



Thinking Metropolis IV: Creative Urban Processes, June 26, 2008

The overall theme of Metropolis IV was different strategies to restructure, reform and reconfigure the city.

KEY NOTE SESSION 1

NAN ELLIN: INTEGRAL URBANISM

Nan Ellin (US), Director of Urban & Metropolitan Studies at Arizona State University. Author of a range of books including "Postmodern Urbanism" (2007), "Integral Urbanism" (2006) and "Architecture of Fear" (1996).

Taking her point of departure in her recent book *Integral urbanism*, Nan Ellin spoke about *the revolution of city making*. The focus has gradually (but radically) changed, she argued, from a modernist, mechanical and functionally differentiated approach to city planning to a holistic and organic approach focusing on the flow of the city as a whole. We are rediscovering what Ellin calls our "urban instinct", which has been buried in modern city planning: the instinct for the city as a complex, diverse and integrated place of human interaction.

Ellin presented 5 qualities as paramount for contemporary city-making:

1) Hybridity and Connectivity

Cities must understand the importance of enhancing the public space as a place for convergence. Deliberate programmes to support connectivity / public space must be considered.

2) Porosity

Cities must consider the unique identity of the different urban elements, but at the same time open for friction and interaction between these elements. Ellin used the metaphor of "porous membranes" underlining the simultaneous presence of identity and openness. The quest is to create the places of interaction.

3) Authenticity

We must consider the unique quality of each place. We should ask the question: Who are we and what do we want from this place? – rather than believe in standard solutions.

4) Vulnerability

We must accept that we do not have complete control over urban space. As opposed to the desire for control that characterizes modernism, integral urbanism must accept the vulnerability of urban space.

Methodological approach

As methodological approach Ellin used the term *urban acupuncture*, accentuating taking the points of departure in existing places, situations and contexts in city making. As opposed to the modernist approach, beginning with a "clean slate" and an ideal notion of what could be, an integral approach begins with an understanding and appreciation of what already is. Ellin presents three steps in a development process:

PROTECT - What do you love?

ENHANCE - What is underperforming?

ADD - What we don't have yet, but would like.



Ellin thus proposes a very contextual concept of urbanism and regards urbanity as a question of density of activities rather than a question of density of building and people.

Examples on how to apply this in praxis and overcome the lack of imagination that characterizes much urban planning can be found in Nan Ellins book *Integral Planning*.

JUUL/FROST: URBAN SPACE AS A CATALYST

Juul|Frost (DK), Building, City and Landscape architects. Rikke Kirstine Larsen. Juul|Frost performs a research programme funded by Realdania named "Public Space as a Catalyst for Change". The research programme tries to uncover how the development of public spaces can work as overall strategies for development, transformation and change of cities. Thus the project focuses on public spaces as transformers for change regarding culture, lifestyle, gentrification, which is done both through theoretical examinations and practical studies, www.urbanspace.dk

A cross-disciplinary research project

In her presentation Rikke Kirstine Larsen introduced the research project *Public Space as a Catalyst for Change*. The project details how the public space can be seen as a strategy for development, transformation and change of cities. The project focuses on both theoretical studies and the practical usage of methods. The project as a cross-disciplinary dialogue between architects, geographers, sociologists, ethnologists and artists is a prerequisite for innovation and the creative development of public spaces and cities.

A problem Rikke Kirstine Larsen presented regarded how the desire of cities and areas to become unique often tends to make the sites even more alike. A central question is then how "authenticity" of a place is discussed – and how it should be considered in planning of public space.

Different approaches to public space

Rikke Kirstine Larsen presented some theoretical approaches of the research project focusing on different ways to look at public spaces, including the mental understanding of a space, the social, life-style related conception of space and the physical and sensual being in space.

As an example of a project that attempts to foster a unique public space Rikke Kirstine Larsen presented the result of the JuulFrost organized competition for Christiansberg. The project attempts to mix the formal and the informal, the historical and the new, the permanent and the temporary.

Q: It was discussed whether or not the Christiansberg project was really able to host the temporary as anything else than just the usual couple of years of low rent artist housing and the old school development. How do you actually integrate the temporary qualities in the actual development?

