

# HELLE JUUL:

## ARCHITECTURE – A PROACTIVE FORCE DRIVING CHANGE

“Strategic urban development begins with the needs, ideas and dreams of residents. Our mission, as architects and urban planners, is to stay ahead of events, set the direction and support initiatives that prevent the destruction of the visions people cherish,” emphasised the distinguished Danish architect and urban planner Helle Juul in an exclusive interview with STRUCTUM.

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More than 35 years ago, Helle Juul, together with her husband, the architect Flemming Frost, founded the practice ‘JUUL | FROST Arkitekter’, which specialises in urban planning, sustainable urban development and the impact of architecture on public health and well-being. According to the architect, having gained diverse academic and practical experience, she has developed a holistic way of thinking; consequently, when creating projects, the practice seamlessly combines aesthetics, engineering, psychology and history, whilst seeking unconventional and sustainable solutions in construction and urban planning.

H. Juul is also President of INTA (the International Urban Development Association), an independent international organisation. Founded in Paris in 1974, INTA brings together urban planning experts from 60 countries, policy-makers and property developers, as well as highly qualified representatives from the

public and private sectors, all striving for balanced urban development and better living conditions for all city residents. “I am the first head of the association who does not speak French fluently,” laughs H. Juul.

### The direction is dictated by growing urbanisation

H. Juul and her husband, F. Frost, graduated from the elite architecture school in Aarhus (Denmark) (Aarhus School of Architecture). Some time later, the couple moved to Copenhagen, where H. Juul obtained a PhD from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and later became a lecturer there.

H. Juul also spent five years heading ‘Skala’, Denmark’s first private architecture gallery, which was founded by the renowned Danish architect Henning Larsen. This project became an important international platform for architectural development. The experience gained through forging international connections

helped the architect to establish the philosophical foundation of her architectural practice.

When developing projects in landscape, urban design, architecture or housing, ‘JUUL | FROST Arkitekter’ always emphasises a multidisciplinary approach, which makes it possible to measure the success of urban planning not only in terms of sustainability and economics, but also in terms of the mental, social and physical well-being of residents.

“As the population continues to grow, the planning of cities and their surrounding areas plays an increasingly important role in ensuring residents’ quality of life and a positive impact on their health,” says H. Juul, discussing the need for a new culture of health and wellbeing created by urbanisation. ‘Every significant urban planning decision stems not from the interests of a single square or building. If a decision is made to alter or expand urban spaces, it is essential first to understand what is ac-



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tually happening in those spaces and to take the landscape into account as a decisive factor in shaping the environment. A building never exists in isolation – it is always part of the wider social, historical and natural context of the city. Whatever space, large or small, is being created in the city, it is always essential to understand the context. At our studio, we analyse and design simultaneously at different levels: from large-scale strategic urban planning down to the finer details of a courtyard or a house. A new building must not only fit in visually, but also extend the existing urban spaces and street network. These principles of urban planning are part of our studio's DNA."

### Urban spaces – like social glue

According to this world-renowned architect and urban planner, we must look beyond buildings alone. If we do not care for the spaces that connect them, the environment will be unattractive to residents. Proper design of spaces encourages people to interact, strengthens a sense of community and reduces social exclusion.

"In many urban development projects, this concept is overlooked, yet this is the crux of the matter – city dwellers belong to a specific space," says H. Juul. – Our studio carries out a great deal of research into urban spaces in Barcelona, London and Paris at various levels. I believe one of the most important things is that European cities are home to people from many different cultures: we must understand their behaviour and treat it with respect when designing spaces. It is equally important to take into account the age groups of residents (to avoid generational segregation), as well as opportunities for both rest and active movement."

When asked to name examples of cities best suited to the needs of modern people, the architect mentions Copenhagen first and foremost. Not because she lives there herself, but because the city is truly democratic and takes people's differences into account. Copenhagen is socially sustainable. Courtyards have become green and accessible to all. In Denmark, the prevailing view is that every resident should be able to see at least one tree from the window of their house or flat.

"I visited the Paupys district in Vilnius – a very fine example of how it is possible to live close to the city centre whilst enjoying the key elements that ensure a good quality of life today: green spaces, an active lifestyle and safety," says

H. Juul, praising Vilnius's efforts to be sustainable and welcoming to people of all ages and interests.

### Multidisciplinary discussions are essential

Urban development, according to H. Juul, is the foundation of ideas, the realisation of which requires dialogue and a great deal of understanding. Different groups of people have different priorities: some see the city through an economic lens, others through a health lens, and others through a green lens, whilst urban planners act as a driving force that must bring these interests together and foster urban development.

