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Public Space: Open to every-Body – but how? Street Art as A Threat or a Prospect

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Abstract

Street art, a form of local urban intervention, encounters strong oppositions from many planners. Making an imprint in public space is, for the most part, only legal if you advertise or if the municipality commissions you. By unlawfully taking up space in the city, streets artists challenge the laws and unwritten rules that make up the foundation of contemporary design and regulation of public space. Are these illegal actions a threat against an open and democratic city where public space should be accessible to everybody? Or are they prospects for a more democratic and creative public space? In this paper, street art is studied as an example to illustrate different interpretations of the right to public space, and to discuss whether the promotion of local interventions can contribute to a more democratic public space and if they can be catalysts for city development in general. Photographic mapping and interviews with street artists and planners are linked to literature on city development and public space.

Keywords

Street art, public space, urban planning, creativity, accessibility

Introduction

Street art is a phenomenon that began to appear in cities over the world only some years ago. To post art without permission in public space, spaces that should be open for everybody, poses many questions about what public space is and should be. How can public space be open to everybody when people have different preferences and ways of using it?

In this text, street art (and graffiti[1]) is used as an example to illustrate different interpretations of the right to public space. On the one hand there are those who believe un-commissioned, personal imprints such as street art are threats to the publicity of public space. On the other hand there are those who see street art and other alternative, local interventions as fundamental conditions for a democratic city and as contributions to city development in general.

Malmö, a city of 280 000 in southern Sweden, is used as the primary example in this study. Malmö is interesting as such, in part because of its history as a former industrial city that has been strongly affected by globalization, and in part because it is a city with plenty of street art and graffiti. Among street artists, the city is known for its open-minded approach. I have even spoken to street artists who have moved to Malmö because of that. However, since about a year, the local police have pursued a harsh policy towards street artists and graffiti writers, and many practitioners are worried that the creative and open atmosphere in Malmö now will fade away. (Sydsvenskan 2008-07-18)

Image 1: Replaced paving stones are common in Malmö.

Image 2: A legal graffiti wall in central Malmö.

[1] In my research the main focus has been on street art since the artists I have interviewed are working mainly with street art techniques. But since graffiti and street art are breaking the same regulations in Sweden, and they are both examples of creative local interventions, I also use graffiti as an example.

The empirical work that this paper is based on is made up of several short studies, conducted from November 2007 until June 2008. I have interviewed four Swedish street artists: Erik, the Photographer, Ballerina and Hop Louie. Erik and the Photographer are part of the street art collective *Malmö Streets Project* posting street art mainly in Malmö. Ballerina has been active in Lund (a town close to Malmö) and Stockholm, and Hop Louie is for the most part active in Stockholm. I have also interviewed two officials at the Streets and Parks Department of the City of Malmö: Sten Göransson and Jerry Ahlandsberg. The third part of the empirical work is a photo project conducted during two months, where I attempted to map the different actors and actions being involved in the visual imprints of a street in Malmö. Three days a week different objects and surfaces were photographed, in order to show the change over time. The empirical work is linked to literature on the globalization of cities and literature on alternative ways of using cities.

Protests against commercialization and security thinking

Street art is a term used mostly for a number of different non-profit, non-commissioned, artistic expressions within the city, often in public places. The concept most often refers to the recent artistic expressions that have appeared, such as posters, stencil art, stickers and knitting, while the concept of graffiti, or spray can art, is used for artistic expressions (pieces, throw-ups, tags) that are performed with spray paint on freehand, without any stencils or other materials. (Andersson 2006, 27-27) Both graffiti and street art are more or less illegal in Swedish cities today, and the art is often an expression for a resistance against spoken and unspoken rules about what can be done in public space, and thus a protest against that some people have "access" to public space, and some have not.

