

## **Abstract**

In the wake of densification and urbanisation, crowding has become an increasingly important issue for social sustainability in cities. This also affects urban design and the ways public spaces stimulate different kinds of crowding and clustering. There are, of course, several factors which affect pedestrian clustering and declustering in public spaces, factors that determine how and why people act as individuals or in groups, some of which concern the built environment, its materiality, and the atmosphere experienced in people's relation to architectural elements. The present study addresses the rhythmic aspects of the spontaneous formation and dispersal of groups of people in socially conditioned events and situations. I investigate clustering and declustering by focusing on the role of physical space and materiality in these processes, using observation studies of pedestrian activities and interactions in selected places in the city centres of Malmö and Lund, two cities in the south of Sweden. I examine the character and materiality of public space in its ability to influence spontaneous clustering and declustering habits, and the various roles that crowds can have as part of everyday public life. I also address how the design of urban public space may afford different rhythms of crowding at different times. The field studies are categorised into crowding rhythms by their temporal scale: first, the everyday crowding related to walking and commuting; second, the weekly, monthly, and seasonal crowding related to regular cultural events such as markets or local festivals; and third, the extraordinary or exceptional crowding related to large-scale public events. The purpose of this study is to increase understanding of the relevance of sociomateriality to ordinary acts of clustering and declustering in public places, and more specifically to gain insight into a variety of crowding rhythms, and to articulate new concepts that can help describe the character of clustering or declustering in public spaces and the role of architecture and urban design in spatial production.