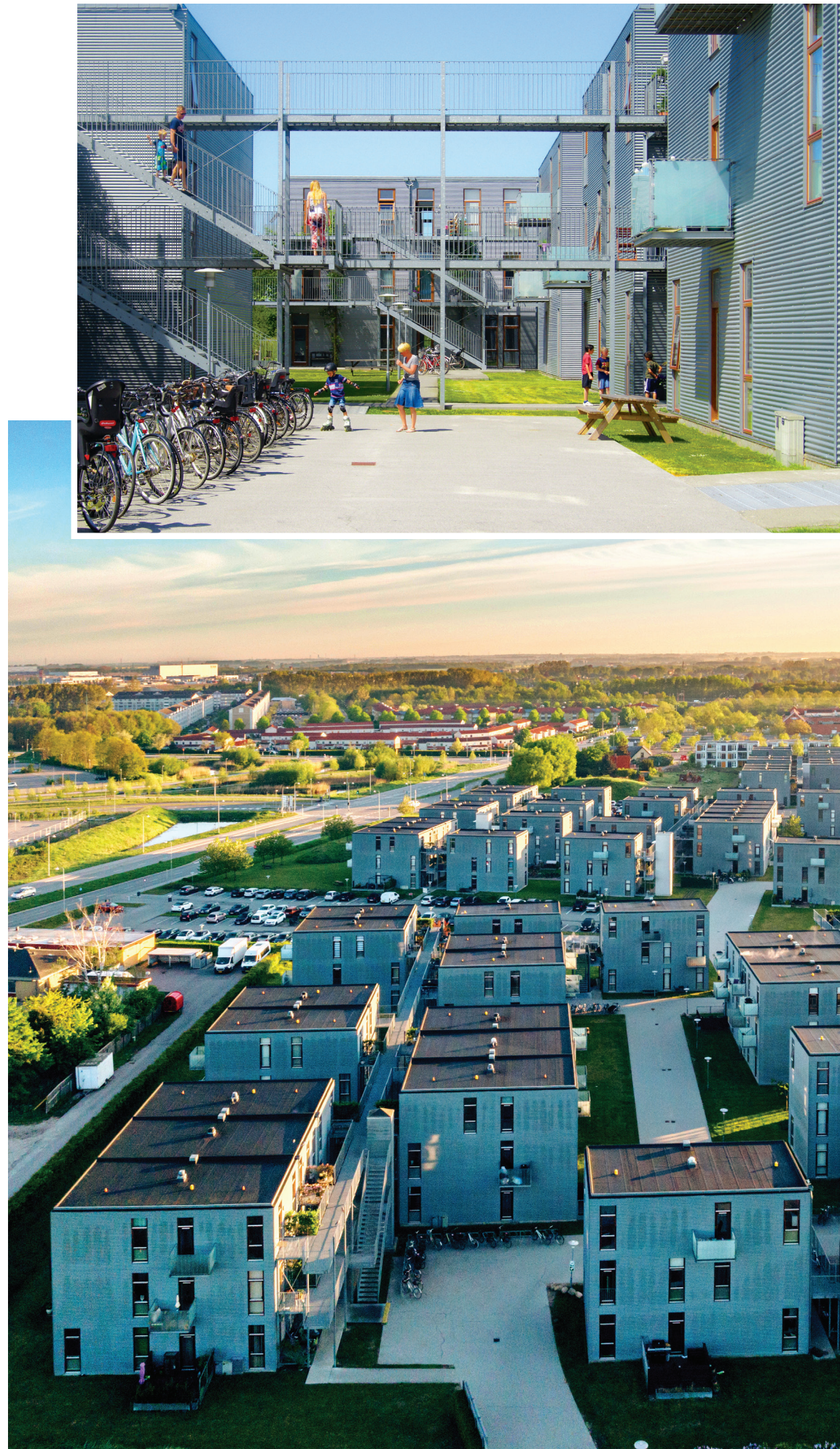
"The greatest challenge for urban planners is to foster dialogue between institutions and their departments. I believe that local authorities and their residents should make a greater effort to organise multi-stakeholder discussions on what kind of city and environment they would like to see. It is only by listening and understanding the situation that visionary progress is made, bringing fantastic added value to the city. Memory is also very important for architecture and spatial planning. Unfortunately, property developers often overlook the history and narrative of a place," says H. Juul.

