

# Inverted Home

*The right of public space for people with substance abuse problems*

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My diploma project is based on a collaboration with the company Makerhubs in Oslo. Embrace is a project where we investigate how people with different needs can coexist in Oslo's many urban spaces. In theory, we all have the same opportunities to use public space, but in practice it is still not so. Can Oslo be an inclusive city for everyone? Is it about not only planning for the society we want, but also for what already exists today. The project focuses in particular on involving drug users. Every day, drug users experience being expelled, discriminated against and not tolerated in the city's spaces. For my diploma project I will explore and start a conversation around how to create urban spaces for everyone and more specifically to allow space for people with vulnerabilities such as drug addicts.

From walking in certain area of Oslo it is easy to come across needles on the ground, people intoxicated walking along the road in Storgata or drug deals happening near Gronland station or along the Akerselva river bank. The open drug environment has been a complex debate in the politics of Oslo and more recently there has been written reports promoting the strategy of decentralisation of low threshold offers (places that provide clean equipment, hot meals and emergency accommodation) to get rid of users in the city centre. Decentralisation strategy becomes about creating even more distance between drug addicts and the general public. It increases stigmatisation and the feeling of rejections and especially doesn't solve anything, because people will always come back. As the report, *The city as a living room?* says; "People with substance abuse problems "do in public space what the rest of us hide in private. For them the city's space can be said to be an inverted home: Here they also live their private lives, but without the shielding, security and personal control that can characterise the home space".

I ask myself is there a way to create a more inclusive safe urban environment in Oslo for people with substance abuse problems, where they are accepted, safe and helped in the right way?

As a landscape architect I would like to involving myself in social complex topics, while using collaboration and participation. This has been the guiding tool through my process. I therefore propose an alternative method of research using mapping, photography, conducting interviews, model making and participative workshops. All this while working with Makershub and meeting people involved in the drug environment in Oslo. Working with people is a challenge which is time consuming and time restricting but it is absolutely primordial in projects that touch the social sphere. It is about taking risks and shifting the power towards the people that are concerned and influenced by the project, in this case, involving drug users.

The information gathered from all this different methods brings me to a mix of different suggestions on how drug users can feel more safe. The possibility of creating rooms of privacy and intimacy within public space, where drug users are allowed to be, would permit a form of ownership and acceptance for drug users. Spaces they feel safe, sheltered from the rest of the public eye while still being integrated in society. This bringing healing qualities into the complex urban fabric made of many different social practises that collide where there is a need for a more harmonious environment for peaceful coexistence. Creating spaces of activity, spaces of relaxation, sharing spaces of possible encounters, all of that while uplifting the ecology of the natural environment.

To conclude, through my education in landscape architecture I have found that there has been a gap in trying to grasp the social, collaborative and participative aspects that involves a designer in today's world. The caring of our environment is essential, and guides the practise of a landscape architect but shall we not forget that caring comes from caring of the other, and more specifically the other that is excluded and forgotten by society. I have used my diploma project to learn on how to work with certain communities and complex issues in cities and take the information found in the design process. Inverted home is a testing ground in understanding how a landscape architect can act in today's world and to inform on how to do no harm.