GREEN ASPIRATIONS AND (UN)SUSTAINABLE DETOURS

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ABSTRACT

THE PARTICIPATORY, PUBLIC ART PROJECT ISTEDGADE GREEN SPOTS AND SUSTAINABLE DETOURS WANTED TO ENGAGE SEVERAL HUNDRED LOCAL RESIDENTS TO TAKE PART IN CO-DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING AND SUSTAINING MULTIPLE GREEN OASES IN AND AROUND THE STREET ISTEDGADE IN CENTRAL COPENHAGEN. THIS ARTICLE CONSTITUTES A QUALITATIVE, REFLEXIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESSES OF DEVELOPING THE ARTWORK WITH A PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE REASONS WHY IT FAILED TO DEVELOP THE AMBITIOUS PROJECT IT ORIGINALLY ENVISIONED. THE ARTICLE DISCUSSES THE PROJECT THROUGH THE LENS OF THE NEW NORMS FOR ARTISTIC PRACTICE THAT HAVE EVOLVED WITHIN SOCIAL PRACTICE ART, A FIELD OF ART WITH A PARTICULAR SENSITIVITY TOWARDS ISSUES OF INVISIBILITIES, INEQUALITIES AND INJUSTICES AND A STRONG ACTIVIST DIMENSION. WHILE HIGHLIGHTING TWO KEY CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT, THE ARTICLE ALSO RAISES THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE SHORT-TERM EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT CONSTITUTES AN ADEQUATE MEASURE FOR THIS TYPE OF INTERVENTION INTO URBAN DEVELOPMENT.

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Introduction

On 22 August 2019, Kenneth Balfelt Team (the Team) invited me to take part in a collaborative reflection about why their project *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* (the project) had failed. The project was part art project, part greenery project, part urban development, and it started out in 2014 by attracting an impressive amount of 4.7 million DKK from two different sources of funding. These sources of funding enabled the Team to propose an ambitious project of engaging several hundred local residents to turn the central Copenhagen street Istedgade into the greenest city street in the country. Eventually, after six years of efforts, the project's only material result was the development of a small urban garden at the Men's Home, a social organisation targeting issues of homelessness and drug use in Istedgade.

This article constitutes a qualitative, reflexive case study (Alvesson & Skjöldberg, 2009; Stake, 2005) of the project. In my analysis I will return to the collaborative reflections on 22 August 2019, but also rely upon extensive fieldwork that I conducted from 2014 until 2018 as the project was being developed. The project was the outcome of a commission for a public artwork for Istedgade in conjunction with a renovation of the street, co-funded by the City of Copenhagen and the Danish Arts Foundation. In addition, the Team attracted funding from the private foundation Nordea-fonden who, in parallel to the commission process, had put out a call for participatory projects that would develop 'green oases' in the city, thus contributing to the 'good life'.

The Team is a small firm consisting of the artist Kenneth Balfelt and a changing staff of somewhere between one and three team-members depending upon the projects they are involved in.[1] They work in the field of art and urban development; Balfelt specifically defining his practice as social practice art (Borello, 2015). My analysis of the project failure will rely upon the debates that have characterised the field of social practice art and are outlined below. I present the discussions of social practice art as resulting in a number of norms that guide the determination of a project's value and merit. My analysis of *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* will indicate a number of issues that affected the project, including diminished organisational support and divided local interest, but also suggest that the project ought to be evaluated as an element in a broader struggle for urban diversity. While it failed to deliver, in the short-term, what it ambitiously set out to achieve, it nevertheless constitutes a contribution to an on-going battle for the future diversity of life in the city.

The article is organised in the following way: First, I outline debates on social practice art to create a framework which will subsequently guide my analysis of the project. Secondly, I introduce the project and the context in which it was developed. Third, I analyse and discuss the failure(s) of the project by way of two sequences of arguments. I start by drawing out the reasons why the project should have been a success, followed by which I will point to two key challenges it faced. Finally, I will discuss what lessons might be drawn from the faith of this project.

Norms of social practice art

The field of social practice art is underscored by social aspirations and the purposeful use of art to address and generate solutions to remedy social problems (Kester, 2004; Lacy, 1995). Forms of participation and collaboration are integrated dimensions of social practice art that may or may not involve cultural institutions, and typically target a community or a specific political issue (Kester, 2011; Lacy, 1995). As such, social practice art merges art and politics, and often has an activist dimension (Thompson, 2012).

