

Upstream

Reimagining the collective dream of a city

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Project description

Overview

The project aims to investigate the potential use of public space in the city of Førde, through the lens of its inhabitants. The project was framed by the desire of the inhabitants for a more pedestrian friendly city, that invites to use and enhances the qualities of the landscape. The first phase of the project investigates the pattern of movement and the organization of the city, and it results in an urban strategy that will allow a pedestrian friendly “pocket” in the south area of the city-center. The second phase is a reaction to the use of public space in the city, that is often occupied by parking-lots or inside a shopping-mall. This phase results in a public library, that emphasizes the connection between the south and the north areas of the city-center, and in the same time it aims to function as a democratic social arena for the inhabitants of the city.

Background.

Surrounded by the dramatic landscape of the west coast of Norway, the city of Førde emerged from a rural reality in the early 60's, and went through a fast process of development. During this emergent years, most of the small towns in Norway, was suffering of high unemployment rate, economic and population degrowth. The reaction of the government to this situation was to revitalize the districts in Norway by establishing a series of development centers in the districts. The strategic position of Førde in the region, access to the fjord and important roads that meet in the city, ensured the nomination of the city as development center in 1965. The dream of modernization and industrialization had reached the city.

This new dream of modernization and industrialization was brought to the city by the political class, as one of the two possible options: modernization and industrialization, or recession and population degrowth. In order to save the city and allow its inhabitants to stay in the place they belonged to, the city embraced this dream. Governmental and private investors, industrial and commercial activities arrived in the city, job opportunities were created, population and economic growth had begun.

Motivation

Nothing comes for free. The establishment of new industrial and commercial activities demanded radical changes to the infrastructure and organization of the city. In order to make this dream possible, the city had to sacrifice bits of memories and history. It had to react fast, and create the conditions that will sustain the modern dream. Roads, bridges, industrial and commercial buildings were built through the lens of functionality, efficiency and practical solutions. The city achieved that, and became one of the fastest growing cities in Norway. During this fast process of development, the connection of the buildings to the landscape, the urban qualities of the spaces in between and nevertheless the voice of the inhabitants, were neglected or even ignored. This resulted in a highly efficient and functional city, but in the same time dominated by a highly car-centred infrastructure and disconnected from its surroundings. This affects deeply the way the inhabitants use the city. The main activities in the city-center are related to the commercial area that dominates and controls the social activities in this area.

Movement

While the previous development of the city happened on the premises of the economic, political and corporate interests, my goal was to focus on the wishes and desires of the inhabitants. A series of investigations and interviews with locals, framed the first phase of the project. Even though I was eager to design a public building for the inhabitants of the city, the feedback that I was giving demanded a different first approach. The desire of the inhabitants for a more walkable city, that enhances the qualities of the landscape and invites to use, indicate an urban-scale intervention.

This phase resulted in a series of interventions on urban scale, that affect the main traffic stream through the city. The interventions aim to create a pedestrian friendly area within the city-center. Future plans of the city were taken into consideration in this phase, as well as other solutions. This process resulted in a traffic-ring around the area of Sentrum-south, that will create a pedestrian friendly area within. In the same time, a pedestrian and bicycle path, that connects different residential areas to the city-center, but it also enhances the qualities of the landscape and nature.

Upstream

As a consequence of the first phase of the project, the car-traffic on main bridge in the Sentrum-south will be substantially reduced. This creates the possibility to use the bridge for other purposes.

The proposal for this location consists in a hybrid structure of steel and engineered wood. The deck of the existing bridge remains open and accessible for pedestrians, while a new elevated volume is placed on top of it acting as a roof for the bridge below. The main volume hosts a public library, while the roof of the entire structure becomes a public piazza, that is always accessible. The structure aims to enhance the beauty of the river and the landscape. The glass facades direct the view towards the river on both sides and make the structural elements part of the architecture.

The proposal aims to function as a public arena for the inhabitants, within the city-center area. A democratic meeting place that enhances the qualities of the landscape, the local knowledge and culture. A space that can be used regardless opening hours or weather conditions. In 1925 the opening of the steel-frame bridge in this very location, was celebrated as an important achievement by the community and marked the first step towards modernity. The era that changed and transformed the city after its needs. Maybe the same bridge, nearly a century later, could mark the beginning of a new era for the city. A time where change can reflect the needs of the inhabitants.

Diploma program.

