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Article

## Planning With Art: Artistic Involvement Initiated by Public Authorities in Sweden

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### Abstract

In a Swedish context, public authorities have, over the past 10 years, implemented a number of initiatives to make art a central part of not only sustainable development but also urban planning as a practice, process, and knowledge area. Art and artistic methods are seen to contribute with new methods for site analyses (often in combination with citizen involvement) to enhance embodied and situated knowledge and give space to critical reflection. One of the Swedish initiatives is called Art Is Happening. Between 2016 and 2018, the Swedish government assigned the Public Art Agency Sweden money to work with public art and citizen inclusion in million program areas. The initiative was framed as using artistic methods to strengthen democracy in areas with low turnout. Fifteen places around the country were selected. In this article, the focus is on one of those projects in Karlskrona, where an artist collaborated with citizens to create a public artwork and local meeting place. During the process, the artist partly lived in the area. Rather than discussing the artistic project from a binary logic as disempowerment/empowerment, consensual/agonistic, and political/antipolitical, it is examined as a process involving a mixture of both, where power unfolded in ways that were both problematic and valuable at the same time. This approach moves away from “good or bad” to a nuanced way of discussing how artistic methods can contribute to understandings of situated knowledge production in urban planning.

### Keywords

artistic involvement; Karlskrona; participation; planning; public authorities; Sweden

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

This article focuses on artistic involvement initiated by public authorities. In a Swedish context, public authorities have, over the past decade, implemented several initiatives to make art and artistic practices a central part of not only sustainable development but also urban planning as a practice, process, and field of study.

The urban theorist Jonathan Metzger (2011, 2016) divides this growing interest into two aspects. Firstly, as one focusing on planning *for* art and culture. Here, the focus is mainly on how spatial planning can create possibilities for a flourishing cultural life and what urban planners can do to strengthen the cultural sector. This aspect has been subject to a good deal of research, for example, around how culture, cultural industries and creative prac-

tices may have the potential to create more attractive living environments and function as economic engines and drivers of urban development (Florida, 2005; Markusen & King, 2003; Sandercock, 2005). The presence of culture is in this aspect discussed as something that ought to lead to measurable outcomes (Sandercock, 2004). This has also been critically discussed by many (such as Evans, 2001; Kunzmann, 2004; Landry, 2000).

By contrast, the other key aspect this article focuses on is planning *with* art and culture. Metzger (2011, 2016) highlights the growing interest among public authorities in using art as a tool to develop the practices of spatial planning. This can be described as an interest in how artistic skills and methods can contribute to new ways of planning. As Metzger puts it, to plan *with* art changes the question from what planners can do for culture and

art to what culture can do for planners (Metzger, 2011). According to this view, artists and artistic methods are seen as contributing with, for example, new methods for site analysis, to enhance embodied and situated knowledge and allow space for critical reflection (Metzger, 2016). Artists are understood as having been given an expanded societal task, potentially functioning as instruments for political change (Sand, 2019). At the same time, there is also a critical strand of research, acknowledging the risk of placing overly high expectations on the possibilities of artists and artistic methods to solve our times' most troubling issues, such as the lack of democracy, sustainability, and segregation (Metzger, 2011; Sand, 2019).

Artists' involvement in societal development has a long history. From an art historical perspective, artistic movements have used the city, and urban society, as a venue and source of material for more than half a century. A variety of examples of socially engaged practices, such as large-scale designs, utopian visions, and bureaucratic constructions, have been initiated by artists and/or have originated in assignments from public and private institutions. Since the 1980s onwards, there is a broad ongoing debate about the role of public art in several disciplines, such as art history, architecture, cultural studies, urbanism, and human geography (Nilsson, 2018).

One branch is linked to dimensions of social involvement and addresses themes about participation, social engagement, critical spatial practices, social change, social sustainability, and community involvement (Nilsson, 2018; Zebracki et al., 2010). Enhancing social interactions through artist involvement are connected to "new genre public art," a term coined by the American artist, writer, and educator Suzanne Lacy in 1991, which refers to a public art genre that aims to include or directly engage publics in creative processes (Nilsson, 2018).