The first occurrence of modern illegal art in the streets, graffiti, appeared in the 1960s in large American cities, a reality full of images, signs and logotypes. Even though the phenomenon of writing your signature on walls, trains etc certainly is connected to a human need to make imprints, communicate and be active in shaping your surrounding environment and thus can be said to be similar to e.g. cave paintings and messages found on walls in Pompeii, street art is also a product of current times. (Berg 2004, 134-135; Jacobson 1996, 9-11) Andreas Berg writes about graffiti in the book *King Size. A project about Tags, DIY-Craft & Subcultural Globalization*. He compares tagging with Andy Warhol's famous reproductions of e.g. Coca Cola bottles and Campbell's tinned food. He suggests that just like Warhol's reproductions, tags are a critique against advertising and its repeated logotypes. It is a kind of upheld nonsense. Graffiti writers undermine advertising through their imitations of it: By means of repeating their tags in as many places as possible, as large as possible, and in the most visible locations, the writers limit the supremacy of advertising. They create and reproduce their own logotypes. (Berg 2004, 139-140,

145-146) When they fill the "neutral" façades with their names, attention is drawn from the advertisements and the logotypes of the companies, which would otherwise have been able to speak their message with disturbance. Many street artists call their imprints tags, even if they are not done by means of a spray can, but are stickers, stencils, or knitting.

Not all graffiti writers and street artists use repetition in the form of tags as a means of protest. Adbusting, the act of altering advertisements, is also a common method with more or less artistic ambitions. Sometimes, the adbusting is so refined that it is hard to make out whether it is actually part of the advertisement itself. This raises even more confusion. The power of advertising is limited by a direct alteration of the objects of protest. The commented advertisements urge passers-by to reflect. (Klein 2000, 279-309)

A lot of street art is a protest against the commercialization of public space. Street artists want to take the city back. Many street artists are reacting to the fact that municipalities are allowing outdoor advertising and promoting a uniform and "neutral" design of buildings etc., at the same time as other forms of visual expressions are prohibited. They are critical of the decisions taken by municipalities that support an order where only those who have enough money can take up visual space in the city. (E.g. Andersen 2007; Banksy 2005; Andersson 2006; Paulsson 2008) There were already many names on the walls before the writers started to write theirs, graffiti artist Joe Austin writes in the book *King Size:* the people who have their enterprise in the buildings put up their names, and through advertising companies other enterprises put up their names as well. To buy oneself room in public space has become the norm, to take up space in other ways has become a protest against this norm. The Swedish street artist Hop Louie is pointing out that taking up room in public space implies power:

> It has to do with the right to free speech, I think it is wrong that only those who can pay enormous sums of money, that is companies, should be allowed to put up things in the public space that belongs to everybody. […] I also think it is wrong that the municipalities turn squares and natural places for gathering into indoor malls, where only approved commercial messages are allowed and security guards remove people who do not consume (e.g. homeless people). (Hop Louie, in Paulsson 2008)

Writing your name on a façade is in contemporary Sweden only illegal if it is done in the "wrong" place, i.e. somebody's property, without commission. The definition of scribbling[2] used

2 In Sweden, the word "klotter" is used to describe these actions. It has no direct translation, but the closest word is "scribbling". The original meaning of this word is something that is done quickly without artistic ambitions, but refers traditionally to writings on a school toilet, or a shopping list. In English, the word most commonly used is graffiti.

by the City of Malmö is paint, posters and stickers in the wrong place (Ahlandsberg 2008-05-23). Time, place and context determine what is legal or illegal.

> Unfortunately, most things go in the wrong direction. The world becomes more and more commercialized, and more and more resources are used for surveillance, CCTV etc. I guess the politicians will go in the same direction and there will be less and less room for personal expressions in society. (Ballerina, in Paulsson 2008)

Many street artists are protesting against increasing security thinking. They connect it to control of people, where actions that go outside the box of "normality", or the accepted, can be regulated.

Repetition and modified advertisements are not the only expressions of street art. Works of art being put up in only one single, or a few locations, waiting to be discovered. rather than shouting for attention, are also common. The fake CCTV cameras by Malmö Streets Project along the pedestrian street in Malmö are an example of this. The cameras are a protest against a proposal from the City of Malmö to put up surveillance cameras along the entire street.

Image 3: Fake CCTV cameras by street art collective Malmö Streets Projects.

