



I need a place where I can meet my friends

How do we create good meeting places?



From an empty space to a happier place

# A guide to creating good neighborhood houses in Oslo

## **Abstract**

The City of Oslo is in constant growth, especially in the eastern part of the city. This requires a need for efficient urban planning strategies. Among these is the densification of the Oslo east, where empty land is available for development. To ensure a smooth transition towards sustainable development and functioning neighborhoods, social factors must also be implemented in the planning.

This can be done through a neighborhood house, a physical social meeting place for the local community. There is no established definition for a neighborhood house, but it can be defined as social infrastructure- a place to meet others (Klinenberg, 2018), that is supposed to be for the neighborhood. A neighborhood house can then be an open meeting place for the local community and provides services, social activities, and events.

The guide includes a description of three different neighborhood houses in Oslo by their core qualities. They are evaluated through three main aspects: local context, trust, and co-creation, and makes it possible to compare them. This is to understand which success key elements are location-specific and which are scalable to different contexts.

The neighborhood houses visited are:

- Sagene Samfunnshus, Sagene
- Samfunnshus Vest AS, Røa
- Petersborg Nabolagshus, Ensjø

The guide then presents a fourth neighborhood house being built in Furuset in 2023. It is referred to as a neighborhood house by OBOS, which is why the term is used throughout this guide. In contact with OBOS, the developer of this new neighborhood house, there was issued the need for a meeting place for young adults. The group conducted a survey to gather information from the age group 18-25 in Furuset.

The guide further contains an interpretation of what young adults want. The findings from the survey are listed in the appendix for others to make their interpretations.

The guide is written for developers of neighborhood houses but especially for the Norwegian developer OBOS since this guide is based on their project Furuset Village, which will be built in 2023.

This guide is written by Maren Halbakken Viken, Hamna Ahmed, and Maria Hugues, students doing the CityStudio Oslo course in the autumn of 2022. The project team conducted original fieldwork to inform these results.



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## A neighborhood house

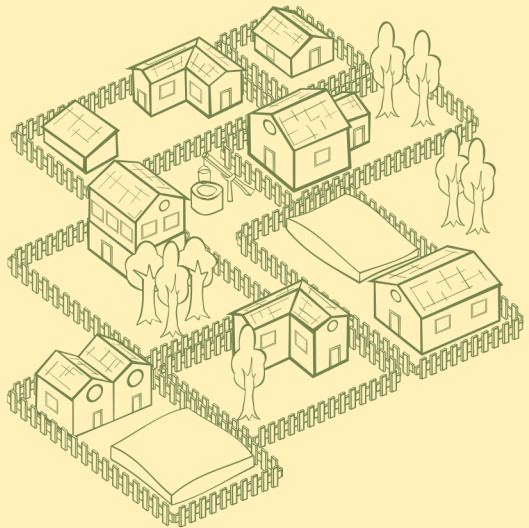
A neighborhood house can function as more than just a building. Because of its capacity to provide an arena that allows for socialization and integration, it creates a focal point for a neighborhood and increases the possibility for social interactions. Since neighborhood house is not an established term, in this guide it is used as an umbrella term for a community center and other social meeting places made for the local communities.

A neighborhood house is a building that provides services and a meeting place for the local neighborhood. Here you could have a coffee with a neighbor, meet new friends or go to events. It helps the local community socialize and integrate already existing residents with new residents. A neighborhood house is an example of a social infrastructure, a space that invites people into a public space. This infrastructure is important for the well-being of the locals and can create more resilient neighborhoods against conflicts (Klinenberg, 2018). Other examples of social infrastructure include libraries, playgrounds, pavements, and schools. These spaces are crucial for prohibiting exclusion and isolation, and for people to gain social capital such as networks, support, and a sense of community.



Through research, three core elements that create a good neighborhood house were found:

- Thinking about the local context: where the neighborhood house is located defines how it should operate.
- Local engagement and co-creation: gives the user a sense of belonging. This is about the responsibility and ability of the users to help decide on activities and use of the space.
- Trust and reciprocity: making sure you are in a safe space and knowing that good actions are rewarded will make people more likely to use this offer.