While the above aspects are important too, this article's focus is on the growing interest from public authorities to invite artists to be part of participatory urban planning projects. More specifically, it concentrates on artistic involvement initiated by public authorities and urban planning in a Swedish governmental project, *Konst Händer (Art Is Happening)*, carried out between 2016 and 2018 by the Public Art Agency Sweden. During a period of two years, artists were invited to work with public art in an extensive way, together with local residents and municipalities in 15 locations around Sweden. One of the objectives was to create good conditions for increased influence, participation, and culture in residential areas with low voter turnout (Kulturdepartementet, 2015).

The empirical material originates from one of these processes in Karlskrona, Sweden, where the artist Johanna Gustafsson Fürst worked for nearly two years in the residential area Kungsmarken. Her work took the form of two parallel processes: a collaborative artistic process to produce a site-specific public artwork and a supportive process that was part of developing a local

meeting place. During the process, she was partially based in the area.

While much has been written about art *for* planning, there is less theoretical discussion about the possible opportunities for and problems around planning *with* art (although there is a growing interest with contributions from, e.g., Borén & Young, 2017; Metzger, 2011, 2016; Sand, 2019). The existing literature dealing with artistic involvement in planning also tends to be positioned as describing artistic involvement as an engine to promote political change or purely cosmetic, distracting from real political issues.

The aim of the article is to explore possibilities and challenges with artists being part of urban planning processes and discuss how artistic involvement and possible methods can contribute to understandings of situated knowledge production in urban planning.

What happens when art is given a democratic mission and used as a tool to engage residents in certain residential areas? What kind of knowledge can artists and artistic methods create that can enable other forms of understandings of places and spaces? Can we even talk about "art in planning" when it includes such a broad variety of expressions and ways of working? Rather than using a binary logic which would distinguish between disempowerment/empowerment, consensual/agonistic, and political/antipolitical, the article has the ambition to transcend these dichotomies and discuss the case study as a process mixing both. As Chilvers (2009) states, such an approach shifts the focus from questions of good or bad and provides an opportunity for being open to "both and" rather than "either or."

## 2. Method and Material

The empirical material in this article is based on three semi-structured interviews with Johanna Gustafsson Fürst and the project's curator at the Public Art Agency Sweden. It is also based on written material from the artist and from evaluation reports from Public Art Agency Sweden. The interviews were carried out in 2017. During that time, I was part of a research group consisting of seven researchers from different academic disciplines following *Art Is Happening*. The researchers focused on different projects within *Art Is Happening* and had different perspectives. Some focused on civil society; others conducted interviews with curators at the Public Art Agency Sweden, while still others examined the public artwork and role of the artists. The group met regularly, read each other's texts, and discussed common findings and elements that differed in the projects. This article is based on the Swedish report that I wrote in this context. The focus is on the frames and context for the participatory work made by the artist. This includes exploring personal perceptions that she had in this process and relating it to the broader framework of the governmental project. The quotes from the interviews have been translated from Swedish to English by the author.

### 3. Planning with Art

#### 3.1. Artists as an Asset

As mentioned in the introduction, there is lively and diverse research on public art in several disciplines. The recurrence of questions of democratic process, rights to the city, instrumentalisation, and other questions of the politics of urban development process are some of the themes currently being discussed (Nilsson, 2018). One way of describing the growing interest in artistic involvement in urban planning is to see it as stemming from recent decades' interest in moving urban planning from expert-driven to a more bottom-up practice—what is sometimes discussed in planning theory as the shift from urban planning as *government* to urban planning as *governance* (Borén & Young, 2017). Central to this shift is the interest in working with deliberative decision-making processes where citizens, stakeholders, and other actors are involved in the planning processes. As a result, residents are increasingly invited to participate in planning, visualising, and redevelopment processes. These participatory processes are described as having the potential to move away from rational/conventional planning methodologies (Healey, 2006; Sandercock, 2002) and create more democratic processes, where inhabitants and other actors can participate as co-creators of places and cities. Participatory work with residents is also viewed as crucial for creating inclusionary decision-making processes relating to class, race, and gender and as a way to achieve more sustainable cities and societies (Abrahamsson, 2015). Connected to this is a growing recognition that with increasing urban complexity, economic change, and socio-cultural diversity new collaborations may be required to shape the development of 21st-century cities (Borén & Young, 2017).