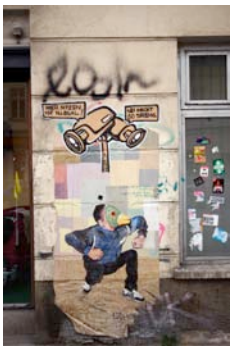

Image 4: Street art in Berlin.

Street art as a threat

The practices of street art and graffiti are arousing strong opposition among many planners and politicians: the illegal art is perceived as a threat to the planned order and has been linked with insecurity. Those who see street art as a threat often have an interpretation of the right to public space that differs from that of people who use the city in an alternative way. The first interpretation is founded on a definition of publicity and public space where the general and uniform make up the foundation for publicity, while the unique and diverse are the foundation for the latter. (Mitchell 2003, 118-156)

The Aesthetics of Order

Julia Nevárez uses the notion "the aesthetics of order" to describe the structures that form public places in a way that makes people experience them as secure. A high level of maintenance, surveillance and "beautification efforts" are the three main examples which she describes. According to Nevárez, these measures are parts of the attempts global cities make in order to attract tourists and the professional middle class. (Nevárez 2007)

Nevárez stresses that the aesthetics of order is linked to the privatization of public space. Central Park in New York, which she has studied closer, is maintained with the help of a public-private-partnership between the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation and the Central Park Conservancy, which is sponsored by private donors. The high level of maintenance, surveillance and "beautification" would not be possible without the help from these donors. In exchange, the donors are given influence on a public place. The Central Park Conservancy has implemented a particular taste, which is supposed to appeal to tourists and the middle and upper class. The aesthetics of order does not only effect the way the visual aspects of the landscape are perceived but also which kind of activities are perceived as appropriate. Unanticipated and dissent activities are counteracted by means of design or regulation. (Nevárez 2007)

Children's dens are examples of activities that are often perceived as something that makes a mess and disturbs the order. Children have not gone through the process of socialization where they learn what is supposed to be beautiful and safe. (Kylin 2003) Street art and graffiti are also perceived as something that makes a mess, even soils: the notion of "clean facades" in opposition to facades with street art and graffiti. Street artists and graffiti writers are, in contrast to children, aware of what is seen as beautiful and accepted by society in general, but they choose to protest against these norms. (Paulsson 2008)

Image 5: Street art in Malmö.

Sten Göransson at the Streets and Parks Department in Malmö thinks that many people make an unwarranted association between street art and insecurity because they connect it to areas that are unfamiliar to them. Street art often occur in places with a low level of maintenance, and many people feel uncomfortable in these places, as they are not used to spend time there. Because of this, they connect street art to insecurity. (Göransson 2008-05-23)

SL (Stockholm Public Transport) and politicians in Stockholm have since many years asserted that graffiti has a connection to other kinds of criminality. Media has helped to spread and uphold this picture. Research done by criminologists David Shannon and Michael Johnsson at Stockholm University showed, however, that graffiti writers are usually not involved in criminal activity, except for the act of writing graffiti (Dagens Nyheter 2001-10-15).

Different interpretations of the right to public space

According to Don Mitchell, there are two contradictory visions of what public space is, its purpose, and who should have access to it. The first vision implies that people have access to public space as long as they use it in accordance with existing regulations and norms. This vision emanates from an idea about safety where (adequate) people who use public space should be able to feel comfortable and not be bothered by e.g. homeless people or political activity. This vision leads to attempts to apply control and order, and to the exclusion of unanticipated and dissent people: if you do not use public space in accordance with the regulations and norms, you do not have the right to use it. Mitchell implies that the interpretation of which behaviours are acceptable and which are not, often set out from privileged groups in society. (Mitchell 2003, 128-130)

The other interpretation of the right to public space emanates from a vision of public space as a place for free interaction, without the coercion by powerful institutions: places for user participation and political activities, where it is possible to appropriate space in one's own way. However, such uses often counteract the prescribed ones, and are thus seen as a threat by those in favour of the first interpretation. Don Mitchell states that it is through the conflict between these both visions, the prescribed and the challenging, that public space has become accessible to more groups, and thus become more open. (Mitchell 2003, 118-156)