NB: The program for the diploma project was written in an early stage of the project. The main thoughts took shape during the research for the social anthropology essay. Most of this initial thoughts and intentions were brought further into the project, while other became less important.



Førde, 2018, photo Firda (local newspaper)

“[...] it’s pointless trying to decide whether Zenobia is to be classified among happy cities or among unhappy. It makes no sense to divide cities into these two species, but rather into another two: those that through the years and the changes continue to give their form to desires, and those in which desires either erase the city or are erased by it. “

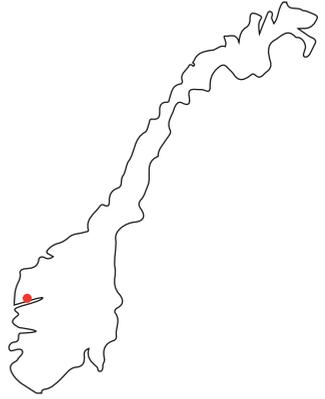
“Invisible Cities”, Italo Calvino

Where ?

Norway
Resources
Mountains
Nature
Vestlandet
Fjords
Rivers
West Coast



Bergen school of architecture



Bergen school of architecture

History and development



The city of Førde emerged from a rural reality, and as a reaction to the political and economic climate of the 1950's and 60's. Advantaged by its' geographical position, that places it central in the county, Førde faced the economic reality of that time by embracing the modern dream of industrialisation and economic growth.



The economic recession, high unemployment rate and population degrowth, affected most of the small towns in Norway in the early 60's. Førde's dream of modernisation and industrialization, was to a high degree a reaction to the economical and political climate of this time, rather than a natural development phase. The city had to make quick and radical changes in order to save itself and allow inhabitants to stay in the place they belonged to.



Bergen city center, 1950's, Torgtet and Zachariabryggen. Bergen Byarkiv.

This phenomenon is not unique in Norway. Many cities have faced the same reality but with different consequences. Cities like Bergen, Stavanger or Trondheim, have experienced the wave of modernisation and industrialization from a position of strength, compared to smaller cities. The identity of these cities was strong and had roots deep into the history. This allowed them to preserve their already well established identity and character.



Førde, 1950 s, Alcune arkiv.

Small cities like Førde was, were not in the same position. The identity of this places was to weak compared to the overwhelming force of modernization and industrialization. The dream of modernization and industrialization, on the one hand, saved the city , but on the other hand nearly erased it and replaced it with something else.



Symbols of the consumer society



Image of one of the shopping malls in Førde

The modern lifestyle was embraced by the western countries. New technologies, new materials and means of production, brought radical changes in the way our societies function. On the one hand, modernity improved the life quality of the people, but in the same time changed radically the structure of our societies. The new reality is based on the production of symbols that redefine lifestyles, and make this symbols not only the product of the society, but in the same time, its raw material. The consumer society, becomes both the engine and the fuel of the new economy. In this new reality, cities are no longer seen as landscapes of production, but as landscapes of consumption (Zukin 1998)



Førde 1940's



Langebrua Fjørde 1960's



Fjørde city center 1980's



Fjørde nowdays

Fjørde was to some extent one of this cities. The rural reality based on agriculture and fishing was replaced with industrial production. The small scale commercial activities were replaced by dominant shopping malls. Streets and public spaces had to make place for the new means of transportation. All this, changed radically the structure of the city and the lifestyle of its inhabitants. For centuries the relation between the identity of the inhabitants and the identity of the place, had a strong connection to the local landscape, climate, resources and culture. The modern dream has create a disruption in this continuity. With modernity the concept of "local" became weaker.



Main hospital of the county, located in Førde



"Førdehuset", the culture house of the city



Førde Art Museum



Article from NRK, the best municipality in Norway 2018

From an economic and demographic perspective, many of these changes were positive. The city survived the recession and thrived, people didn't leave and more people were attracted to the city. Besides the economic growth and good job opportunities, the city developed high standard social services, health, education and culture. Investors build factories, hotels and shopping malls; the central hospital of the county was placed in the city; the demographic growth demanded cultural and educational institutions; etc. In 2018 the city was assigned the prize as the best "kommune" (municipality) in Norway to live in.



