

# **THE VIDEO STORE<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Presented in the proceedings of 56<sup>th</sup> IFHP World Congress, Sept 16-19, Gothenburg

## Abstract:

This paper explores the notion of architects and designers as facilitators and design processes as processes of actualization and cultivation in relation to two research projects performed in a suburb of Gothenburg, Backa. Suggesting that there is a lack of places where issues of social sustainability, in relation to city development, can be discussed and probed on an everyday basis outside professional and formal structures, an informal and experimental space, a “civic-lab” was established, by the researchers in a former Video-store for those everyday experts, living, working and spending time in the area for four months. Centrally located the 200 sqm space, at the ground floor, with big windows facing the street and where interior had been stripped out provided a low-key platform. Asking: In what way can an open, informal and performative space dedicated to development of local ideas and initiatives and supported by researchers become a tool of mobilization in relation to city planning and city development?

The question of how to deal with and build upon the everyday life and concerns of people within city development and urban planning is an urgent socio-political matter at the core not only of social as well as ecological and economical sustainability. Demographic tools are well developed but as tools they merely entitle and priorities professional knowledge and a linear logic often produces predictable outcomes, being exclusive rather than inclusive. This kind of knowledge needs to be complemented by processes that reflect and include desires, concerns, dreams, individual and collective narratives. In this context the tradition to deal with experience in an open non-instrumental way, which one can find within practices of art, provided a productive platform.

With a mix of experiences and methods from a social work, architecture and design, the former video-store became the platform for picking up, connecting, expanding and bifurcating local ideas into autonomous initiatives, such as small-scale urban farming, a flea-market and home-work/handicraft evenings for children. These “small changes” bear witness to the lack of interplaces in contemporary Swedish society where initiatives can connect and grow, as well as how designers can engage in these processes without risking high-jacking processes which might not be theirs to run?

In addition, the Video-store also contained issues of power, democracy and responsibility. Ideally local democracy is a way of strengthening the interaction between the municipality and people. It is about the sharing of power, but can also be a way of reassigning responsibility from state to individuals, or of strengthening certain “loud” groups in favor of others on the margin. Therefore the purpose of the Video-store was to prototype processes as well as discuss issues of democracy, the possibilities and limitations of participation, the tensions and “passions” in the relationship between people and the local as well as central administration, city planners, architects and politicians as situated within current frameworks and processes.

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*Backa, a Gothenburg suburb is undergoing a major development project, which includes a refurbishment of the local square and its surroundings (Selma Lagerlöfs torg) as well as additional housing throughout the area – process that is still in its initial stage. In the vicinity of Selma Lagerlöfs torg there is a commercial space known by the locals as “Marias Video” - the name of the former video store that used to be there. The space has been empty ever since (as many other commercial spaces in the area), except for the winter 2010/2011 when it was reincarnated as experimental civic space in the name of (artistic) research. The space with its proximity to the square with large windows facing the pedestrian street was a perfect meeting point. What is accounted for in this paper are the difficulties and possibilities with activating a space for dreams, concerns and issues to be actualized and cultivated into local initiatives. There is no straightforward conclusion in this paper but a range of overlapping processes and practices which intersect in the four-month initiative the Video-store. Still the paper has key issues, which has some of the qualities that a more straightforward research question/paper would have. A central one is the question of how to deal with and build upon everyday experience in city development and planning. Another issue, is how to benefit from the fundamental openness of art, artistic processes and actualization as an alternative to what is possible within the formal planning apparatus and a process of realization. A third issue is how to do this without compromising democratic values and practices.*

## 1. THE BACKPACK - (*why we went were we went and what we brought with us.*)

In truth we did not exactly know what to expect or what would happen when we opened the “video-store” to the public. Still, we were not without agendas. Gothenburg has been undergoing huge building and rejuvenation projects throughout the city. Backa is the last area to be developed at the far end of the waterfront. Critics of the previous development sites have pointed at how the rents have gone up and how the area is catered to a well-off middle class leading to gentrification of the areas (Thörn 2009). Further, in these projects there has been either little involvement of people affected or dialogue projects that have failed leading to disappointment and resentment towards the politicians. The changes taking place in Gothenburg are not unique in any way rather the city is going down a route that many cities across Europe and globally have

