

Use and Restore the Freighthalls

– some ideas of involved politicians, residents and experts concerning why the Freighthalls at Nørrebro Station must not be replaced by more housing in one of Denmark's most densely populated areas, or by yet another consumer palace, but on the contrary must be restored and used as a local and global dynamo – an ArtFreight Centre where artists and the local citizens can meet, cooperate and utilize a unique cultural historic framework for art and culture activities that can function as social adhesive and an instrument for improving integration.

Use and Restore the Warehouse Halls and the railway property at Nørrebro Station. Quotations and pictures from YNKB's three programmes for tv-tv: The Process 1, 2 and 3, produced by YNKB and the Freighthall Group and was broadcasted on 16 March, 27 April and 22 June 2005.

Thanks to all who participated. Those responsible for the production are:

Finn Thybo Andersen, Delphine Bechard, Kirsten Dufour, Finn Christiansen, Katja Løgstrup-Hansen, Jette Hye Jin Mortensen, Rasmus Pedersen, Loui Gram Petersen, Sarah Sillehoved, Station 2000, Marianne S. Sørensen, Vladimir Tomic, Joen P. Vedel, Thomas Bo Østergaard

English translation by Mary Bille

TEMA 11

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YNKB

Baldersgade 70 st tv

2200 Copenhagen N

www.ynkb.dk

info@ynkb.dk

Use and restore the Freighthalls and Railroad Property at Nørrebro Station

Quotations and pictures
from YNKB's three programmes for tv-tv

Outer Nørrebro is Copenhagen's and thus Denmark's most densely populated area with the greatest concentration of immigrants (29%).

If housing were built on the area where the freighthalls stands, Mjølner Park and the 1700 youngsters who live there would be cut off from the rest of the neighbourhood.

An international Art and Culture Centre can give Outer Nørrebro a new image. It will develop the great cultural potential to be found among the younger generations living in Nørrebro.

Outer Nørrebro needs an institution that its citizens can be proud of and that can contribute to a high quality of life. An art and culture institution of international format will also benefit citizens in the whole Øresund region.

Hi! My name is Bill and I am project coordinator for the youth fair, and I think we should have more cultural events and a cultural centre here in Nørrebro, Nørrebro, Nørrebro.

I want to support this initiative for an activity park by the old Freighthall-building near Mjølner Park. I think it is a really good idea. Such things are lacking here in Outer Nørrebro. All kinds of things are always going on around St. Hans Square and the inner city.

I think it's a good idea!

It makes a lot of sense to build a new playground and a culture house where people can sit and have fun and be active instead of hanging around on the streets and making trouble.

I think it would be really great if the Freighthalls can be transformed into a culture centre where everyone can meet.

We have 1700 youngsters in Mjølner Park, and there's not room enough in our clubs for so many. Therefore, we need more clubs or a cultural-centre where all – not only Mjølner Park – but the whole of Nørrebro can participate and decide what activities we will have. We can meet; we can make a network; we can make integration.

But no, I don't think they should be torn down. I think they should be restored. We have enough housing in Nørrebro. The population is dense enough here, so therefore there should absolutely not be anything but a culture house and an open park over on the railroad property there.

The Freighthalls should be a culture house and the DSB property an activity park. Now! It is our right to have some grass here and some activities where everyone can meet no matter where they come from. All of Nørrebro can easily meet here. That would be real, real nice. That's what we stand for.

Use and restore the Freighthalls so they can become an international centre for contemporary art and culture

DSB's Freighthalls at Nørreport Station in Copenhagen was built in the 1920s and was used for loading and storing DSB railway freight until the 1990s. After that, the buildings became superfluous and until today have been empty and unused, but they remain a modest though characteristic monument to the industrial age. This cultural historic dimension is underlined by the fact that Nørrebro was originally one of the city's working class quarters where the majority of the residents earned their wages in the factories and lived under the conditions of the industrial society of which they were a part.

These distinctive buildings have been allowed to fall into disrepair, since DSB's plan has been to sell the property to private investors interested in building new commercial property. The area could thus be developed into a new monument to the consumer society that characterizes our era. Now, it is no longer the individual citizen's potential as producer but rather as consumer that determines a person's value to society.