Old city-center of Førde



Heritage building and access to the river



Mixed-use area in the area of the old city-center



Small commercial activity in older building

During the development process, the city tried to enhance the local qualities, in the area of the “old city-center”. The development of this area had clear regards to the local building typology, connection to the landscape and the scale of the buildings. In this area, urban qualities and local identity are still visible. But the overwhelming force of modernity, eventually submerged also this area. The public spaces were flooded by cars, while the local commercial activities strive to survive the pressure of the shopping malls in the new emergent city-center, across the river.

Why?

Potential
Agency
Resilience
Change
Community
Resources
Adaptability
Pride

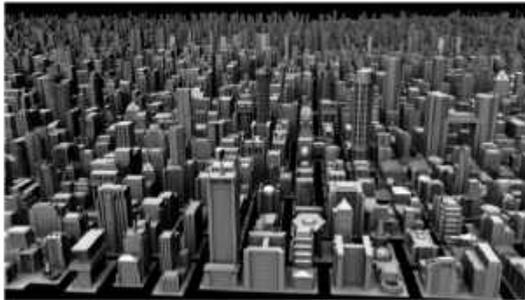
”Place, acts as a kaleidoscope, in which the history of a place can be seen as formed through the interaction of multiple coexisting yet irreconcilable lenses. [...] The kaleidoscope is our collective memory. In this realm people’s senses of the past are continually reinvented in order to reflect new presents, and the desire for new futures.” (Richardson. 2008)



The city of Førde might not have left many architectural reminders of their past, but the city itself is a reminder of the resilience, spirit and energy of the people that inhabit it. The achievements of the community, through the struggle, sacrifices and hard work, transcends the material reality, and appeals to the sense of pride and belonging to the community. The dramatic landscape of fjords, mountains and rivers, together with the achievements of the community as a whole, are the binding force of their collective memories and place identity.

The Generic City

S, M, L, XL
Rem Koolhaas



I believe that in a reality where the history and development of our cities had very different starting points, and where modernity and globalisation is fading away the uniqueness of architecture into the “generic”, and the lifestyle of the people into the “common”, we should allow ourselves to search deeper and to look closer.



We should look for the invisible layers that are the cornerstone of our communities. The values, dreams and ideals that have motivated the people and laid the foundation of our societies. The binding force of our collective is often invisible for the eye, but in the same time is that what defines the uniqueness of our communities. Is the thing that make "us" different from the "others". Is the source of our motivation, of our dreams and our desires.

Biases and preconceptions



My native town in Romania



City of Como where I lived a large part of my life



Bergen, where I lived since 2012



Førde, my next stop

Blinded by my background and previous experiences, the way I looked at the city of Førde, was somehow superficial. The small city in Romania where I was born and spend my childhood, the city of Como in Italy where I grew up and spend most of my adult life, the city of Bergen where I've lived for the last years, and nevertheless the cities I've visited by travelling; are all places that affected my way of looking to cities. When looking to the city of Førde, I just couldn't see past my biases and preconceptions.



Generic architecture that dominates most of the city-center



Cars and parking lots are covering most of the space in between



Social activity controlled by the program of the shopping mall



The river-side is on the back side of the shopping mall.

As future architect, I couldn't ignore that the architecture that dominates large parts of the city was lacking connection to the local building typologies and traditions; that the city structure has long prioritized cars rather than pedestrians; that most of the public program in the city is inside shopping-malls and controlled by private actors, and nevertheless that the connection of the city to the local qualities (the fjord and the river) are to a great extent ignored.

What?

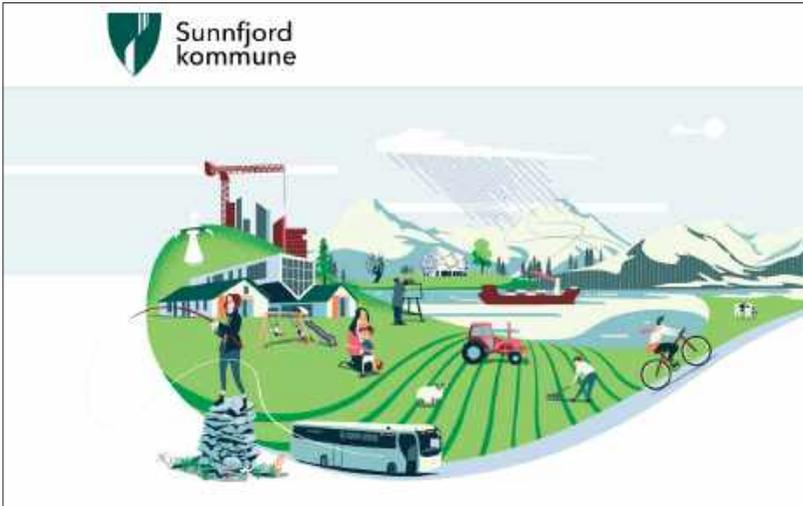
A word cloud featuring the word "Local" in the largest font, centered. To its right is "Sustainability" in a large font. Above "Local" are "Resilience" and "Change". To the right of "Local" is "Identity". Below "Local" is "Resources". To the left of "Local" is "Moral Obligation". Above "Sustainability" is "Adaptability".