According to the architect, the cities of the future need not only cultural changes, new values and new planning methods, but also unity when working across different sectors. "The way we live and behave is the kind of future we create," says the architect.

### The City's Compass of Values

'JUUL | FROST Arkitekter' places great emphasis on the culture of health in future cities, which is based on data collected about specific locations. This holistic concept links urban planning with residents' health, thereby creating an environment that ensures people's physical, psychological and social well-being. When putting forward development proposals, the studio's architects always study the environment and strive for social harmony within a specific neighbourhood. One of the greatest challenges of our time – loneliness – is being actively addressed: spaces are designed to foster neighbourliness and a sense of community. Considerable attention is paid to access to green spaces, natural light, noise reduction and a sense of security.

These aspects have become a priority in the six studio projects in Scandinavia presented below.



## Residential neighbourhood Bedre Billigere Boliger in Copenhagen

In Lithuanian, the name of this project would be something like 'better affordable housing'. Commissioned by a major Danish property developer, this neighbourhood is a prime example of how it is possible to create compact, affordable homes for people on average or lower incomes, whilst maintaining high architectural quality and a sense of community. The creators of the 'Bedre Billigere Boliger' project based their ideas on the premise that a small space can be functional, bright and cosy. When designing the buildings, they drew on Plato's spatial concept of 'Chôra': a physical building is a dynamic, transformable space until its final purpose is determined and human social life begins within it. 'Chôra' is expressed through the choreographically arranged pathways of interior spaces, green courtyards and corridors. Residents move to and from their flats via central courtyards and balconies. These are not merely entrances, but also social spaces where residents can meet their neighbours and their guests. The cost of the homes has been reduced by opting for factory-prefabricated modules and panels assembled on site. This has accelerated construction and reduced the likelihood of defects.





## *Munkebjerg Park in Odense*

In this dynamic, modern, mixed-use and sustainable neighbourhood of the Danish city of Odense – which harmoniously combines various types of housing, business centres and green spaces – people of different generations have made their homes. Thanks to its high architectural quality and exceptional integration into the landscape, this neighbourhood won the prestigious ‘Odin’ award in 2020, presented to Danish start-ups and growing companies for innovation. The practice ‘JUUL | FROST Arkitekter’ was responsible for all stages of urban planning – from the vision and site plan through to the implementation of the design for all the buildings. The architectural and landscape design encompasses family homes, student and senior citizens’ accommodation, a town square, a public park, a day care centre, a multi-purpose office building, a shop, as well as terraced houses – everything needed to ensure a mixed-use and vibrant neighbourhood.

Although a unified aesthetic has been maintained across the neighbourhood, the finishes of the building façades vary to avoid monotony and ensure that each

block has its own identity. Commercial buildings, including a 1,200 sq m grocery store, have been designed with integrated green walls to soften the urban environment. The neighbourhood combines not only different types of buildings but also those of varying heights. Residential areas, arranged in rows, form ‘green wedges’. This gradually opens up a view of the forest reserve to the south of the district. All flats are designed to allow an optimal amount of natural daylight to enter. Communal terraces with glass greenhouses are installed on the roofs of the residential buildings. These extend the outdoor living space and serve as a popular meeting place for neighbours. Vehicular traffic is prohibited in the large green spaces between the buildings, whilst car parks have been designed underground. Rainwater collection basins with wooden platforms for relaxation have been installed in the centre of the courtyards. Special drainage grates channel the water into small fountains and cascades, which also serve a recreational purpose. The homes in this project have been awarded the international DGNB sustainability certificate.



