

PARK LEK—An Interview with Artist Kerstin Bergendal on the PARK LEK Project

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70733/sahqeiovnsi3>

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Abstract

The interview discusses the *PARK LEK* project by artist Kerstin Bergendal, which took place between 2010 and 2014. The *PARK LEK* project is described and discussed in relation to methodologies and strategies in the advanced practice of artistic research and considering the role of the artist as researcher.

The PARK LEK Project

This conversation takes its point of departure in the publication *PARK LEK and the Scandinavian Social Turn* (2018) by the collaborative platform Public Enquiries.^[1] Public Enquiries was a collaborative research project at Valand Academy in 2016–2018, aiming to describe and critically discuss the specific modes of artistic practice and enquiry at play when visual artists engage in questions of social practice, duration in temporary public art, participatory dynamics, critical urbanism, democratic processes and art outside the exhibitionary complex.^[2] As a backdrop and focal point, Public Enquiries used the work of the Swedish-Danish artist Kerstin Bergendal, and her project *PARK LEK* from 2010–2014. Bergendal's research method is based on the use of time and a particular mode of deep listening, as well as moments of collective reimagining of the local based on her mapping of ideas and lived knowledge among participating local citizens and local agents.

The *PARK LEK* project by Kerstin Bergendal was initiated in 2010 by an invitation to produce an artwork that would focus on parks for the inaugural group exhibition entitled "PARKLIV" at the new gallery Marabouparken Konsthall. The exhibition space is situated in the Marabou Park in Sundbyberg, a satellite city just outside Stockholm in Sweden. The invitation was extended by Helena Selder, then curator at Marabouparken Konsthall, and was accompanied by an invitation for a one-year residency at the gallery. This residency would later be extended twice, as Bergendal's work grew into three separate project phases, realised between 2010 and 2014. The project became a profound critical investigation into the processes of public urban development, with as point of departure a concrete proposal for a new urban development of a green zone between two local urban areas. Part of the artistic discursive process was performed in parallel to and in collaboration with the local municipality. Helena Selder was the essential collaborator for Bergendal during the entire process.

The process led not only to a rejection of the proposed programme, but to a now realised altered urban scheme that challenges existing development procedures by proposing a prototype for a different format of public consultation and how city planners reflect and act on issues. What started out as a utopian critical reading of an urban planning procedure thus ended up as a concretely altered and realised urban planning approach, developed from within through a visual art project and a slow, non-traditional process of local discourse.

This was done through concrete elaboration of ideas and formats by the artist, combined with a form of “administrative activism” within Sundbyberg municipal administration and City Council.^[3] Selder defines *PARK LEK* as “possibly the first art project in Sweden that successfully managed to challenge existing plans for densification and re-development of a residential area, and to replace it with a constructive set of counter-proposals and guidelines for how the municipality could co-work with locals in urban planning in the future.”^[4]

The project consisted of three different phases, which in itself were a work in progress. The first phase related to the “PARKLIV” exhibition at the then new Marabouparken konsthall in Sundbyberg in 2010 with the assignment to reflect upon local green public spaces.^[5] The second phase was realised in 2011–2012. This was initiated as a collaboration between Marabouparken konsthall and Sundbyberg City Council, and was part of the national collaborative research project The Design of Public Spaces.^[6] For this phase, Bergendal was invited by the City Architect Karin Milles Beijer at the planning department of Sundbyberg to lead what she called “a parallel public hearing process” regarding the densification of two neighbouring urban districts, Hallonbergen and Ör. This phase was presented in the group show “Hembyg(g)d” at Marabouparken Konsthall in 2012, and comprised 53 short video dialogues with locals, shown in a mock-up of a living room, along with a very large architectural model showing a concrete counter-proposal for a new urban development programme, developed collectively with participants.

The project’s final phase, *PARK LEK PARLIAMENT*, was a concrete collaboration with the city of Sundbyberg, and Marabouparken Konsthall. It materialised in 2013–2014 as a process of negotiations between professionals and locals, performed in a bright pink open corner in the middle of the local shopping centre of Hallonbergen Centre. The process generated a catalogue of concretised proposals for improvements of the existing urban areas, and an outline of parameters for the distribution and qualities of future new settlements.

