

The Provision of Space

Lund's City Library as Crucial Social Infrastructure

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Abstract

This study examines how the City Library in Lund functions as a form of social infrastructure and crucial urban public space. This is realized by way of a triangulation approach through the examination of two municipal documents which dictate the programming of the library, an interview with a seasoned librarian, and several semi-structured observations at the site itself. The study is grounded both in theories of public space and the development of public space in the 21st century, and in particular utilizes Latham and Layton's (2019) conceptual framework of social infrastructure to analyze the value of the library as a public space. The results show that two primary groups make use of the space, students and pensioners. Primarily, younger people visit the City Library in order to access the space itself, while older people visit the City Library in order to access the functions provided within the space. The social value of the library lies mainly in its unconditional access and varied abundance of functions, which in turn could be seen to contribute to a more equal city. The findings contribute to the understanding of modern day urban public spaces, and which part public libraries might play as accessible indoor spaces in the city.

Key words: public space, social infrastructure, public libraries, Lund's City Library, usage, provision

Sammanfattning

Denna studie undersöker hur Lunds stadsbibliotek fungerar som en form av social infrastruktur och som ett viktigt offentligt rum i staden. Detta genomförs med en trianguleringsmetod genom en granskning av två kommunala dokument som styr bibliotekets verksamhetsinriktning, en intervju med en erfaren bibliotekarie, och ett antal semi-strukturerade observationer vid platsen. Studien grundar sig både i teorier om offentliga rum och utvecklingen av dessa i det tjugoförsta århundradet, och använder i synnerhet Latham och Laytons (2019) konceptuella ramverk social infrastruktur för att analysera bibliotekets sociala värde som ett offentligt rum. Resultaten visar att främst två huvudgrupper använder rummet: studenter och pensionärer. I första hand besöker yngre personer biblioteket för att få tillgång till dess ytor, medan äldre människor besöker biblioteket för att ta del av de funktioner som erbjuds. Bibliotekets sociala värde ligger främst i dess ovillkorliga tillgänglighet och varierade utbud av funktioner, vilket i sin tur kan anses bidra till en mer jämlik stad. Studien bidrar till förståelsen av moderna offentliga rum och vilken roll folkbibliotek kan spela som tillgängliga inomhusutrymmen i staden.

Nyckelord: offentliga rum, social infrastruktur, folkbibliotek, Lunds stadsbibliotek, användning, tillhandahållande

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1. Introduction

In a world facing increasing threats to democracy, public spaces serve important roles as accessible meeting places for all (Audunson 2019, p. 2). Public spaces have long been regarded as integral sites in the city, beginning with the agoras of Ancient Greece where democratic forums were held to discuss community matters and political ideals (Harvey 2006, p. 1). In recent decades, however, public spaces have begun to be increasingly targeted and restricted, ceding previously public territory to the private sector (Németh & Schmidt 2011, p. 6).

Public space matters, and is worth studying, because it is where citizens are allowed to express themselves in the city, be it through socializing or through political demonstrations, as Setha Low writes they are *“vital for people to socialize, learn, and play, and they form an infrastructure of inclusion and exclusion”* (Low 2023, p. 2).

Libraries in particular have served important functions in cities, with a history ranging as far back as the library of Alexandria, serving as both providers of information and being of the unique ability of functioning as open indoor spaces available for community discussion (Mattern 2014). They continue to be widely used and in 2022, 3.5 million individuals in Sweden borrowed at least one object, be it a book or another form of media, from a public library (Kungliga biblioteket 2023). But they can also be inclusive sites, and have shown to serve as vital spaces where visibility and provision of aid for marginalized groups such as migrants have been made possible (Audunson 2019, p. 6). Furthermore, as digitalization increases across all facets of modern society, libraries are seeing their function and purpose slowly change, and are having to adapt to these changes (Audunson 2019, p. 1).

1.1 Research problem

As public spaces are increasingly being restructured as a result of neoliberal urban planning strategies, public libraries in particular emerge as highly relevant spaces to research, as they are one of a few indoor public spaces which are completely accessible without needing to pay some kind of fee to enter, the original promise of the agora. However, since the role of the public

library has also changed a considerable amount in the past few decades, their future seems clouded in uncertainty. This study seeks to explore these contradicting developments in order to better understand the social value that public libraries provide for a city. This is of relevance both because of said infringements on public space in general, but also because research on libraries has historically tended to focus on their role as a provider of information, neglecting the social aspects and values which they provide (Audunson 2019, p. 2). Here, the focus on how Lund's City Library acts as a crucial form of social infrastructure becomes particularly relevant to study. By utilizing a conceptual framework developed by Latham and Layton (2019), social infrastructure allows us to study and value those public spaces that may be taken for granted, showcasing their potential to contribute to a more tolerant and just city.

1.2 Aims of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how specifically the City Library in Lund functions as a form of social infrastructure through a qualitative case study. In doing so the study aims to find the underlying factors behind this function by using social infrastructure as a conceptual framework. Furthermore, it seeks to find what the usage of the public space indicates about Lund's City Library's value as an urban public space. In short it is a case study which uses the City Library to explore the role of the public library as a public space in modern society. The choice of research questions aims to reflect the public library's unique status as a public space.

1.3 Research questions

Thus, the research questions this paper aims to answer are:

- How does Lund's City Library function as a form of social infrastructure, and which factors contribute to this function?
- What does the case study indicate about the social value of urban public spaces?

1.4 Scope and delimitations

The paper does not intend to evaluate all of the public libraries in Lund. There are five in total not including school or university libraries. Instead it focuses on the main library Stadsbiblioteket (tr. *the City Library*), and looks at the library as a whole. The study thus also includes the entrance area just outside the library, the adjoining café (inside the same building) etc. As such, it is also not a general evaluation of the library habits of Lund citizens. It is the site itself, Stadsbiblioteket, and its usage which is in focus. Choosing to analyze all five smaller neighbourhood libraries would be out of the scope of the study. The City Library was furthermore chosen because of its larger scale, it is the centerpiece of the library system in Lund and any larger trends vis-à-vis public libraries as public spaces are likely to be more apparent there, and then move outwards.

2. Background

2.1 History of public libraries

Public libraries as institutions have a history which spans more than 150 years, coming into their own in the long nineteenth century. Through the introduction of the Public Libraries Act in 1850, the United Kingdom sought to provide another outlet for the working class with regards to receiving an education and becoming more cultured in the arts (Rooney-Browne & McMenemy 2010, p. 455). The era in question was marked by the 1848 Springtime of Nations, and the following decades' inter-European project with its advocacy for cultural cultivation. Through pompous planning and building of opera houses and museums, national libraries such as the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris were another form of opulent expression of the very public dedication to a high standard of culture of the time. Between 1848 to 1880 the number of libraries in Europe expanded twelve times, from roughly 400 to close to 5 000 (Hobsbawm 1975, p. 334-35). The historical context of public libraries is very important to realize as much of the vision for the public libraries of the 19th century still lives on today.

2.2 History of Lund's libraries



Figure 1. Construction of the City Library, 1969. (Source: Lunds Stadsarkiv)

Through the establishment of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate in the 1860s, work was begun in Lund to establish the city's first public library. What commenced as a single bookshelf put together by the church assembly had by 1870 moved into the attic of what is today the elementary school Vårfruskolan (tr. *the Vårfru School*). The library's available books were printed in a catalog from which people could borrow, although it was not completely free since a semester fee had to be paid each semester. The church-run library also had to compete with the Workers Library, however in 1919 when the Social Democratic Party established a majority in the city council it was decided that the various smaller libraries would be consolidated into one library: Lund's Stadsbibliotek (tr. *City Library*). In 1928, opposite Lund's Cathedral, Domkyrkan, the new library opened. It was quickly established that it had been heavily under-dimensioned, and it was decided that the library should yet again move. On top of a former medieval cemetery, the new City Library, based on the plans of Danish architect

Flemming Lassen, moved to its current location on St. Petri Kyrkogata in 1970, after decades of planning. Northwest of Petriplatsen, the site of the current City Library, was land which was owned by the municipality, and there had previously been ideas of constructing a music venue on the site. The building of the library sparked a heated debate in Lund at the time, with critics questioning the decision to raze older buildings to make way for the library. Ultimately, the protests were largely unsuccessful, although the library was built a little bit more to the west than first planned, as some of the old neighbourhood was demolished. The new, much more modern library was a major success, and in its first year of opening more than 500 000 books were borrowed from the library (André n. a.). Thus, for the enabling of the public space that the library has become, spatial interventions have been necessary. The infrastructural network did not materialize out of thin air, it was born out of conflicts in the city. As seen in figure 2 and 3 below, also the areas outside of the library have evolved, turning what was a parking lot into a green urban plaza.