The discussion of social practice art constitutes a particular branch of art theory, but it is related to and intermingled with discussions of cultural participation (Bhabha, 1998; Kwon, 2004). This is because, first, it also addresses the invisibilities and inequalities that characterise cultural participation, and secondly, it shares the attention towards the role of art and culture in society; third, it is intermingled into the discussions of cultural participation, because social practice art takes part in a world that is affected by changing public conceptions of art and culture as well as changes in cultural policy (Jalving, 2017; Kwon, 2004).

In an art history lineage, social practice art can be traced back to artistic experiments in the 1960s and 1970s that merged art and political protest movements (Finkelpearl, 2013). Artist Suzanne Lacy's concept of a 'new genre public art', introduced in the early 1990s, was based on that legacy when trying to redirect the field of public art from the tradition of sculpture towards practices of community engagement and activism (Lacy, 1995). Since then, a number of competing terms have been

suggested, including participatory art, dialogical aesthetics, and socially engaged art, but the preferred term is the notion of social practice (Bishop, 2012; Jackson, 2011; Kester, 2004; Thompson, 2012). Today we might speak of a genre of social practice art that requires a particular kind of artistic expertise, characteristic of its prime performers, and that has also begun to be taught in art schools (Sholette et al., 2018).

The discussion of social practice art has involved a series of argumentative moves to challenge traditional parameters for evaluating artistic quality (Kester, 2004, 2011; Lacy, 1995). Historically, art theory has been characterised by a rich and varied discussion of what constitutes artistic quality, but social practice art has challenged the foundations of these discussions as too narrowly framed by the tradition of art and too concerned with issues of aesthetics (Kester, 2004). Instead, social practice art has emphasised criteria related to the issues that art engages and the creative processes that it organises together with collaborators (Kester, 2004; Lacy, 1995). In other words, what is addressed as new criteria for judging the value of (social practice) art is art's ability to 'creatively' address questions of invisibilities, inequalities and injustice, and its organisational practices of involving participants in collective forms.

More specifically, social practice art is evaluated in terms of *who* it engages, *how* it engages participants, the time or *duration* with which it engages participants and the *structural level* at which it targets a particular site or issue. Added to which are the more implicit norms of *autonomy* and of *collectivity and consensus*. All of these parameters offer responses to the question of art's political effect in society and thus of its value in terms of addressing and challenging invisibilities, inequalities and injustice. It thus relates to particular norms within discussions of social practice art where the question of political effect and ethical performance constitutes new marks of excellence. These evaluative norms are not universally shared, and they are not formal yardsticks by which external partners ask artists to measure their projects. They are not typically listed as I do in this article. Rather these evaluative norms are the indirect outcomes of the discussion of social practice art that have been posed to defend the field of social practice art, but also used as competitive positioning between artists. They are reflections of important questions to be posed to (social practice) art as well as expressions of internal power-games that measure artistic quality in respect of its political radicality and ethical performance.

The question of *who* social practice art engages relates to the question of art's role in society. Instead of an affluent audience of visitors to cultural institutions, social practice art addresses people and communities from less affluent contexts. The typical focus has been communities or residents in areas with low income, social problems and limited political power. However, this evaluative criteria have also come to be a measurement of artistic quality, where the project's merits are measured by how deprived a community is that it engages with; for instance, children in the outskirts of Greenland or plantation-workers in Africa.[2]

The question of *how* social practice art engages with participants and collaborators touches upon the question of the power-relations involved in such collaborative practices. New genre public art, for instance, emphasised the key role of listening rather than artists expressing themselves, thus challenging the societal value of autonomous art practices (Gablik, 1995; Raven, 1993). A favoured tool to address this issue of power-relations is Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Participation', originally developed within the context of urban development (Arnstein, 1969). The ladder describes a scale of progressively more participatory forms of public involvement in urban development projects. While the low rungs frame artificial forms of consulting local citizens about pre-planned schemes, the upper rungs turn over decision-capacity to the local citizens themselves, granting them direct influence on new developments.

The norm of *duration* developed as a critical response to an explosive interest during festivals and cultural events in commissioning artists to do site-specific work in areas of which they had had no prior knowledge (Kwon, 2004). Short-term engagement was thus pitted against long-term durational commitment that testified not only to the artists' sincere interest in a particular site or issue, but also to their endurance in developing a project at a slower pace and in collaborative practices with local citizens and institutions (O'Neill & Doherty, 2011). As normative criteria for artistic excellence in public art, the monumentality of time thus replaced the monumentality of a sculpture's weight, as art theorist Dave Beech elegantly expressed (Beech, 2011).