taken. Urban rejuvenation, redevelopment projects are being carried out in many places according to the same cultural pattern, what Sharon Zukin calls “Domestication by cappuccino”(Harvey 2012, Zukin 2010). At the same time however urban discontents also have become more frequent and we have seen people taking to the streets manifesting their discontent (Harvey 2012, Dikeç 2006). David Harvey concludes: “These days it is not hard to enumerate all manner of urban discontents and anxieties, as well as excitements, in the midst of even more rapid urban transformations. Yet we somehow seem to lack the stomach for systematic critique. The maelstrom of change overwhelms us even as obvious questions loom.” He argues that the right to the city must entail “changing and reinventing the city after our hearts desire” and claims that this has to be a collective rather than individual endeavor which cannot be divorced from the question of “what kind of people we want to be, what kind of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold” (Harvey, 2012).

This caused us to be curious about how the development of Backa would take place and how the people living there would be involved. When we started our project the planning process had just started and therefore there was a real opportunity for people living in the area to perhaps intervene and influence the process. Were the people living in Backa prepared to take part in a planning process and could an initiative such as the video-store somehow contribute?

Backa is a suburb of Gothenburg built in the 60's with the usual public owned high-rise concrete buildings mixed with privately owned houses and apartment blocks. The area is an average district according to statistics of income, employment and health though at a closer look one can see that the district is highly segregated and in different localities within the area, statistics show low incomes, high unemployment and low health rates, much lower than the average Gothenburg level. A district with its fair share of social issues and conflict. Unrest in the area became front-page news in 2010 and 2011 when youth set fire to cars in the streets and there were incidents between youth and police. Recently Backa became incorporated into a larger district as a part of a larger re-organisation of the city within the municipality. This has lead to an upheaval of administration and changes in the district. One new aspect that came with the new organisation of the city were changes to the regulation and mandate for the districts. The social dimension of sustainable development was underlined also stating that this requires communication with the citizens. Further it states that there should be participation by the

citizens in the development of society and that on the district level there should be involvement in the development of old and new housing - actualising the issue of city development, democracy and local dialogue processes.

As researchers we had experience from Backa from both work (Emma had previously worked with young people and issues of democracy and sustainability in Backa) and research (both authors were involved to a degree in a collaboration between Gothenburg University and Backa concerning issues of culture and health). Further we had been a part of the research project Ingrep (Interventions) that focused on art and city development which was based at HDK, The School of Craft and Design. As the different research projects developed HDK became more involved in Backa through various master-programs under the reign of “social” design - a new area of design developing at the school. For us (as researchers), the imminent change of Backa was an opportunity to be part of something, and in combination with a upcoming change of HDK there was, as we saw it, an opportunity to stake out a new ground together with the people and the district of Backa.

Our story of the video-store has debts and the first one we find in a social work practice influenced among others by Paulo Freire (1970) (and put into practice by Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education, a Delhi based organisation from which Emma has extensive experience). It is an approach to social work that is based on the prerequisite that communities and the people living there are seen as collaborators and in Ankurs own words use that collaboration to *“build new, dynamic spaces for companionable learning. We engage in diverse and experimental practices of sharing and generating knowledge, questioning accepted practices and wisdom. Over the years Ankur has witnessed the emergence of new narratives and perspectives that would hitherto have been lost”*[1] From this practice, we draw extensive professional and personal experience - working with and building on that which otherwise would have been lost has been a constant point of reference. This approach recognises how the rich character of the everyday experience often fails to be acknowledged by the formal institutions of society, but when acknowledged can be actualized into narratives and perspectives, creating new platforms and possibilities for local communities.

Secondly we, Henric in particular, took on the challenge of the video-store from the perspective of artistic research - where artistic practices are key driver sin various knowledge processes. We will not go into the arguments here concerning artistic research but we would like

to stress the context of art and design here. Art in this context, in our particular version, is about arts capacity to unsettle and to bring new experiences and understandings into already (perceived) settled matters. And when we talk about design, again in this context and in our particular version, we talk about designs capacity to bring something new out of something fuzzy and yet unknown.