In 2002, a locally based group of artists with a global perspective on art that is concerned with ecological and social aspects of society – Outer Nørrebro Culture Bureau (YNKB) – became aware of the building and the surrounding railroad property, in cooperation with a local grassroots group, Outer Nørrebro Initiative Group (YNitivgruppen). They became interested in the area's cultural historic value and future possibilities as an artistic dynamo for the neighbourhood. Their vision for Project Art-Freight encompasses a social artistic practice that involves the local area in exchanges with global artists in projects and activities within the visual arts, theatre, music, film etc. Such activities can act as social adhesive and an instrument for improvement on many levels of the integration process.

Since then, the group has qualified its vision through seminars, exchanges of ideas, and events with participation by local and global interest groups: international and local artists and art teachers; national professionals within art theory, architecture and cultural history; national and city politicians; and local resident groups. In November 2005, we succeeded in persuading the Special Building Authority to propose that the railway freight station integrated with the warehouse building and the custom house on the railway property be preserved.

In this publication, some of the interest groups: politicians, artists and other professionals, plus local residents, tell why they believe that the buildings should be preserved and used for ArtFreight. The quotes are taken from three TV programmes produced by the culture bureau YNKB for the local TV station on the Copenhagen Channel, tv-tv, which were broadcasted in March, April, June and in the fall of 2005.

January 2006
YNKB
Outer Nørrebro Culture Bureau

ArtFreight

The Freighthalls as Art and Culture Centre.

The aim is to create an art and culture institution of such dimensions that it will establish Outer Nørrebro as an international Art centre.

Outer Nørrebro needs an institution that its citizens can be proud of and that can contribute to a high quality of life.

They are some very good and solid buildings, and they represent a building style that will completely disappear if they are not saved.

Karsten Skytte Jensen

Chairman for Nørrebro's Historical Society

Originally the Freighthalls was used as a freight station. It was the second rail freight station here in Nørrebro. The first lay where Nørrebro Park is today, and it was used until 1930. In the meantime, a larger rail freight station was being built in this area and began to function at the end of the 1920s. It was in use until the end of the 1990s and has been empty since then. They are some very good and solid buildings, and they represent a building style that will completely disappear if they are not saved. Then, we will not be able to see how a station looked at that time.

It is a bad idea to tear down the Freighthalls and build housing, because that's not what we want. Everybody out here has said it before: We don't want housing. There are really, really, really many people living here in this area.

Bilal Elfout, Engineer, resident in Mjølner Park

If you have never been to Mjølner Park, you should just come and see the ghettos they are talking about. You can see they are fenced in. The only way to open the ghetto is to make an activity park out here that can be a cultural meeting place for everyone.

There are so many youngsters that need to come out and play, use their energy and meet other people. There are not many green areas in Nørrebro, but now we have a chance to create a green area with lots of activities.

We also lack a culture house, and I think it would be really, really smart if we could restore the warehouse building with its cultural values and make some indoor activities. It would be a really dumb thing to do to tear down the Freighthalls. It's a bad idea, because it is really handsome and just needs some maintenance, but the inherent value, the art and the activities – they are what mean most to us.

Everyone living here agrees that we have a need for this, and the politicians have constantly said that they will save it and help us. But it was just talk. And if we consider integration and all that, then I would like to say to the new Integration Minister: Just come out here so you can see what we are talking about. It would be really great if we could all help to realize this idea.

This is the strength of ArtFreight, and this is what we must work to realize.

Jan Christiansen, Head City Architect of Copenhagen

It's important that it isn't too fine and that there are some workshops, that it doesn't have designer smartness. Other places are like that and that's as it should be.

For me, ArtFreight has the double perspective that it is both international, a community centre for the whole world, and that it is also anchored in the local reality. This is the strength of ArtFreight and this is what we must work to realize. There are all those other stories about the existing buildings that can be reused, and the idea of sustainability. That's what we in Copenhagen want to support, some creative environments that are nourished by and at the same time enrich the society of which they are a part, like here in the concrete suburb.

What is special about this place is that even though we are in the middle of Nørrebro, it is possible to create a big playground where all kinds of activities can take place.