## Case studies in Oslo, Norway

### Sagene samfunnshus, Sagene



**Founded:** 1988

**Size:** 1774 m<sup>2</sup>

**Area:** District Sagene

**Opening times:** 09-22 (every day except some holidays)

**Ownership:** Sagene district, Nazar café and Yogaskolen

**Operators:** Department for culture, local environment and urban development

**Activities:** 2 800 activities a year

**Visitors:** 170 000 visitors a year

Sagene community house is in the District of Sagene in Oslo. The community house is presented as a meeting place for the locals in Sagene and provides a great number of activities for several age groups 360 days a year. They have rooms that can be rented for events and meetings, and provide the local community with a social space.

#### **Demography**

In the District of Sagene, there are around 44 000 inhabitants. The smallest age group is 13-15, and the biggest age group is from 19 to 30 years old. The District of Sagene has the shortest life expectancy of other districts in Oslo (Oslo Kommune, 2022). Sagene also has the highest population density among Oslo's districts. The area is known for its municipal housing. Gentrification has taken place, where several privately owned apartments have arisen.

## **Operation and facilitation**

This community house collaborates with public, private, and voluntary organizations. The privately owned café also can work as a supervisor to keep the house open for longer hours.

To tackle youth and the increase in dropouts, the house has provided an office for NAV workers to create Ung Samvirke, where they focus on getting youth jobs.

They also facilitate other events that the youth in the area want, for example, watching the world cup together.

This community house works economically with the help of private and public cooperation. They seek funds from the municipality to organize events, for example, to get youth summer jobs. In addition to that, they also receive income from renting out premises to organizations and individuals for meetings, parties, and other social gatherings.

## **Target group**

The target group for this community house has been the locals in the area. The house accommodates youth, by creating summer jobs and events for them. They also target kids and parents for Barnas Kulturhelg and target the elderly with health-related activities to tackle short life expectancy. The house offers Yoga lessons and dance classes in bachata, which attracts a unique group of yoga practitioners and dancers. The house is open for everyone to enjoy.



# Samfunnhus Vest, Røa



**Founded:** 1969  
**Size:** 3 242 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Area:** District Vestre Aker  
**Opening times:** Employees (09-14)  
renters (09-14 or 16-23)  
**Ownership:** Private  
**Operators:** Cooperative enterprise  
**Activities:** 1000 a year  
**Visitors:** No statistics

The purpose of this community house is to support the non-profit groups and associations in the western districts of Oslo, by providing access to rented spaces for association meetings, and activities for social and cultural purposes. This part of the business is not intended for acquisition.

In addition to this, the premises can also be rented out on a commercial basis. They have bylaws about how the house is operated, a membership community, yearly meetings, and a council. Outside of this community house, is Røa Torg, which is a square with a lot of shops and restaurants.

## Demography

Røa is in the District of Vestre Aker in Oslo. There are approximately 49 000 inhabitants in this district, and Røa has around 10 000 inhabitants. The age group 19-29 is the smallest proportion in the district. The largest age group is 40 to 49 years old. The district has a large number of immigrants and a high degree of education among its residents. This implies that the general population has a higher socioeconomic status.

## **Operations and facilitation**

Samfunnshus Vest is privately owned and has two admin workers. They rent out most of the floors in the building to healthcare companies to keep their prices low. There is also a library in the building. The rest of the spaces are for others to rent for events such as meetings, bridge games, and birthdays. There are more than 1000 events held there every year.

Because there is no collaboration with the district, there are few free activities. They have a membership community of 200 members, with a registration fee of 1000 NOK. Those who are members are prioritized for renting the premises and are also able to rent for a cheaper price. The members also have the right to take part in decisions being made about the community house.

## **Target group**

This community house is not specially tailored for the local community at Røa, but rather has users from all over Oslo- as well as outside of Oslo. The users are bigger organizations, associations, health services, and private persons. They have practice rooms for choirs and bands that can be rented to youth for a cheaper price. This was implemented to increase the activity among the youth.

# Nabolagshuset Petersborg, Ensjø



**Founded:** 2021  
**Size:** 967 m2  
**Area:** Ensjø  
**Opening times:** 12-20 (12-21)  
**Ownership:** Ferd Eiendom  
**Operators:** Kirkens bymisjon  
**Activities:** No numbers  
**Visitors:** No numbers

Petersborg aims to become Ensjø's most vibrant meeting place for the local community, with various activities and offers for the neighborhood. Ensjø is an area that is experiencing expansive urban development, which has led to the need for meeting places, activities, and offers. This neighborhood house opened its doors in June of 2021. They offer a senior cafe, and cooking classes with Sprellfisk (a national diet program, generations meetings, a garden with self-produced vegetables and fruit, and other activities made with enthusiasts in the area.