TIM JONES: GETTING BACK - How Toronto had it, lost it and got it back again

Tim Jones (CAN), Director of Artscape in Toronto, a not-for-profit enterprise engaged in culture-led regeneration which has developed programmes for the past 20 years and which is often used as a model for many cities worldwide, www.torontoartscape.on.ca

Tim Jones presented a narrative about the political and cultural downfall and renaissance of Toronto and presented a range of examples of ambitious and experimenting ways of working with art in relation to the city. In his narrative Tim Jones accentuated the importance of good policies and a creative city planning framework. In getting Toronto out of the 90's depression, the political courage was marked by the new Mayor Mike Harris.



Amongst the early initiatives launched in the early renaissance of Toronto were the art festival *Luminato* and the development of the old industrial area *The Distillery District*.

Good examples

In this new political climate it was possible to foster new visions and develop creative platforms of collaboration. The challenge of an artistic and cultural development of a city is not only a question of lack of money – but also lack of imagination. Amongst the projects recently realized by Artscape are:

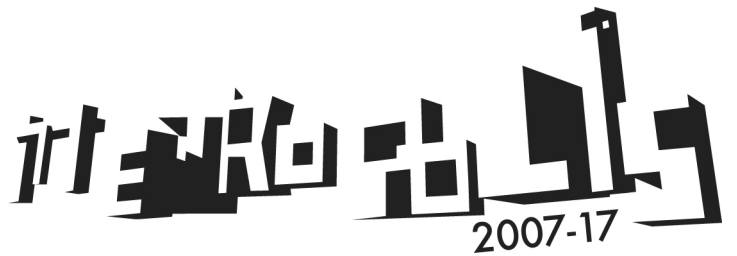
Artscape Wychwood Barns - A housing project linking art and environmental projects

Liberty Idea Village - A project linking artists and creative businesses.

Queen West Triangle - A housing project realized by Artscape through a collaboration with a developer and the Local Authorities of Toronto, resulting in affordable housing for artists in an attractive area. The constellation of having an organisation as Artscape being so active in the strategic development of the city is rarely seen.

The lessons learned

The cultural and artistic field of a city works as a result of very complex dynamics. A cultural actor like Artscape has to consider how to work strategically in this field. A cornerstone is to show leadership and to dare to launch really compelling projects – also in times of crisis. The more ambitious the projects are, the better the chances are to get finance and create partnerships also with actors from outside the publicly funded art world.



BREAK OUT SESSION A: Creative Spaces and Clusters

TRANS EUROPE HALLES

Birgitta Persson (SE), Secretary General of Trans Europe Halles, the European network of independent cultural centres in former industrial spaces, www.teh.net

Birgitta Persson opened the session with examples of independent cultural centres from all over Europe. Most of the centres are located in former industrial buildings where independent cultural organisations have revitalized city areas. Trans Europe Halles provides a network for the independent cultural centres in Europe, where they can benefit from each other's experience, take courses in practical matters such as marketing and basic economy, how to structure an organisation etc.

THE CUSTARD FACTORY

Dave Peebles (UK), Marketing director at the Custard Factory in Birmingham, www.custardfactory.com

Dave Peebles followed up by explaining the business strategy of The Custard Factory. In the beginning of the 90's they had bought 5 acres of cheap industrial space in the city of Birmingham, and started a cultural investment in the area by lending artist free studio space. By inviting artists to come and use the area, creative firms and smaller industries followed the creative environment and started paying the rent in the area. It has been The Custard Factory's experience that the managing process is more successful if they give the artists a space to manage on their own, than if they manage it for them.

ARTSCAPE

Tim Jones (CAN), Director of Artscape in Toronto

Tim Jones supplemented Birgitta Persson and Dave Peebles, stating that artists are very hard working people, but need to think more strategically. They must learn how to organise themselves and understand the processes they have to go through, to get what they want.

Q: Isn't there a conflict between the whole idea of an 'artist underground' and 'living on the edge of society', and then this organisation of nice and well kept art studios with a cafeteria and a reception? Are you normalizing the artist?

A: Tim Jones: Most artists want a secure environment and want to be able to concentrate on their work. The ones who wish to interact with the city in another way just move on.

Q: Where will the new independent cultural centres appear?