Heine Thorhauge, art student, Nørrebro resident

What is special about this place is that even though we are in the middle of Nørrebro, it is possible to create a big playground where all kinds of activities can take place.

The worst that could happen here would be new concrete buildings to house even more people and be even more barren and dull and close Nørrebro in even more and make it even more compact.

Actually, the whole world lives in this neighbourhood. That means that there are unexploited cultural resources here that we could use in this old Freighthalls.

Finn Christiansen, Spokesman for the YNativ group.

Initiative Group has together with YNKB developed this culture and activity park project and ArtFreight project in the Warehouse Halls so we can attract people from outside. The whole DSB property has first priority in the improvement of this neighbourhood.

The vision, the idea, the content of the park, is to be created by the residents,

and an important demand is to introduce some nature into the city while making a park that differs from the parks we already have, something wilder for all generations no matter where they come from in the world. We are talking about the global here, that is a linking of the local and the global, and also creating a cultural dynamo. It wouldn't hurt if people on the street level were able to create some activities and some city spaces that people around the world could import and say: That's a damn good idea! That would create a sense of security in the area and a greater sense of community. People would get to know each other, and we could eliminate a lot of prejudice.

DSB as agreed to sell two-thirds of the area, and build on the last third. They won't give that up because they want the money. DSB has applied for permission to tear the warehouse down and when it was refused, they simply stopped negotiations with the city. Therefore, I propose that the city start negotiations regarding the two-thirds of the property, and that we obtain the right to buy the Freighthalls within a year, so we can develop the economy of the whole project in more detail.

I believe it is important that future art institutions are placed where people live and that they become active participants.

Finn Thybo Andersen, Artist and teacher at the Royal Art Academy, member of art group YNKB

The Freighthalls have some very interesting qualities: a well-situated, beautiful brick building at the end of a 160-meter long space. A non-hierarchic structure – there are 38 entrances that inspire a picture of lots of equally important activities. It will be an art centre where the local residents participate but where there are also links to the world outside. I believe it is important that future art institutions are placed where people live and that they become active participants, so that art institutions are not isolated islands. Those who follow what is happening in art today know that socially engaged art is up front. And if you want to create a new art institution then it is obvious to place it in the most densely populated area in Denmark where all the conditions and problems that people have to deal with exist. YNKB has proposed that in the Warehouse Halls a research centre should be made for socially engaged and ecological art where residents from the Nørrebro and North West neighbourhoods can meet artists from all over the world and make experiments and gain experience together.

...It is this dialogue and communication and interest for people and meetings between people that is essential.

Lene Crone Jensen, Acting Director, Rooseum, Malmö

This area, Outer Nørrebro, where unbelievably many people with different backgrounds live is enormously interesting. The fact that there is access for others who can come from further away makes its location really fine. Many people in Copenhagen work with these things, with art that is based in different social contexts. I don't know whether we used that expression too much, social contexts, but it is actually art that just wants to be in dialogue with other people. That's what is essential. It is not art that is meant to solve problems or anything else, but it is this dialogue and communication and interest for people and the meetings between people that are central. This is a good basis – establish a local foundation and work it up so it can develop and have a local function, but also work seriously to build the international breadth that lies in the initiators ideas.

It can be very beneficial for integration to get the young people from Mjølner Park involved in something where they are taken seriously and actually choose and form some of the physical surroundings right next to where they live.

Wojciech Laskowski, artist and art pedagogue, resident, Outer Nørrebro

Just such spaces are perfect – some halls that have been used for something else. They present a challenge. Such buildings have very good qualities, instead of building something new that is completely anonymous and without history. In other cities in Europe, for example, in Germany, you can see old industrial buildings that are no longer being used for their original purposes transformed into various cultural institutions. Developments in Copenhagen are going in precisely the opposite direction. Everything is being torn down so there is nothing left. And the warehouse building is maybe one of the last places in Copenhagen where the industrial environment still exists.

It can be very beneficial for integration to get the young people from Mjølner Park involved in something where they are taken seriously and actually choose and form some of the physical surroundings right next to where they live.