Figure 2. Petriplatsen in front of the City Library in 1969. (Source: Lunds Stadsarkiv).



Figure 3. Petriplatsen today. (Source: my photograph)

3. Literature review

This chapter discusses what previous literature says about public space and their development, and how public libraries might fit into public space discussions, with the chapter moving towards how libraries can be seen as a form of infrastructure, ultimately arriving at the fourth chapter where the thesis' analytical framework of social infrastructure will be described.

3.1 Public space

In distinguishing between public space and private space, it must be said that public space is not necessarily the opposite of private space. This paper assumes the stance that public spaces are spaces which are accessible by foot to anyone, without restrictive controls or pressure to consume, implied or not. For instance, a shopping center is available for anyone to enter but once inside it is implied that you must purchase something in order to be there. Put in other words by the UN Habitat public spaces are: *“places that are publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive”* (Scruggs 2020, p. 8). In the Swedish planning and building laws, the term “common place” is the one used for streets, parks, and other outside places (Boverket 2023). However, this term becomes inadequate if we are to study places from more perspectives than the boundaries imposed by planning laws, which is where the term “public space” becomes quite useful. In one sense, public libraries have been characterized as semi-public spaces as they do require the entrance through doors and are tied into a specific social activity. Németh and Schmidt further write that *“Indeed, spaces that attempt to do everything well often fail to do anything well.”* (Németh and Schmidt 2011, p. 9). As a public space, a library could also fall into the sub-category of being a public facility, which also includes the outside area (Dolley 2025, p. 9). Ultimately, as public space is the most commonly used term in literature, that is the one that will be used in this study. A plethora of research on the subject theorizes public space as the arena or forum in which Jürgen Habermas' “public sphere” comes together. Highlighting public spaces' ability to bring together people and foster democratic thought (Audunson 2019, p.2). Here we can identify a dialectic relationship between the public and the library, as Joanne Dolley quotes Karen Pundsack: *“The public is essential to libraries just as libraries are essential to the public”* (Dolley 2025, p. 10-11).

3.2 Public space in the 21st century

Peter Marcuse (2006), in writing on public space, has detailed how existential security fears in cities have evolved in the 21st century to deliberately constrict public spaces. In positing the public space as an integral arena for promotion of democracy in the city, aligning with French theorist Henri Lefebvre, Marcuse (2006, p. 922) believes public spaces to be symbols of the city's openness. However, largely as a response to the 9/11 attacks, or through the political use of the attacks, various government and security actors have played upon the need for "securing" the city. Crucially though, according to Marcuse (2006, p. 922), these security measures must be understood as ways of securing the city from the people rather than for the people. Through intensive lobbying a fear is manufactured in order to create a reason for its own existence. This is because *"In the controlled city, rights can best be exercised at home, in private, not in public."* (Marcuse 2006, p. 923).

Critical to this is the substitution of the private spaces to fulfill the functions of public spaces. A strong example is the shopping mall which has an inherent commodity exchange incentive to its design and usage, but he also highlights the role of bookstore cafés in undermining the role of the public library. At the forefront of public space infractions is the production of an existential insecurity in the city. That is, a perceived sense of danger to one's life without a specific pinpoint towards who would be posing that threat. This is seen as merely a ploy which preys upon the fears of the city's residents to take control of the urban landscape in service of capital (Marcuse 2006, p. 925). French philosopher Gilles Deleuze similarly argued that the practices of everyday life are now moderated by an ever-present mode of surveillance, which through the digitalization of society builds up and analyzes human patterns, and crucially since everything is stored, it also creates a memory bank of human activities (Graham 2012, p. 141). When analyzing public spaces, these are important questions to keep in mind in order to understand for whom a space is for, who is excluded and who is included, and what measures are used to moderate this.

Don Mitchell (2017, p. 503) takes a further step, and through returning to Lefebvre, writes that public space is a struggle, while simultaneously being sites where forms of struggle take place. Attempts to control or regulate public space must be seen as part of a larger project, one in which

capitalism necessitates the “abstraction” of public spaces. Important in “securing” the public space is an increasing pressure put on unhoused people, as public spaces must be rid of “unattractive” elements. Restrictive measures are inserted into the space itself in order to exclude one or several groups of people. Mitchell (2017), similarly as Marcuse (2006), points to the increasingly entrepreneurially driven urbanism, wherein it is not public spaces, but private spaces, which are supposed to be the new forums of sociality. This closing down and constricting of public spaces is believed by Mitchell (2017) to be inherent to the city under capitalism, to “abstract” spaces and rid them of heterogeneity. Thus, it cannot be said that all public spaces will inevitably look the same physically, yet in purpose and use the goal is total homogeneity. In other words, the domination of a space’s exchange value over its use value (Mitchell 2017, p. 512). This is a similar development put forth by David Harvey, *“In the previous social order, the city had been ‘a horizon of possible collective action and understanding.’ But, concludes Clark, ‘all such horizons must be made invisible in societies organized under the aegis of the commodity.’”* (Harvey 2006, p. 6). In light of these developments, Donald A. Barclay summarizes the value of public libraries well:

“The post-911 tightening of security in public buildings of all sorts—coupled with the increasing privatization of what were once public spaces—has left public libraries as perhaps the last remaining indoor public spaces where an individual can remain from opening until closing without needing any reason to be there and without having to spend any money.” (Barclay 2017, p. 267).

These patterns provide important context to how public space has been treated in the past decades, which directly impacts also how libraries are framed and, in turn, act as public spaces today.

3.3 The library as a public space

Although the public library still acts as a public space, it does not function in the same way as it did at its conception. Especially, the role of the library has gradually shifted since its conception of a publicly accessible space of information with the advent of the internet. No longer is it

necessary to find a physical book, when the same information can be found on the internet within a few clicks (Rooney-Browne & McMenemy 2010, p. 456). A majority of recent research on public libraries take their grounding in German philosopher Jürgen Habermas' theories on the "public sphere". The public sphere is according to Habermas all of those conversations where private people are joined together constituting a public (Audunson 2019, p. 2). This is a new development since the turn of the century, largely because of library research's previous US and UK dominance neglecting non-English theory (Audunson 2019, p. 3). Aabø, Audunson and Vårheim (2010, p. 25) in the article "How do libraries function as meeting places?", conclude that libraries serve as very complex meeting places with different purposes for different groups of people. For some it is a familiar place where you meet people from your community, while for others it is a way of coming into contact with "the other", people of another background who they might not normally interact with. Both Audunson (2019) and Aabø, Audunson and Vårheim's (2010) research take their grounding in the discourse of libraries, focusing on the conversations that are held in the library, but the usage of public sphere theories remain relevant because of their influence also on research on public spaces.

Rooney-Browne and McMenemy (2010) study the role of the library as a public space, also drawing on Habermas' "public sphere" theories, and how that very role has come to be challenged with the advent of the internet. They begin with highlighting libraries' potential as spaces very open for forming communities across socio-economic and demographic groups. However, the merger of libraries and commodity sales has slowly begun to corrupt this latent potential. In the United Kingdom specifically, bookstores began to appropriate some of the services connected with libraries such as attempting to create spaces which felt more like living rooms than a café (Rooney-Browne & McMenemy 2010, p. 457). However, the opposite also appeared to happen, as the UK government in response advised libraries to take on more private inspirations. In practice this meant actions such as premiering best selling books, utilizing promotion campaigns and integrating coffee shops into the libraries. While these strategies saw moderate success, some commenters believed the commodification to take away from the library's true purpose. That is, to provide the space for the public to come together, instead of "*blurring the distinction between consumerism and citizenship*" (Rooney-Browne & McMenemy 2010, p. 458), which is what appeared to happen. In a particularly outrageous

scheme, libraries in Milton Keynes and East Renfrewshire entered into a partnership with Amazon, where their library websites “encouraged” users to buy the books on Amazon instead of borrowing them, and in return the library would receive a percentage of the Amazon sale (Rooney-Browne & McMenemy 2010, p. 460). The authors conclude that although with the onset of new services provided by libraries creating new opportunities for reaching out to more people, they also risk devaluing in the long term their ability to foster a meaningful public space for both sharing of knowledge and creating democratic communities (Rooney-Browne & McMenemy 2010, p. 462). This operation of the library as an entrepreneurial venture, turning what should be a public space for all into a means of collecting revenue, follows larger entrepreneurial urbanism trends.