##### 3.1.1. Affect

As part of the interest in finding new ways of planning, interest in bringing artists into planning processes—planning *with* art and culture—has increased. In the academic literature on art and urban planning, it is possible to find several descriptions of what artists can contribute with in urban planning processes. Artistic methods are seen as having the potential to offer creative and explorative methods of understanding and connecting with a place and its inhabitants and can therefore create other forms of listening and understandings. For example, instead of creating background data for a place based on numbers and statistics, many artists make use of bodily knowledge, paying attention to emotions and a sense of compassion, and in this way bringing embodied, affective, and emotional ways of knowing to a planning process (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Including artistic competence in planning processes can therefore, as Sandercock (2005) suggests, be seen as a way of inviting new groups into the urban conversation, as well as intro-

ducing new forms of expression and thinking into planning processes. In line with this, Kunzmann (2004) highlights the importance for urban planners to develop new forms of knowledge for approaching society. He argues for more culture and artistic perspectives in urban planning education to help urban planning to become more creative. On the same note, Bianchini and Ghilardi (1998, pp. 195–196) state that what urban planners need “is the creativity of artists, more specifically of artists working in social contexts” and that planners, among other skills, need to develop open ended and non-instrumental ways of working. As Borén and Young (2017, p. 3) discuss, the use of “creativity” is in this context not used to find ways to be more efficiently appropriated for the goals of neoliberalised approaches, but rather “to support a more progressive and imaginative planning system, one which is more in touch with the diversity and exclusions which are increasingly marking the twenty-first century city.”

##### 3.1.2. Space for Critical Reflection

The urban scholar Patsy Healey (2006) has written that if we want to achieve a democratisation of planning processes, it is crucial to reshape our frames of reference and loosen previous assumptions. This could lead to new light being shone on old issues, and new concerns being uncovered. Artistic involvement and methods may contribute to this through creating more accessible arenas for deliberation. As artists do not usually work within the bureaucratic system, they hold the possibility of raising critical questions originating from this outsider position. They can create critical space for reflection in otherwise pressured planning processes, as well as displace and expose established norms, and in this way act as catalysts to make room for the robust and complex (Metzger, 2016; Sandercock, 2005). As Håkansson (2013) writes, the value created in a process with artists is thus not only about developing beautiful and functional public environments, but also about identifying and highlighting problems and conflicting interests. Metzger (2011) discusses this using Dryzek's (2005) distinction between “cool” and “hot” deliberative settings. He argues that artists can achieve dialogue in “cool forums” that open the possibility of listening in a way that allows positions and standpoints to change. This is contrasted with ordinary planning processes that mostly consist of “hot forums,” where positions are locked, and arguments already set.

##### 3.1.3. Imagination

Another element where artists are considered contributors to planning processes is the ability to be imaginative: to be able to offer (mental) space for speculation, desire, dreaming, and longing, as well as the possibility to leave the comfort zone and engage in dialogue with strangers (Sandercock, 2002). This ability is something

that Sandercock calls for as a way of transforming planning practice in the 21st century. She states that planning practice needs to develop the ability to “imagine oneself in a different skin, a different story, a different place, and then desire this new self and place that one sees” (Sandercock, 2002, p. 8). Another aspect of imagination can be connected to a more-than-human approach to planning. In order to address the climate crisis and make space for sustainable methods of planning, there is a need to go beyond a planning paradigm that only focuses on humans to one that also includes other species. The possibility of artistic competence in exploring embodied, affective and emotional ways of knowing could be regarded as an asset (Metzger, 2011). How do we include the perspective of a river or a moose? How can we learn to listen in new ways other than merely using words or written language (Metzger, 2014)? Metzger (2011) also points out the potential that art has for estrangement of that which is familiar and taken for granted. This can create a space for unknowing, for temporary disorder and a departure from routine ways of understanding and approaching situations. New ways of framing a problem can develop as a result, new questions may be found, and questions and problems may be viewed from new perspectives (Metzger, 2011).