Together the norm of *how* to involve participants and the norm of *duration* point to the norm of *collectivity and consensus* that characterises the field of social practice art and its aspiration to create communities. To conjointly follow Arnstein's suggestion to leverage decision power to participants *and* engage in durational processes underline a presupposition that such practices will almost 'automatically' resolve in the achievement of consensus in respect to a joint purpose and the formation of a unified community. This norm has been challenged through reference to radical democratic theory that underlines dissent as the

foundational dimension of democracy and thus of public spaces and public assemblies, but it still seems to drive the aspirations of social practice art (Kwon, 2004). In particular, the norm expresses itself in the artist's aspirations to invigorate a slumbering community by bringing forth joint desires in order to facilitate a process of community-formation (Kluitenberg, 2018). The act of generating collectivity and consensus is thus predicated upon the belief that by targeting the right place and taking the time to engage its local users, the artist will be able to generate a sense of collective agreement in respect to a common purpose.

Finally, there is the question of the societal level at which the artist intervenes. This issue concerns the differentiation between addressing individuals, communities or broader structural problems as the cause of invisibilities, inequalities and injustice. Art historian Grant Kester offered an early critique of social practice art as community empowerment projects, pointing out that, if artists target individuals or incoherent communities as the source of social problems, they support right-wing ideology that blame the individual for their poverty rather than target the structural reasons that sustains poverty (Kester, 1995). Kester's critique of artists' empowerment-strategies might be seen as an early example of a more widespread critique of art that serves the interests of neoliberal ideologies (Wilson, 2018). If contemporary governments are increasingly reducing its social services, then art offering to remedy social problems comes to serve the interests of these very same policies (Wilson, 2018). The critical stance of art becomes co-opted and turned into what the artist group BAVO pejoratively calls NGO art (BAVO, 2007). BAVO describes NGO art as delivering micro-solutions or pocket revolutions to real, everyday problems, but in a manner that supports current policy rather than offering radical critique of the latter (BAVO, 2007). In response, however, Kester has argued that these micro-solutions offer something substantially better than the academic exercise of 'deep' critique practiced by some political artists in the safe confines of the art academy or art institution (Kester, 2011).

This discussion points to another implicit norm in social practice art: the norm of *autonomy*. Expressive and political autonomy coalesce in efforts to stay clear of co-option, but the pretence that social practice art, let alone art practiced in art institutions is somehow magically exempt from support, denies the very interrelationship between autonomy and heteronomy. As performance scholar Shannon Jackson argues, artistic autonomy depends upon various forms of support, and the attempt to imply that one can do entirely without support borders on aligning oneself with neoliberal ideologies (Jackson, 2011). This point should not deny the need to critically scrutinise systems of relations between art and its forms of support, but underline the fact that no absolutely autonomous position exists. Social practice art must come to terms with the grey scales of practices that take place in the complicated situations of social and political struggles.

Having now outlined a framework of the normative criteria for judging social practice art, including who, how, the duration and structural level targeted by social practice art, I will turn to the case study of *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* to analyse and reflect upon the causes of its failure.

A green and social vision

As stated, *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* was the outcome of a commission for a public artwork for the street Istedgade in central Copenhagen, which was developed over a period of six years from 2014 until 2020.[3] From 2014 to 2016, it focused on attracting funding, specifying the project idea and developing an organisational team along with relationships with key local partners. Between 2016 and 2018 several unsuccessful attempts were made at developing specific green spots. Finally, 2019-2020 marked the closure of the project and the realisation of its only material expression in the form of a small urban garden at the Men's Home.

Istedgade is the central street in the district of Vesterbro, running 1,100 meters from Copenhagen's central train station to the square Enghave Plads. It is flanked by five-storey residential apartment buildings, many of which host small independent businesses, including bars and cafés, at the street level, but the street is also well-known for its red light district and drug-use. For the local residents, in particular those with a longer attachment to the street, the street is characterised by a strong social cohesion that is referred to as the Istedgade Spirit, which indicates that people take care of each other, despite different life situations. Today, however, this spirit is perceived to be threatened by processes of gentrification that have converted Istedgade from a working class area into a wealthy neighbourhood, leading to conflicts between the area's new residents and, in particular, the environment of drug-use and sex work.