3.4 The library as infrastructures(s)

Cauê Capillé (2018) has furthermore compiled research on different perspectives of public libraries as infrastructure(s). In continuing with Rooney-Browne and McMenemy’s (2010) library research, he utilizes this quote by Imholz: *“the 21st century library will be a place to access people, not information”* (Capillé 2018, p. 409). Since the internet has made all information accessible, it is the social aspect which differentiates the library from other sources of information. Capillé (2018) theorizes that despite the rapid development of technology in the past few decades the library *“still frames social relationships in the modes of its traditional ideologies of politics and culture”* (Capillé 2018, p. 410). He divides the public library into several categories, and he finds that they serve several different purposes, reflecting larger power relations. These are: as Politically Charged Architecture; a Building Type; the Spatial Organization of Knowledge; Educational Institutions; and Open Access and Social Control.

The library as Politically Charged Architecture indicates that as a large space with a free-for-all indoor aspect, the public library is extremely valuable politically. This is also not a notion that has gone unnoticed by governments, as enormous national libraries continue to be constructed because of their social value (Capillé 2018, p. 409). One example of such a library is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, a complex merging the National Library and National Opera, inaugurated in 2017 with a \$630 million price tag (Makowska 2021, p. 3). As a Building

Type public libraries are deeply linked to communication, as a mode dedicated to the preservation and furtherance of idea and information. (Capillé 2018, p. 410) And as Education Institutions, libraries have always been connected to educating people, as Lund's first library located inside Vårfruskolan demonstrates (André n. a.).

Capillé argues that one of the most commonly held positions is that public libraries function as the Spatial Organization of Knowledge. That is, through the way in which the space is laid out with different sections of the library holding different information, this reflects a fixed set of knowledge. This in turn is a problem as it requires an actor to actively have divided the access to information within the space, which makes how people use and interact the space decided based on this very divide. Capillé (2018) details the work of Thomas Markus who suggests that above all else buildings are primarily social objects (Capillé 2018, p. 410). There is thus a conflict between providing unilateral access to a consensus necessary information, and the decision of which information should be presented. However, there is also a difference in types of libraries. The collegiate libraries which have a longer history differ from public libraries as well as the aforementioned prestigious national libraries in the way that information is presented and spatialized. National libraries for example tend to be more archival in nature and function as a way of calcifying a nation's heritage, whereas the purpose of public libraries has always been to provide "good reading" (Capillé 2018, p. 412-413). It can therefore be reasoned that libraries do not provide all the information, eschewing radical material in service of turning the library into a social space more akin to a living room.

Capillé further discusses public libraries through the lens of Open Access and Social Control. Certainly important is the fact that there are librarians present on the floor, who serve both as custodians and controllers. Since information desks tend to be placed so as to have as much perspective of the library as possible, this has been problematized by some as a form of control. But another important aspect is the notion that it is not the librarians, but actually the visitors who regulate themselves within the space. With the equal parts openness of the space and designated areas, it is believed that as one is acutely aware of being perceived, behaviour is modulated (Capillé 2018, p. 418-419).

Shannon Mattern (2014) proposes that libraries must be thought of “*as a network of integrated, mutually reinforcing, evolving infrastructures*” (Mattern 2020, p. 2). Within libraries spatial, technological, intellectual, and social infrastructures inform the library as a site and are equal parts informed by each other. Furthermore, she believes that libraries serve a very important role for marginalized groups of people such as migrants and seniors not only through the prospect of building a community, but through the available services such as internet access and access to professional help with writing a resumé. As funds for all manners of social welfare programs are cut, local libraries are one of a few indoor places available for access to those abandoned by the increased stranglehold market forces hold over the city. Yet, this also places a tremendous pressure on not just the infrastructural capabilities of libraries but also those staff members who might find themselves having to help provide care in ways which might not be in alignment with the original purpose of libraries. It is the opinion of some librarians that a lot of people do not visit the library with a specific purpose in mind, merely to take part in a community (Mattern 2014).

4. Analytical framework

Building on Capillé (2018) and Mattern’s (2014) coupling of libraries and infrastructure, this study takes its grounding in the conceptualization of public spaces as “social infrastructure”, utilizing it as an overarching framework to structure and interpret the material. Developed out of sociologist Eric Klinenberg’s call for highlighting the social importance of infrastructures, Alan Latham and Jack Layton (2019, p. 2) see it as a particularly useful concept when studying those public spaces where the “publicness” of the space might not be as explicitly obvious as within a plaza or a park. They summarize it as: “*In short, social infrastructure refers to the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection.*” (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 3), which makes it a relevant tool for analyzing the tangled functions of the public library. For this study, social infrastructure thus functions as the lens through which the City Library as a public space can be examined regarding how it produces social value for the city.

Social infrastructure is understood through four analytical categories: 1) the actual infrastructure; 2) publicness and public space; 3) sociality and encounter; and 4) the politics of provision. These four dimensions are deeply intertwined and inform how public space can be studied through the lens of social infrastructure (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 1). In this thesis, these four dimensions are used as analytical categories through which the empirical material is interpreted. These four categories guide and structure the methods used and the presentation and analysis of the empirical material.

Here it is necessary to define what differentiates the two concepts of social infrastructure and public space. If, as mentioned earlier, public spaces are those spaces accessible without a profit motive, then the concept of social infrastructure becomes the way to research public spaces and highlight their merit from a larger urban social point of view. When utilizing social infrastructure to research public spaces, it also helps us see the dialectical aspect of public spaces. How “good” public spaces are produced by the public which uses them, and how the public which uses the space is influenced by the design, maintenance, and provision of the public space. To summarize, when analyzing the City Library through social infrastructure, public libraries emerge as spaces both being actively produced by its provision of infrastructure, but also through the sociality of its usage. This is where the components which social infrastructure depend on become important.

Below the four dimensions of social infrastructure are explained. These are 1) the actual infrastructure; 2) publicness and public space; 3) sociality and encounter; and 4) the politics of provision.

Firstly, by researching public spaces through *the actual infrastructure*, public libraries materialize as places embedded within various networks, and its relations to the rest of the city become apparent. Infrastructure is what facilitates social activity, and it is crucial to see this infrastructure not just as the physical material but also as relational (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 3). Crucial to social infrastructure, and in particular libraries, is the aspect of “learning with the space”, that is as a space whose social codes become more apparent the more time one spends there. It is durable, and its primary function of borrowing books is largely unchangeable. This is the robustness of the networks behind the library, the actual infrastructure, that allows it to

become social infrastructure, and also makes certain that what libraries are used for cannot be changed easily. When using actual infrastructure as a category, it is thus not meant to repeat the overarching concept of social infrastructure, but instead serves to describe those conditions (material, political, etc.) which enable a public space to function as social infrastructure (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 3). Through studying the actual infrastructure, questions which emerge and guide the study are: how does the physical space enable or constrain people? How is the public space connected to its surroundings?

Secondly, seeing public spaces through *publicness and public life*, good social infrastructure may produce a more tolerant and empathetic public within its space. When discussing the forms of social life and publicness which are formed, we must not only think about face-to-face conversations but also community-building as a form of publicness. This also requires a sense of trust, both in one another and in the maintenance of the infrastructure itself. Out of this comes a sort of “surplus” social value, where access to public space can produce a more tolerant publicness. Here, we can see the value of public spaces in producing a more inclusive and just city. Nevertheless, one cannot only focus on the more positive aspects of publicness. This focus also requires paying attention to eventual exclusions from the space, and the ways in which public space can be unequally distributed and produced (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 4-5). Through studying publicness and public life, questions which emerge and guide the study are: who uses the space? Which groups are included or excluded?

Thirdly, when studying how public spaces encourage *sociality and encounter*, social infrastructure is relevant because of the way it as a concept “affords sociality”. As spaces in a city that are explicitly produced to encourage social interaction, one of the strongest potentials of public spaces lie in their ability to encourage spontaneous conviviality. The authors bring up as an example the way children’s playgrounds might inspire parents to converse with each other, thus being brought together in a social setting they normally would never meet in. Libraries are also highlighted as spaces that are not necessarily pre-determined. Certainly the primary intended purpose is the borrowing of books, but it is very versatile as a public space. For marginalized groups, such social infrastructures are also crucial (Latham & Layton 2019, p 5-7). Through

studying sociality and encounter, questions which emerge and guide the study are: what kinds of encounters are facilitated by the space? Do people sit in groups or by themselves?