#### 3.1.4. Art as Distraction

While there is a wealth of public reports and case studies pointing towards the possibilities of artistic practices in urban planning, critical voices also feature in the literature. The point is raised that artists risk having high expectations projected onto them as saviours of democracy, charged with solving huge structural problems, such as sustainability, segregation, and participation—issues that are very difficult to solve, both individually and on a local level. This more cautious attitude can be linked to a broader critical discussion of deliberative governance models in general, where public authorities’ interest in artistic involvement and participatory processes are described as part of a post-political era (Blakeley, 2010; Tahvilzadeh, 2015). This period is defined as a state where the formal structures of democracy are maintained, namely free elections, freedom of expression, and so on, but emptied of content and vitality. Politics is determined at a greater extent by opinion polls and surface appearances than by ideological positions. Instead of being the realm of agonistic battles between left and right, politics has been reduced to marketing logic and communication (Werner, 2018). When politics is mainly dedicated to management, more responsibility is placed on art, architecture, and design to counteract the dilution of democracy by creating new forms of meeting places and engagement among residents (Werner, 2018). In this state, participation may only give the appearance of democracy, one that is emptied of content and vitality as it is not allowed to challenge consensus. The processes that citizens are invited to participate in often have lit-

tle or no political relevance. They are activated through the productions of public artworks, such as the construction of a new park or youth centre. However, their democratic influence rarely extends beyond the immediate area (Metzger, 2016; Werner, 2018).

Critics therefore call attention to the risk that artists will simply be cast in the role of clowns and, despite good intentions, act as a distraction from more acute political issues. This can be regarded as depoliticising management technology, where artists becoming creative play leaders invited to produce diverting events (Metzger, 2016). Rather than adding to deep conversations that may influence political decisions, they contribute to superficial marketing with a focus on producing documentation consisting of pleasing images of happy people harmoniously working together. The ability to present documentation of a successful process tends to be more important than highlighting existing conflicts and power structures (Wiberg, 2018).

Much socially engaged art is motivated with a rhetoric of inclusion and “democratisation.” The idea that including art will automatically result in a favourable city is criticised for being naïve, overlooking the contested, unfixed, and socially contingent nature of space and place (Massey, 1994; Zebracki et al., 2010). Sand (2019) argues that artistic activity and art do not automatically have democratic effects, it rather depends on the circumstances in which art can work. It can lead to both political and social conflicts coming to the surface or being covered up by involving artists in the kind of aestheticisation of cities that leads to the displacement of poor groups. Spiers (2020) put forward that dialogical and socially engaged art is often motivated by the idea that it will include and listen to less privileged groups; nevertheless, at the same time, systemic variables are not questioned and changed. Marginalised groups are invited to the table but may only participate through the existing framework. There is thus no room to question the framework, risking the affirmation of an unequal order.

Another aspect is that the growing interest in using art as a solution for societal problems has grown at the same time as the welfare society is being dismantled. As an example, in the same areas where Art Is Happening involved artists as part of urban development processes, there are closures of schools, libraries, and other social services (Sand, 2019). In addition, socially engaged art is also criticised for being too pragmatic. Critics point out that there is too much focus on short-term goals, and concrete, small-scale interventions, all of which limits the possibility of artists to act as a revolutionary force (“How much politics can art take?,” 2018). Rather than engaging in challenging long-term political processes where underlying structures are exposed and combated, their actions are anchored in the existing order, which means they can easily become co-opted by the system.

To sum up, artists are on one hand seen as able to go beyond conventional practices of knowledge production, creating possibilities for other forms of listening and

ways of understanding places and inhabitants. On the other hand, the inclusion of artists in planning processes is shown to involve risks: Instead of being a positive force, artistic involvement may reinforce inequality and injustice.

#### 4. Art Is Happening

In 2015, the Public Art Agency Sweden was commissioned by the government to prepare an investment in cultural activities in certain residential areas with a focus on artistic design during 2016–2018, which came to be called *Konst Händer* (Art Is Happening).

The task was to contribute through artistic methods to creating meeting places and more engaging living environments in areas with low turnout, and together with local organisations in civil society work out practical examples of how post-war council housing estate areas could be artistically enriched. In the assignment it was specified that the content of the investment should be based on the residents' needs and knowledge of the place and characterised by a broad civic influence. It was also stipulated that it was an initiative for "increased democratic participation." The aim was that collaboration and participation in the processes should contribute to cohesion and increased democratic participation (Public Art Agency Sweden, 2015).