For Kenneth Balfelt Team, the purpose of the project was to use the development of green spots to mend and renew the social

relations in Istedgade. They planned to involve the local citizens in the development and maintenance of a series of co-designed green spots in the public spaces of the street. They wanted to create collaborations between shop owners, residents in the apartments and the environment of drug-users, also referred to as the 'street people', because they use the street as their living room. While the green spots would offer a pleasant urban environment in an area that, as it were, featured very few green amenities, the grander purpose of designing these spots was to challenge the relationship between the citizen-segments. To counter the conflicting issues that characterised the current relationships, they wanted to bring the various citizens together around their common interest in urban greenery.

In their application to Nordea-fonden, the Team expressed some of its success criteria around particular numbers of participants. These included the involvement of 300 local residents in co-designing, implementing and sustaining at least 20 green spots in Istedgade, where two thirds of these spots were to be developed in collaboration between citizens from different social segments, thus contributing to generating new and less conflictual relationships. 100 of the participants were to take an active part in implementing the green spots, while 50 were to be involved in the practices of sustaining the spots for the duration of 10 years. It is fair to say that the project did not deliver nearly close to its own criteria for success.

In the ensuing analysis and discussion of the project, I rely upon research I conducted from 2014 until 2018. My research involved observations at 26 project meetings along with interviews with the artist, his team members, the commissioners and local residents. I also reviewed the project's public records and the team's Dropbox accounts of project files. I draw upon these various sources of data to discuss and reflect upon why the project failed to deliver what it itself aspired to achieve, drawing on theories from social practice art. The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part explores why the project ought to have been a success. The second part points to two key challenges that affected the project's development, in turn drastically diminishing its scale.

Green aspirations

On paper, *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* looked like the perfect social practice art project with a distinct participatory and political dimension. The artist, Kenneth Balfelt, was a recognised expert in the genre with wide experience of citizen-involvement that adhered to the norms of social practice art. In a Danish context, other artists refer to him as a source of inspiration for their practice (diary notes, 19 April 2018). He and his team have also published a practical guidebook for social practice art and urban development projects (Kenneth Balfelt Team, 2015). Here, they emphasise the need for artists to arrive 'strategically unprepared', which indicates the importance of meeting the local users of a site without a preconceived idea of what you want to do. In other words, it indicates the necessity of supressing your own ideas to be ready to listen to the knowledge of the local users whom the artist also refers to as 'local experts'.

Being pre-themed on greenery, the project slightly violated the artist's own dictum of radical openness to user-feedback expressed in the phrasing of arriving 'strategically unprepared'. In the early stages of developing the project, however, the artist had flagged the possibility that the local citizens might not want any greenery and that it was part of the project's ethics to be open to such a rejection (observation notes, 24 September 2014). Still, the Team expected green spots to be a welcome initiative in the area as local interest in more greenery had been expressed in several recent citizen hearings (observation notes, 17 June 2014). The Team also emphasised that, in fact, Vesterbro was the least green area in Copenhagen, with only two or three square metres of greenery per resident, compared to the citywide average of 25 square meters per resident (observation notes, 17 June 2014).

Balfelt and his team had an intimate knowledge of the area. The artist had lived there for several years and had already developed a number of projects in the area. In 2009, for instance, he took part in redesigning the Men's Home together with its residents and users, developing an interior design that offered them a more dignified and pleasant environment than before. This project was later granted an award by the Danish Arts Foundation and was subsequently highlighted as one of 25 key works (out of 1,273) that the Foundation had supported in its 50 years of existence (Jalving, 2014). More recently, the Team and a group of local 'beer drinkers' had co-designed a small park featuring, most prominently, a long, serpentine park bench. This project was developed in response to a prolonged closing of Enghave Square due to Metro constructions, which deprived

the beer drinkers of their usual social meeting space. The Team worked together with the beer drinkers and the Vesterbro neighbourhood council to find another location, and subsequently designed and constructed the park. Having participated in its construction, the beer drinkers also oversaw the park's ensuing maintenance.

Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours expanded the Team's *durational* engagement in the area. Not only was the process of developing green spots intended to last two years and thus, as the Team suggested in their guidelines for citizen-involvement, allow the local residents to become familiar and comfortable with the upcoming changes (Kenneth Balfelt Team, 2015). But the project also adhered to durational aspirations by connecting the process of developing the green spots with their subsequent maintenance. The durational timespan along with the citizen's ability to influence the outcome of the green spots were the ingredients that would make them feel collectively responsible for its maintenance.