Finally, seeing social infrastructure as a *politics of provision*, the library emerges as a crucial factor in providing for both people and society. Equal access to social infrastructure increases people's physical and mental health, which in turn benefits society as a whole. Abundance is therefore important, and the authors highlight the library's potential for this goal. They thus see the more functions provided as something characterizing a "good" public space. Similarly, when these functions are not provided it may be seen as a deliberate way of strangling the city. Additionally, another important factor is that public spaces are maintained and cared for, so as to be welcoming (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 8-9). This does not equal the "securing of the city" through surveillance as described by Peter Marcuse (2006), but rather the physical aspects of maintaining a space's cleanliness and not letting it deteriorate materially. Other components include accessibility, and that provision corresponds to people's needs, allowing the flexibility of a space. Through the politics of provision, public spaces are scaled up, and we can see them as reflective of municipal strategies. Through studying the politics of provision, questions which emerge and guide the study are: what functions are provided by the space, and how do these reflect users' needs? How is the space maintained?

Table 1. *The four categories which enable social infrastructure.*

Social infrastructure categories:	What the categories "do":
The actual infrastructure	The conditions (material, political, relational) which allow for strong social infrastructure.
Publicness and public life	The larger public that is produced in the public space, that in turn helps form strong social infrastructure.
Sociality and encounter	The ways in which the public space facilitates day-to-day meetings between people from different backgrounds.
Politics of provision	The functions provided by, and the governance of, public spaces, and how they reflect the needs of people.

Thus, when public spaces, like a library, are understood through the prism of social infrastructure as a framework, we can better begin to understand their social value as urban sites available to all.

5. Methodology

This chapter presents an account of the methodology of the thesis, detailing the research design, the methods used, the data analysis, and ethical considerations.

5.1 Research design

This study is a qualitative case study on Lund's City Library's worth as a public space, investigating it through the lens of the concept of social infrastructure. In adopting a worthwhile methodology this study has consulted Christine Mady and Hossam Hewidy's (2024) article "The public library building as nexus for social interactions: Cases from Helsinki" on how two public libraries in peripheral Helsinki function as public spaces. They utilized a triangulation approach, conducting document analysis, observations, and interviews with librarians. This study is not a replica of Mady and Hewidy's (2024) study, but it draws upon their research in order to discover valuable components to consider when observing in a public library. Both studies are anchored around public libraries as public spaces, but whereas their study does not utilize a specific theoretical framework, my study of Lund's City Library uses social infrastructure as the entrance to analyzing and understanding public spaces. Yvonne Rydin (2021, p. 197) recommends taking inspiration from specific methodologies used in a similar case study in order to maximize the advantages of the chosen theoretical approach. The study has also adopted a triangulation approach with the usage of three different methods, where each method is meant to complement each other rather than stand alone, which serves the purpose of providing several perspectives on a case (Denscombe 2010, p. 167). The methods adopted for this study are: document analysis, semi-structured observations, and interviewing.

5.2 Document analysis

Document analysis was used as a method in order to both provide information and a potential rationale behind why the space is laid out in the way that it is, and what type of usage the library is attempting to promote. Furthermore, they act as complements to the interview data, corroborating or denying the librarian's point of view on the subject. The documents in questions are sourced from the municipality, and are governance documents meant to provide the blueprint for the function of the libraries and cultural institutions in the municipality of Lund. When conducting document analysis it is important to question the validity or intent behind what is written (Denscombe 2010, p. 190), but since they largely detail policy goals there is little risk of information being provided in an untruthful manner. Additionally, the documents are of strong merit because of their relative recency. They were written at the end of 2023, and purport to detail functions between the years 2024–2030, of which there are still several years left, so they do not risk being outdated (Denscombe 2010, p. 196). Bryman (2016, p. 546) highlights document analysis as a valuable method because of the fact that they contain data not specifically created for the research. He makes the argument that the value in documents lies not necessarily in the supposed reality they produce, but rather they should be seen as part of an ecosystem of documents and be seen as written for a specific readership. Documents alone are not representative of how an organization works (Bryman 2016, p. 560-561), which is why they in this study work in tandem with the other chosen methods.

The analysis was conducted by carefully reading the documents, and extracting important quotes and statements from the municipality-written text. This was done through a deductive qualitative analysis, wherein pre-determined themes were applied to each document. In practice this generated the themes: the actual infrastructure, publicness and public life, sociality and encounter, politics of provision. Since the primary focus of the study is to find out how the City Library functions as social infrastructure, using themes informed by theory is a form of analysis suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2023, p. 293) in order to maximize coherence in the work. The documents were thus coded with the help of Latham and Layton's (2019) understanding of social infrastructure as a concept in order to maintain a similar and rigorous methodological context throughout the study. See Appendix 2 for an example of how this was done.

In essence the purpose of using document analysis as a method was for it to work in conjunction with the other two methods, to see if there are any contradictions between the municipality's goals for the library, the actual usage of the physical space, and the librarian's opinions on the library. It could be seen as a limitation that the themes guided the analysis, rather than the analysis guiding the themes, but since the purpose of this thesis is to understand the City Library and public space as social infrastructure, this method of analysis was decided upon in order to maintain academic rigor. Ultimately, I prioritized a consistency in analysis across the three methods utilized.

5.2.1 Material

Below, the documents used for the document analysis are briefly presented and summarized. These are the Biblioteksprogram (tr. *Library Program*) and the Kulturprogram (tr. *Culture Program*).

Table 2. *The material used for document analysis.*

Document	Published	Content	Purpose for thesis
Library Program	2023	A document which details the intended and ideal functions of the libraries in the municipality of Lund. By the Library Law from 2013, all municipalities in Sweden are required to create such a document. The document has a strategic purpose and covers the years 2024-2030. It was put together by the Culture and Leisure Board and is also a document supposed to act as a guideline in collaborations with outside actors such as civil society and Lund University. For the municipality's public libraries (not university, school, or kindergarten libraries), they	Describes the principles under which the library is meant to be operated, and the decisions which inform its spatial design.

		present three primary goals: 1) Democracy and participation, 2) Cultivation and culture, 3) Sustainability and life quality.	
Culture Program	2023	A document which details the general strategic work with regards to cultural institutions within Lund municipality. Similar to the Biblioteksprogram it covers the years 2024-30, and it concerns a few similar points as that document. It was also put together by the Culture and Leisure Board. For the municipality's cultural institutions they present three primary goals: 1) Democracy and diversity, 2) Strengthened cultural infrastructure, 3) Cultural innovation – creative expansion.	Describes the goals for Lund's cultural institutions, which is of value in order to understand how the library fits into a larger network of cultural institutions.

5.3 Observation

To best capture the actual usage of the library in order to answer the research questions, semi-structured observations were decided upon as valuable and the most useful observational method.

As a starting point, an observation which was completely unstructured was conducted before the actual retrieving of data commenced. This unstructured observation served the purpose of generating a “sense of the place”, so as to ensure that the first semi-structured observations would not be conducted without any previous sense of the rhythms and ambiances of the site (Tabačková 2024, p. 211). No data from this observation was recorded, nor used for the purpose of analysis. There is an important difference between conducting site visits, and site analysis. Site analysis is akin to the case study, and in this aspect site visits become part of the larger site analysis. Site visits are valuable to use in planning disciplines because of the knowledge of the built environment that is gathered (Tabačková 2024, p. 199).

The semi-structured observations were carried out on three occasions, twice on weekdays and once on the weekend. They were also carried out at different times, to see if the usage changes during different hours of the day. The first visit was conducted on 3 May 2026, a Sunday, between 13:00-14:00. The second visit was conducted on 4 May 2026, a Monday, between 10:30-11:30. The third visit was conducted on 6 May 2026, a Wednesday, between 14:30-15:30. Since the project was only carried out by one person, there was some degree of mobility during the observations, as it was not possible to cover the entirety of the library at the same time. The observations were thus a combination of stationary and mobile observation.

