

# Ett skepp kommer lastat . . .

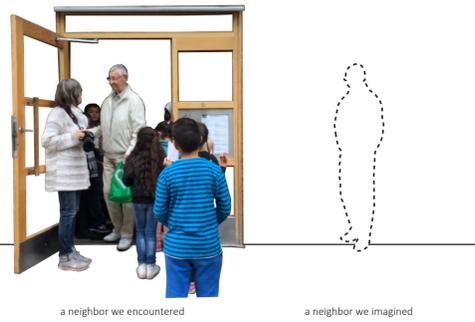
[A ship comes loaded...]

A constellation of 13 participatory workshops and an exhibition in Frölunda, involving eight groups of children and youth from three different schools, initiated as an interdisciplinary research project and cross-institutional collaboration in 2015.

**Aim:** to build empathy and respect for our unknown neighbors through urban exploration, imagination, and expression.  
**Methods:** multiple and indirect: observational tours, artifact-tools for both inquiry and expression, perspective-switching.  
**Outcome:** a three-week participatory exhibition of the workshop processes and artifact-tools in the Frölunda Kulturhus.  
**Participants:** 159 children and youth ages 7-12 and 14-16 (grades 1-5, 9, and 10); exhibition: 1,900 visitors of all ages.  
**Time:** 1-2 hour workshops over four months, integrated with a three-week exhibition (plus activities outside workshops).

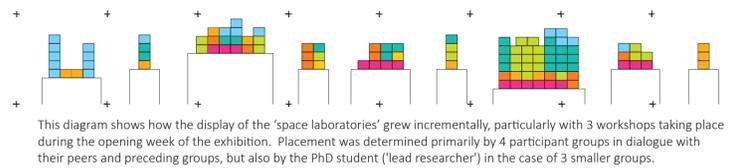
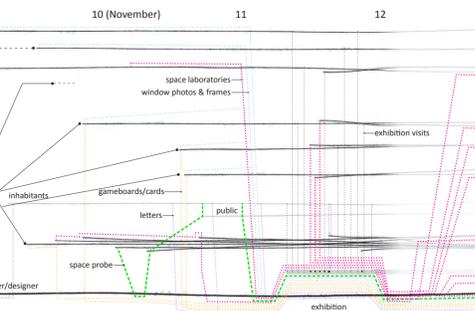
This multifaceted project was initiated as a collaboration between Jon Geib, a PhD student, urbanist, and architect, and the Frölunda Kulturhus. It grew to become a constellation of 13 workshops involving, in parallel, eight different school groups from three parts of the city, and was integrated with a three-week exhibition. We began by asking: "how do neighbors communicate indirectly through architectural interfaces (doors, windows and common spaces)?", and pursued this with the local after-school club through observational tours of local apartment blocks, the children noting welcome signs, nameplates, handcrafts, plants, sounds, smells, and so on. Afterwards they illustrated their memories of—and speculations about—our unknown neighbors and their apartments as game pieces on a pre-designed laser-cut plywood gameboard. Through the metaphor of *Ett skepp kommer lastat...* [A ship comes loaded...], a Swedish children's game in which players take turns adding guesses about the contents of an incoming ship (until memory inevitably fails), we imagined our neighbors floating in housing blocks and similarly unknown, encouraging an 'urban empathy' increasingly needed

in an urbanizing world. Classes from a neighboring district echoed this workshop through the Gothenburg Cultural Department's *Museum Lessons in Public Space* program, but as 'outsiders' or 'researchers from outer space' (as we all are, to some degree). The pedagogues and local group then designed a 'space probe' to ask our neighbors questions from a distance. Finally, by turning door peepholes around to look into 'space laboratories', five groups were able to imagine and make their own (or neighbor's) windowed interior space, and afterwards most added them incrementally to the exhibition. Here, these and other workshop 'artifact-tools', designed doubly as artworks completed by the participants, were displayed—yet newly gathered into larger collective configurations. Participants thus indirectly met their other 'neighbors'—through encounters with other groups' artwork and re-encounters with their own. Meanwhile, a participatory sculptural installation dramatized our artistic research process as an endless expedition, inviting visitors to join us in asking "who is your neighbor?".



Extending the project to study the 'home territories' of the other school groups would have generated further empathy and dialogue, as would more workshop time. Feedback found that children felt important and most had fun—especially with 'making' activities—while being challenged by an urban environment-based learning experience. They were positive about being part of a wider project, especially encountering themselves and their work among unexpected new material in the exhibition (e.g. seeing how other participants used the workshop artifact-tools in different ways). The carefully considered design and aesthetic of the exhibition and its contents led many visitors and cultural officials to recognize a new way of collaborating with children and youth and of taking them seriously.

The project timeline below shows how groups were connected through different artifact-tools and the exhibition (each thread indicates a new workshop or meeting).



This diagram shows how the display of the 'space laboratories' grew incrementally, particularly with 3 workshops taking place during the opening week of the exhibition. Placement was determined primarily by 4 participant groups in dialogue with their peers and preceding groups, but also by the PhD student ('lead researcher') in the case of 3 smaller groups.



Participants met indirectly through encounters with each other's artwork, and re-encounters with their own. A design-built sculptural installation—part ship, apartment, research lab and spaceship—with screens made of the sheets used to laser-cut the space laboratories, dramatized our artistic research process as an endless expedition and invited visitors to join.

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Visual feedback from a participant. Perhaps a way to see artistic-cultural inquiry as 'steering towards the difficulty'?



Above, the interior of a space laboratory with built-in door viewer. Designed with two removable sides (top and side) and optional folding white chipboard inserts, the laser-cut poplar plywood 'boxes' make future experimentation possible (as all were returned to the participants after the exhibition). Top middle, a line of boxes showing the view from outside. At right, participants' placed drawings of similar window views they had made on their observational tours. The 'gaps' were later collaged with photographs taken from a wider local area (one of three panels).



For further documentation on *Ett skepp kommer lastat...* see: Geib, Jon. (2017). *Separations in Multivocality: Reconfiguring Dialogue through Design*. Licentiate Thesis. Chalmers University of Technology, Department of Architecture. Available at: <https://publications.lib.chalmers.se/publication/250748>. A limited amount of printed copies are available upon request.



Each participant group was engaged in different ways with the exhibition and its partly organic growth. The most local group made multiple visits, including to the vernissage (bottom), and took turns walking the space probe. The three groups from a neighboring district added their space laboratories incrementally during the first week, and one group completed their gameboard on site (below, top).