The street artist Erik seems to use something like the second interpretation of the right to public space. Together with some other street artists in Malmö Streets Project, he posted art in public places in Malmö with the logo of the City of Malmö in it, but wrote My City instead of Malmö City. (malmostreetsproject.se) For Erik, it is about ownership – not the kind that can be bought for money, but the right we all possess to the commons, a right that is now run over by companies. *"Slow and sure the city is becoming less and less ours,"* he writes, aiming at the

building of new malls on commons. Because of this he wants to emphasize that it is my city, meaning everybody's city and not a city belonging to corporations, or nobody. (Erik, in Paulsson 2008)

The globalized city

A main target for the protests by street artists and graffiti writers is the commercialization of public space, the spreading of malls and security thinking. These tendencies are also part of the process of globalization. Globalization is a complex phenomenon that can be seen from several different perspectives. One of the effects is that cities around the world are competing for investors, citizens and tourists, and the establishment of enterprises, as consequences of increased possibilities in communication and transport, and thus increased flexibility when it comes to localization of businesses. The process of cities conforming to this phenomenon is usually referred to as place marketing. To market a city is actually not something new, but it has been intensified by the globalization, especially in former industrial cities. (Book 2008, 185-186)

From industrial city to a city of knowledge and culture

As a former industrial city, Malmö has been greatly affected by globalization. The city went into a depression during the 1970s and 80s after the industries, the shipbuilding industry being the most prominent, chose to re-establish its production in other parts of the world where the labour was cheaper. (Greiff 2008, 25-26)

To get out of this economical crisis and solve the unemployment that followed, the cities had to find new ways to become attractive. It became common to invest in institutions of knowledge and culture. The City of Malmö chose to establish a university and to realize the plans for a bridge to Danish capital, marketing the Öresund region together with Copenhagen. (Greiff 2008, 27)

To market the city

In the struggle for the "right kind" of inhabitants and tourists, it has become increasingly important to establish a positive image of the city. To do this many cities are investing in so called *flagship architecture* and other spectacular attractions. The purpose of this architecture is to work as a catalyst for city development by creating attention and thus attract investors, visitors etc. In Malmö, the 54-storey building Turning Torso is an example of flagship architecture built when a part of the old harbour was turned into a new housing area, Västra hamnen. *Waterfront developments* like these are also a common way of marketing former industrial cities. (Dannestam 2008, 201; Mukhtar-Landgren 2008, 169; Olsson 2008, 32-36)

Image 6: Turning Torso and Västra hamnen, waterfront development in Malmö.

To market and establish consumer environments are yet another way in which Malmö and other cities try to support the economic development. (Olsson 2008, 33) An additional 165 000 square meters of malls are planned for the next few years, an increase by 30 percent. (Planering Malmö 2008:1)

New ways to collaborate

The new building projects are often implemented in *public-private-partnerships.* This as well is part of the strategy to survive the strained economic situation. Cut-downs in the Malmö city budget as a consequence of the economic situation forced the politicians to look for new sources of income. Together with an increased "business thinking" with exposure to competition and an organisation based on a division commissioner and executers within the public administration, this has resulted the dissolution of the borders between public and private sectors, and public and municipal managements do not supply the traditional services of the welfare state to the same degree as before.

Another example is agreements with advertising companies on the maintenance of outdoor furniture in exchange for advertising surfaces in public space. The two biggest companies in Sweden are JCDecaux and Clear Channel, which are active in 43 and 64 countries respectively. (jcdecaux.se; clearchannel.se)

The Downside of Globalization

The divided city

Using new strategies, the City of Malmö has managed to reverse the increase of unemployment and economical problems. During the past twenty years, Malmö has turned into a city that attracts

not least young people, with an active culture life and an innovative university, while empty apartments have turned into housing shortage.