Italo Calvino's advice is to look at cities through the lens of their uniqueness, rather than to fall into the trap of the generic. In the same time, another Italian (this time architect), Giancarlo de Carlo said that *“architecture should be a representation of the user, and not a representation of the architect.”* I aim to use their advice during my diploma and approach the task through the lens of the uniqueness of the site and its inhabitants. Even if I acknowledge the weaknesses of the city, I believe that Førde can become its own type of city. A typology based on the unique features of the city and the dreams and desires of its inhabitants.



The shiny promise of wealth and prosperity that modernity brought, blinded our societies and led to the unsustainable lifestyle that is characterizing us. In the same time, during this process we were stripped of the character and uniqueness of the local, and lost contact to the local landscape, resources and traditions. But humans are resilient, and the reality we brought ourselves into is changing. The environmental, political and economic climate of our time, is affecting everyone of us. The public debate of our days is characterized of an increasing awareness towards climate change, sustainability, resource consumption, local vs global, etc. In this context I believe that this urge for change can be sensed everywhere, and Førde is no exception.



City-plans, regulations and improvement of the city infrastructure, are clear indicators that there is a new collective dream in the air, and that Førde is entering a new phase. My aim is to address this changes through the lens of its inhabitants and to put this time, the resilience, spirit and energy of the city at the service of the people that inhabit it. The modern dream of industrialization and economic growth has created a disruption in the continuity between local identity, resources, culture and local knowledge. I aim that through my diploma project to show that the changes our societies are facing, are creating in the same time an opportunity for the city to reach back to the qualities and values of the "local".

How?



A word cloud of architectural processes. The words are arranged in a horizontal, overlapping manner. The word 'Engage' is the largest and most central. Other prominent words include 'Experience', 'Listen', 'Observe', 'Interview', 'React', 'Reflect', 'Challenge', 'Imagine', and 'Map'.

Map Listen Observe Interview React
Experience Engage Reflect
Imagine Challenge



First concept model

As in a book, our stories and memories merge to create our collective memory. From this abstract space, our collective dreams emerge. Listen, observe, reflect and imagine the collective dream. My aim is to create a project that will capture the uniqueness of the place and identity of its inhabitants. A “space” that the inhabitants of the city can find their place into, and can relate to.

The main goal of my diploma project is to use the concept of "local" as a tool to enhance the local qualities, the unique landscape, and nevertheless the spirit and collective identity of the inhabitants. In order to do that i will divide the semester in four main phases:

Phase one: Understanding

My approach demands that the answer comes from within, via its inhabitants. In this phase I will try to get an overview of the situation and understand the site as good as possible. I will try to listen to different voices from the community by conducting a series of interviews. I will use different techniques of site registration (photography, sketching, cartography, etc). I will try to get a grasp of the everyday life of the inhabitants (travel by bus in the city, bicycle, shopp, work, be social, etc.)