As a social practice artwork, the project had a distinct political ambition directed at mending and renewing the social bonds in the street, in particular emphasising the need to support the street's continued hospitality for the street people. The artist himself at one point explained that 'greenery' was his artistic form used to create the 'content' of communities (observation notes, 17 June 2014). The project not only targeted the street people, but the entire spectrum of residents in the street. However, it reserved a special place for the street people. On the one hand, they were offered the opportunity to take part in educational training on green maintenance with the possible outcome of taking on maintenance jobs for the green spots developed in the area. The Men's Home already organised such small chores for members of the community interested in work, so it fitted into that scheme, only redirecting it from sweeping backyards to garden-work. On the other hand, one of the designated spots was directly next to the Men's Home itself, and thus aimed at offering a more inspiring and pleasant environment for its residents and users.

The project thus sought to integrate communities, but at the *structural level* of urban planning, rather than addressing any individual behaviour. The proposal to work with urban greenery implied that mending the social bond in the street required a material restructuring of the urban setting into a more inclusive and hospitable green environment that all citizens could play a part in collectively sustaining. In other words, the project responded to the aspirations of mending social bonds by effectively arguing that such mending required the reconstruction of the site into a different kind of urban setting.

In summary, the project proposal in its description adhered to the norms of social practice art, in terms of *who* and *how*, as well as in terms of the *duration* and *structural level* of engagement, emphasising its political aspirations of securing the continued hospitality for the street people and the broader goal of sustaining the diversity of life in the city.

Unsustainable detours

Now that I have detailed the reasons why *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* ought to have succeeded, I will offer two key explanations for why it failed. While the above arguments are based upon the merits of Kenneth Balfelt Team, their project proposal and the funders' initial favourable reception, the following discussion dives into the details of the obstacles the project met. The first challenge is the problem of organisational support, while the second is the challenge of the local citizens' divided interest in green spots.

The challenge of organisational support

This challenge relates to the relationship between autonomy and support in situations where artistic projects intervene at the structural level of organising public spaces. The Team saw itself as an independent small organisation, but their work depended upon the organisational support of its external collaborators, extending beyond merely funding, but also negotiating further agreements in terms of a maintenance guarantee. In early 2015, the Team had received confirmation of financial support from the City of Copenhagen and the Danish Arts Foundation, but the larger sum of funding from Nordea-fonden required that the City issue a maintenance guarantee for an initially jointly calculated sum of 900,000 DKK to fund the removal of greenery, should the project fail to enlist the local community in sustaining the green spots. As it turned out, it would take the entire duration of 2015 and a few months into 2016 to generate this maintenance agreement, which in the end was much smaller, specifically

50,000 DKK, and consisting of funds withdrawn from the project itself.

One reason for this obstacle was a reorganisation of the City administration during 2014, which meant that the City's top-management lost interest in the project and were reluctant to further support it with a maintenance guarantee. From the Team's perspective, the additional funding from Nordea-fonden was a gift to the neighbourhood, enabling more green spots in the area, whereas the City approached it as an additional expense. Their reluctance also had to do with the artist's choice of working with open-ended processes of citizen-involvement that had no clearly specified result. As one of the City's participants expressed it, they were not able to calculate the expected maintenance costs which rendered them reluctant to even give the go-ahead to funding the project in the first place (Interview, 13 January 2015). The final agreement with the City was made with another administrative department than the one that had taken part in the collaboration with the Arts Foundation, and as a result of the challenges in securing the promised funding from Nordea-fonden, the Arts Foundation together with the City eventually withdrew their remaining financial support.

This challenge also led to the temporary disassembling of the Team. Upon the expected receipt of both sources of funding, the artist had hired a small team and rented an office in the local area. The Team consisted of a student intern and two full-time employees, one of which was granted half a year's leave from his regular job to take part in the project. As negotiations collapsed, they eventually had to be let go, followed by which the artist also made a settlement with the Arts Foundation and the City in respect to their part of the project funding. They had been eager to see the results of their project funding and were disappointed that the artist had not begun work in some form, like a pilot-project, to indicate that he was moving forward in the process. The artist, on his side, was disappointed in the Arts Foundation for not assisting him in securing a maintenance guarantee from the City; a maintenance guarantee that he considered a formality as it was absurd that he would construct green oases and simply leave everything to wither and die. The money reserved in a maintenance guarantee would never be spent.

Several issues thus generated this organisational challenge. First, the project's durational activities of citizen-involvement formed a core part of the Team's interpretation of the work's quality, and indeed this dimension was costly in the hours demanded to engage and mobilise the local public. As such, the project budget did not itself include the funding required for securing the green spot's maintenance. Secondly, none of the funders were able or willing to offer the extended organisational and financial support that was required to secure the project's projected structural changes. They all delivered more support than they usually would, but they deferred the ownership of its realisation to the Team – including securing 10 years maintenance of its projected results. As a result, the relationship between the project and its dependency upon external support was out of balance.