A: Birgitta Persson: Where the rent is low and where the area needs to be revitalized such as the areas around the cities, the suburban areas, villages or the countryside. They seek new areas where they can develop themselves as artists without paying a high rent.



BREAK OUT SESSION B: The New Urban Landscape

1til1LANDSKAB

Jacob Kamp and **Trine Trydemann** come from the young landscape architectural firm 1til1landskab which works in the field of architecture, (urban) landscape and design. The office strives for pragmatic and poetic solutions, focusing on luxuriance, simplicity and contrast. Read more on www.1til1landskab.dk

Jacob Kamp and Trine Trydemann presented some of their projects, reflecting on the challenge of the landscape architect. The question of “urban life” became a recurring theme in the presentation and discussion. Jacob Kamp opposed the notion that it is the responsibility of the landscape architect to create “urban life”. It is not possible to create life and if you are too focused on satisfying one type of social behaviour, you run the risk of making something that doesn’t work for other groups. The task is to make something that lasts – and in order to do so, you must create a concept which is not based exclusively on one type of life. It has to be open for many types of use. The landscape should be considered a frame, not a producer of content. This often means: the simpler and more flexible, the better. A place has to be beautiful both with and without people.

The concrete projects must be seen as just one chapter in a long history. It is not about working from a Tabula Rasa. One has to think with the lifetime of trees as the time scope.

Kamp and Trydemann insisted on the landscape architects to exercise aesthetic judgement. “We are obliged to create what we think is beautiful”. And you have to know you can’t please everybody. The projects that try to please everybody often end up pleasing no one.

GH3

Diana Gerrard and **Pat Hanson** (CA) are both partners at the Toronto based architectural firm gh3, which has won a number of awards including the City of Toronto Urban Design Award 2007. Their work includes a revitalization of the urban forest as a primary sustainable strategy, and they have devised an easily replicable test project on the Toronto Waterfront: *The Super-Real Forest*, www.gh3.ca

Diana Gerrard and Pat Hanson presented a range of their projects and discussed different notions of landscape and “nature” in cityscapes.

A pregnant project by gh3 is “Superreal Forest” proposing the qualities of “real forests” in cities. The project is particularly interesting in the Canadian / Torontonion context as a comment on a quest for a place’s “authenticity”. The project, combining a glass building and a dense forest also has environmental aspects as the leaves serve as shading in the summer, while allowing light to come through in winter.

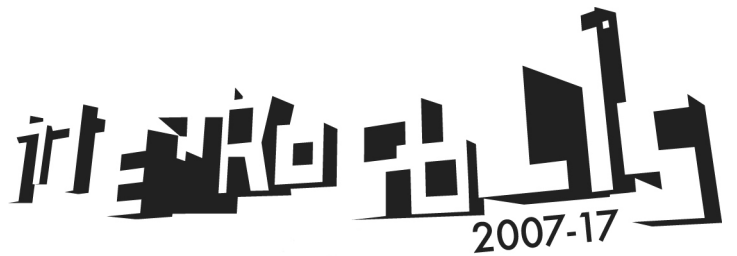
The *Lake Ontario Project* proposed to create a forest on the beach, giving sunbathers natural shading and offering an attractive and interesting public space.

Q&A: The projects of gh3 raised a discussion regarding what concept of nature the projects proposed. gh3 argued for a very pragmatic concept of nature and for accepting the cityscapes’ artificial qualities.

EKER & FISKE

Joram Schaap (NL) is partner at Eker & Schaap landschapsarchitectuur, an Amsterdam based office for landscape architecture and urbanism, www.ekerschaap.nl

Joram Schaap presented a strategic development perspective on the city of Almere in the Netherlands. Built in 1976 it is one of the youngest cities in the country.



Almere faces a range of challenges regarding both its spatial organization and its identity. It has a very interior-like organised urban structure with “cosy” compounds that do not open up to the urban areas, nor to the surrounding landscape. The challenge for Almere is to consider how to open up towards the sea, the landscape and to find its own cultural identity as a place. Today it’s a place that lacks a clear cultural identity and urban qualities.

Joram Schaap presented some of the strategies both architectural and more conceptual and brand oriented towards rethinking the city of Almere. One strategy focused on the relationship – and the contrast to – the nearby city of Amsterdam. Another concept highlighted the qualities of Almere as a place to live in. A third concept proposed to strengthen the concept of Almere as a multiple city.