## Demography

Ensjø is in the District of Gamle Oslo. In Ensjø, there are around 10 000 inhabitants living there. The age group 13 to 18 years old is the smallest, whereas the age group 20-40 is the largest. Ensjøbyen is one of the ongoing projects in Hovinbyen, Oslo's biggest urban development area (Oslo kommune, 2022). The area has been dominated by car dealers in the past but is now turning into a hub where the plan is to create more housing.

## **Operations and facilitation**

Petersborg neighborhood house is a collaborative project between Ferd developer and a selection of co-owners in Ensjø. This neighborhood house is operated by Kirkens Bymisjon. They have rooms, equipment, and time to help neighbors start activities. They can help build offers, and activities, and establish associations/organizations. Furthermore, they contribute through good conversations, brainstorming and assisting established organizations, and obtaining volunteers. The local community is able to rent rooms for private events and other activities. Since it is a non-profit organization, they get donations and volunteers for existing events, but also for starting new activities.

The building has an attic with a large room that can accommodate up to 30 people. The second floor is used as office space during the day but can be used as an activity room in the afternoon and evening. A kitchen is installed on the first floor with rooms used for activities. In the basement, they have prepared a music room/studio.

## **Target group**

The house is prioritized for children and young people but has a wide range of activities for other age groups. Kirkens Bymisjon has received support from the Sparebankstiftelsen DNB, to establish youth services. Even though they wish to offer for kids and youth, they have plans of creating yoga clubs, second-hand markets, and other activities for every age.

## Three core elements of a neighborhood house

### Local environment:

It is highly recommended to look into the **local environment** and the local issues when planning a neighborhood house. Doing this will help developers understand more about how to tailor the neighborhood house to the locals' wishes and needs.

Local context can be viewed at three different levels: micro, meso, and macro level. This can further help influence a neighborhood house. Micro level targets the individuals and uses preferences, expectations, attitudes, knowledge, needs, and resources to describe the community. The Meso level is a population's size that falls between the micro and macro levels, such as organizations and communities. The macro level targets the system-wide environment, where external influences such as policies, guidelines, research findings, evidence, regulation, and legislation can influence a neighborhood (Johannessen et al., 2021, 82).

### Participation process:

Local issues require local solutions. The locals know best about what affects them and daily life in the area and will have some recommendations on how to solve problems. They are also the main group that might use the neighborhood house. Therefore, **participation processes** to include and engage locals are important.

Local engagement and a strong community can contribute to good physical and mental health. Having social activities opens people's interpersonal networks, and helps break down barriers to the outside world. Making new friends, broadening their social network, and having fun and contributing to the community can give individuals a deeper sense of purpose. Having a say in what is happening in the local community also helps create a sense of belonging.

### Trust

The last aspect is **trust**. This is one of the most important factors to feel at peace and be satisfied in your local community. You want to have honesty, and safety and to be able to rely on people. In a multifunctional space like a neighborhood house, you can meet all kinds of people who are initially strangers. Trusting them without previous relationships or evidence might initially be challenging. On the other side, it is a prerequisite for actual social engagement and an authentic feeling of community.

Living in a dense society has been demonstrated to increase safety. The urban activist Jane Jacobs talked about “eyes on the street” as a way of describing natural surveillance. Dense cities and a tight-knit community create safety, as everyone is having their eyes on you (Wekerle, 2000).

A way to ensure safety is through a collaboration organization between the private, public and voluntary sectors. This kind of cross-sectoral work can also create jobs for the local community. However, trust has to be mutual to be effective. Employees at the neighborhood house have to trust that the locals respect the neighborhood house, and the locals have to trust that everyone takes responsibility.



# **Furuset**

## *Furuset Village*

The Furuset Village is a new sustainable development project conducted by OBOS, providing both housing and common spaces. This project won the C40 international competition in 2019. C40 There are planned to be around 70 apartments, and two buildings for social meeting places (OBOS, 2022).