The challenge of the divided local interest

The second challenge to be addressed is the local interest in green oases. While more greenery was on top of the local citizens' interests as expressed in citizens-hearings, it was also an interest that divided local opinion. Some citizens embraced the aspirations, while others felt it violated their impression of the area as a downtown urban area. For the Team, the development of the green spots was carried by aspirations for co-creative processes of envisioning and designing the spots, which faced difficulties when confronted by disagreement and disinterest. A case in point is the green spot developed for Saxogade, a small side street to Istedgade.

Saxogade was selected as a spot because of its connection to the social organisation Settlementet that offers tailored occupational support for unemployed people with additional problems, including running a number of socio-economic shops in the street that provide such employment opportunities. Settlementet was in the process of making their shops more attractive to the broader segment of residents in the area and these aspirations fitted well with the Team's idea of generating a lush green oasis. The vision of turning Saxogade into such a garden also attracted the attention of a small group of residents who took part in a work-group designing the local spot.

The group met about once a month throughout the spring of 2017 to collectively design the green spot for Saxogade, the design itself being sketched by a small architectural firm that also participated in the meetings (observation notes, 11 January, 1 February, 19 March, 19 April, 19 June 2017). However, the process was marred by a number of challenges. On the one hand, the group was limited in numbers. Although the artist and his team felt that their process of knocking on doors and inviting

citizens to open meetings had yielded positive feedback from the citizens, the team, in fact, struggled to get a broader community to take part in actually developing the green spot. Also, and for various reasons, those that participated in the work-group would not necessarily show up at each meeting. It frustrated the architects, as designs would be remade in response to feedback at one meeting, only to receive another type of feedback at the next meeting (observation notes, 19 April 2017). Issues of legal clearances also came up. Could fire trucks pass under the wires planned for the idea of implementing a green 'roof'? Would the City accept the removal of parking spaces? As the architects expressed it, they could not move forward before decisions were made, and reaching decisions also required consulting with the City administration, but the artist was reluctant to contact them before the work-group had reached an internal agreement. However, he accepted the architects' proposal to issue a process plan to alert the work-group participants that final decisions would be made at the upcoming meeting. For the artist, affected by the durational norms of social practice art, the idea of reaching consensus seemed a matter that would eventually come about by taking enough time to discuss the issue among participants. In this case, however, it did not happen.

The aspirations of generating collectivity and consensus, however, took an even stronger blow, when the design was eventually finalised and the City preliminarily agreed to the suggested changes to the street's public spaces. The City only required the forming of a street guild to secure the maintenance of the new green garden. The Team's plan was that the project funding would pay for the process and material used to construct the green spot, but its subsequent maintenance would be the responsibility of the street guild, made up of three cooperative housing associations based there and the local shops. The cooperative housing associations are formal organisations with a running board of residents who oversee the maintenance of the individual apartment buildings. The chairmen of these boards had not taken part in the work-group, but they had been informed about the process and according to members of the work-group, they had responded favourably to it. However, when asked to take part in the street guild, they had a number of reservations. One was the public benches, which some feared would attract unwanted citizens using it for sleeping purposes. Another was the parking spaces that they wanted to keep. Finally, there was the annual cost of maintenance, which the Team had calculated in response to letting Settlementet's employment scheme handle the regular maintenance. All of these points of critique led to adjustments to the original design into a light version. Still, by summer 2018, one of the housing associations withdrew completely, and the Team's final attempt to mobilise the community did not prove to the Team that the community was sufficiently supportive of the idea. This eventually led the artist and his team to cancel this green spot completely (interview, 29 August 2018).

Several aspects of this challenge point to social practice art norms of inclusivity and durational practices. The Team aspired to enlist and engage the community, but struggled all along. The artist envisioned that given time, people would become more alert to the process, see their own vision of the area expressed in it, and thus be willing to take on the responsibility for maintenance. As such, the process of developing *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* points to social practice art's strong dependency upon local support and local community consensus. For the artist, a work's value is not measured by its aesthetic imprint on a site, but by its ability to infuse and mobilise the local citizens, detecting the local energies slumbering beneath the surface and form them into a collective desire, which the project failed to do in this particular site.