Parallel to this image of progress there is another image, a "downside" or an "inner" image of the city, which makes up the reality for many people. This is an image of a divided city where the gap between those who are well off and those who have economic difficulties, has increased. These conditions are shown spatially in the city through segregation and gentrification. There is a division of housing areas in Malmö based on class and ethnicity, where the western parts of the city are dominated by upper and middle class citizens with a Swedish ethnical background, while the eastern and southern parts are dominated by citizens of other ethnical backgrounds and less income. This division of the city started already at the beginning of the 20th century, when middle class citizens chose to move to the western parts to get away form "the dangerous lower class citizens" and problems with smoke from the industries. (Stahre 2004, 68-69; Mukthar-Landgren 2008, 167, 173-178; Olsson 2008, 37-39; Greiff 2008, 21-27)

These tendencies, though, have had a relatively small impact on Swedish cities compared to many cities in e.g. the United States where there are big differences between poor areas and so-called gated communities. One explanation to this can be that the Swedish welfare system still has a strong impact. Another explanation is the resistance that the changes due to globalization have met on grass root level. Local, political and cultural factors modify the global tendencies. (Stahre 2004, 68-74)

The privatization of public space

Another downside that has been discussed among researchers (e.g. Don Mitchell 2003) is the privatization of public space. Privatization is a result of many different but at the same time interwoven processes, all implementing increased control over public places in order to curtail alternative and unanticipated activities. Public-private-partnerships are part of this process. In the United States, the concerns of private sponsors have had greater impact on the design and regulation of parks and other public places, where guards and surveillance cameras secure order. (Nevárez 2007; Mitchell 2003,118-156).

Commercialization and "disneyfication" of public places also reduces publicity, because of the building of pseudo-public places such as malls and glass-encrusted passages where other activities than consumption and transport are counteracted. Public life is reduced to consumption of experiences and places. Disneyland is seen as a symbol for the commercialization of experiences: in Disneyland all surfaces are planned in detail to make the visitors consume experiences. There is no room for unanticipated, spontaneous activities and meetings since

everything is directed in advance. The target groups for these places are tourists and other people with great purchasing power. The processes behind privatization are contributing to the dived city where those who have the means to influence are being protected against other, "less wanted" groups. (Mitchell 2003, 137-143; Zukin 2002, 325-334)

Public space as a stage for conflicts

Reactions and opposition against existing or new ways of designing and regulating the city are nothing new. In public spaces such as streets, squares and parks, there has for a long been a struggle time between on one side the authorities' attempts to control people, and on the other the protest against these attempts. In many cases, the questioning of authorities have had an impact on planning, and made public space more democratic by making it accessible to more groups. One example is that public space used to be a "male sphere" in which women only were allowed if escorted by a man, or in the company of other women during organised activities. Thanks to the women's movement during the 20th century, it is now self-evident that women have access to public space, even if previous preconceptions regarding places that women should avoid during the night are still prevalent. (Mitchell 2003, 128-156; Olsson 2008, 101; Björk m fl 2008, 57, 61-65)

Global resistance against global politics

From the 1960s and about 30 years on, the urban social movements in Sweden have had a clear focus on environmental issues, focusing on local projects such as the construction of motorways etc., but at the end of the 1990s the global, neo-liberal changes became the focus of the protests instead. There was also a globalization of the social movements when the different organizations were inspired by and started communicating through the Internet. One example is *Reclaim the Streets*, a movement that started in London at the end of the 1990s, but quickly spread to other countries, including Sweden. The aim was to "reclaim the street and the city" from the commercial and global economic actors which, according to the participants, had stolen the city from the people. Characteristic of this kind of movement is also that they are loose and diffuse; there is no overall organization, anyone can organize a Reclaim the Streets. (Stahre 2004, 74-81)

Image 7: Reclaim the Streets in Malmö, September 2008.

Image 8: A Street Party in Malmö, May 2008.

Street art as resistance

Street art can be seen as a part of the urban social movements focusing on globalization issues since the actions of the street artists are often questioning capitalism and commercialization. The fact that street art often implies questioning the right of possession is in itself a critique, be it conscious or unconscious. (E.g. Andersen 2007; Banksy 2005; Andersson 2006; Paulsson 2008) The great increase of street art in recent years can be understood in light of this, but it can also be explained in part by other factors.