Finally - our context is the university - and what we in particular think of is the notion of the university established by Wilhelm von Humboldt almost two centuries ago. He made the bold suggestion that new knowledge could be developed at the university through research. Until that point universities had been seen as the guardians of ancient riches. Consequently, what von Humboldt did was to transform the university from a place of keeping to a place of exploring. The reason for raising this issue is that exploration for explorations sake, by curiosity, at least under the reign of neoliberalism and new public management cannot, as we learned, be taken for granted.

## 2) THE MAP - (*as it is charted by others before us*)

Many of us are familiar with the *The Production of Space* from 1974 (published in English 1991) where Henri Lefebvre introduces a triadic model of space pointing at how space is produced along three axes. First there is the commonsensical and habitual “Spatial practice” (sometimes referred to as “perceived space”) producing the everyday – for instance (as exemplified by Lefebvre) “the daily life of a tenant in a government subsidized high-rise housing project” (Lefebvre 1991, p 38). Along the second axis we have “Representations of space”, sometimes referred to as “conceived space”, the conceptualized space of “scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers” (ibid, p 38) which also as pointed out is the dominant mode of spatial production. Finally, along the third axis, we find “Representational spaces”, sometimes referred to as “lived space”. This is space “as directly lived through its associations images and symbols” (ibid, p 39). This is the space of various forms of artistic production, that delve into the realm of the imaginary which not only transcends but has the power to reconfigure the balance of popular “perceived space” and official “conceived space”.

Knowledge can be regarded as a special kind of attention. If you’re a botanist the forest looks different to you than if you are woodcutter. Similarly, the everyday perspective you have on your apartment and neighborhood (perceived space) looks different than the goal- and future-

oriented perspective you have if you are a planner working with the development of the same neighborhood (conceived space). And further, the magnifying glass of the botanist does something else to the botanist than the axe does to the woodcutter. Similarly the rental apartment does something else to the tenant than the planning-process does to the planner. All this are with the words of Giorgio Agamben – apparatuses – i.e “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (Agamben 2005). The magnifying glass as well as the planning-process change the way we “capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control” and so on. Where the apparatuses, drawing on Michel Foucault, is that which transforms living beings into subjects in process of subjectification. Thus the rental apartment subjectifies the person renting it into a tenant and similarly the planning-process produces planners.

In this perspective it should not be a surprise that everyday experiences of perceived space has difficulties coming to speaking terms with the bureaucratized reality of conceived space and vice versa since they pay attention to different things and are subjectified by different apparatuses. Patsy Healey writes: “In the complex multirelational context of the urban, all kinds of knowledges are produced through the way people in different relational contexts engage in their various activities...This kind of knowledge, acquired through bodily engagement as well as mental formulation, is difficult to access in the 'public realm' ...” (Healey 2007). Further on if “accessed” there is the even bigger challenge of acknowledging and how to take into account that which has been shared.

This challenge is political in Rancière’s definition: “It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”(Rancière 2004) The data and stories that are allowed existence will define the stages that are created for dialogue which in turn reveals who are included and who are excluded, which interests that are guarded, which conflicts (noise) that are made visible (speech), allowed and what processes are possible i.e. who are allowed to participate in the public domain. Marginalised areas and people are often described through statistics that are then complemented with stories *about* them. Often poor people are portrayed in two contradictory images – the innocent poor that needs to be defended or saved or the

dangerous needy (prone to criminality) that needs to be contained. The two images help to reduce people into objects of either guilt or fear and consequently into problems that need to be solved either through charity or through control affecting also how development projects for certain areas are conceived. Historically the demolishing (or the renovation) of poorer areas leading to the displacement of marginalised people has been legitimate form of urban development. (Harvey 2012)

In this sense, according to Rancière, politics are “material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done” (Rancière 2004:39). And it is precisely in this intersection, between “invisibility” and “visibility”, that artistic ways of doing and making may intervene “in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility” (Ibid:13). Where artistic ways of doing and making can be seen as process of mobilization, about creating a certain momentum or pull, acknowledging something that has passed unnoticed or unimagined. However, any intervention should be made with caution, there is the obvious risk of placing too much belief in a story or a conversation that it has in itself a inherent power to create change. There is an apparent risk to end up in what Grant Kester calls “dialogical determinism” i.e. the naive belief that all social conflicts can be solved through the utopian power of free and open conversations and exchanges. (Kester 2005:182) This belief disregards the apparent differences in power relations that define participation in a discourse. Where new stories have the inherent power to create new social conflicts as they can result in illuminating and creating an understanding of material, economical and political differences.