Discussion

In the above analysis of *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours*, I started by listing a number of reasons why the project appeared to have potential, and then proceeded to point to two issues that challenged its realisation. The first part of my analysis adheres directly to the norms of social practice art and enlists these norms as measurements of a project's success, in addition to which I added the project's ability to attract substantial funding. As the second part of my analysis shows, however, the project's failure is also partially attributable to the norms of social practice art.

First, it was the political aspirations of intervening at the structural level of urban development that constituted the need for further organisational and financial support, which thus generated a prolonged process of negotiations that ended up crippling the project. The lesson to be learned is that either you keep all expenses within the pool of money that you have already assured and make them last for the process of developing your project, the material costs of creating them and the cost of subsequent maintenance, or you will need to secure the organisational and financial support of more generous political partners to carry

out your vision. As it turned out, the very lack of a maintenance agreement from the city would come to figure as a problem when forming street guilds, since the horizon of 10 years maintenance responsibility was difficult for the cooperative housing associations to digest.

Secondly, it was the aspirations of forming a community consensus that barred the project from realising its green spots. In my analysis of the collaborative design of the local spot in Saxogade, I emphasised how difference of opinion challenged the process of reaching a joint decision on the design of the urban garden. While the participants were clearly allured by the expected realisation of a lush green oasis, they nevertheless did not agree about its precise design, indicating that the work of generating collaborations around new urban development cannot just be solved by taking enough time to reach consensus. It also demands the execution of situational decisions to move any processes further towards completion.

In respect to the further difficulties of forming street guilds, one conclusion could be that the project should never have come so far, because despite expression of high interest in more greenery at the citizen hearings, there was no broad local interest in taking on the collaborative responsibility for the development and maintenance of urban greenery. This consideration formed part of the collective reflections in the evaluation meeting that the Team invited me to take part in on 22 August 2019, and with which I initiated this article. The motivation for hosting such a collective reflection was, primarily, the aspiration to learn from a trying process that had developed quite differently, and was less successful than the artist's previous projects. In other words, the artist wanted to find out what others had noticed that he himself had not. A further motivation was the ongoing reporting to Nordea-fonden, who continued to support the project until 2020.

In addition to me, one of the team-members who had taken part in conceptualising the project participated, and together we discussed several aspects of the project. I pointed to some of the challenges I have described above, but the issue that seemed to offer the artist most ground for self-reflection was his own role in pursuing the success of the project (diary notes, 22 August 2019). These aspirations were spurred by the complications of securing the project's funding. The hardship of this process made him even more intent on succeeding, but as a result he overlooked several warning signs. One was that the citizens in Istedgade did not feel they needed an urban garden, but only thought it was nice to have, so the very aspirations of developing a new urban environment were less acute than in his previous projects. The aspirations to succeed also barred the Team from pausing and rebooting their strategies in the process, reflecting upon whether they had generated support from a majority of local residents or only a minor group.

The challenge of generating local support speaks of the norms of collectivity and consensus. The Team was aspiring to generate a community by working durationally. In the artist's self-reflection, he returns to the same criteria as a measurement of where they went wrong: they did not take the time to pause and reflect, and to realise that there was no broad community interest in green spots in Istedgade. At least not to the extent that the local citizens wanted to engage themselves in the collective process of realising these and guaranteeing their maintenance. For the artist and his team, the project's success was not only about the quality of its projected aesthetic environment, although this seemed to be a chief allure for many participating citizens. It was also about the emotional energy they hoped to ignite in the participants. Yet in this case they did not discover enough energy slumbering beneath the surface.

However, it may be that the very aspiration of generating a broad consensus constitutes an impossible criterion when diverse publics need to collaborate. As the Team operated in a public site where they had to secure formal support from the local citizens in the form of the formation of a street guild, they not only had to enlist interested participants, but also bridge the entire spectrum of publics in the site. However, as theories of radical democracy have made clear, all formations of publics are necessarily partial, dependent upon the exclusion of others, and in situations such as the design of public spaces, difference of opinion will inevitably surface (Kwon, 2004). Thus, if the goal had only been to realise the green spots, then sufficient, if not unanimous, support for the idea would have been enough to merit its realisation. Complete agreement might never have even been possible. But for the artist and his team, the purpose had always been to form a community that could collectively struggle to achieve the result of a lush green garden, whereas they found themselves in a situation of trying to convince local residents to spend time and energy on the project.

Conclusion

In this article I have conducted a qualitative, reflexive case study of *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours*. As a case study, it offers a story of the many different issues that might complicate the participatory, collaborative aspirations of social practice art. It points to the way in which the political and ethical norms of social practice art not only influenced the conceptualisation of the project, but also came to challenge its realisation.