Currently, 1105 people in the age group 18-25 live at Furuset (Oslo Kommune, 2022). This group is however challenging to find and research. Since there is not an existing social arena for all young adults in Furuset, there is no exact place where they gather. They might for example study elsewhere in Oslo or work outside of Furuset. In other words, a lot of people in this group do not spend a lot of their time in Furuset. Because of this, this age group of young adults has not taken part in a lot of the participation process relating to the Furuset Village.

## *Context*

Furuset is a satellite city situated in the District of Alna in the eastern part of Oslo. The area is known for being multicultural. Norwegian media has on different occasions portrayed the district as unsafe due to the presence of youth crime. One of the reasons could be that Furuset does not provide enough places for teenagers and young adults (18-25 years old) to gather.



## Participation Process for Furuset Village

The neighborhood house being built in Furuset Village may become a place where young adults meet each other for activities that impact both them and the community. Including the young adults and giving them a reason to spend their time in Furuset, might change the habits of the community. It could also change the reputation the area has in the rest of the city. So where might this group of young adults be?

### Methods

The group did an online survey that received more than 30 responses. This survey was for young adults who live at Furuset, use Furuset, or people who know this group well. The survey was given to people through QR codes on posters, flyers, and on Facebook groups. Participants were able to choose if they wanted the survey in English or Norwegian.

Doing fieldwork at Furuset created a better understanding of the needs of this space and the local context.

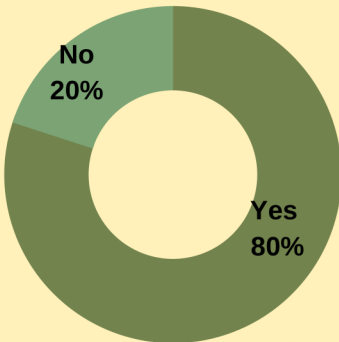
By doing this, there is a clear overview of what young adults living in and using Furuset might want or need in the new neighborhood house in Furuset Village.



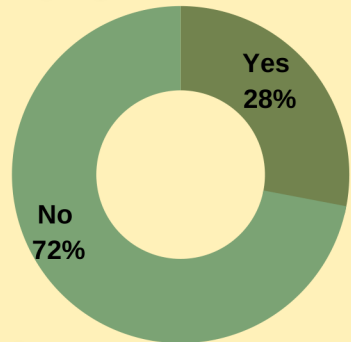
## Survey answers

When asked if there are sufficient services/activities for young adults at Furuset, almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  the people answered no. When asked whether the young adults knew about the development of Furuset Village, 80% answered no. This is also the case with the responses to the question “Do you feel included in the developments of Furuset”, where only 8% answered yes, and 44% answered that they did not know, which could be interpreted in different ways. If they were involved in a participation process, they would probably know. It could mean that they do not know that participation processes occurred, or what the participation process looks like.

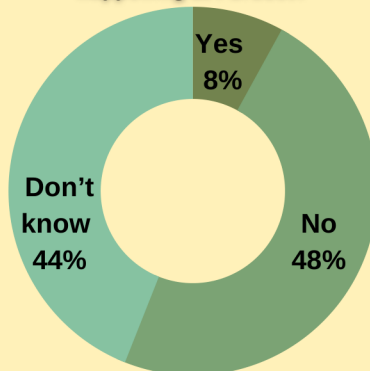
**Do you know about the development of Furuset village?**



**Are there enough offers for young adults at Furuset?**



**Do you feel included in the developments happening at Furuset?**



Open answers from our survey also indicate that young adults from 18-25 years old believe that Furuset does not provide enough places for them to meet. Several answers stated the need for a place to be with friends. As for now, many young adults spend their time outside of Furuset. A variation of activities and places for this young generation at Furuset could create a “sense of belonging” and a better social environment.

The findings show that young adults require more places and activities for their age group in the area. They declare a need for an emphasis on the aesthetics of Furuset and a need for safer spaces.

In the survey question about what young adults do in their spare time, the answers could be an inspiration for what the functions of the neighborhood house should aim to have. Similar interests can be collected and used as indicators of general interests.

For example, the findings show a pattern of young adults spending their spare time working out. There is also a desire for better gyms and a variety of gyms. Good health seems to be important for young adults. This way, incorporating activities or groups to promote good health and working out, could be a potential initiative from the neighborhood house.

Some people also expressed a high engagement with playing video games - which could translate to having gaming equipment and events.