Phase two: Mapping the possibilities

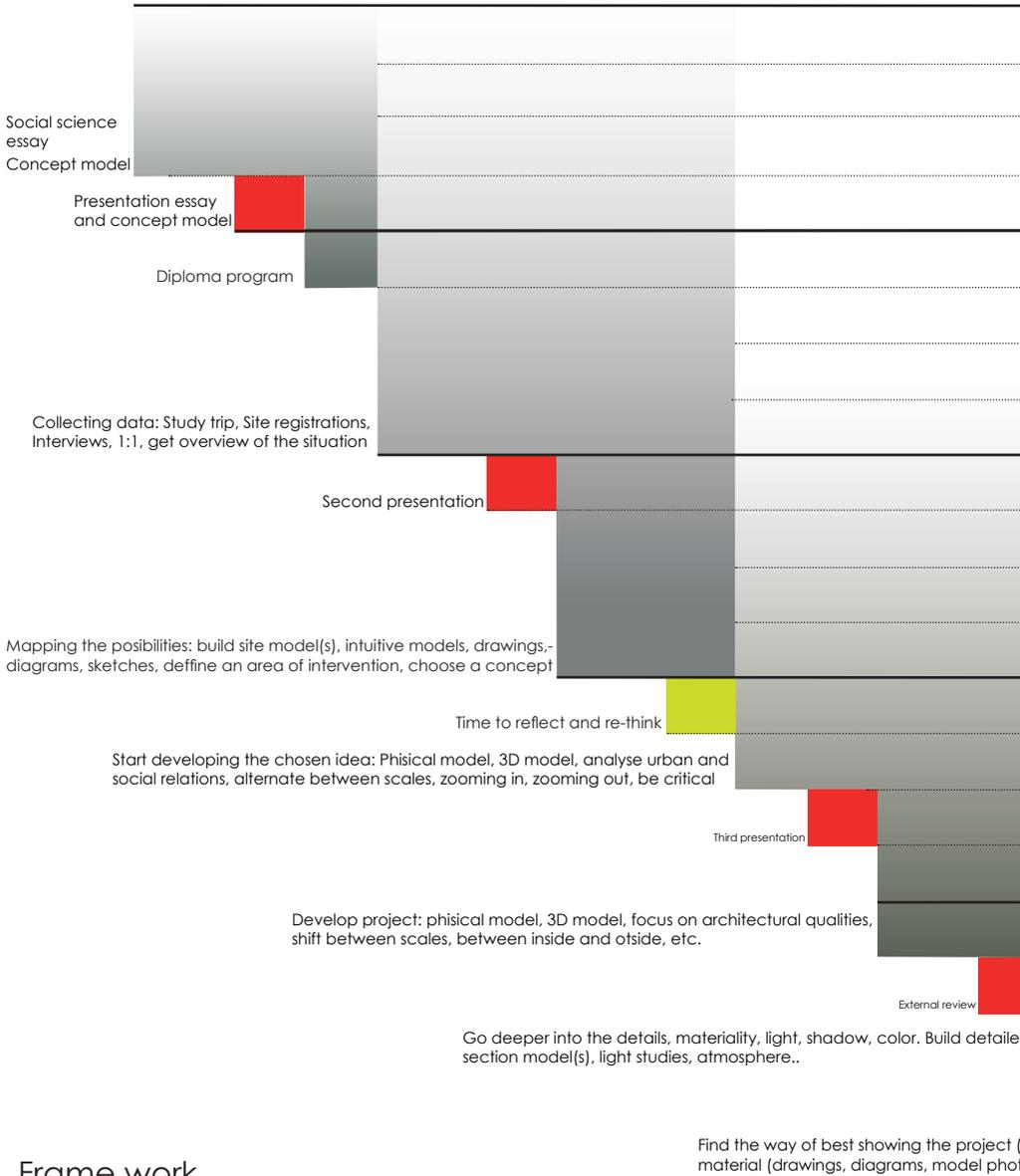
On the background of the knowledge from the first phase, I will try to map the different possibilities through different techniques (intuitive models, drawings, diagrams, sketches, etc.) I will build a (or several) site model and will work digitally in the same time. Shift from different scales. At the end of this process I will condens the ideas to one, that will be brought into the next phase.

Phase three: Develop the project

In this phase I will focus on the relations between the proposal and the surroundings. I will work on architectural qualities, materiality and urban and social interaction. I will allow the design to change and adapt to the potential discoveries on this path.

