality] is nice'. Marie also underlined the positive of being in a very multicultural setting: 'I am used to working in this area, so I am feeling very comfortable with these people and actually

really like the diversity'. On the basis of this I characterize multiculturalism as a motivating social distance, which has an emotional impact, since it makes people feel comfortable and at ease.

## **Social status**

At a larger physical distance people only react upon the specific characteristics of other people, when they experience extremes. This entails, that the individual only experience and react upon social distance to other people once there is a major difference in for instance social status, which was underlined by several of my interviewees. Social status is an issue only referred to as a negative aspect in this study and concentrated around two aspects; alcoholics and homeless people. A user of the Library Square explained, how she generally wants to sit by herself with a certain distance to other people, but of course it depends on who it is. There is a difference on whether it is a bum or a good-looking guy sitting close by. Another user of the Library Square underlined, that she chose her positioning on the square based on the fact, that a man was sitting and drinking beers, and she did not want him to approach her and start talking to her. Drawing on Goffman the very perception of homeless people and alcoholics can be understood as based on markers in terms of possessional territory. Certain objects such as many plastic bags with basic belongings or beer bottles related to the individuals add to other people's perception of their social status. The study indicates that social distance between the individual and homeless people or alcoholics has a restricting impact, since it influences the individual's experience and use of the urban space. I propose, that it has both an emotional and spatial impact on the individual's use of urban spaces as it affects the individuals experience and influences the individual's choice of location.

## **Deviant behavior**

This study shows that the type of social distance with the most apparent influence on the individual's experience and use of urban spaces is deviant behavior. As illustrated in Diagram 1 deviant behavior has respectively an emotional, behavioral, spatial and time impact as the individual is influenced in all these aspect by the mere presence of people of deviant behavior. It is the common association among my interviewees that Israel's Square used to be a place for extensive drug dealing before the renewal of the square. During my Behavioural Mappings on Israel's Square I returned to the square every hour covering 24 hours in a weekend. In this period of time it was very apparent, that drug dealing was taking place, since the same people were often at the square for many hours during the night time. A clear indicator of their deviant behaviour was, that they noticed my presence and reacted to it by for instance shouting at me. They were very aware of me, when I came to the square and did my observations. At the same time I was very aware of this and chose to adjust my own behaviour, given that I conducted my mappings on the square but chose not to register the data until having left the square. The purpose of this being, that I

did not want these people to feel my presence as a threat if I registered all their behaviour. This underlines, that the mere presence of these people on the square led to an adjustment of my behaviour and a feeling of uncertainty.

I also interviewed a family that live just next to the square that involuntarily follow the drug dealing closely, which leaves a distinct feeling of being unsafe: 'You see them continuously passing by here and leaving something in the bushes, and then, if you are watching, it takes 3-4 minutes, then someone else passes the same spot and picks something up, right? It goes on all the time'. The husband in this family was also approached one night by these people: 'I came home one night around 10 pm, where some people were walking around here, that were clearly up to something, and where I might have looked a bit too much at them, and where they came up to me and sort of stared, as if I had to quickly move along. So I enter our doorway and just when I am walking in, the door is just kicked up with a huge bang by some bikers who are forcing themselves into the doorway. And then I am thinking, now I might have to hurry up into my apartment, right? And obviously that is not pleasant'. I characterize deviant behavior as a restricting social distance, since it directly affects people in several ways. It has an emotional impact, when people feel unsafe by the mere presence of people conducting this behavior. In addition it has a clear spatial, behavioral and time impact when it influences people's choice of location and behavior on the square as well as the duration of their stay on the square. A very important finding of the study is that even though deviant behavior makes people feel uncomfortable, and they adjust their behavior, it does not prevent people from using urban spaces.

## DISCUSSION

This study shows that urbanites generally perceive social diversity as an apparent positive when using urban squares. Social diversity makes individuals feel at ease as opposed to being in urban spaces with homogeneous groups. The preservation of physical distance and information privacy is vital though, given that people do not want to sit close to strangers or share private information with them. These aspects must be obeyed to keep the stranger relation intact. This could be characterized as people taking a type of backstage role in public spaces, using Goffman's terminology, in the sense that people seek a visual contact with strangers while wanting to keep the 'audience' at a distance. It could be argued, that urbanites navigate in urban spaces based on the idea of the perfect stranger. Strangers should be present in urban spaces and use these in accordance with what the individual perceives as common behavior in that specific space, and strangers should navigate and position themselves at a certain physical distance while respecting the privacy preserve of information. This introduces an interesting paradox given that the individual holds no knowledge of strangers or any interest in engaging in social interaction with strangers, while at the same time having clear and high expectations to their behavior. In this study this



ideal of the perfect stranger is only disturbed, when the urbanite is confronted with major contrasts in the behavior of strangers in relation to themselves, which is represented by either low social status as alcoholics or homeless people or deviant behavior such as drug dealing.