Further as pointed out by Kester, it is not only dominant groups and voices who are likely to claim the so called front stage described by Healy, art and artist (as well as artistic researcher) may just as well be tempted to take the role of unasked for representation. Here the key question, again following Kester is: What does it mean for an artist to surrender the security of self expression for the risk of inter-subjective engagement? We are all too familiar in communication that fails...we need models that succeed. Can art still elicit a more open attitude toward new and different forms of experience?” (Kester 2005). In a slightly different manner this challenge framed by Bourdieu (2008) is formulated like this: ”It is necessary to go beyond the idea of ”giving a voice”, having hearings or interviewing the poor. Where some are called to tell their stories and others think about it, conclude, and decide. – what is rarely mentioned, however, is

how much it takes to create the conditions for a real freedom of speech and possibility for rigorous thinking together.”

One key element in the development of our cities is the anticipation of the future. In most cases the anticipation of the future spells continuity, as in the extrapolation of the past and the immediate now. And in life, for what it counts, we expect tomorrow to differ little or nothing at all from today. If we follow Bergson (1998), the way we understand and deal with the future in the end falls back to how we deal with time itself. Witnessing the industrial revolution at its peak, he identified the measuring, division and synchronization of time as central perquisite for the new emerging society. Time was dealt with as an abstract unit, exchangeable, like a currency. For Bergson, time conceptualized in this way, although proved immensely productive in many ways, also posed a threat. Bergson differed between what he called *realization* – the execution of series of planned and synchronized operations designed to achieve a certain result – and *actualization* – the way something unfolds as an effect of time. Kwinter (2002) uses the ice-cube and the snowflake to explain. When poured in an ice-cube mold and put in the freezer, the freezing water adopts the shape of the mold in a fully predictable and instrumental way – the ice-cubes are realized according to the plan. But when falling through the sky at temperatures below 0°C raindrops actualize themselves into snowflakes in infinite ways. Another way to explain this is to look at the difference between a drawing (or a plan) and a sketch. A drawing is about realization, about execution – it’s about definitions and limitations. A sketch is less straightforward, less instrumental, to sketch is to explore something without fully knowing what you will find. The sketch is thus about exploring the differences in a brush-stroke, in the pitch of a sonic arrangement, about the variations we find between blue and green. Looked upon this way, what is at stake in the end is a certain kind of sensibility; call it an artistic sensibility, towards the abundance of time and life in all its differentiations and nuances as an endless resource of creation and creativity.

### 3) THE EXCURSIONS - (*where we went and what we did*)

To work with ideas and to discuss are not isolated actions but happen in a context and as Freire (1970) states they need an arena and a place in society. When we moved into the empty video store, it was as researchers. We had no plan to realize something in particular – instead we

imagined that there were a lot of things waiting to be actualized both issues and actual projects but that there was a lack of arenas to do this. In fact, we had very little mandate of realizing anything, beyond our own limited scope as researchers. Lacking formal muscles we thought that we, by means of our experience as architects, designer and facilitators, at best could support, connect ideas, concerns and initiatives into having their own momentum. We imagined a space as an informal space of sketching (in the widest sense elaborated on earlier) and communal learning. It would be a place where you came if you wanted to discuss or do something with others rather than complain or give feedback to a ready-made idea. Such a space of actualization would complement the already existing formal space of realization (the development company's - Framtiden - office), already established a block away where you came either to take part of (being informed) or giving feedback (informing) the ongoing (planning) process, subjectifying people into informers and informants, rather than creators and imaginative beings.

Of course you can create, imagine and discuss as much as you like, but it can be lonely on your own and good ideas often benefit from talking and working with other people to develop them further. How would/could the formal process, following Healey, access, and further on bring these ideas, dreams and concerns into the planning process? In our mind these dreams, imaginations and concerns either had to be cultivated and formulated collectively together with others into something which could exist within the formal process or find their way of actualizing themselves outside the formal process potentially influencing the formal planning process through living examples and alternatives. Our assumption was that these were important means for local people to influence and take part in the development of the area but were not given and would not necessarily just appear in public. However, perhaps if there were an informal place where you could "sketch" together what an urban dream could be, what was important to protect, what ideas could be actualised and knowledge shared - in a sense prepare before attempting to enter the formal planning process - more people would get involved in the ongoing development process.