First, the analysis indicates that the ability to succeed in such practices requires more substantial and sustained organisational and financial support than was available in this particular project. In fact, its aspirations of carrying out structural interventions meant that it required more substantial support than other classic forms of art. The durational practices of citizen-involvement with an unknown outcome challenged the City administration's calculations, while the very choice to work with something as fragile as greenery in public spaces generated a need for further financial backing. If there are lessons to be learned from this, it is that structural changes to urban sites are costly, and that even the high sum of 4.7 million DKK covered only some of the funds necessary to ensure the project's aspirations. If autonomy is desired, then it comes at a price of more limited funding, while the further mobilisation of funds demands collaborations with politically more powerful partners. In this case it was never a possibility.

Secondly, the analysis of the case complicates the issue of how to engage in citizen-involvement beyond simply listening and accommodating the interests of the local residents. It shows the difficulties of relying on time to resolve conflicts or even to get people interested in contributing to a project. Thus, the lessons of citizen-involvement are that broader publics will not necessarily agree, and that even given time, someone will need to make a decision to move things forward, or, as the Team did in this case, dismiss the project's realisation. Perhaps the local interest in green spots was too vague. Perhaps it was big enough to merit the realisation of the green spots. At the same time, these challenges point to differences in evaluative criteria between social practice art and its participants. Was the aesthetic result or the inclusive processes of citizen-involvement the most important factor in the project? And how do we better balance the two? One suggestion would be to measure the success of such projects not only on the basis of the material manifestations they leave behind, but also on the immaterial value it brings to the area, the discussions it opens and continues and the connections it makes between local residents, if only for a short period of time. While such measurements might soon turn into calculations of participant numbers, thus conforming to project reporting, the quality of a work lies also in its participation in a broader, collective struggle for urban diversity.

The above conclusions and lessons draw from the short-term evaluation of the project and its failure to generate green spots in and around Istedgade. However, it is also possible to speculate about the merits of the project in the long term. As an end to this article, I propose to evaluate *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* not as a failure, but as part of a broader on-going struggle exploring and supporting the possibilities of diversity in contemporary urban development. For the Team, the realisation of the green spots and the collective energy it sought to generate were intimately connected, not least for the further purpose of securing the maintenance of its green and social purpose. The project's vision of Istedgade as the greenest city-street in the country and of creating spaces for the hospitality of the street people thus contributes to the struggle for the future diversity of the city. It shows a vision of how social practice art and its participatory and collaborative engagement might address issues of invisibility, inequality and injustice, by way of generating new collective spaces of interaction that attract both affluent and less affluent citizens. A point of attraction for the City's chief architect, taking part in the commission process, was exactly the experimental way in which the project proposed to develop green collaborations between small shops, apartment residents and the street people (interview, 7 March 2017). It offered a timely proposal to Copenhagen's urban development, which had just begun to commit itself to a green agenda. While the City faced the challenge of accommodating the influx of new citizens, it also needed to find solutions to harbour more urban greenery within the city itself. This is still an on-going battle, and one in which local activists feel that neither the less affluent citizens nor the public amenities of green areas are being supported, so the prospect of success is challenging, even in the long run.

However, things might change, and occasionally have changed for the better. In Vesterbro, for instance, 2012 saw the installation of the first injection room, a publicly available room with sanitised conditions and medical staff, where the drug-users can go to administer their drugs. These injection rooms moved the drug-addicts out of the area's staircases and backyards, but more importantly, it saved hundreds of lives that would otherwise have been lost to overdoses. Kenneth Balfelt was involved in

the struggle to introduce injection rooms, one example being his 2002 mock installation of an injection room in an old bunker, showcased in the context of an art exhibition. It would be wrong to claim that this art-piece was the instrumental road to the implementation of the injection rooms, but it was one part among many – and the artist took part in several others – that pushed the political balance in favour of making a new decision for how to accommodate the lives of drug-addicts. Likewise, I hope that in hindsight *Istedgade Green Spots and Sustainable Detours* will prove to be a similar step in the success of ensuring a more social, green, diversified and hospitable urban life in Copenhagen.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1   See https://www.kennethbalfelt.org/

2   See Berliner & Enghoff (2019), and Renzo Martens, The Institute for Human activities:
    http://www.humanactivities.org/en/about-3/

3   See https://www.kennethbalfelt.org/istedgade-gronne-spots