The semi-structured observations were conducted in both a participatory and concealed manner. This meant that as a researcher I placed myself in spaces where people were conducting a similar activity. In practice this meant either sitting in study areas writing on a laptop or picking up a magazine. But I did not make my role known to those using the space. However, since people sat by themselves, often wearing headphones, my presence was rather concealed. Participatory observations are useful for the way that they retain the naturalness of the setting which is under study (Denscombe 2010, p. 182). In the chapter "How to Study Public Space", Setha Low (2022, p. 215) also highlights participant observation as a particularly meaningful method when researching public space specifically. Since the library is also a form of refuge for some groups of people, I did not want to appear conspicuous to people, in the hopes of maintaining as natural a setting as possible. Zuzana Tabačková (2024, p. 206) further recommends going beyond merely using your eyes, instead activating all your senses. This was relevant in gauging noise levels for example.

The protocol forming the basis for the semi-structured observations were inspired by Mady and Hewidy's (2024) work, while the specific questions which grounded the observation guide were inspired by the social infrastructure cornerstones which Latham and Layton (2019) denote in researching public spaces. The protocol by Mady and Hewidy (2024, p. 5), which inspired what I would record, included observing gathering places, noise levels, aspects of space appropriation, interactions, surprises, frequented facilities, and user profiles, within two Helsinki libraries. Using social infrastructure as a starting point, the data from the observations were divided into

four categories, see appendix 2 for an example of how this was done. By consulting literature before conducting observations, it is beneficial for the researcher to note the features which are necessary and most relevant for the research, in order to retrieve the most informative amount of material given the limited time schedule (Denscombe 2010, p. 177).

Nevertheless, although there were guidelines set up beforehand regarding what information in the space was going to be observed, I felt it necessary to allow for unexpected patterns and usages to be allowed to appear. Allowing for unexpected observations becomes of particular relevance during the mobile aspects of the observations, being able to complement the more fixed aspects of the observation (Tabačková 2024, p. 204-205). When observing I attempted to stroll as naturally as possible through the space, only writing down field notes once the mobile observation was completed. Notes were written down in an observation protocol, and included both descriptive and reflexive notes.

It must be said however that because of the availability of the interview subject, all of the semi-structured observations were carried out after the interview had been conducted. There is thus a slight risk that the librarian's answers could have influenced and clouded my judgment of the usage of the site.

5.4 Interview

On 23 April 2026 at 13:00 a video interview was conducted with a librarian from the City Library via the online platform Microsoft Teams, at the request of the interviewee. When it was time to conduct the interview, the interviewee also asked not to have their webcam on, but consented to the recording of their voice. The choice of interview subject was not made by me, rather the librarian in question responded to a general email sent to the City Library's public email address. The librarian had been employed at the City Library for almost 20 years, and could thus be considered very knowledgeable in the field. The interview lasted for roughly 30 minutes. According to Denscombe (2010, p. 154), interviews lend themselves as a valuable method when seeking information on the experiences of people. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner, to have some basic guidelines but also to allow flexibility depending

on the answers of the interviewee and with the order of subjects covered. Semi-structured interviews also have the advantage of allowing the interviewee to speak more freely, allowing them to elaborate on points that they find valuable (Denscombe 2010, p. 155). The questions that were prepared beforehand were furthermore inspired by the four categories enabling good social infrastructure, see appendix 1 for how this was done. The interview was recorded so as to ensure that all the information was correctly preserved. It was stored locally, and the audio was transcribed through the help of the program Sunet Scribe. As the interview was conducted in Swedish, I manually translated those parts of the interview which were of interest to the results and analysis section.

For this study the interview mainly serves the purpose of complementing the semi-structured observations. By gaining the knowledge of the librarian, the experiences from the observations are deepened and complexified. Denscombe (2010, p. 167) recommends that interview data should not always be taken as pure fact, but be complemented with document and observation, in order to verify the interviewee's answers. Additionally, the librarian as a subject possesses much more insight into the value of the library as a public space for marginalized groups of people, which might be difficult to read in the space with an observation. As executors of the Library Program, and as custodians on the floor responsible for ensuring the functioning of the library, there could certainly be a degree of impartiality. However, with as much responsibility librarians hold, this does not seem particularly likely, and as revealed in their answers they did not present an idealized view about their way of working. It is a limitation of the study that an interview was only conducted with a single person. The interviewee provides expert insight on the subject due to their long-term experience, however, it must be noted that the librarian's answers cannot be expected to answer for the whole institution, but rather reflects the experience of one key actor within the space.

5.5 Ethical considerations

To ensure a rigorous research process, work on the study has throughout been performed in a manner that is systematic in line of qualitative research. Because of the specific nature of the public space, that of being a place indoors, much care had to be put into ethical considerations.

As the library is a place where marginalized and vulnerable people sometimes visit, the role of the observer (researcher) comes into question (Creswell & Creswell 2023, p. 202). Additionally, conducting observations in places where the observer would clearly be out of place, such as the children's part of the library, was naturally discarded. Observations regarding the demographics of library users were kept deliberately very vague and very general. No assumptions were made towards users' sexuality or ethnic origin. The only assumptions made were regarding age groups of visitors. No strict guidelines were set regarding exact ages, but it was noted whether people in general were younger or older.

There were also some considerations regarding conducting short interviews with users of the library, but after hearing the librarian's explicit statements regarding the library as a place where one can visit unbothered, as well as experiencing in person the general rhythm of self-regulation, I decided against this.

6. Results & analysis

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented and then analyzed. The two research questions which this chapter answers are: How does Lund's City Library function as a form of social infrastructure, and which factors shape this function? What does the usage of Lund's City Library indicate about the value of urban public spaces?

The results are divided into the four categories that make up the concept of social infrastructure: the actual infrastructure, sociality and encounter, publicness and public life, and the politics of provision. For each section the results are first briefly summarized, then analyzed in conjunction with more detailed presentations of the results. As these are categories which are not meant to be understood as isolated from each other, but rather as deeply entwined and interrelated there might be some degree of overlap between categories. At the end of the chapter, a larger summary of the public library as social infrastructure is presented.

6.1 The actual infrastructure

As Latham and Layton (2019, p. 2) write, the infrastructure of a place must be understood relationally in the city, and as part of a web of inclusion and exclusion. A space, and especially a public space, cannot be understood as an isolated structure. Thus, when analyzing the actual infrastructure which stimulates social infrastructure, what emerges are several things. In the library it was observed that large square windows allow for much sunlight to light up the inside, but also allows users a clear view of the outside world, connecting interior and exterior. It is not a space which feels distinctly disparate from the city. The librarian highlighted the unique nature of the site itself, saying that:

“[The library] is a small universe in concentrated form, or you could even define it as Lund in a concentrated form.” (Interview with librarian, 2026-04-23, *my translation*)

This is a quote which very poignantly reflects the role of infrastructure in a city, and how that infrastructure contributes to sociality. When seeing the library as emblematic of the peculiarities present in a city like Lund, it becomes a space able to reflect the tendencies and experiences happening outside the library. The municipality of Lund seems to agree, highlighting in the Culture Program that it is through public space, specifically, in which the relation between humans and the built environment, the city, is formed (Lunds kommun 2023b, p. 6). This is one of the primary strengths of social infrastructure, as discussed by Latham and Layton (2019, p. 2), as it allows us to see spaces as “more than just fulfilling an infrastructural need”, they are the spaces where the city is experienced. This experience depends on the networks and materialities of the actual infrastructure, just as this infrastructure would be meaningless if a public did not inhabit it.

In the library, it was additionally observed how integrated spatially the library is to the outside street. Primarily in the form of the bus stop, located mere meters away from the entrance, connected through a small urban pocket plaza, accommodating benches and bike racks, allowing a natural flow of people to and from the library. Furthermore, the librarian noted that despite what some people might think, the library, and librarians, are very perceptive regarding what

happens in the world around them. They are quick to note changes and incorporate these into the physical environment. As an example, the librarian highlighted how they had noticed an influx of young people to the City Library, and then responded to this development by creating a new room specifically targeted towards teenagers, where a very deep kind of chair allows for much more privacy. Essentially, creating a new space in order to make a group of people feel more comfortable. In general, the librarian described that during their almost 20-year long tenure they had changed the furniture arrangements several times. However, the librarian questioned particularly the economic aspect of buying so much new furniture. Within the library it was observed, through a plaque, that users are actually allowed to move furniture around themselves, as long as it is put back in its original place when leaving the space. In the third observation it was observed that a group of three people asked another library user if they could borrow a table and a chair from where the lone user was sitting. They agreed, and the furniture was later returned. While on the surface it perhaps seems like a very minor interaction, it is a small act that shows precisely what Latham and Layton (2019, p. 2) discuss as positive outcomes of social infrastructure. It shows the fluidity and flexibility of the space, it shows an encounter between strangers, and it shows the sense of trust generated by a space where people are allowed to both unconditionally arrive and appropriate the space, within limits, to their liking. How, in short, the practices of everyday life in a public space may foster small forms of trust, contributing to a larger public.