The Public Art Agency Sweden received SEK 26 million for the investment. *Art Is Happening* focused on post-war housing estates, which make up approximately 25% of Sweden's housing stock. The selection processes consisted of an open call aimed at society and the municipalities and regions of these residential areas. The question asked was as follows: What place or situation would you like to influence through artistic collaboration with us? The applications contained concrete proposals for places and situations that could be influenced through artistic work. One hundred and fifty-three applications were received. After a selection phase, 15 sites around Sweden were selected, of which seven of the proposals came from civil society and eight from municipalities/construction companies (Sand, 2019). At each site, the Public Art Agency Sweden invited professional (both national and international) artists to develop public artworks in close collaboration with civil society and local authorities based on the proposals. This manner of working, allowing civil society and municipalities to hand in proposals, was a reversal of the Public Art Agency Sweden's usual application procedure (Sand, 2019). In total, *Art Is Happening* resulted in 19 works of art in different municipalities in Sweden.

##### 4.1. *The Collective Body*

The application to be part of *Art Is Happening* came from Mellanstadens newly established association, within *Folkets Hus och Park* (People's House and Parks), a countrywide Swedish community centre and park asso-

ciation. The local association *Mellanstadens Folkets Hus och Park* (FHPMP) had gained access to a defunct boiler plant close to a residential area in Kungsmarken, Karlskrona in Southern Sweden, which they wanted to turn into a cultural centre. They applied for, in collaboration with the local housing association *Karlskronahem* and Karlskrona municipality and the Swedish union of tenants, to "form a place for meeting, culture and party" that could function as "a hub in local civil society and a meeting place for everyone based on democratic values" (Werner, 2018, p. 110). Among the plans was also to renovate a dance floor nearby, an artificial turf and some small houses.

In 2016, Johanna Gustafsson Fürst was invited by the Public Art Council Sweden to lead the artistic process. She is a well-known Swedish artist that had previously worked with several artistic projects in close collaboration with civil society and inhabitants, some of them located in post-war housing areas.

Kungsmarken, located in Mellanstaden, is a residential area on a hill on the outskirts of Karlskrona, built in the 1970s. The people living here come from all over the world and have large global networks. There is high unemployment in the area. Mellanstaden consists of three residential areas: Gullaberg, Marieberg, and Kungsmarken. Between them, there is a centre and square that consist of a parking lot and closed grocery store. In the area there was a play place, gallery and studio, interior design outlet, pizzeria, mosque, second-hand shop, and *Karlskronahem's* local administration building, but no public meeting place. For a long time, there had been a local commitment to create a common gathering place for the area, which was brought to the fore when FHPMP gained access to *Panncentralen*.

Gustafsson Fürst's assignment was to create a site-specific public artwork, to share and develop methods for collaboration and, based on the submitted application, collaborate with residents and associations during the artistic process and in the development of the local community centre in the old boiler plant (*Statens Konstråd*, 2016). During the two years that she worked there, she periodically lived in Mellanstaden in an apartment borrowed from the local housing company *Karlskronahem*. She began by spending time in the area and getting to know the local people. Rather than coming to the area with preconceived questions and ideas, she allowed questions and concerns to be raised in dialogue with the inhabitants. She took private lessons with residents, in Arabic and cooking. She followed the association FHPMP's daily work and helped to create funding for the community centre, participated in meetings they had with politicians, officials, associations, and schools, among others, and joined discussions related to how the building could be renovated (as shown in Figure 1). She also shared her experiences of collective processes and acted as a support in applications for arts funding.

After a while, with the help of FHPMP, a working group was put together consisting of Gustafsson



**Figure 1.** Photo of the public meeting in Mellanstaden's People's House. Source: Courtesy of Nadja Braiteh.

Fürst and eight residents and workers in Mellanstaden. The group consisted of people with diverse experiences of living and working in the area, of different ages, and born in different places in the world. Some of them had lived in the area since it was built, and some had recently moved in. During the two years, they met regularly. Representatives from the local housing association Karlskronahem and FHPMP and civil servants from the culture administration in the municipality were also part of a continuous dialogue. Together, they steadily discussed and developed the project both with the community centre and the artwork. The group's work began with a two-day workshop where they jointly went through the schedule, methodology, and financial framework. The group also walked around the area, talking about their experiences of the place and noting down their feelings about the neighbourhood. They continued to meet in different forms during the entire period. It was central to Gustafsson Fürst that all those involved got paid and that a production budget was put in place.