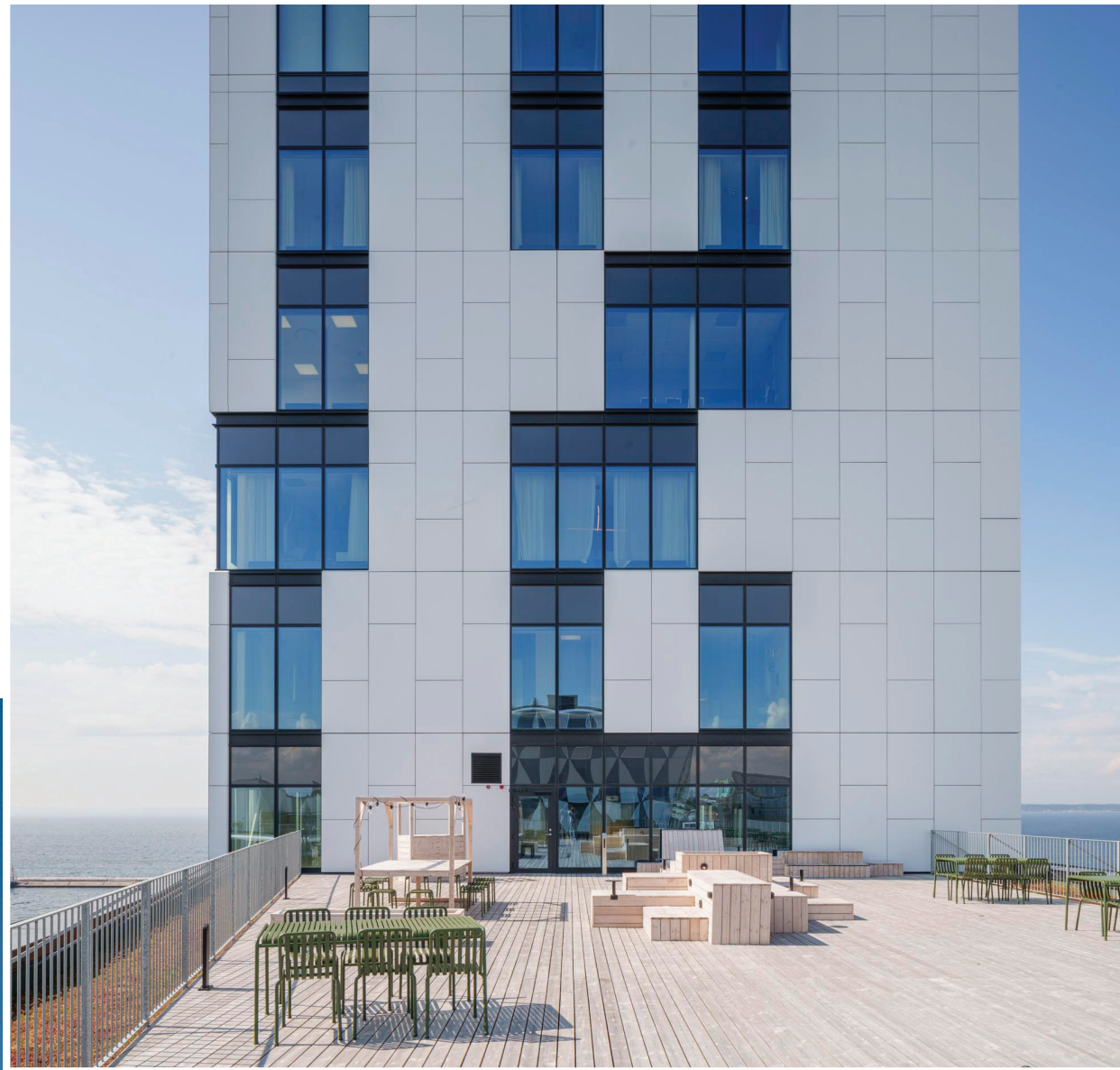
## *Helsingborg Business and Leisure Complex in Sweden*

The 'World Trade Centre' and 'Scandic' hotel complex at the Port of Helsingborg is a 13-storey mixed-use building situated at the end of the pier in the new eco-district of 'Öceanhamnen'. The entire complex has been designed as a single, vibrant space – the approximately 7,800 sq m Scandic hotel, with 184 rooms, and the 4,500 sq m World Trade Centre offices share the same infrastructure. Making optimal use of every square metre, the ground and first floors feature shared reception areas, hybrid meeting zones and co-working spaces. This allows business clients to make use of the hotel's services, whilst hotel guests can ac-

cess professionally equipped workspaces. The ground floor layout faces the harbour promenade. The restaurant and foyer areas are designed to be easily accessible from the street, making the complex a bustling meeting place for the local community, rather than just an isolated business centre. The first six storeys of the building form a solid base, whose textures blend in with the traditional harbour districts. Rising from this solid base, like a lighthouse at the jetty, is the tower. The hotel's façade is monumental and rhythmic, whilst that of the pale white tower is playful, accentuated by deeply recessed geometric glass sections. The terrace on

the building's roof offers a view of the Öresund Strait. The complex incorporates energy-saving technologies, with solutions integrated into the roofs and terraces that contribute to a sustainable lifestyle and reduce environmental impact. This project complies with the stringent 'Sweden Green Building Council Gold' standard and has been awarded the 'Nordic Swan' eco-label.