Street art is not a movement or organization in the meaning that there is somebody organizing the actions. The artists make their art on their own or in smaller groups. (E.g. Andersen 2007; Banksy 2005; Andersson 2006; Paulsson 2008) In this aspect, street art is even less an "organization" than Reclaim the Streets, which has gathered. several thousand people at some occasions. (Stahre 2004, 81) At the same time street artists as well as organizers of Reclaim the Streets are frequent users of the Internet, through which they inspire and communicate with each other. Street art is in this way a local intervention, which takes place through the interaction between the artist and a specific place, at the same time as it is put into a global context through the posting of photos, videos etc. on the Internet. Individual websites, weblogs, YouTube and street art forums are important complements. Street art, Reclaim the Streets and many other protests in public space have something in common beyond the protest against the existing order: the protest is done through *direct action*. The citizens choose to protest in the city and not through the bureaucratic system.

Street art as a prospect

Dynamism

Using Don Mitchells interpretation that public space is created through a continuous struggle between different interests, Lina Olsson is arguing that places that have been appropriated, i.e.

have been used in a personal way to make the place "one's own", must be appropriated again if they are not to be dominating. (Olsson 2008, 101-102) According to this reasoning change is a way to prevent structures of power to emerge since no change of the place is allowed to become permanent. Individuals are allowed to take part and make imprints and form the city by using it in their own way, but this assumes a *temporary* use, otherwise a new order is created.

The temporary state is vital for street art. The Swedish street artist Klister-Peter has expressed frustration over the fact that his roe deer stickers still are left in many places in Stockholm, although he put them up many years ago. (Akay & Peter 2006, 184) Ballerina writes that he *"would like to see an ever changing process, like in a gallery, where pieces of art are replaced gradually"*. (Ballerina 2007, in Paulsson 2008)

Image 9: Klister-Peter's roe deer sticker in Stockholm.

Image 10: An ever-changing "outdoor gallery" in Berlin.

Diversity

Several researchers write about an ongoing homogenization of public places as a consequence of the impact of private interests. (Mitchell 2003; Zukin 2002: Gabrielsson 2006) Don Mitchell argues that the variety and diversity that many planners cherish is a controlled and commercialized diversity, where the focus is on the prospect of profit making. It is connected to the disneyfication of places, where different cultures are used to attract tourists and other groups of people with great spending power who can consume. This is an arranged and controlled "diversity," without an open mind for spontaneous and alternative activities. (Mitchell 2003, 138-140)

Catharina Gabrielsson implies that within the Swedish planning culture, people often refer to "meeting places" in a stereotyped way: meetings between people have increasingly come to mean "recognition" rather than a meeting of different ideas, life styles etc. According to Gabrielsson, this is a consequence of the impact of the market economy, which is a system that more than any

other is driven by recognition and uniformity. This view on meeting places does not hold the idea of public place as a stage for conflicts. (Gabrielsson 2006, 57-59)

Sten Göransson believes that part of the problem is that planners do not always understand actions that differ from the norm, as for example graffiti writing. He argues that every action in fact has a meaning, in one way or another. Should that way of thinking be applied on graffiti and other unanticipated actions, there would be a difference. (Göransson 2008-05-23)

Creative loopholes

The researchers Philipp Oswalt, Philipp Misselwitz and Klaus Overmeyer have in the project *Urban Catalyst* studied the value of temporary, spontaneous use of places for the city as a whole. They have come to the conclusion that spontaneous use is a neglected potential for the development of cities, as places that deviate from the traditionally planned, are often places where new ideas emerge. By smoothing the progress of spontaneous use, a broader spectrum of areas of interest, individuals and places would be given space. (Oswalt et al 2007, 282-287) In other words: they also see alternative, unanticipated activities as a requirement for democracy, diversity and creativity.