Here, the “taken-for-grantedness” of the library space becomes relevant. There are norms and routines which are produced through the long-standing existence of the space, but there is also signage in the City Library which details how one should behave. A fluid infrastructure being able to respond to developments both inside and outside the library on one hand shows the strength of the library as a public space and its ability to reflect changing needs, but on the other hand it may risk devaluing the immutable space and the comfort which that rigidity provides. There could certainly be those people who take comfort in the permanentness of the space, where disruptions could make the space unwelcoming. Where the library holds its strength, is in its connection of a specific activity with a specific space, that is the borrowing of books. It is built on what is called an “installed space”. Since this fact is immutable, it allows for an otherwise rather flexible space (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 3).

What this shows is both that the City Library's infrastructure cannot be understood as separate from the city, it relies on a bus stop, it reflects the citizens' visitor patterns, and events going on outside the walls of the library, and it shows that also within the library the infrastructure is very flexible. Ultimately, it is shown that much care is taken into ensuring that the space adequately reflects the needs of users, as they change through time.

6.2 Publicness and public life

With regards to the category of publicness and public life, the results reveal several things. When studying the publicness and public life of social infrastructure, it is necessary to ascertain who visits the space, but perhaps equally important is who does not visit. How is the space designed and maintained in order for a larger public to form? (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 4)

The results find that the two primary groups of people visiting the library are younger people, presumably high school or university students, and older people, presumably pensioners. Although those could be supposed to be the only groups of people that have the ability to be in the library for hours upon end on a weekday, no difference in demographics was noted on the weekend. There is also a strong degree of separation in terms of which activities are performed. It was observed that older people to a much stronger degree access the functions offered by the library, while younger people access the space offered by the library. Exceptions exist, naturally, but older people browse the bookshelves, sit in chairs reading novels, newspapers, and magazines, or make use of the stationary computer screens offered by the library while younger people sit, usually at a table, with their laptops brought from home in front of them. As a public space it was observed to be very quiet, allowing people to use the space peacefully without any potential distraction. According to the librarian:

"[...] when I move through the room I relish that people sit quietly and enjoy the space. We let people be by themselves, and that's what I think people appreciate with libraries. We don't rush to assist people. Many want to appear without being spoken to, it's their room as much as it is ours." (Interview with librarian, 2026-04-23, my translation)

Especially in the middle part of the library with the working tables there was never any noise, even in the form of conversation. There was a little more noise to the sides, but all conversations were held in very low tones. In fact, the primary noise that was heard was when on occasion a librarian helped a user find a specific book on a shelf. Once or twice the blaring sound of the scanning machines in the entrance would go off, but this was very rare. This does show that the municipality's goal for the library to be an undemanding and safe meeting place is largely reflected within the space (Lunds kommun 2023a, p. 12), a notion echoed by the librarian:

"[...] it is the last public space, in my opinion, where people feel welcome." (Interview with librarian, 2026-04-23, *my translation*)

There is no need to legitimate yourself to access the space, not even a library card is necessary to enter. This is another of the municipality's goals, that of Lund being a city enriched through allowing people to be and express themselves. Similarly, the municipality of Lund prides itself on its multicultural character, and the fact that people from all around the world live and work in the city. Something which should be reflected in its cultural institutions (Lunds kommun 2023b, p. 5). This reflects very much what Latham and Layton (2019, p. 4) speaks to in that crucial to social infrastructure is a space which allows individuals from different backgrounds to operate freely without any sort of barriers towards mobility. Not necessarily the forced interaction between people, but the sense of trust generated by unconditional and equal access to space.

The primary measures which were observed to potentially create a sense of control were the scanning machines in the entrance. It is a space easily accessible for people with impaired mobility, as an elevator can take people up from street level into the library, and there is enough space inside for a stroller or a wheelchair. There are of course guidelines and rules modulating behaviour, but these appeared to be more self-regulated by the users than actively enforced by the librarians. This fits also with the learning of the space discussed in the previous category.

There are thus several ways one can look at the function of the City Library with the help of the publicness and public life component. On one hand, the usage of headphones and lack of noise within the space could indicate that some aspects about the publicness of the space are rather

weak. In terms of both meetings between people and the prospect of a community forming. But on the other hand, even though it is just the opinion of the librarian, people appear to feel safe and welcome in the library. There was no group that was observed to be potentially excluded from the space. Which should perhaps be the largest indicator that there is a successful public dimension, that of creating an inclusive community. This is also something that has been put forth by Ash Amin, who posits that for public spaces to be truly public there needs to be a continuously produced and maintained sense of trust. Here, the example of the moving furniture in the section above, can be seen as contributing to an “ethics of togetherness”. Where the publicness is formed through a shared space and the trust that goes along with the shared usage of that space (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 4-5).

6.3 Sociality and encounter

The third category of sociality and encounter serves to analyze how the space enables or prevents people from meeting, where encounters between strangers, spontaneous or planned, is believed to contribute to a more tolerant and just city.

During observations it became quite clear that there is not much in terms of one-to-one conversations occurring. Occasionally, groups of two or three people entered the study areas of the library, and proceeded to speak in low tones. A majority of the young people present additionally wore headphones, a clear marker against any potential encounter with strangers. When seeking to understand how these encounters in question are facilitated, it is necessary to once again return to the design and layout of the space. Although there are many tables where you are seated next to and opposite strangers, there is a formal aspect to the seating, with tall tables and chairs, not particularly conducive to the spontaneous encounters which ideally might be desired (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 8).

Here, the changing nature of public libraries heavily comes into question. How can the library balance being a quiet refuge and being a space enabling social interaction? In the Library Program it is mentioned that people should be given the opportunity to actively participate in community discussions (Lunds kommun 2023a, p. 7), and similarly in the Culture Program it is

stated that through events held in public spaces Lund citizens should have access to meeting places (Lunds kommun 2023b, p. 8-9). In the City Library such events are frequently organized, where strangers are deliberately made to discuss with each other. One such example was discussed in the interview:

“We have these smaller book circles. Those who sign up get to meet people they have no previous relationship with, unless they come with friends, which is rare. Then the purpose is talking to each other, so we also want to facilitate a social connection, a meeting place.” (Interview with librarian, 2026-04-23, my translation)

The librarian also highlighted the encounters one might form by being a long-time user, for instance through small-talk conversations with people you have met in the magazine room for many years. Here, the social value present in the infrastructure becomes apparent, in line with Latham and Layton’s (2019) discussion. What makes public libraries stand out is that the ways in which sociality and encounter can be facilitated are almost endless. There is the firmness of the activity of borrowing books, but around that stability libraries have the ability to form many ways of encounter within the space. Both based on responses from users, but also based on goals such as those posited by the municipality, regarding creating space for community discussions.

Nevertheless, as mentioned, based on the observations there does not seem to be an abundance of convivial encounters, neither between acquaintances nor strangers. But, as Latham and Layton (2019, p. 5) reveal, the crucial value of social infrastructure is that it “affords sociality”. The City Library is not a site overly designed or dedicated to the spontaneous encounters between people, instead it allows people to do so under their own conditions. Here, the social value provided by libraries comes in the form of providing such spaces where sociality can appear. It is of less importance whether those encounters happen, than that they are allowed to happen. Then, one could naturally argue that if the majority of people present wear headphones, the provision of seating areas and such does not matter much anyways. But conviviality does not merely form through inter-human conversation, but through the synthesis of space, design, and accessibility (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 5). The environment allowing for social interaction is set up through

the placement of furniture and such, which is again another of the library's strengths, in that it is not a settled space, there is allowed much dynamism.

6.4 Politics of provision

The fourth component, the politics of provision, relates to the abundance of functions present within a public space. Latham and Layton (2019, p. 8) discuss the importance of providing an abundance and diversity of functions. If social infrastructures only appear to provide a specific function, then there is less potential to produce the "social surplus" posited by Ash Amin as there are fewer reasons to access the public space. That is, providing actual material benefits to the city via the production of a more trusting society.