An art school could have some more permanent activities in the form of groups for children and youngsters who come once a week. Good possibilities would also exist for larger one-time projects, both inside and outside. Cooperation with local schools could be established – I have actually carried out some projects in just this area at Rådmandsgade and Grundtvigs schools, so I know

The most important for me is that ArtFreight comes to exist, that the buildings are restored, because they are so fantastic. The idea is to open up into Mjølner Park through art.

Lise Egholm, Principal, Rådmandsgades School

You would have a life full of people that move out to see art and thus move back and forth and into Mjølner Park and out again – also, ArtFreight could open the two-thirds of the property that could be made into a park. That would create life and interest for the area. The idea of bringing art here to Nørrebro is, I believe, really positive, bringing a positive focus to our neighbourhood instead of it always being a place with problems. We can collect some experimental and interesting art here for everybody, not just us living in Nørrebro but for the whole city. We will do what we can so they don't just tear it down and stop our project.

Now it looks as if they will build housing where the Freighthalls is. I consider that a problem, because if there is something we have enough of here in Outer Nørrebro, it is in fact housing. We have housing everywhere, but we don't have anywhere where we can be active together. And when art enters the scene, interesting things begin to happen. One of the artists connected with ArtFreight has visited our school, and I have seen what it means for kids to work with art in this way. And you could do the same with elderly people and other groups or institutions. We don't need more housing here. The area is as densely populated as it can be, the most densely populated area in Copenhagen – and they will build more housing. That's all wrong – that's not what they should do.

I think this is a good project because it is important that residential areas also offer cultural activities that involve and engage the residents.

Jytte Andersen, MF for Social Democrats, former city and housing minister

This is a good project and I believe that you should continue to work actively to realize it. It is important that residential areas also offer cultural activities that involve and engage the residents. Each area of the city should have some cultural trademarks.

There is a concentration of immigrants in Mjølner Park, which presents some special problems. Nørrebro deserves more culture, so it is natural to consider whether there are some buildings – perhaps also of cultural importance – that we could invest in and use. During my experience as city and housing minister, I have seen lots of examples in many other European cities and capitals where

unused harbours and industrial areas have been used to give city areas a cultural lift.

I am convinced that if the city of Copenhagen really adopts this project and finds it convincing and positive, then it would also be possible for the city to negotiate with DSB so the project can be realized.

ArtFreight is a fantastically visionary and very, very exciting project, where we have some completely unique buildings with a really beautiful location.

Bjarne Fey, member of Copenhagen city council for SF

ArtFreight is a fantastically visionary and very, very exciting project, where we have some completely unique buildings with a really beautiful location, also in relation to the commercial strategy for Copenhagen to develop creative environments in some areas. One area in focus is the Outer Nørrebro and North West area, where we can see a great potential. There is a cultural dynamic in this neighbourhood, and the Freighthalls lies in the centre of the environment that could be created here. Therefore, it is a really good idea.

Another good idea is to move cultural institutions from the centre to the periphery and use city spaces to develop more drive – not just in North West but in the whole of Nørrebro. 60,000 to 70,000 people live here – a very densely populated area. So something should be able to happen here.

There is a great need for it, because things are very tight here, especially around Mjølner Park. I think it's a good place to live, but it is also an environment that is closed in upon itself. It is important for Mjølner Park to invite people inside and at the same time for its residents to mix with the rest of the residents of Nørrebro. If that is to happen, we need to use new, untraditional methods.

But first: How can we win more time to realize this dream called ArtFreight?

It is often difficult to save buildings that cannot be directly used for an other purpose. But here it is almost as if these spaces were built for art. It is so obvious.

Inger Wiene, Museum Director, Copenhagen City Museum

The Freighthalls is definitely worth saving, because it tells the history of late industrialization in Outer Nørrebro. It tells about the infrastructure necessary to transport all the products back and forth. On one side of the warehouse building there is a ramp for loading trains; on the other, a ramp for loading trucks. It also harmonizes well with human transport by lying near Nørreport Station and

Slangerup Railway, which are also protected. It is also designed by a famous architect, Wenck, who also designed Central and Østerport Stations.