So we rented one of the empty commercial spaces at the main square - the former video-store. Being at the main square felt important as it was one of the locations in the area where people from the whole area came in an otherwise very segregated district. We soon found out that the store we had rented had already been a kind of meeting place, the empty space was full of connotations and history. And as any space, following Lefevbre (2005) ,it is sustained and

performed by people, by our way of thinking and by our way of acting (or not acting), not only the grand schemes, but just as important, the little things. Similarly the video-store is not 150 sqm of empty commercial space – the memory of the video-rental service closed down was still strong among the locals – hence “Videobutiken” or “Marias Video” refers back to what has been. “Marias Video” had been one of the few places that was open during the evening a place where youth would hang out, bringing their reality, their way of life as well as their scooters - creating a lot of tension and complaint in the neighborhood. Consequently, many wanted the video-store to close but there was also a concern. The square had - as many areas that undergo redevelopment - many vacant spaces due to the uncertainty of what was going to happen to the square. In all, the neighborhood became weaker in a wicked spiral of less revenues, less services and less support, creating more frustration and tension – a sense of abandonment – and the empty video-store (which still is empty) was just one more sign of this. Consequently, us moving in was met with different responses and expectations. Where the video store was a space of loss but also, as we hoped, of promise – a place with histories - but also with futures.

The re-instating of the former video-store into a space of sketching and actualization, that is, into an atelier or studio required preparation. It's layout could serve as a blue-print for an art gallery (or show room like the housing company's). But whereas galleries and show rooms in most cases aim to conceal the work behind the final art piece, the atelier and studio is open and full with all that is required to produce art - it is a workspace. It becomes filled with drawings, sketches, images, molds, photographs, images, models, mock-ups and all sorts of things that either are a direct result of the ongoing work and process (or have been) or things that for different reasons have caught the attention of artist – a map of possibilities pointing at new and old directions. In our space material produced earlier in an open workshop “Food for thought” at Selma Lagerlöfs torg was put in display (we had put up a tent at the square and offered a bowl of soup in exchange for a vision for the area). A scaled model of the square and it's surroundings was made out of banana cardboard boxes and installed on the floor. Posters with info about the project and parts of the wall were painted with blackboard paint where invitations and information were chalked up. A map of Backa where you could mark where you lived or point directly at a particular place was painted directly on the wall (in yellow). For furniture we scavenged green and black stainless steel chairs from the cultural centre at the square and tables

and large stands for flipcharts from HDK. We bought pens, glue, paper, crayons, scissors, tape, knives, brushes, rules, cardboard and a printer.

We wanted the space to have an “unfinished” feel so that anyone could feel that they could come in and start something - that nothing was pre-conceived. But we also knew that for some it takes a form of courage to enter any kind of new space. So we chose to both keep the space open so people could come in when they walked by and we had events that we advertised on the internet, posters and flyers but we also had direct collaborations with for example the local school and other projects or organisations. The different approaches reached different people, we found that the announcements had a hard time getting through to those who weren’t already engaged in similar issues. However, keeping the space open as much as possible - which in this case meant two days a week - helped to reach other groups (many told us that they had passed the space many times before picking up the courage to come in). Not surprisingly we initially mostly picked up children who immediately saw an opportunity to ask questions or to start drawing. Through the children we also managed to connect to their parents. But as it proved, and as one might imagine, it is one thing to participate in a workshop or a meeting and it is another to actually mobilize around one particular concern or issue. Time and perseverance proved itself a key aspect here. Quite early on, a young local enthusiast for urban farming and permaculture came to the space wanting to do something but had no context to take his ideas further in the area. Backa has a past as a rich farming area and there are a few allotment areas as well as a rich food culture due to multi-cultural and multi-ethnical backgrounds of those living in Backa. We supported the initiative by helping the young enthusiast to organise lectures and theme evenings on city gardening. After a couple of meetings we managed to form a working group - Gåsagången gror! - with the goal to start a collective garden of eatables on the lawn in front of the tenement housings where the video-store was located. We got in contact with the attendant in charge of the outdoor environment in the area who was positive towards launching the initiative. But as the project slowly grew in momentum it soon became clear that we were entering contested ground. When one member of the working group approached the local tenant association they were immediately against the idea of engaging the tenants in this manner. The main argument was that they had tried this before and that it would not work now either. Further, they were convinced that the local youth would destroy any project made in a public space. Despite this, and due the perseverance of those few tenants engaged and especially the attendant,

a Gåsagången Gror! garden was launched in the spring 2011. By this time we had unfortunately already left the video-store due to lack of funds and the municipality owned company that owned the space would not let it to us for free temporarily even though there were no other tenants in sight.