Here, the City Library's opening hours stand out. On weekdays, the library is open for 10 hours between 09:00-19:00. On Saturdays it is open between 11:00-15:00 and on Sundays between 12:00-16:00, so for 4 hours. This reflects the abundance of provision, hailed by Latham and Layton (2019, p. 8), being open both beyond the regular 9-to-5 work schedule and being a space that is accessible on weekends. However, the rather limited opening hours during weekends does prohibit extended visits, and seems to be more inclined towards shorter visits, such as borrowing books, where there could be some questions regarding the degrees of accessibility. Regarding accessibility, the librarian also noted the influence of various lobby groups on the layouts of the space. During the beginning of their career, lobby groups representing wheelchair users had been very successful in influencing the space, but in recent years this was a group that had seen a smaller amount of impact. Even though this is just the opinion of one librarian, it does show another difficulty in responding to people's needs (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 8). As needs change over time they become outdated, but there is also the risk that the needs responded to by the library only represent those groups who manage to make their voices heard.

In the Library Program, the municipality states that citizens should have access to computers and other resources in order to enable access to digital government services. Additionally, the library is supposed to nurture a wealthy and multicultural inventory of culture in order to allow people to encounter more creativity and cultural outputs (Lunds kommun 2023a, p. 10).

“The public libraries shall continue their role as nurturers of creativity and culture. The operation shall offer a cultural scene characterized by diversity and quality. Through developed methods and interactive surfaces more people, regardless of pre-conditions, shall be given the opportunity to encounter culture in their everyday life.” (Library Program – Lunds kommun 2023a, p. 10, *my translation*)

In the library there are small art installations, designer furniture, green plants, and access to interactive surfaces such as puzzle tables. Here we can see the municipality recognizing the value in the library as a multi-functional space. Both through the access of digital infrastructure and interactions with cultural artefacts, there is an understanding that the role of the library has evolved from a place where one accesses information to one that serves a larger social role in a city. Here is a clear example of municipal policy attempting to respond to some of the provisionary measures proposed by Latham and Layton (2019, p. 8), where a crucial aspect is creating a space that is both diverse and feels cared for.

The city library was also observed to provide a considerable plethora of functions that were actively accessible for use. There is access to many forms of media beyond books, such as newspapers, DVD films, tables with puzzles, printers. There are also brochures of sorts available on a wall, described as digital guides, which showcase how to set up and use different smartphones, both Androids and iPhones. There is strong access to charging stations and the librarian also mentioned that users are able to borrow chargers while visiting. Interestingly, these had been previously placed in the library for anyone to grab, but they had had issues of theft regarding electronic devices. Not just chargers, but video game controllers, headphones have all seen a reduction in availability following disappearances. This is a really interesting development in the light of the “ethics of care” development proposed by Latham and Layton (2019, p. 7). Because this care is a two-fold process. For social infrastructure to develop there needs to be active involvement from the actors controlling the space, the municipality, and in essence librarians and other workers within the library. But there also needs to be a response from the users, or the community. If functions previously provided disappear, then yes that equals a fewer amount of provided services by the library, but the provision is dependent on the

actions of the users. Which, once again reveals the production of public spaces to be a synthesis of planning and usage, of design and appropriation.

Additionally, when seeing the City Library through the actual physical care as maintained by its caretakers the space emerges as one kept very clean, and they even provide recycling trash cans. The wide influx of sunlight through the large windows illuminates the space, further creating a sense of openness and cleanliness.



Figure 4. Light peering through the windows. (Source: my photograph)

Of note is that the library's toilets are located outside the entrance, and it is necessary to walk through the scanning machines to access the toilets. It could be seen as a negative aspect that it is required to "leave" the library to access an essential service. But on the other hand, it also makes the toilets accessible to people who might not want to have to publicly enter the library, for whatever reason. Latham and Layton (2019, p. 8) discuss how the maintenance of a public space influences the experience of provision and production of trust. Here, it can be inferred that, although the placement of toilets is inconvenient for library users, they also help create a sense of communal trust by being easily accessible to the city. It must be stated as well that there are toilets in the adjoining café, however these are only available to café visitors.

However, for as much as the two documents emphasize the potential for Lund's public libraries and cultural institutions, reality paints a somewhat different picture. In direct contradiction to the goals stated in the Library Program regarding the provision of a digital infrastructure, the librarian revealed that a huge problem facing the library is municipal budget cuts. According to the librarian their budget is reduced for each passing year. As digital infrastructure becomes more and more crucial, which is explicitly stated by the municipality, the City Library has had to actively cut down on the services they are able to offer. In terms of physical material they now have fewer available books, daily newspapers, magazines, than they used to, but they have also been forced to shut down digital databases.

A particularly surprising statement from the librarian revealed that the City Library holds a huge inventory of old magazines which people request to borrow from, but since the library has been forced to shut down their database, staff members no longer know where each magazine is stored. Here we can see the exact consequences of a lack of a "politics of provision" as described by Latham and Layton (2019, p. 8), wherein all the information needed to assist citizens has previously existed, but then been shut down as a result of political decisions. By seeing social infrastructure as dependent on a politics of provision, the decisions by the municipality have long-reaching consequences. Apart from potentially creating a sense of helplessness for the librarians, the cutting down on services reflects extremely negatively on the response to the needs of users. This is especially highlighted by Latham and Layton (2019). Even though an abundance of functions is important, even more important is that these functions reflect what people need in order to create a democratic ethos, a sense of belonging that is equal among citizens. The City Library needs to be able to cater to several different groups of people, which, once again, is something that the municipality themselves state that they should do.

This cutting down of services also harkens back to Mattern's (2014) exact description of public libraries being expected to support society in so many more ways than is manageable that its primary goal of promoting literacy is being forgotten. The documents show that the municipality desires for their public libraries to provide a plethora of services, yet at the same time, what happens if this means cutting down on the public's accessibility to information in the library? Information that moreover used to be publicly available. Again, in returning to Mattern (2014)

there risks devaluing the role of the librarian, turning them from custodians of information to social workers.

6.5 Social infrastructure

As the four categories in some ways overlap with each other it is also necessary to briefly discuss the results through the overarching lens of social infrastructure. Based on the research, what can then be said about the City Library's role as social infrastructure? When synthesizing the four categories, we can see that social infrastructure is something that is difficult to properly value, but whose value becomes most apparent when taken away. In the day-to-day activities in the library there is perhaps not a strong degree of spontaneous encounter, but the accessibility of a public space without any restrictions, and the amount of people that are always present, shows that clearly there is a very strong social value in public libraries. When seeing the City Library as part of a larger web of infrastructures, the difference in activity between younger and older people may also suggest a lack of other appropriate spaces in the city. In particular there are broader implications regarding the access, or lack thereof, to spaces that do not require entrance fees. Even though this study focuses on the City Library, an important part of social infrastructure is also that there is an abundance of it in a city, and an equal distribution (Latham & Layton, p. 8).

Additionally, in what could perhaps be considered a contradictory state, the City Library is simultaneously a space that is tremendously robust but also very fluid and unsettled. Meaning that the activity of book-borrowing provides a fixed element to the space, and then around that fixed element the space can be designed and used almost endlessly. Furthermore, of vital importance is the social surplus first posited by Ash Amin, wherein an "ethics of care" and a general sense of trust in the space and in one another has the potential to create a city, and society, which is more tolerant (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 7). The librarian's revelations that they have cut back on functions both because of the behaviour of users and because of a lack of funding by the municipality does, then, reveal a lack of respect for this tolerant publicness which social infrastructure has been shown to be able to facilitate.

Latham and Layton (2019) highlight the role planners and politicians can play in providing access to social infrastructure, concluding that:

“Infrastructure is about the facilitation of activity. The material qualities of social infrastructure is central—the way it is embedded within networks, has a modularity, exists within conventions of practice, and affords certain kinds of activity and use. The design, maintenance, distribution, and qualities of what is provided affects how social infrastructures function.” (Latham & Layton 2019, p. 9-10).

When applying this quote to the data, and the difference in activity between younger and older people in terms of accessing the space and accessing the functions, the City Library being a space that is completely accessible stands out as its strongest feature. Thus, when thinking about social infrastructure in the city, it becomes clear that planners and politicians in particular cannot ignore the multiple ways in which such an infrastructure contributes to a more inclusive Lund.