Jeppe Høst, Copenhagen City Museum:

In this specific area, it is difficult today to see the industrial influence that has existed. Mjølner Park lies where United Paper Works was once located. If the Freighthalls is torn down and a new housing area built there, we would lose the historic identity that the area still possesses but which becomes harder and harder to see.

Most important of all, we can have a place for art and culture that has the format to attract more people than just those who live here.

Troels Glismann, Chairman for Housing Association Lersøgård

Lersøgård is a neighbour to the DSB property and the Warehouse Halls, and we of course support YNKB's plans to transform the area into an art and culture centre and an activity park. So it is completely hopeless and against the wishes of the residents here, that the city's central bureaucrats talk about placing commercial and residential buildings here. We consider it completely insane to prop more people into Denmark's most densely populated area. 8-900 people live in Lersøgård and 3000 in Mjølner Park, and we have no outdoor areas, no free ground.

Fortunately, two-thirds of the railway property is earmarked for public purposes. We can hope that we can count on this. But the last third is just as important, so we have to stop the city's plans for commercial space and housing. They are talking about building 10,000 square meters with a plot ratio of 110. If they build along Borgmestervangen, it would give a building height of five storeys. We discussed this at our annual meeting, and many shareholders asked what they could do to prevent this because we all have a natural interest in preventing further increases in population density. And right over there is the last possibility to create a green area in Outer Nørrebro. And most important of all, we can at the same time have a place for art and culture that has the format to attract more people than just those who live here. It is not just for our own sake that this project should be realized. It would give the whole of Copenhagen a lift. That's one aspect of it. The next is that if they build a whole lot and close the future park in even more, then we risk having a Mjølnerpark park that nobody has any reason to use.

I have absolutely no doubt that art and culture can give a really big lift. Also in relation to integration and understanding each other.

Principal Ingrid Brandt, Heimdalsgades School

I am convinced that many youngsters can improve both their standing in school and their attitudes toward other people through working with art and culture. And I am also convinced that many children and youngsters can learn through working with art and culture. We don't all learn in the same way. Time and again, we see that some of the boys we typically call maladjusted can become interested and engaged in e.g. painting.

I have absolutely no doubt that art and culture can give a really big lift. Also in relation to integration and understanding each other. It is seldom we see young people who are involved in playing music, singing, dancing or painting go around the streets and act crazy. This don't go together.

In relation to art and culture, Outer Nørrebro is a socially low-status area – there just isn't any – so it would be valuable to have an institution that is based in the area that we can use and where we can participate in culture's diversity.

The projects for making the Freighthalls into an art and culture centre are very exciting. They ought to be developed further.

Mikkel Warming, member of Copenhagen city council for Enhedslisten

Enhedslisten believes it is important and completely in agreement with the idea behind neighbourhood improvement projects, that initiatives should come from citizens and up through the system. We find, for example that the projects to make the Freighthalls into an art and culture centre are very exciting – and we have voted to support them in the city council. They ought to be developed further instead of allowing the property to be used for more traditional forms of speculation, as DSB would like.

Borgermestervangen, Copenhagen

Protection Hearing

The Special Building Authority has at its meeting on 17 November 2005 proposed that the Railway Freight Station connected with the warehouse building and the Custom House at Borgmestervangen 5, 7 and 17, unregistered railway property, Udenbys Klædebo Quarter, Copenhagen, be protected.

The Building Authority's recommendation

The Special Building Authority states: "The Authority finds that the warehouse building consisting of an office building integrated with a hall with loading ramps, together with the custom house lying behind it, at Borgmestervangen 5, 7 and 17, Copenhagen, have the cultural historic and architectural qualities to justify protection.

The Freighthalls has been a loading station for railway freight, and as such this is a building type that has been a constant component of every station facility in Denmark, whereas the adjacent custom house characterizes the type of facility found only in the larger cities. In addition to being representative of a typical but today more and more rare type of building, the warehouse building located in Nørrebro, due to its integration with a neo-classic administration building and its impressively long and beautifully crafted storage hall, is completely unique in relation to the more humble warehouses in the provinces.

Architecturally, the two brick buildings – the office building and the custom house – present a fine, modest neo-classicism, where the office building is characterized by a very fine gable, exposed brick work, finely proportioned windows and doors and hipped roof. In addition, there is the long storage hall, which is an example of the period's proud traditions for carpentry; with the rhythmically placed doorways, the supported overhang and the skylights' division of the roof construction, a powerful building with a strong character is created, where the structural principle is clearly seen.