Elisabeth Högdahl has also studied people's informal use of places and their potential for the city as a whole. She uses the concept of *creative loopholes.* Creative loopholes are challenging norms in society since it involves doing things differently; they turn things upside down. Thus, these actions are questioning who should have access to the spaces in the city. (Högdahl 2008-05-16)

To Högdahl, creativity involves an ability to take one thing and make something else out of it. She argues that this is easier without surveillance and control. Areas with many creative loopholes are thus characterized by a certain degree of absence of top down planning. This is most common in areas characterized by low status, low rents, aesthetic variation and high tolerance: areas that by many people are perceived as shabby. In such areas there are many possibilities to produce creative loopholes by appropriating places in ways that do not follow the norm. (Högdahl 2008-05-16)

The street artists often make use of loopholes to post their art: they often do it during the night, when few people are out and it is harder to see them; they invent techniques to make posting quicker; they often utilize "unused" surfaces in the city such as the back of traffic signs, concrete walls in tunnels, switch boxes etc. The list of techniques can be made long and differs depending on the situation and the artist.

Image 11: Street art poster in Malmö.

Image 12: Stencil on a switch box in Malmö.

Local interventions as catalysts for city development

Both Urban Catalyst and Elisabeth Högdahl stress the importance of focusing on processes when working with the city. Urban Catalyst writes about the need to recognize different forms of appropriation developing over time and which can not be foreseen, but must have the space to grow. Högdahl stresses that it is about approaching the city as something that is alive and not as a museum. That means that it is neither desirable to create places where everything is planned and controlled top down, nor to freeze "shabby" areas and try to conserve them. Instead, it is important to support people in the process of developing their own neighbourhoods, starting with their own conditions and needs. (Oswalt et al 2007, 286-287; Högdahl 2008-05-16)

The act of writing graffiti on subway cars was an intervention that emerged in New York at the end of the 1960s. The trains were circulating the city day and night and were visible in various places. By writing on the cars the writers transformed the tracks into outdoor galleries with free admission where the art was changing from car to car, but also from day to day. The exhibition process was going on for almost 20 years, and during its most intense period more than 10 000 writers took part. (Jacobson 1996, 29-30)

Instead of endorsing this new local intervention, the mayor of New York chose to declare war against it, using campaigns, graffiti removal and expanded surveillance over the areas around the tracks where the trains were parked during the night. The paintings were not "unproblematic": they often covered the windows, cars were tagged on the inside and staying in the train parks involved safety risks. (Silver 1983) With an open mind and curiosity for the new phenomenon and the possibilities it held, maybe these problems could have been solved and room could have been made for this new way of using the city.

An example of a project where a municipality has started to work in this direction is the skateboarding park Stapelbäddsparken in Malmö. By not planning everything in advance, but

instead let the project develop over time and by the ideas of its users, a meeting place attracting both local citizens and people from all over the world has emerged. (Lieberg 2004, 21-27) The fact that Stapelbäddsparken has become an internationally known arena, hosting the prestigious final of Quicksilver Bowlriders three years in a row, indicates that loopholes can have a positive effect on the whole city. Urban Catalyst mentions several examples of projects where municipalities have worked in similar ways. The development of a former industrial area in Amsterdam is one. The municipality supported an alternative, local initiative that resulted in the development of a cultural centre, which is working as a catalyst for the whole city. (Oswalt et al 2007, 282-285)

Image 13: Quicksilver Bowlriders in Stapelbäddsparken, Malmö 2008.

When discussing creativity and entrepreneurship in the city today, the focus is often on spectacular and large-scale projects with the aim of creating an international reputation, and a focus on how to attract the "creative class" to settle in the city. The creative class then often refers to middle class people with great spending power, often with an interest in cultural events and with professions within the knowledge based sector. (Landry 2008-05-16; Mukhtar-Landgren, 171) Stapelbäddsparken and the example from Amsterdam are evidences that it is possible to turn this way of reasoning upside down. They show the potential in supporting people in the development of their neighbourhood, based on their own conditions. It also shows that creativity has nothing to do with class, but rather is connected to what options people have. According to Urban Catalyst, the promotion of greater diversity and participation requires the support for financially weaker groups and alternative ways of planning where informal use of places are given room. (Oswalt et al 2007, 286-287)

Street art can imply different degrees of oppression, involving functions being destroyed for other people, for example the front side of traffic signs being posted over and becoming unreadable.