# **Recommendations based on survey answers and neighborhood house research**

Based on more than 30 survey answers, research conducted in three different neighborhood houses in Oslo, and spending time at Furuset, there are some recommendations that can be used further in the development of this neighborhood house.

## **1. Local context**

### **1.1 Urbanization**

Furuset is a special area due to it being a satellite city in Oslo but also due to the current process of urbanization and densification. This is a good opportunity for developers looking to contribute to local needs with innovative responses

### **1.2 Youth environment**

The young adults expressed the need for a better youth environment. By creating clubs and events in safe spaces based on the local's interests, the youth environment could get better.

## **2. Organizational environment**

### **2.1 Collaboration with the District of Alna**

OBOS should collaborate with the District of Alna on the facilitation of this neighborhood house. Firstly, having a well-established organization would ensure economic stability, as seen in other neighborhood houses. Secondly, employees from the district know the local needs well. There could also be a collaboration with a voluntary organization.

## **2.2 Establish a steering committee**

Having a steering committee of Furuset representatives to make decisions would further ensure both a good fit for the local community as well as creating a common responsibility. To ensure participation, representation, and inclusion in the building management, the steering committee should match the demography of people living in Furuset.

## **3. Trust**

### **3.1 Trust the young adults**

Trying to trust the young adults of Furuset and engaging them in the local community in a healthy way is smart. This point is particularly important due to the ongoing media bias regarding Furuset and the safety in the area. Trusting the young adults might be hard as to the reputation Furuset has of troubled youth and criminality, but it might be just what these young people need.

### **3.2 Shared responsibility**

Promote a shared responsibility of the neighborhood house. The key to local involvement and people's contribution lies in trusting that people will give proper use to the neighborhood house and respect the rules. A sense of responsibility and trust can awaken motivation and growth in people that have not been granted that opportunity before.

### **3.3 Establish house rules**

Have written rules about the expectations of the users. This could include how to use objects in the neighborhood house, responsibilities after leaving the space, consequences if rules are broken, and rights and benefits. These rules could be decided on together, and modified according to results after a month or so.

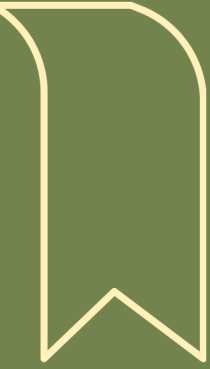
## **4. Integration into the local community**

### **4.1 Create an identity**

Creating a good and inclusive name for the neighbourhood house would further create an identity for this place. When visualizing this project, among other names, "yellow hub" and "the Furuset house" has been suggested. This would be very descriptive of this building, as well as it is a catchy name for the people at Furuset to use.

### **4.2 Introduce at Trygve Lies Plass**

Introducing the neighborhood house to people already closer to the hub at Furuset would spark interest. There could be bright yellow dots on the pavement, or a bright yellow sign pointing towards the equally yellow house.



## Suggested uses

- Celebrating events
- Gaming night
- Themed evenings could be social such as costume parties, but also educational such as lectures and workshops fitting for the area and user group.
- Creating specific clubs for working out with the initiative of the neighborhood house. This could be going on runs or a walk together, starting from the neighborhood house, or the neighborhood housing posters about common training sessions at the local park.

## Credits

Peter Austin, Planning Advisor at City of Oslo, Urban Development Department. Provided guidance and connected the group with C40 and Furuset Village.

Farah Humayun, Urban Planner at District of Alna. Provided local knowledge, and connected the group to contact OBOS.

Hanne Løvbrøtte, Project Leader at OBOS. Providing information about the Furuset project .

CityStudio Oslo students and staff. Thank you for the Weekly feedback.





