FREE EXPRESSION:
This multifaceted project was initiated as a collaboration between our Cultural Center and Jon Geib, a PhD researcher. It became a constellation of 13 workshops involving 159 children and youth in 8 different school groups from 3 parts of the city, and was integrated with a 3-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 neighbors and their apartments as game pieces on a pre-designed laser-cut plywood gameboard. Through the metaphor of A Ship Comes Loaded…, a Swedish children’s game in which players take turns asking 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 most added them incrementally to the exhibition. Participants met indirectly through encounters with each other’s artwork. A design-built sculptural installation—part ship, space laboratories, dramatized our artistic research process as an endless expedition and invited visitors to join (bottom left). Participants met indirectly through encounters with each other’s artwork. A design-built sculptural installation—part ship, space laboratories, dramatized our artistic research process as an endless expedition and invited visitors to join (bottom left).

OUTCOMES & EVALUATION:
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 tools in different ways). The quality of the exhibition and its workshop tool artworks led visitors and cultural officials to recognize a new way of collaborating with children & youth and of taking them seriously.

IMAGES:
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 exhibition designer (PHD researcher) in the case of 3 smaller groups.

Participants met indirectly through encounters with each other’s artwork. A design-built sculptural installation—part ship, apartment, research lab & spaceship (interior side not shown)—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 (bottom left).