The idea for a public artwork gradually emerged. As Gustafsson Fürst describes it:

I felt that it was important that we create something permanent and visible, partly because the group I worked with wanted this and that we thought the place needed it both visually and symbolically. Permanence means something. It's expensive, it requires maintenance and it has to work for a long

time. I can see a pattern that bothers me: In areas like these, you work with social projects where everyone is expected to have their say, and the focus is on participation and democracy. As if people were not already active or politically conscious. My experience is that it is the opposite! In newly built areas, or more socio-economically privileged areas, artworks are made without dialogue and as the situation looks now, dialogue is needed just as much there, maybe even more. (Interview, 2017-03-03)

After a period of group work, important aspects emerged: The public artwork should take the form of light art, and it should be protected from vandalism. The boiler plant had been a warehouse for Christmas decorations for central Karlskrona, while there was no investment in Christmas lights in Mellanstaden. Many residents had also experienced a lack of streetlights and long repair times for broken lamps in their area. Gustafsson Fürst explains:

The light art we made should be there for a long time, it's not just for Christmas, as Christmas is not something that everyone celebrates. The whole idea of light and justice has been very present throughout the project. The fact that it takes a long time for lamps to be repaired in certain residential areas is political injustice. There is a fragility in the technology in the work that is both good and concerning. Unlike, for

example, an artwork made of bronze, light art can go out and it will be plain to see if the municipality does not take care of it quickly, which will be very symbolic. (Interview, 2017-12-05)

During the process, some friction arose. One example was when representatives of the municipal corporation that managed the building that housed the People’s House suddenly changed their minds and said no to the artwork. There was a period of discussions with representatives from the cultural administration and the Public Art Agency Sweden. Finally, a new location was found for the artwork, where it was given a freer position in relation to FHPMP and thus came to strengthen the entryway to the residential area as a kind of entrance.

In October 2018, the public artwork was inaugurated (as shown in Figure 2). It consists of two illuminated signs located 36 m in the air on each side of a lattice pole of the kind usually used for power lines. The lights come on at the same time as the streetlamps. On one of the signs is a light drawing consisting of an interpretation of a map of the area’s residential buildings. On the other sign, the word “HERE” is written in shining letters.

Gustafsson Fürst explains:

Placing the artwork high in the air makes it visible to the entire residential area and consequently to several parts of Karlskrona. In this way, it may benefit many people. A place is created not only through those who live in the area but also based on other people’s ideas about the place. The title of the work is *The Collective Body* and that body is not only the

one that shows itself in the public sphere and has the courage to act but also the bodies that do not. So, the title refers to all bodies in all places and can also be seen as a gigantic map pin marking the place. (Interview, 2017-12-05)

The public artwork creates an entrance to the residential area Kungsmarken (as shown in Figure 3), but it is also visible from far away. Karlskrona’s identity is largely built on the picturesque environments in the middle of the city. The artwork points out Kungsmarken as a justified part of the city. By using an aesthetic that is close to billboards, the aim was to apply the same marketing strategies that municipalities around the country use in the competition to attract new residents and taxpayers. This was a way to highlight and critically discuss the relation between the centre and the periphery.

In her article about the processes, Gustafsson Fürst (2020, p. 22) writes:

As an artist tasked with creating art, I’m also aware of the importance of taking responsibility for a space of unknowing and being open to the unexpected. So, I let the work follow a series of events triggered by our meetings and allowed the result to grow slowly. Even though I regard the work *The Collective Body* as a result, I don’t know exactly what it does. All I know is that it’s there and that it’s still shining. What I knew was that something would be done and that it would be the engine to create a WE, which in turn helped me create a work. That is why the collaborations created during the process are so important to me. As an



**Figure 2.** Photo of the inauguration of the public artwork *The Collective Body*. Source: Courtesy of Richard Estay.





**Figure 3.** Photo of Kungsmärken and the public artwork *The Collective Body*. Source: Courtesy of Richard Estay.

artist, I work for and with social spaces that are not always comfortable and conflict-free. Spaces where different areas of responsibility work together. You may not be able to sit on the kind of imaginary park benches that artists create, but they are able to produce something else. Something extra, that cannot be defined in advance, and which will be different for everyone who encounters the work, something not yet visible.

