

Abstract  
**Crafting Urban Quality**  
A story of practice

This thesis aims to understand how urban qualities emerge through practice and shape urban development, contributing to existing literature on value and quality in architectural and urban studies. By examining a prominent Copenhagen urban development project envisioned to address pressing societal and environmental challenges, the research moves beyond traditional positivist/objectivist and social constructionist approaches. These conventional methods often fail to grasp urban quality's complexities and situatedness by ignoring its processual aspects. Instead, inspired by Actor-Network-Theory and John Dewey's Theory of Valuation, this thesis conceptualizes urban quality as a processual effective agent within urban development practice, shifting focus from attributes to active performance.

Through eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in developers', architects', and investors' offices, meeting rooms, and site visits during developing a new local plan for a post-industrial site, the study gains deep insight into how urban developers produce and utilize urban quality. The research explores urban quality across multiple analytical scales, from intimate ethnographic observations to broader examinations of official narratives, historical context, and political-economic environments. This multi-scalar approach reveals how seemingly minor practices collectively shape cities.

The findings demonstrate that Copenhagen's urban development practice is entering uncharted territory with global investment funds as key players. Long-term investment goals significantly influence how 'urban life' is produced and performed. For instance, what used to be traditionally known as 'home' is now performed as a 'product', a 'service' and a 'living experience' tailored, and largely curated, to specific demographics. Temporalities are integral to the urban development professionals' work in crafting urban quality. For instance, cultural heritage, as urban quality, is not inherent but strategically mobilized to create a sensory, urban atmosphere. Likewise, the future serves as a powerful agent in the development process. Professionals compose events and recruit tenants to perform the urban future to come. Pasts and futures work in the present as effective agents and are mobilized to create 'urban life' before construction takes off, effectively mobilizing champions and creating a 'strong sense of belonging'. This thesis argues that failing to take these practices of crafting and mobilizing urban quality seriously as architectural would undermine their agency. The architectural processes analyzed in this thesis are often performed through storytelling, images, and performative events. They are not representations of a future but work within the present by setting out directions for the urban development process.

Through examining how urban quality works in practice, this thesis offers a new perspective on contemporary urban development. It highlights the transformative potential within the practical space where urban quality is crafted. It contributes with new perspectives to assist political and municipal authorities, citizens, and urban development professionals in discussing a foundational question concerning their work and engagement in developing Copenhagen and, indeed, other cities: Who is this city built for?

Keywords: *actor-network-theory, adaptive reuse, architecture, blended city, cultural heritage, ethnography, green development, local planning, real estate investment, sustainability, urban development, urban diversity, urban nature, urban quality.*

## Resumé

# At skabe bymæssig kvalitet En fortælling fra praksis



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Afhandlingen undersøger, hvordan bymæssig kvalitet opstår gennem praksis og former byudvikling, og bidrager dermed til den eksisterende forskning i værdi og kvalitet inden for arkitektur- og urbane studier.

Gennem et etnografisk studie af et større københavnsk udviklingsprojekt fortælles historien om, hvordan investorer, arkitekter og grundejere arbejder med at omsætte arkitektoniske visioner til en ny lokalplan. Hvordan forhandles og materialiseres bymæssig kvalitet? Hvilke fortællinger driver byens udvikling, og hvad er de praktiske konsekvenser? Ved at afdække investorers og byudvikleres hidtil underbelyste daglige arbejde, giver afhandlingen nye perspektiver på de etiske forpligtelser og dilemmaer, der opstår når byen udvikles.

Undersøgelsen viser, at københavnsk byudvikling bevæger sig ind på nyt territorium med globale investeringsfonde som centrale aktører. Langsigtede investeringsmål påvirker fundamentalt, hvordan 'byliv' produceres og iscenesættes. Hjem er blevet til et 'produkt' og en 'boligoplevelse' skræddersyet til specifikke målgrupper. Tid spiller en afgørende rolle i byudviklernes arbejde med at skabe kvalitet - kulturel mobiliseres strategisk til at skabe stemning, mens fortællinger om fremtidens by bliver et aktivt redskab i udviklingsprocessen. Gennem events og midlertidige aktiviteter iscenesættes det kommende byliv, længe før byggeriet går i gang.

Afhandlingen argumenterer for, at disse praksisser må tages alvorligt som arkitektoniske processer. De er ikke blot repræsentationer af en bymæssig fremtid, men aktive kræfter der former byudviklingen her og nu. Ved at undersøge hvordan bymæssig kvalitet virker i praksis, bidrager afhandlingen med nye perspektiver på nutidig byudvikling og rejser det grundlæggende spørgsmål: Hvem bygger vi egentlig byen til?