Schaap underlined that the fact that the city owns the land, is an important factor to be able to realize the ambitious development projects.

KEY NOTE SESSION 2

GRO KRAFT (N), Director of KORO Public Art Norway

KORO Public Art Norway organises both temporary and permanent installations, visual art works and as an integrated part of architecture and public spaces, www.koro.no

Gro Kraft explained the Norwegian / Scandinavian political premise for KORO as a vision of “spreading art to the people”. The state is expected to commission art for the public and does so with a range of projects with artists. The fundamental factor is the arm-length principle so it is independent advisers who decide what is to be supported.

Q&A: The presentation raised a discussion about the need for public art. Is public art needed? Does an institution like KORO really help artists and / or the public? Is art in public space in danger of becoming just “design” instead of a critical practice? Gro Kraft insisted on the self-critical potential of an organization as KORO whereas others demanded a more open and challenging approach to urban art.

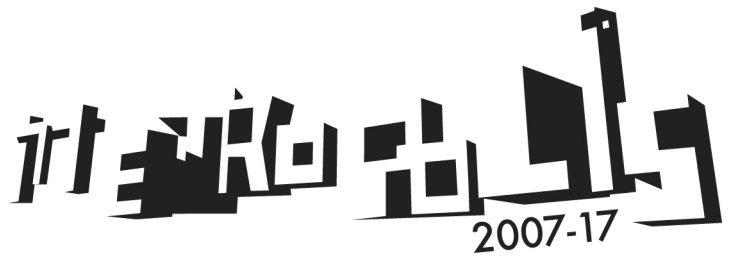
RITA JUSTESEN (DK), Head of Planning & RIKKE FAABORG (DK), Head of Urban Development at By & Havn By & Havn (DK), formerly Ørestadsselskabet, Københavns Havn & Arealudviklingsselskabet works with a range of projects that aim to integrate creative industries, culture and investment in the current plans for Copenhagen, www.nordhavnen.dk // www.orestad.dk

Rita Justesen presented the ideas for the sustainable development plans for Nordhavn. You can read about the ambitions and visions on the website www.nordhavnen.dk

Rikke Faaborg from the Urban Life group of By & Havn introduced the overall thoughts regarding their work in Ørestad and Nordhavn, working with everyday life, events & activities and both temporary and permanent initiatives.

Rikke Faaborg presented a range of examples that can help foster urban life such as supporting the establishment of small shops on the street, facilitating combined use of spaces (such as the new high school in Ørestad), collaborating with artists (such as Halfmachine who also participated in the Metropolis festival), working with progressive rent, allowing for unusual events in new buildings (such as BIG’s Mountain building used for parties and exhibitions) and supporting recurring social traditions in the new area.

Q: Are the cultural events in Ørestad only an alibi for a badly conceived city development? Isn’t it too little, too late?



A: Admittedly the development process could have been better and we have learned from this. But one also has to remember that the city is not finished. Far from all inhabitants have moved in yet and we will see how the new city will grow more lively over the next years.

Trevor Davies argued that the vacuum in the development process between the government / city structure and city private developers poses a central challenge for future planning. How to ensure ownership to initiatives? Which organisation structures and partnerships can enable such successful city development?

CHRISTINA RAY, founding director of Glowlab

Christina Ray (US), founding director of New York's leading arts organisation Glowlab. Christina Ray will talk about 25 years of arts activism in the streets of New York including the major Conflux festival which has provoked, informed and entertained New Yorkers; "the art and technology festival for the creative exploration of urban public space", www.glowlab.com // www.confluxfestival.com

Christine Ray presented the Conflux Festival, a festival for artistic and social experiments that explore public space. The projects range from some using the city as a playground to others which offer critical investigations of the city.

The projects often offer new combinations of low tech and high-tech. Among the examples were design projects such as the development of new types of urban shelters as well as temporary events such as performances taking place in public space.

The festival works as a place for knowledge transfer. The artists share what they know, with the public and with each other.

The aim of many of the projects realized as part of the Conflux Festival is to confront the "soft" commercial public spaces full of advertisement with a vision of a more edgy and inclusive public space.

