

Method Support for Developing Knowledge Environments



AKADEMISKA HUS





A structured dialogue about knowledge environments

One important element in creating attractive seats of learning and campuses is being able to describe and analyse the environments in a well-considered way. What makes one knowledge environment more attractive than another? Akademiska Hus has developed method support for the structured discussion about the path to world-leading knowledge environments, with particular focus on the constructed environment.

The successful knowledge environments of the future have well-developed spaces where people can meet freely, and where there is scope to share ideas and have stimulating discussions during much of the day and night. Spaces where people come together.

As active partners and experts in knowledge environments, at Akademiska Hus we like to maintain an in-depth dialogue with our tenants and other business partners about how, together, we can develop these spaces in the best way.

There is a long tradition of planning, describing and evaluating function-specific operational premises such as lecture halls, laboratories and similar environments. However, method support and tools are needed in order to develop, evaluate and discuss other crucial parts of a campus, alongside the function-led areas.

We want to use the method support presented in this document when we plan and develop knowledge environments, but also to evaluate what we see on study visits in Sweden and internationally in a more systematic way. We would like to use the method support in a developmental, energising dialogue with our tenants and other stakeholders as, together, we continue to reinforce Sweden as a successful nation of knowledge.

STRUCTURED OBSERVATION

Quite simply, our aim is to find concepts and a thought model that supports a structured approach to observing knowledge environments. This will make it possible to maintain in-depth dialogue and thereby promote the development process.

In our model we focus on spaces for meetings, a key concept in developing the successful seats of learning of the future.

Four criteria

In order to capture the aspects which help create successful knowledge environments, we have defined four important dimensions - we call them **our four criteria**:

- Environment for innovation and learning
- Environment for business and society
- Environment for diversity
- Environment for the whole person

We view these four criteria/dimensions as jigsaw pieces which fit together to form the foundation of an attractive knowledge environment.

The four presented criteria are primary groups, where opportunities can be provided within each group to describe more specific functions. For many places, other aspects of using the environment than those usually included in a function description can be identified. These places might for instance be cafés which on the one hand fulfil a functional need, are part of 'the whole person', and on the other hand could be a central meeting place and an 'environment for innovation and learning'.



Two perspectives

In an analysis of a particular area – a whole seat of learning, a campus area or a specific building – we study the four criteria based on two **perspectives**:

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

In what way does the physical environment in the place we are studying help or hinder the free, inspired, creative practice of each of our four criteria? Can the physical facilities support and develop them functionally, culturally or in some other way?

USE/ATTITUDE

Physical measures alone cannot bring about changes in behaviour or modes of conduct; they must be put into a context where they respond to a need or a demand and are supported through the existing operation's clear management and attitude. We summarise this in the word 'use' – which is the second perspective we apply to our four criteria.

How are the environment, its functions and its opportunities for different types of application emphasised in purely communicative terms? This applies both to how functions are made visible to those who spend time in the environments, and to how information material and advertising material, for example, are designed to stimulate their use.

- Different environments can be evaluated based on selected criteria and on how the environments are used.
- The evaluation can encompass a whole campus, a sub-area or an individual building.
- The results can be compiled graphically so that the outcome of the evaluations for the physical environment and use/attitude respectively overlap, and provide a picture of if and, if so, how the two perspectives work together. They may also consist of a qualitative description or some other basis for discussion, for instance.
- The goal for Akademiska Hus has been that the model and the criteria should serve as a basis for shared discussions regarding development plans and strategies in the ongoing development process which takes place alongside our seats of learning.



1. Environment for innovation and learning

This first criterion is characterised by the meeting between people and the exchange of ideas which inspires creative processes. The opportunity to show one's own work and share in that of others. An inviting and open-minded environment that does not get in the way of free thought.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Develop by: Creating open arenas, 'shop windows', prominent, visible meeting rooms or shared workshops. Forming creative workspaces and learning environments, well-designed entrances, stair halls and so on which inspire and bolster an exchange of ideas. Planning rooms that are particularly suited to the exchange of ideas, including neutral project rooms with space to develop and visualise thoughts and ideas. There should be environments with expectations of innovations and architecture and logistics which promote spontaneous meetings. Environments should ideally be mixed with proximity/access to different areas of expertise.

USE/ATTITUDE

Develop by: Consciously arranging meetings and work around 'stages' and open environments. Giving status to stage happenings. Developing work methods that include the physical environment being used. Showing good examples. Informing about the opportunities available in the use of prominent rooms.

2. Environment for business and society

The second criterion highlights environments for direct contacts and collaboration with the private sector and society at large.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Develop by: Providing business and society with space on or directly adjacent to the campus. Placing different types of workspace close to each other. Creating physical environments that attract and motivate non-academics to visit the campus as well. Strengthening the physical environment with thoroughfares and meeting places that link together and facilitate exchange.

USE/ATTITUDE

Develop by: Making collaborations visible, and securing and stimulating them. Taking the initiative for meetings. Upholding a culture that encourages and favours collaborations and contacts.

3. Environment for diversity

Our third criterion focuses on space for people with different characteristics, circumstances and life experiences: social, ethnic and cultural. It values openness for people with varying backgrounds, international contacts and a free exchange of thought across boundaries. A successful knowledge environment is favoured by a working climate where all people are empowered to shine.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Develop by: Encouraging environments that are accessible for different groups and people, and which show traces of many people and a lot of activity. The environments should be varied, with space for the unexpected and free from strict codes.

USE/ATTITUDE

Develop by: Affirming openness and acceptance, where people's differences are seen as assets. Encouraging meetings and shared utilisation. Being vigilant of groups who isolate themselves. Highlighting results that have been achieved through interdisciplinary collaboration and/or diversity in constellations. Stimulating a range of services that affirms diversity. Seeing diversity in the activities as an important democracy and equality issue.

4. Environment for the whole person

The fourth criterion is based on an offering of a total concept. On the campus, many human needs within or adjacent to the area should be able to be satisfied. The campus should be an attractive destination also outside of the normal every day.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Develop by: Providing a broad range of services for students and staff – a '24 hour campus' with attractive cafés and eateries, and focusing on quality and care. Planning for housing on or adjacent to the campus. Offering arenas for culture, physical activity and other stay-healthy activities, also spontaneously in the public space. Offering spaces for reflection, recreation and seclusion.

USE/ATTITUDE

Develop by: Securing a wide range of services and facilities beyond the conventional operation, with the aim of delivering good quality and attractiveness, not just the standard 'provision'. Also inviting people from outside the academic world to use the facilities. Providing different kinds of study and workspace, and communicating generous availability. Informing staff and students of available services, recreation, culture and so on. Marketing the campus area's facilities and services as attractions for the surrounding community.

Background facts

In our method support project, we have drawn on a comparative study conducted by the Danish University and Property Agency. The study lists a number of success factors for university environments. These criteria have been analysed, evaluated and discussed in a workshop arranged by Akademiska Hus, involving various representatives from the academic world. The results of the workshop have been processed, and the criteria and method have then been tested and further refined.

Something that very much affects the design of a campus environment is the essence of a seat of learning, and how that seat of learning wants to be perceived. In order to interpret and evaluate the knowledge environments correctly, the identity with which the seat of learning wants to be associated is an important basic parameter. The intention is to make the criteria adaptable to and compliant with the chosen identity, rather than to challenge it.

As a real estate company, Akademiska Hus is entirely focused on creating, developing and maintaining environments for research and higher education. With this document, we want to take yet another step towards shaping and developing environments based on the relatively complex and abstract terms that are used to define and discuss the knowledge environments of the future.



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