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## Appendix

### List of survey results:

#### **Hva mener du mangler på Furuset?**

#### **What do you feel is missing at Furuset?**

- Ungdomsklubber
- Et sted å møte venner
- Cafe og arrangementer for venner
- Inkludering
- Alt mulig.. har bodd her i 2 år og kun møtt og kommet i kontakt på treningsstudio Trenger en sosialarena
- Langrennsløyper, kafè, fotballpub/kafè. Andre type aktiviteter. Tennisbane, kino, badeland.
- Et moderne treningssenter på størrelse med SATS, eksisterende tilbud som Actic er altfor dårlig. Ungdommene vil ha det godt med et treningssenter som er på bakkenivå/over bakken.
- Variasjon i tilbudene. Samhandling på tvers av alder og etnisiteter.
- Mest av alt mangler arbeidstilbud. Ungdom må få muligheter til å bygge opp en CV med ulike gjøremål i og for fellesskapet.
- Det burde også vært en bytte-/fiksekafe for å få mer gjenbruk lett tilgjengelig.
- Ønsker klærs butikker til norske. Ett bedre matvare butikk.Noen kaffe er som du kan sitte å få prate,møtte med venner.
- Lys på kveldstid og klubber/ og et møteplass som unge mennesker kan benytte seg av. (En liten fotballbane med vegger eller noe)
- Hyggelige steder å sitte og kose seg
- Ingenting

- Klesbutikker, normal,
- Bedre senter
- Innested på kveldstid
- Kanskje flere områder der ung voksne og familier kan bruke på rekreasjon: Åpne kafeer, parker og annen tilbud.
- Flerbruks kulturarena, tilpasset konsert, teater. Og en pub/bar.
- De unge må føle seg mer sett og føle at de er inkludert i ett felleskap.
- Ikke no spess
- Ikke mye
- Ting som faktisk gagnar oss fremfor å bygge unødvendige bygg som ikke har noe relevans. Kunne vært flere fritidsaktiviteter og et område hvor flere kan henge sammen uten å gjøre så stort ut av det.
- Renere t bane
- Bolig
- Nordmenn
- Celebrations and relevant clubs that are not for kids
- Don't really think about it. I think that they have everything necessary.

## Hva må til for at du skal bruke mer tid på Furuset?

### What has to happen for you to spend more time at Furuset?

- Å ha noe å gjøre her
- Noe å finne på
- Noe arrangementer
- At ungdommene fjerner seg fra senteret på nattetid.
- At man inkluderer de unge voksne i mye større grad.
- Satsing på E-Sport
- Et triveligere senter, varierte spisesteder og butikker. Biblioteket er en viktig møteplass for alle.
- Jeg bo der. Vi eldre generasjon også ønsker i blant å gå ut uten å reise til sentrum, men er det ikke trygg. Litt sang og musikk. Teater nå tenker dere nå drømmer hun.
- Trygghetsfølelsen må være tilstede for det. Et sted som skiller ungdommer og fritid, med familie og shopping osv.
- Ha det hyggelig med benner og stoler
- På biblioteket
- bedre parkering
- Bedre senter
- Aktiviteter
- Større, åpne og lyse områder for å gjøre skrivearbeid.
- Pub
- Slutt på de negative stereotypene om furuset
- Er her hele tiden
- Flere gratis fritidsaktiviteter
- Slutt på dårlig ungdomsmiljø. Ikke fint med mye politi osv. trenger mer fritidsaktiviteter for bedre fellesskap rundt de unge
- Bygg noe som er relevant hvor alle kan samles uten noe stiv stemning.
- At det ikke stinker
- Sharialover

## Hva gjør du på fritiden?

### What do you do in your spare time?

- Trener
- Trener, skater
- Er med venner i sentrum
- Tegner og leker med hunden
- Henger med familien min og venner
- Trener, trener og trener
- Møter venner, trener, drar ut på byen, ser fotballkamp. Står på slalom om vinteren og eventuelt langrenn.
- Er aktiv i nærmiljøet og miljøengasjert.
- Går turer, løser sudoku kryssord TV om kvelden.
- Jeg spiller videospill. Mange ungdommer er i nabolaget og skaper en utrygg følelse.
- Henger på senteret
- Lese bøker og se på tv
- Skole
- Henger
- Er utøvende danser, så bruker mye tid på å trene. Ellers bruker jeg tid til lesing og kortspill med venner.
- Trener, konserter, utstillinger, leser
- Ingenting
- Biblo med venner
- Ikke mye, ute med venner
- Biblo, venner, fotball
- er mye på jobb, trener, leser
- Basket
- Partey
- Learn norwegian, study
- With family

## **CityStudio Oslo 2022**

CityStudio Oslo is an interdisciplinary course that focuses on solving existing problems in the city. Students from different universities and fields come together to create projects that will bring value to the city of Oslo. This year the focus has been on environmental and social sustainability in the city center of Oslo

# **CITYSTUDIO**

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**OSLO**