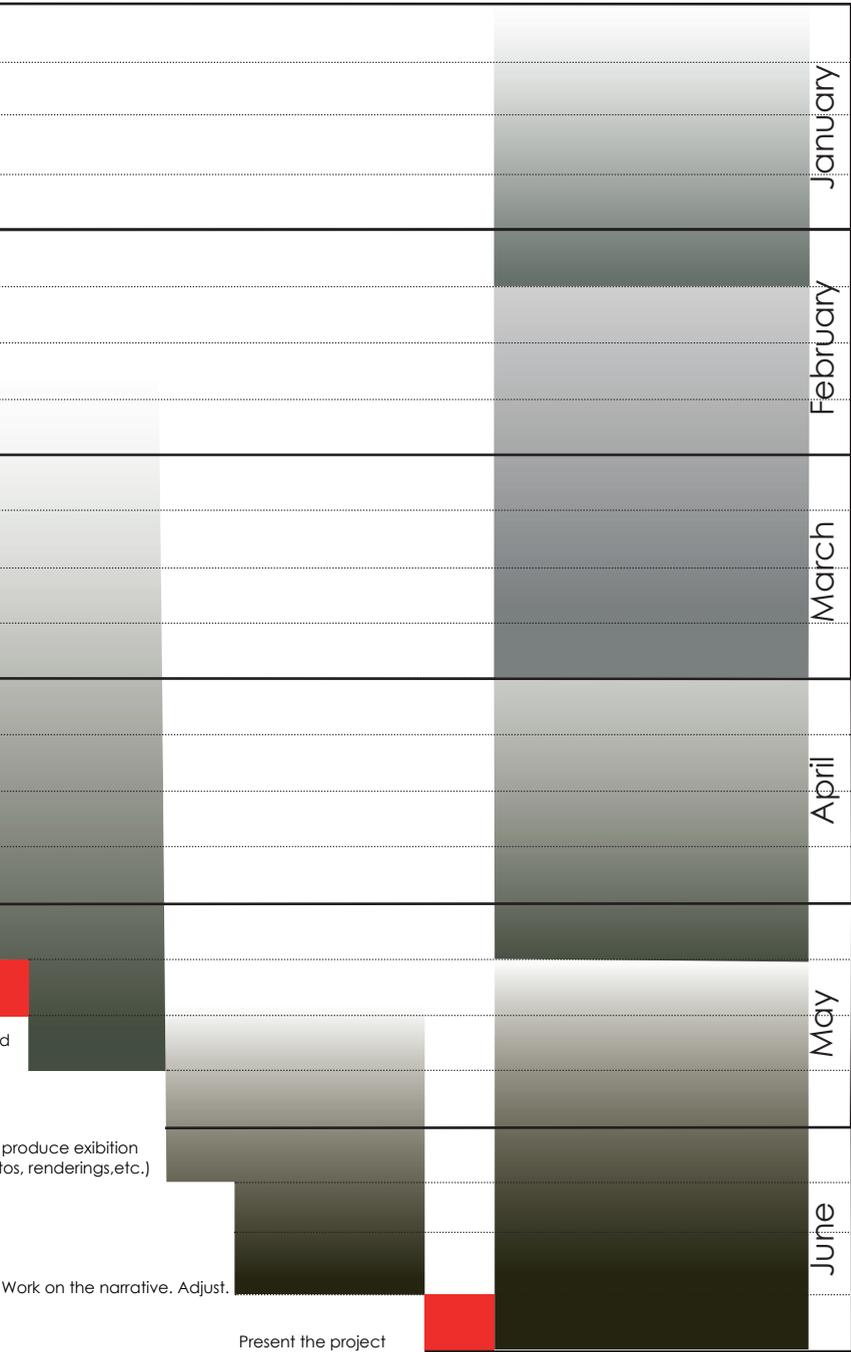
Phase four: Showing it

In this phase I will focus on the visual representation of the project. I will produce the necessary material in order to show the qualities of the project and the process (models, drawings, diagrams, model photos, etc) In the same time I will prepare on the narrative of the process and the oral communication of the project. I will setup the exhibition and edit the material in relation to the exhibition space and the narrative.



Frame work

Sum-up, reflect, think.



Curriculum Vitae

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Education

2018-2020 Master in architecture from Bergen School of Architecture

2015-2018 Bachelor in architecture from Bergen School of Architecture

2014-2015 Akaemiet Bergen, realfag kompetanse

2012-2014 Bergen katedralskole, Studiekompetanse

Profesional experience

2014-2020 Bergen Mur og Puss. Position: mason.

2013-2014 123Bad, Bergen. Position: project leader.

2011-2013 FW Utvikling, Bergen. Position: carpenter.

2003-2011 Building contractor (dealing with small building and renovation projects), Como, Italy.

1997-2003 Employee in several building companies.

Mater courses

Begen Arkitekthøgskole
Master course: "Complex context"
Tutors: Andre Fontes , Tom Chamberlain



Begen Arkitekthøgskole
Master course: "Vanishings"
Tutors: Rikke Jørgensen, Claudia Carbone



Begen Arkitekthøgskole
Master course: "New Wood Open Form"
Tutors: Marco Casagrande, Jacob Schroll, Charlotte Erckrath