During the working process, other pressing local issues emerged. For example, the traffic situation in the area around the boiler plant was problematic. Kungsmarksvägen, a wide road with bumpy asphalt, is right next door. Cars speed by, and there is a lack of pedestrian crossings. Residents have long complained about the dangerous situation. To support that process, Gustafsson Fürst and the curator from Public Art Agency Sweden, Joanna Zawieja, worked with year seven students from the local school, Sunnadals. They talked about art in public spaces and created symbols that they consolidated into a street painting emphasising alternative uses of the place.

On the same day as the students created the street painting, they took the opportunity to test temporary traffic obstacles to reduce the speed on the street and make the “square” larger. When the speed limit was lowered, it also became possible to use the space in front of the premises as a public square. Some of those who live

and work in the area pushed the issue further, which led to the traffic solution we tested later being made permanent by Karlskrona municipality.

Gustafsson Fürst writes:

At the same time, it created a safe place for the young people to paint and caused the municipality to open its eyes to the potential of the place, which I think contributed to the solution later being implemented. Here, then, the collective artistic process of painting on a street had a knock-on effect on traffic issues. (Gustafsson Fürst, 2020, p. 18)

Gustafsson Fürst describes that it can, in one sense, be seen as an advantage that, as an artist, she does not have the same prior knowledge a planner does. This allows her to ask other questions and, for better or for worse, not see the same obstacles and limitations. In this case, she believes that there was an advantage in relation to enabling the public artwork and other changes to take place.

In her article, Gustafsson Fürst concludes:

Art and artistic processes can make room for the political in more ways than information or representation. It can construct processes to act politically in the realm of the senses, create space for more opportunities for participation and thus accommodate more people who can participate. Space for more forms of

care. I don't mean that art must therefore be intrinsically good or that it's even possible to know for sure what is good, but I believe that artistic processes can be powerful by alternating between different responsibilities. (Gustafsson Fürst, 2020, p. 23)

### 5. To Hold “Both and” Rather Than “Either or”

In the formal introduction to Art Is Happening, the public authorities state that “The investment should be based on the residents’ needs and wishes about the place and is characterized by broad participation” (Kulturdepartementet, 2015). The purpose is, among other things, to strengthen culture and activities promoting democracy in “certain residential areas with low turnout” (Kulturdepartementet, 2015). As Werner (2018) concludes, “increased democratic participation” is something that is mentioned many times in policy documents regarding Art Is Happening, but without further defining what democracy and democracy-promoting measures actually are in the project. Democracy is mainly discussed as participation, where participation both becomes the problem formulation and the solution in the form of participation from citizens (Werner, 2019). Sand (2019) critically discusses that artists were given the role of solving society’s problems, with more engaging living environments, increased voter turnout, a greater sense of belonging and social sustainability. Instead of being regarded as having intrinsic value, they needed to be politically useful in an instrumental sense. A focus on so-called “areas with low turnout” also risks presenting an image that there is something wrong in these areas that needs to be repaired with short-term art projects when the problem has to do with far larger structural problems that cannot be solved either locally or with temporary project fundings.

As Werner (2018) put forward, art and artistic practices are, on one hand, not often prioritised in governmental budgets but, on the other hand, placed with hopes of solving issues that society has otherwise failed to solve. From this perspective, Art Is Happening can be seen as following a pragmatic project logic where the focus was on finding concrete solutions to problems that can be solved within a short time frame. Should artists solve lighting problems? Or arrange for new speedbumps to be put in place? From this perspective, the project could be read as a distraction from “real” political issues, as Metzger (2016) has warned.

The results of Art Is Happening were reported through conferences and publications. In these, the successes and positive lessons from the projects were emphasised. Reports were published containing nice photos from *The Collective Body*, which communicated a successful participatory and collaborative process and collaboration. Communicating success stories and “happy talk” (Ahmed, 2017) can be important, but it also risks hiding frictions and negotiations that are an inevitable factor in participatory processes and which

may carry important knowledge and new questions (Wiberg, 2018). This links back to Spiers’ (2020) critique that inclusionary and participatory artworks seldom allow for critique or challenge of the project’s operational tenets.