Another interesting finding of the study is that peoples' spatial trajectories in urban squares is not only based on their personal objectives but also based on what other people might think, since the individual has an interest in respecting other people's experience of the urban space as well. In one way this is clearly in line with Goffman's theory on face-work and how individuals are not only protecting themselves in social situations but also protecting the other when assuming that they feel, think and act like themselves. On the other hand it could be argued, that humble behavior like this, where you opt not to intervene in other people's use of urban spaces, and where you implement this as a factor in your own spatial trajectory on urban squares, is a typical characteristic of Danish or Scandinavian people. There is a potential for further research within this area, because it would be interesting to examine whether this is a characteristic of the present culture of study or whether this has an impact on peoples behavior and spatial trajectories elsewhere.

Based on the data findings in this study I argue that different types of social distance have different types of impact on the individual's experience and use of urban spaces, and I introduce a distinction between respectively motivating and restricting social distance. Both types of social distance are relevant to study in urban research. Motivating social distance can be viewed as a positive navigator when planning urban spaces. It is well known within urban studies, that multifunctional spaces has the potential to create social life in urban spaces because different types of activities attracts different types of people. This is a very descriptive understanding of the social life in urban spaces though, which is based on each group's relation to an activity in an urban space and thereby not on the dynamics between these groups and their respective use of an urban space. When focusing on how the urbanite is actually motivated by the presence of other types of people, as in the present study, this introduces a more dynamic approach to the understanding of the individual's experience and use of urban spaces. Restricting social distance can on the other hand be viewed as creating a spatial division in urban spaces, where urbanites navigate on the presence of restricting social distance to other people. In addition this study indicates that if you encounter the presence of a group of people that you experience a social distance to, this is more likely to have a restricting effect on your experience and use of urban spaces as opposed to encountering a single person of social distance.

This study also reveals that urban spaces do not hold static qualities in respect to how individual's experience and use them. People have their own rhythms and daily routines for using urban spaces and due to that, the individual's experience of social diversity and the impact of this on the individual's own spatial trajectory in urban spaces changes during the course of a day for the single individual as well as from individual to individual. The relation to strangers in urban spaces is situational since it is contingent

upon the individual's situation in that given moment such as emotional state, physical condition or reason for using the urban space and also due to the fact that the user segment changes ongoingly. Urban spaces are also dynamic and can transform during the course of a day from experienced as being nice and approachable during the daytime to dangerous during the nighttime as we saw in the case of Israel's Square in this study. People can experience this and accept it in the sense that the feeling of uncomfortability or danger during the nighttime does not prevent people from using the square at other times of the day. They adjust their behavior on the square on the basis of the social milieu present at certain times of the day, which underlines the dynamic dimension between the social life, the physical design and the individual. It also underlines the need to look beyond the boundaries of the dominating person-to-person or person-to-place perspectives in urban studies and incorporate all three dimensions in the analysis of the individual's experience and use of urban spaces.

## CONCLUSION

A current tendency within the design of urban spaces is the strive towards multifunctional urban spaces, which entails the understanding that diverse activities will lead to diverse people having a reason for using urban spaces. This is also the case with the two chosen case studies in the present analysis respectively Israel's Square and the Library Square in Copenhagen, Denmark. Social diversity is in that respect intended and perceived as a positive for the single individual in the very design of urban spaces. How the single individual actually experiences social diversity and reacts towards this in praxis, including particularly social distance, is an underexposed aspect in urban studies. This study is an attempt to examine the impact of social distance on the individual's experience and use of urban spaces and with that it constitutes a contribution to this line of research. The study reveals that different types of social distance have varying impact on the individual's experience and use of urban spaces. On the basis of these results I have introduced the distinction between a respectively motivating and restricting type of social distance. The individual's experience of social distance on the basis of alcoholism, homelessness and criminal behavior has a restricting impact on the individual's experience and use of an urban space. A crucial point in respect to this is though, that this restricting social distance does not prevent people from using these urban spaces in general, but it has a clear restricting impact on the individual's spatial trajectories and at what time they choose to use the urban space. Contrarily the study illustrates a motivating type of social distance when the individual encounters what could be named the perfect stranger as well as multiculturalism which both have a positive impact on making people feel comfortable and at ease. The present study introduces a nuanced perspective on social distance in the analysis of how the individual experiences and uses urban spaces, since diverse types of social distance influences the

individual differently. Similarly it highlights that both the person-to-place and person-to-person perspective should be included in the analysis of how the individual experience and use urban spaces. The individual's experience and actual use of the design of urban spaces is not static, but on the contrary dynamic and highly affected by the constellation of user segment present in the urban space at that very moment of use.

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