The remains of the *PARK LEK* project, which were handed over to the city of Sundbyberg, consist of 50 filmed interviews with over 140 participants for the whole project more than 300 people participated an accumulation of documented perspectives on the districts gathered in a layered map of Hallonbergen and Ör, and the realisation of a new regional plan for Rissne, Hallonbergen and Ör in Sundbyberg..^[7]

This interview engages with the project as well as the artistic and research strategies being practised in the *PARK LEK* project.

The *PARK LEK* Project

Sanne Kofod Olsen: *The PARK LEK project started out as an invitation to contribute to an exhibition thematising parks in the public gallery Marabouparken Konsthall. But it ended up as a huge four-year-long project, and actually succeeded in influencing and changing existing public planning approaches. Can you tell us something about how it started out?*

Kerstin Bergendal: Initially, it was just a journey towards an open end. It was Helena Selder who gave me a first

direction by pointing me to the park around the gallery, and to some basic facts about it. A few initial aspects of the Marabou park became crucial for later developments.



Figure 1: A hand drawn map of the city of Sundbyberg, where names of different urban areas and central meeting places are replaced with denominations used by participants. Thus, this map represents a -physical reality, parallel to the physical one. Kerstin Bergendal, 2010.

Marabouparken Konsthal is literally dug into the ground of Marabou Parken, which was originally the park of the Marabou chocolate factory, founded in 1937. Today the Marabou Park is highly cherished nationally for its aesthetics. In 1937 it was also one of the first parks to be made available to factory workers and their children for recreation, and to the public on Sundays, by the factory owner, as a corporate benefit.^[8]

In addition, the park was also one of the first to introduce a manned playground *a parklek*. This was basically just a small pavilion where you could borrow tools to play with and occasionally take part in activities. Subsequently, this format became a fixed version for a *parklek*, an almost obligatory addition to Swedish parks for at least 30 years. In particular, in parks located in relation to new suburban settlements that were mushrooming on the outskirts of the nucleus of major Swedish cities, from 1960 and onwards. To Swedes, a *parklek* is therefore a known entity. In the original invitation from Helena Selder, I was asked to consider this context.

I chose to pick up on a specific aspect of the *parklek* its organisation. I found it offered a specific double condition for interaction between the tiny institution and the locals in its vicinity: on the one hand, all activities in a *parklek* were based on a voluntary commitment one could in fact not pre-register for any activity. You just simply showed up. On the other hand, such a voluntary commitment could only be generated through a durational strategy. A *parklek* therefore must have been understood by locals as a more or less constant element, a part of the everyday. To me, the two conditions added up to a specific form of a flexible but durational state of exception that I was interested in investigating as an artistic possibility.

The title of the project of course came from a small alteration of the name *parklek*: By using *PARK LEK*, I could emphasise both the aspect of enquiry concerning parks, and the exploratory nature of my research about the commons.

Sanne: *And what came out of these initial investigations?*

Kerstin: Well, in the beginning, I had no specific area but the current park to consider. So, at first, I simply began building a model of the Marabou park, in order to investigate its logic. While doing so, I learnt how the park was situated along a river leading out to open waters. The shoreline along the park was used as a winter storage for sailboats. I began to play with the idea of using the river shore, including the repetitive cycle of boats moving on and off land, as a flexible public space. It would always be in flux and thus open for unplanned and unspecific interventions from the public. Such vaguely programmed or multifunctional spaces tend to offer themselves as surfaces for social contact. But could such a surface in fact be organised?