Some projects are contesting the usual development processes, sometimes skating the borders of legality in order to voice its criticism. This position on the border is a hard one to maintain for the festival, as some artists refuse to work with certain sponsors, but still some funding is necessary. So there is tension between: collaborations with developers – and conflicts with them.

BREAK OUT SESSION 2A: Acting in the Public Space

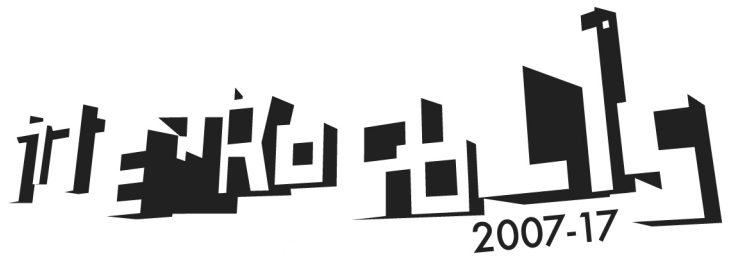
Recent artistic practice with site-specific performances, social interactive performances and contemporary celebratory projects

CIRCOSTRADA NETWORK

Yohann Floch (F) from Circostrada Network, a European platform for professional exchanges, research and information on street arts, www.circostrada.org

Yohann Floch presented an overview of performances in the public realm from a French viewpoint, where urban actions are well-developed art forms in contrast to Scandinavia. There are many different definitions of street art, depending on different contexts and different languages ranging from circus to urban interventions.

Floch presented a range of impressive examples of street art especially from a French tradition. A tradition with street art as big events can be seen in the companies Ilotopie, Trans Express, Compagnie Off and Compagnie de la Russe. Other



companies work more in direct relation to urban space, such as Ex Nihilo, Artonic, Compagnie retourarmont and Compagnie Beau Geste.

Q: A recurring question was: Can street art modify the city? Is street art changing the city or is the city only a stage? How can the art affect an area or neighbourhood?

A: Often politicians only see street art as a means to an end of impact – fixing social or ethnic problems in a community, but don't value the street art experience in itself – and don't really want to contribute to the making of street art. Floch insists that street art must be seen as something more than just means to an end. From the outset street art has a democratic aspect as it is performed in public and for free. It creates a public in city space.

The question remains how to make moving arts collaborate better with architecture and planning without making it the subject of the planning.

TERROIR

Gerard Reinmuth (AU), Director of TERROIR, the practice he founded with Richard Blythe and Scott Balmforth in 1999. The practice emerged from a series of conversations in regard to the potential for architecture to open up questions of cultural consequence in relation to our contemporary condition, www.terroir.com.au

Gerard Reinmuth opened up for a discussion regarding the concept of sustainable development in general, and more particularly how categories about aesthetics and construction must be reconsidered in view of the present situation.

A central question in the discussion of sustainability is how to measure the impact of an action or construction on the environment. We are presented with a lot of images that offer easy ways to buy our way out of the problem, but these solutions often turn out to be very problematic. As Reinmuth says then it seems ironic to "build an eco-home for somebody who is driving a Porsche Cayenne".

The fact is that there is an enormous complexity when it comes to measuring your environmental impact. A low-energy car might be so resource demanding in its construction, that it really would have been better to buy a Hummer.

When it comes to construction the discourse about sustainability tends to focus on energy consumption, forgetting that most of the resources in the building industry are used in the construction itself. Building a brand new low energy house instead of an existing house is more often than not much worse than not building anything at all.

Reinmuth thus advocates for experimenting with an architecture that honours small solutions and applications, changing as little as possible. An architecture of the back pack.

The last part of the lecture introduced the concept of spatial intelligence and discussed how to use this concept as architectural inspiration. Reinmuth mentioned how cultures appropriate traditions and places, resulting in interesting hybrid forms that an open culture should use and support rather than oppress, hinting at the Danish discussions about the Danes and the Others. All the immigrants graduating with the student hat offer Reinmuth an image of how interesting cultural transformations take place.

Artistic interventions can – often more than architecture – act as a testing ground for these kinds of transformations, pushing the discourses and practices forward, and offering new ways of envisioning a city's ability to deal with space in an open and friendly way.