On the other hand, Gustafsson Fürst describes that the work in Mellanstaden enabled more space for manoeuvre compared with her previous experiences. Instead of being handed a brief for a short-term project in the late stage of a process, along with a small fee, the financial conditions in this project were reversed. She had the opportunity to be on-site for almost two years and give a salary to everyone who participated locally.

She learned about the residents’ lives, became involved in the area, exchanged experiences, and allowed herself to be in an exploratory state without clear ideas about a finished product. This enabled a complex, reflective artistic sketching process to occur, which included time for careful listening and exploration. Her method could be described as a practice of intense presence, where she was engaged in a state of unconditional listening, guided by what was happening on the spot rather than by a predetermined goal.

One of the most crucial aspects was that she had the time to engage in a long-term situation of caring and listening and that her work led to both structural and visual changes. Coming from the outside, with a certain mandate, she was able to help with approaching and solving existing problems in new ways, such as the traffic situation and the community centre. The speed bump is still there, and the People’s House is active. Rather than being “hijacked” and used as a distraction for “real” political issues (Metzger, 2016), you could argue that she used the commission and her role both to raise important political issues that already existed in the area and criticise the larger frames of Art Is Happening. Artists who work in similar situations can thus be seen as partly gaining agency, which can be used to raise important political issues that already exist in an area.

In conclusion, the dominant academic debate on art and planning risks getting caught up in an overly binary logic where it is either described as an engine for political change or as an anti-democratic process. In this article, I have looked at *The Collective Body* as an example of a process that contained elements of going beyond conventional practices of knowledge production and challenging existing power asymmetries while, at the same time, being part of an instrumental process. It is therefore possible to read the project from both proponents’ and critics’ perspectives.

To work in the intersection between art and planning is complex. It involves collaborations between different actors, handling conflicting wills and relating to different forms of knowledge ideals. In line with Chilvers (2009, p. 412), I believe there is a need for further situated studies that, in nuanced and careful ways, explore “the openings and closing that occur through relations between actors, knowledge, and power within

and outside participatory spaces” and that engage in “both and” rather than “either or.”

## 6. Concluding Remarks: The Role of Art-Based Methods in Urban Planning

It is difficult to describe what art and artistic methods can bring to the field of urban planning without falling into an instrumental logic and without generalising the abilities of artists. There is not one way to work artistically, it can differ totally depending on who the artist is and the context and conditions for the assignment. Therefore, art in planning is not something that can be captured as “one” thing. Rather, perhaps the danger lies precisely in trying to discern one “best” method for how artists should work in urban planning contexts. With that said, a perspective that I still see as important, and where I see that art has the opportunity to contribute to urban planning is the ability to harbour *not-knowing*.

Rather than becoming better at having all the answers, art can offer urban planning a way to dare to remain in a state of not knowing. Art can add space for speculation about what does not yet exist in a way that few other traditions of knowledge are capable of, a speculation that can be both concrete and abstract. It can be about giving time to marvel at what we do not understand or creating imaginary spaces or concrete situations where unexpected leads can be followed; it can be about enabling a language other than words through which to understand the world or creating a framework where there is room to remain in the unfamiliar and abrasive and listen to what exists in new ways.

As the philosopher Jonna Bornemark (2018) describes, it is precisely when we dare to remain in a state of not knowing for a while that we also can broaden our repertoire and see other alternatives for action. It is here that we can open up a re-categorisation of established approaches and concepts. When urban planning is in many ways driven by efficiency and goal management, art can, at best, as I see it, open up other ways of relating to society.

Here, art, if given the right way of functioning, can contribute by providing explorative methods to remain engaged in difficult questions, which can be a support in planning processes.

If public authorities intend to involve artists in urban planning processes, it is not advisable to simultaneously enter into a logic requiring quick, concrete successful results. If there is a genuine interest in engaging in art and artistic practices and changing working methods, there is also a need to invite frictions, uncertainties, and failures, which can help raise new questions and perspectives.

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