In addition, the warehouse building has cultural historic significance for understanding the history of Outer Nørrebro's industrially conditioned development. In a time when most large industry in the area has been closed down, the warehouse building tells the story of the importance of infrastructure's for the location of industry in Copenhagen's past. In the fully developed city at the beginning of the last century, railways were located where there still was room for them. The Lygten station, used for weekend trips out of the city, and the

workday station, Nørrebro, and the warehouse building are an integrated whole that tells us about the development and diversity within the railway structure, and how the location of the railway strongly contributed to creation of a whole quarter – Outer Nørrebro – with the many industries originally located here, together with housing for the workers.

The Building Authority finds that the fundamental values to be protected in the building complex at Borgmestervangen in relation to the administrative building are connected with the building's architectural appearance with its fine masonry, the window and roof construction, and the inner stairway's robust but also elegant form with the banister elements embedded in the steps of the stairway.

The fundamental values to be protected in the storage halls are connected with the roof's overhang over the rail and road ramps, the closed character and the many portals, and inside, the visible rich carpentry of the ceiling and walls as well as the skylights. The Building Authority finds that it is thus not compatible with ensuring the values to be protected to insulate the building.

In regard to future restoration, the Building Authority finally recommends that the newer partitions in the administration building be removed and the original division of spaces be re-established.

Hearing

Comments can be sent to the Cultural Heritage Administration. Comments must be received by 1 April 2006.

Cultural Heritage Administration will then decide whether the building shall be protected, at the latest 3 months after that date.

Consequences

Until the protection decision is made, no construction work can be carried out besides ordinary maintenance, unless the Cultural Heritage Administration gives permission.

This is in accordance with § 6, 3 in the law on protection of building and city environments.

Announcement

The Cultural Heritage Administration will announce the proposal in the local district and/or daily newspapers. This announcement will also state the deadline for sending comments to the Administration.

From YNKB's ArtFreight proposal

To use the Warehouse Halls at Nørrebro Station for an international art and culture centre that will give the neighbourhood a new image and utilize the cultural potential present in Denmark's most densely populated area.

To create an art institution of a completely new type that integrates international contemporary art in the local community.

To place a modern art and culture institution in Denmark's most densely populated neighbourhood and integrate it into the local community

To create a meeting place for Nørrebro's citizens and the rest of the world.

To establish guest accommodations for international artists who wish to work with and in the local community.

To make pictures, music, dance and theatre schools for children and young people with highly qualified artists as teachers.

To establish workshops for artists and residents.

To create an international research centre for social and ecological art.

To connect the Art and Culture Centre with establishment of an ACTIVITY PARK on the railway property, and thereby create an energy centre, a cultural dynamo, that spreads energy to the whole area.

Who is YNKB?

YNKB – Outer Nørrebro Culture Bureau – is a locally based group of artists who wish to relocate artistic activity in the local environment. That is, YNKB wishes the interaction among the residents of Outer Nørrebro to inspire activities in Outer Nørrebro that relate to the local environment. The group's practice grows out of and is interactive with whatever we meet in our journey through our neighbourhood.

In addition to activities in the area, YNKB has also used the space in Baldersgade 70 for exhibitions, arrangements, events, video shows, workshops and conferences since 1999.

YNKB participates in the Initiative Group and supports the group's proposal to use the DSB property at Nørrebro Station for an Activity Park formed according to the wishes of the area's residents.

In addition to local activities, YNKB also participates in Danish and international exhibitions.

YNKB's ideas for creating an international art centre integrated in a densely populated neighbourhood has been presented at exhibitions and seminars inside and outside Denmark, e.g.: Biennale in Venice 2003; Prague Biennale 2003; Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, San Jose, Costa Rica 2003; Spacemakers, lothringer dreizehn, Munich 2004; Minority Report, Festival for Contemporary Art, Århus 2004; Capitalismus reloaded, Berlin 2005; and spring exhibition, Headquarters: Artistic Interventions in Social Space, Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.