The building, constructed from light-coloured materials and featuring an impressive tower over 50 metres high, has already become a new visual landmark, visible both from the mainland and from ferries sailing from Denmark.







## *Study and Research Campus Campus Örebro in Sweden*

'JUUL | FROST Arkitekter' has fundamentally transformed the identity of Örebro University's study and research campus. Prior to the redevelopment, it was a closed-off area with little connection to the city or local business community. The architects decided to create an open, vibrant and integrated urban space. Detailed designs were drawn up for three new buildings connected to the campus square and the adjacent campus area - comprising a street, a garden and an arrival zone. The campus square, the new business school, the NOVA Houses (the university's main meeting centre, bridging academia and business), the student halls of residence and the researchers' accommodation have been transformed into a vibrant and attractive urban university precinct. The central concept behind the 'Juul Frost' buildings is visual openness. During the day, the glass façade of the NOVA Houses reveals the life taking place inside, whilst in the evening it glows from within like a lighthouse, blurring the boundary between the interior spaces and the square. Thanks to the multitude of opportunities for social gatherings - ranging from the 560-seat 'Magnum' auditorium to small, informal spaces - NOVA House has become a unique meeting point for people from across the city. The pattern of the 2,500 sq m paving in the central 'Campus Square' - composed of concrete slabs imitating flowing ice - extends into the interior of the NOVA building, visually connecting the outdoor space with the building's interior. The project is also exceptional for its technological innovation.

By adopting an open BIM methodology at a time when many contractors were still using 2D drawings, 'JUUL | FROST Arkitekter' won an international 'buildingSMART' award for digital precision and seamless collaboration.



## *Recreational park Pulsparken in Odense*

The architects transformed the 24,000 sq m park in the Bolbro district into a rainwater management infrastructure and an active community space. Conceived as an extension of the communal spaces of the 'Christians Park' residential development, 'Pulsparken' complements the existing green spaces and encourages residents to relax and engage in physical activity in nature. The architects have combined the park's engineering solutions for rainwater collection with active leisure areas,

such as sports pitches, running tracks and play areas. At the heart of the park are two rainwater basins that collect water from the surrounding neighbourhoods. A wooden footbridge and a special terrace have been built over the water. These areas are designed for peaceful relaxation, observing nature and community gatherings. A special zone with a bright red surface, designed by the architects, serves as the park's visual axis and an integrated obstacle course that encourages

physical activity. The park also features dedicated areas with outdoor exercise equipment, whilst the paths are designed to ensure that pedestrian flows do not intersect. The paths have different surfaces, suited to walking, running, cycling and rollerblading. Taking humidity levels into account, zones of terrestrial plants have been designed, along with specific riparian vegetation around the ponds. Smart lighting along the paths ensures safety after dark and highlights the park's geometry.







## *Metro Square Enghave Brygge South in Copenhagen*

JUUL | FROST Arkitekter has been working on the conversion of a former industrial site into a vibrant harbour district since 2007. The practice is responsible for the master plan, detailed plans and development concept. Amendments to the local plan are currently being made in relation to the new metro line and the square, taking into account its impact on pedestrian flow. The space, almost 200 metres long, is being transformed into one of the greenest metro squares in Copenhagen.

It stands out for its harmonious blend of industrial materials (black steel, concrete) and green spaces. The metro station's elements (skylights, ventilation shafts, lifts and emergency staircases) are aesthetically integrated into a single architectural strip, echoing the industrial character of the nearby historic H. C. Ørsted power station. By emphasising sustainability and industrial identity, this project connects the transit zone with the vibrant life of the harbour community. The square features wide

recreational steps leading directly down to the water and the old quay. Green islands have been created using plants typical of an industrial environment and resistant to the harbour's climate, incorporating crushed concrete and gravel. The square is paved with solid concrete slabs, which visually unify the space and lend it a modern, clean appearance. Convenient bicycle parking areas, designed to blend into the surroundings, have been provided for residents who cycle to work every day.