Other experiments that took place were the different workshops “Framtidstorget”, “Framtidstorget Skällstorpsskolan” and “Matpalatset”. One key prop for these workshops was the “Parascope”, a “Future Binocular” which “resembles scenic viewer binoculars but instead of showing the here and now, it displays several visualisations of how things might be in the future in that particular place”[2], developed by the design group Unsworn Industries. The Parascope was set up in the square and in the initial mode you could see the 360 degree section of the square through the binoculars. Afterwards people were given the possibility to work, draw and write on a paper panorama - a depiction of the actual site - with pen, paper and scissors - which after being photographed is downloaded into the parascope - hence adding your vision of the space to the already existing “real” version. At the end of the day you could, with a push of a button, zap through the different versions of the future in the parascope - all with a 360 degree perspective. Later we put the panoramas on display in the windows. And it’s noteworthy how difficult it was for many to think beyond what was depicted in the image - i.e. the physical structures that already existed. Sometimes it took a lot of encouragement for someone to take the scissors or a crayon and cut out or scribble over an existing building in order to create something else. Also, the first attempts often included a typical image of shopping malls and cafeterias. The power of what already existed in reality or what a typical city image is expected to be was so strong it took time to imagine in new ways. In the panoramas many also took the opportunity to highlight what they liked about the square, things they wanted to keep.

We also worked together with a group of local youth that had in an earlier project (with Emma) came up with an idea that they wanted a “Food Palace” at the square. To promote their idea they had earlier organised a food stand at the local market as well as a presentation of their idea which was presented to representatives of the city district of Backa. As in the case of many dialogues local peoples suggestions are often presented through words which in a way is much weaker than the alluring images that architects and development companies present when they show off their plans for an area (it is always sunny weather and full of smiling couples with happy kids). Could we work together with the group to create a similar kind of presentation

material for their idea? Could we produce a tangible vision of how The Food Palace would look and feel through the architects/designers tools ie models, images, drawings and so on.

The first challenge was re-assemble the group, which was not an easy task, but most of them felt it was urgent to bring their idea a step further and tried to their best ability to commit to a new process. The second challenge was for the designers and architects, following Kester (2005) to open their own artistic and professional process into a collective process where the group of youth could get involved in the actual designing of the palace, a process that that was more tricky than we imagined. There were a series of design sessions where we slowly outlined the architecture of “Food Palace” and in-between these sessions we produced drawings and models based on the sessions, designed to assist the articulation of the design in the following sessions. This material was on display for visitors to comment and reflect upon but also proved helpful when team-members showed up spontaneously, making it easy to pick up discussions and design-decisions. This process ended up in model in the same scale as the cardboard city on the floor and one ambition was to produce a new parascopic view to be viewed through the paroscope at the parking lot where the Food Palace was imagined to be located, but the process dragged on and in the end we did not have the time nor the money to re-stage “The Food Palace” at site. However, we produced images of the model and created a new presentation of the idea which was sent to the six architect offices that had been given an assignment from the development company to create a vision of the square where at least three of them picked up the idea and added it to their plan (although only one acknowledged the youths work...).

#### 4 THE NOTEBOOK (*some things to bear in mind for the future*)

Four months was a very short time for a project like this however we have continued to work in the area after we left the actual space, but without the meeting space no new contacts, relations and projects were made though we have kept working especially with the urban farming initiative and the people connected to it.

The notion of the sketching and experimentation entails failure as an important ingredient in the learning and development process. Working on your own, the failures and successes are yours only but when you move into a public space and into a collective process with people or a community with mixed interests and backgrounds the process is more unpredictable and

responses to the initiative came in all various way imaginable - from immensely positive, just positive, indifferent, to sceptical, to in the other end - immensely negative.