Regulation and planning are needed to counteract this, but the question is how it can be done without completely oppressing people's creativity.

> I don't promote letting people paint in whichever way they want, wherever they want, but I think public art and expressions should have more space in contemporary society, where it is suppressed by all means. I don't have the answer to how it should be done, but I think it has to be done within some kind of structure. (Ballerina 2007, in Paulsson 2008)

Planning for creativity is a complex process. It requires that the individual is given some space to interact in her own way, at the same time as restrictions are needed, preventing individuals from taking up too much space and thus making it difficult for other people to use the city. Both dynamism and static structures are requirements for preventing structures of power to emerge, and thereby making more room for creativity. This implies that informal and alternative uses do not necessarily pose a threat to the accessibility and openness of public space. On the contrary, it is a precondition for creating participation and diversity.

The potential of public space

Several researchers who have highlighted that the definition of publicity is getting narrower due to security thinking, increased influence from private enterprises and commercialization, also stress the importance of defending public space as democratic sites for political expressions, and the citizens' active participation through spontaneous and unanticipated activities. (Mitchell 2003, 118-156; Olsson 2008, 45-46; Gabrielsson 2006)

Catharina Gabrielsson advocates a need for keeping a clear distinction between the private and the public: the state should use its power to counteract the privatization and commercialization of public space. (Gabrielsson 2006, 86) The fact that municipalities usually own public places involves a greater ability to create lasting loopholes in the city. Many of the places studied by Urban Catalyst were privately owned ground that was temporary appropriated by other groups, legally or illegally. When the ground became attractive for investors, the landowners got rid of the temporary tenants. (Oswalt et al 2007, 274-279) In this aspect, the design and use of these places are to a higher extent than public space driven by market forces: in public places, the municipalities have a greater ability to regulate the effect of the market on design, use and maintenance. This stability could help counteracting the neglecting of weaker groups.

Don Mitchell stresses the role of public places as places where individuals and groups of people are making themselves visible: places where it is possible to be represented. By taking up room in public space, groups become public. Public space has an important role when it comes to the struggle for people's rights and position in society. Groups not represented in public space are

often groups that are discriminated against in society. For instance, Afro-Americans in the United States had limited access to public space before they were recognized as legitimate citizens. In Sweden, Stockholm Pride has been an important part of the fight for the rights of homo-, bi- and transsexuals. By representing themselves in public space and appropriating it in their own way, these groups are part of the creation of public space. Public spaces are not automatically public once and for all; different groups and individuals must recreate publicity continuously. (Mitchell 2003, 129)

Sten Göransson at the Streets and Parks Department in Malmö describes how they are struggling to find ways to create meeting places that are used by as many groups of people as possible. On the one hand they are trying to fill the public places with people by making room for different activities. On the other hand they do not want a few groups to be privileged on behalf of other groups. He uses open-air cafés and restaurants as an example. They add a function; turning the place into a meeting place and making it safer as many people are spending time there. At the same time, the open-air cafés and restaurants make the place accessible only to those who are paying to eat or drink, and they also take up space that could have been used for other activities. (Göransson 2008-05-23)

This example shows that regulations and norms are needed, but new kinds of uses should also be allowed to emerge. It also shows the importance of continually discussing questions connected to what public space is and should be within the departments of the municipalities. What impacts will our way of planning, designing and regulating have? How can we create places that are open for everybody and make room for people's needs and incentives?

Reflecting upon and discussing the effects of planning and how it can be done without imposing structures of power is vital, as is the promotion of a greater variety of uses of the city. This presupposes a view on architecture that focuses on the potentials for different uses and the possibility for appropriation, rather than predefined and static functions and meanings. From this perspective, alternative use is not a threat but a source of prospect. For diversity, participation and prospects to be able to emerge, both planning and loopholes are needed.

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Photographs

Image 1, 4, 6, 8-12: Kolbjörn Guwallius

Image 2, 3, 7, 13: Emma Paulsson

Image 5: Hamsteren (www.flickr.com)