This accessible space furthermore depends on the activity of borrowing books. Even though this activity may not be as central as it once was, as discussed earlier the stability that this provides in turn creates major potential for the rest of the space. Since this is an irrefutable activity that cannot easily, if at all, be removed it affords the provision of space and functions which seem to be so treasured. Here, a lack of funds resulting in the shutdown of databases does actually impact the library in the long term since it both pokes at the activity of borrowing and actively provides less functions for the users of the library.

7. Conclusion & discussion

In this chapter conclusions based on the research questions are presented. How does Lund’s City Library function as a form of social infrastructure, and which factors shape this function? What does the usage of Lund’s City Library indicate about the value of urban public spaces?

A few key conclusions can be drawn from the study. The City Library functions as a form of social infrastructure in the way that it awards a strong degree of both individual responsibility and provides a public space accessible without any pre-requisite conditions. This can prove to be invaluable, especially, for younger people and older people, who might otherwise lack the economic capital to idle in private spaces. Thus, regarding the demographics of the City Library, it can primarily be said that the people that frequent the library the most are either younger people there to study alone, or older people who visit the library to take part in functions offered by the library such as computers and magazines. By utilizing the conceptual framework of social infrastructure to study the City Library, we can see that it is a surprisingly flexible space, often changing shape and form, being able to respond to feedback from users directly in the space. Although, different groups of people use the space in different ways there could be said to be, based on the unconditional access, a more tolerant public being actively produced within the space. The social encounters between strangers were few, and not helped by the amount of people wearing headphones, but the library does actively attempt to remedy some of this through social activities such as book circles. Nevertheless, despite the municipality's many points towards the importance of the City Library, and its adjoining digital infrastructure in the two documents which is seen as valuable for the citizens and city at large, this does not seem to reflect the funds allocated to the library. A library that has had to compromise with their digital databases, at the expense of fewer functions being accessible to the public. The municipality clearly aims for the City Library to be more than a place to read and borrow books which is seen as valuable not just for the users visiting the library, but for the city and municipality at large. But with this in mind, the actual original purpose or mission of the public library may get lost, when it is supposed to both be and do so many things at once.

Going beyond the City Library itself, the case study also shows the importance of highlighting those social infrastructures beyond plazas and parks which contribute positively to the social life in cities. For planners and politicians it is a reminder that these spaces cannot be neglected, and how the provision of accessible, multi-functional spaces contributes to a more tolerant and just city.

We can see that as public space has evolved through history, so has the public library. No longer is it a site whose primary value lies in provision of access to information, rather we can see that it is through its being an urban indoor public space accessible to all, for a multitude of activities, that it holds value. Through spatial interventions it has become a huge public space in the heart of Lund. This study began with a literature review detailing the various ways in which public space is losing its character, and how this has also seeped into the world of libraries through privatizations and surveillance technologies. As Marcuse (2006) and Mitchell (2017) detail, public spaces must be seen as a struggle, as sites where various actors try to impose themselves. This is a development which Rooney-Browne and McMenemy (2010) also show has spilled over onto public libraries in the UK, turning them into entrepreneurial ventures. Then, with the case study of Lund's City Library we can see that this development is not necessarily an inevitable outcome. As an urban public space it stands out as largely not cohering to some of the broader developments surrounding other public spaces, which is where its unique value also appears. Although, on the other hand, the fact that one specific space is able to accommodate different groups of people for so many different purposes, may also suggest that the city is lacking in other similar indoor spaces. Necessitating that the City Library becomes the only available space in the face of an increased commercialization of alternative spaces. Additionally, via Capillé (2018) we can connect the self-regulation between visitors as a possible elucidating factor for both the lack of encounter and the norms and routines of the library, as people modulate their behaviour based on how other people utilize the space. The City Library is a public space whose character is valuable to the city because, in opposition to much public space development, it is completely accessible which is especially important in winter when other outside spaces may not be. Furthermore its varied abundance of function and flexible space could be seen as producing a more caring public, in turn contributing towards a more just city. Which is why Lund's City Library is a crucial social infrastructure, and holds much value as an urban public space.

There are however some limitations with the study due to the fact that the perspective of library users is largely missing. The reasons for this were detailed in the methodology chapter, but it does mean that the understanding of the usage of the library's spaces is reliant on the interpretation of the observer and the descriptions provided by the librarian. With only one observer and one interview subject, usage and perspectives that may have been of note for the

study could eventually have been missed. Additionally, with the focus on one specific case study the results from the research may not be applicable to other contexts.

8. Future research

In the future, it would be of interest to further explore how these social aspects appear in Lund's smaller, neighbourhood public libraries. Do they function in a different way, and what comparisons can be made between them? Furthermore, the public library's role as an urban public space could differ in the peripheries of the city. As the librarian mentioned, the City Library acts as the city of Lund in a concentrated form. Do the neighbourhood libraries act as their neighbourhoods in concentrated form, or does something entirely different emerge? Social infrastructure is not meant to be viewed in isolation, and even though the City Library is the largest of the public libraries, it could potentially also be the least connected to its immediate surroundings and neighbourhoods. Additionally, scaling up the research to include the perspectives of library users through a questionnaire might prove to be valuable.

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Figures

Figure 1: Lunds stadsarkiv. (1969). Stadsbiblioteket byggs, mars 1969.

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Figure 2: Lunds stadsarkiv. (1969). Petriplatsen Kv. St. Peter 1969.

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Figure 3: Sturfelt, E. (2026).

Figure 4: Sturfelt, E. (2026).

Interviews

Informant 1, librarian at City Library (2026). Interview 23 April.

Tables

Table 1: Sturfelt, E. (2026). The four categories which enable social infrastructure.

Table 2: Sturfelt, E. (2026). The material used for document analysis.

10. Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Interview guide

These questions provided the guideline for the interview. Not all questions were asked with the exact same wording or order.

General questions

- How long have you worked at the City Library? What is your day-to-day role?
- To what extent do you spend time in the library's public areas?

The actual infrastructure

- How often do you rearrange furniture and various spaces?
- What is the basis for changes? The librarians' own observations or user feedback?
- Has digitalization affected how you design or organize the library's spaces? If so, in what way?

Publicness and public life

- How do different people utilize the spaces in the library?
- Do you notice a difference between people who visit the library to borrow books, and those who don't?

Sociality and encounter

- In your experience, do strangers converse with each other in the library?
- How does the library work to facilitate encounters between people?

Politics of provision

- How do you balance the library being a quiet space and the provision of various functions?
- What challenges exist for the library from a political perspective?

10.2 Appendix 2: Table of themes

The actual infrastructure	“The relationship between humans and the built environment is shaped in the public space. In a well-designed living environment, art and culture are an integral part of the development of urban development, filling public space with both permanent artistic elements and temporary cultural experiences.”- from Culture Program (p. 6). “Three people ask to borrow two chairs from another person, chairs which they later return.” – from Observation 3. “It is a small universe in concentrated form,
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	or you could even define it as Lund in a concentrated form.” – from the Interview.
Publicness and public life	“Public libraries are open and safe gathering places that foster a sense of community and help combat loneliness and isolation. This is particularly important for the growing number of older adults and people who are socially excluded.” – from Library Program (p. 12). “There is a marked difference between what young people are doing and what old people are doing. Using laptops and browsing bookshelves.” – from Observation 1. “We let people be left alone, and I think that’s what people appreciate about libraries. We don’t rush over to offer help. Many people want to come in without being spoken to; it’s their space just as much as it is ours.” – from the Interview.
Sociality and encounter	“People should be given opportunities to develop a sense of civic engagement and actively participate in society.” – from Library Program (p. 7). “People sit alone, wearing various forms of headphones.” – from Observation 2. ““(…) for one thing, we have these smaller book clubs, so to speak. And so, those who sign up get to meet people they haven’t met before—unless they come with friends, which they rarely do. And it often comes down to just talking with one another. So we also want to provide a social setting, a place for people to meet.” – from the Interview.
Politics of provision	“The programs should offer a range of cultural activities characterized by diversity and quality.” from Library Program (p. 10). “Many small services are provided, such as charging stations, electronic device guides, and recycling trashcans” – from Observation

	1. “Now we have these taller workstations where you can plug in your computer and charge it. And we provide charging cables. You can borrow them. Before, when we had a setup where you could just charge your devices, the cables kept disappearing instead. That’s a bit of a shame (...), they’ve been stolen. It’s a bit of a shame. So in the end, we can’t afford to replace them.” – from the Interview.
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