There were two important ingredients of the initiative which probably contributed to this mixed response. We tried hard with each initiative to make sure that the ownership stayed with the local people and that we did not turn into "managers" or turn their ideas into our own projects. As in the collective farming initiative, the organisation of the initiative grew slowly and organically according to who came to the meetings etc. which on one hand gave room for improvisations and an openness but also simultaneously made the project move slowly. For people outside that process, who were perhaps used to the idea that projects are realised as efficiently and quickly as possible often interpreted the slow process of actualization, as just a badly planned and organised project. This view was held not only towards the gardening project but by some also of the space itself. As we could not specify exactly what was going to happen in the space, who would be there and what the end result would be (typical project think) we were considered an anomaly and difficult to place within the normal event of things in the area.

The second aspect, was the role of us researchers. We did not belong to the public administration with a project to carry out, we were not an organisation with a mission and we were not from the locality. Although we were careful to inform people that we came from the university and we only were there to support and strengthen other's initiatives, for some people in the locality (a very small but loud minority) our presence meant that the activity was created by outsiders and therefore not welcome. For others including the local administration we were a new kind of actor in the locality that they were not used to. We also found this in-between position tricky, it is extremely difficult to find the right balance when supporting initiatives like this. You are an outsider and there is the uneven fact to begin with that the local people are engaged during their free time while we are there during our work time and getting paid for it. Obviously it is easy to want to help too much to the extent that you take over. And yes it is an unusual role for a researcher to be in, at least there are not that many other examples of similar work (action research) that we could refer to close by.

Our work was also conceived as a dialogue project. There has been a revival of interest in civil society from the municipality (throughout Sweden) and creating dialogue on issues in the community. Local democracy, community participation are seen as paramount in the development of an area. In Gothenburg the new municipal regulations proves this. There is

however a lot of uncertainty about what participation actually means and perhaps also fear of what it could bring in the form of expectations on the municipality and the politicians. Hence there was also an uncertainty about what kind of expectations towards the local administration our activities would bring. However, our aim was not to create a substitute dialogue process - we would not call it a dialogue project at all. Our aim was rather to create a space where people could build their capacity to better engage with dialogue projects on urban issues further on.

Still, as a testbed for trying out new approaches, new practices and new liaisons, building capacities and networks it became an important experience not only for us researchers but also for those committed to the initiative. The farming project is running its second season with a collaboration with the local daycare centre for children, although whether there will be a third season next spring/summer is uncertain. The initiative has however now branched out into a local flea-market and home-work/handicraft evenings for children. Further, the initial difficulties with the local tenants association has resulted in more people taking an active role in the associations activities, initiatives and policy-making, creating change from within the organisation.

And as a parallel track, as researchers based in Backa, slowly getting to know both those living there and working there with the issues at stake, we have also established new educational platforms in terms of new collaborations, especially with the local social service office, where students on various levels from HDK have worked with products and processes together with the employees. A project that has had an impact both on the students and the social office.

We had three main questions for our work: *How to acknowledge everyday experience in city development and planning? Could the openness of art and artistic work processes be used as an alternative or complement formal planning processes? How would such a work process add to a democratic process?* Throughout our work the importance of a space for actualization (and cultivation) became clear for us. If you have an idea or wish to change or create something locally, hooking up with the right people and the right organisation may be difficult if you don't have the networks or are confident and brave enough to establish them. There is a need to approach things slowly, in a mindful and informal way where ideas find their shape gradually without being forced into formal practices or organisations at once. Here a artistic approach can cultivate processes of actualization and differentiation in way which is impossible within formal and instrumental processes, accessing and building upon dreams, issues and concerns which

otherwise would have been left in the dark. Art at its best can make the unseen visible and design, similarly, at its best can bring shape to that which has been unthought of. Interestingly enough our experiment proved to both help initiate new projects as well as create interest in old organisations. We are confident that a continued effort and time would have enabled more emerging initiatives and would have been able to perhaps reach groups that didn't find us within the four months we were open. Hopefully sustained over time the confusions and misunderstandings about the aims would dissolve as the activities proved themselves. Although the question rises who could sustain a space like that. If the district took over what would that entail for the expectations on the space or if an organisation with its own mission to adhere to, as a "research" run space there was a certain freedom that could be difficult to copy.

## 5 REFERENCES (*further guide to our map*)

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