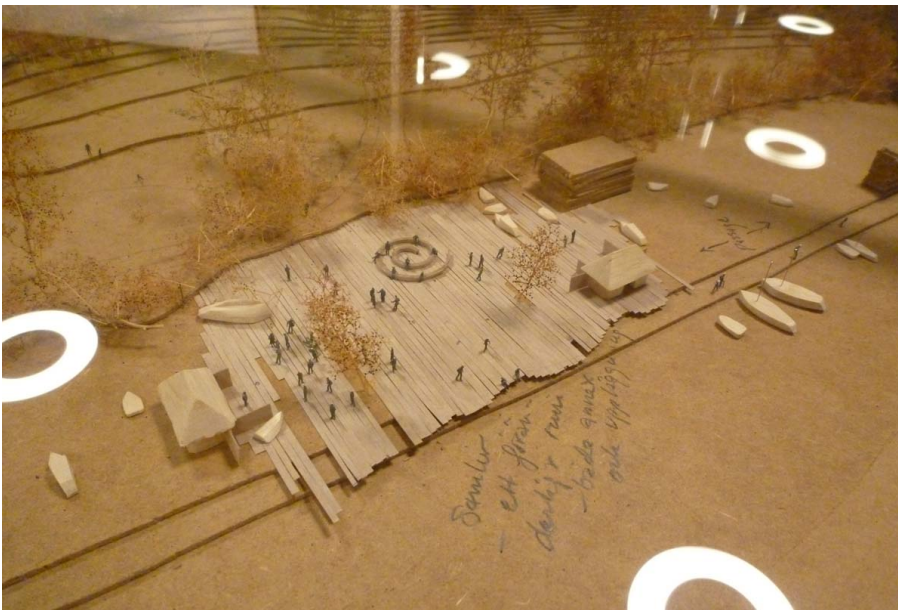


Figure 2: A model demonstrating a principle of a vaguely programmed or multifunctional space. PARKLIV, Marabouparken Konsthall, 2010.

Simultaneously, I also arranged a series of simple coffee-and-cake sessions, aiming to strike up conversations with people unknown to me. I started out by inviting two directors of departments of the municipality, both with parks as their responsibility, albeit in different ways. Over coffee, I asked about the city: could they describe its different parts for me? How were the different parks and green areas used? While they spoke, I took notes of the informal labels they used to differentiate the areas. Later, I drew a new city map, using these labels instead of the formal names. This allowed me to make an image of a non-physical, experienced city, which exists alongside the physical one.



Figure 3: The initial Coffee-and-cake-dialogue: From the left curator Helena Selder, the municipal director of the department of Culture Elisabeth Ståhle and the municipal director of the department of Urban Planning at Sundbyberg City in dialogue with Kerstin Bergendal at Marabouparken Konsthall in 2010.

Afterwards, I also enquired how the city in fact uses its parks. Through the responses I received, I learnt about the nature of social relations within this tiny municipality. It became very clear how this is one of the most segregated ones in Sweden. Here, some of the richest people in the nation live virtually only 500 metres from some of its most challenged citizens. This first conversation would lead to several others. Gradually more and more people were invited to join in by the participants themselves. We spoke about many things: for instance, about how the city actually could secure areas of contact between citizens from different ways of life. And about how these could be kept open, if and when all needs to be planned in order to be legal. What new planning tools could be considered?

In the subsequent exhibition “PARKLIV”, in 2010, I presented the experience from these conversations as a series of documents in vitrines. The content of each vitrine proposed ways to read, to think and to plan public space, prioritising a non-specific or a multiple and flexible use with the aim to create areas of social contact. The architectural model appeared in the centre of the space in one of these vitrines, a large museum-like display. I consider the content of these vitrines to present my research results as well as counter-images to the current order of the city.

Sanne: *It seems as though the project was soon taken to the next level. If we consider the exhibition context as the first phase, what was the next? How did you move into the second phase and what happened?*

Kerstin: I guess it was during the conversations that I learnt about the ongoing sale of the green and park areas of the city of Sundbyberg. You know, unbuilt land is a valuable thing when you live in the close vicinity of Stockholm.

The City Architect Karin Milles Beijer was one of the participants in the first phase. She introduced me to a proposed programme for urban development of an area located between two challenged urban districts of the city. This included a large part of a beloved green commons, which was to be sold to a group of six of Sweden’s most prominent urban developers, primarily for new private housing to be built between the two areas with

mostly public housing. She was concerned: the normal municipal planning procedure had been limited, as the group of developers had been allowed to define a decisive part of the programme for this development, and this proposal was soon to be sent out for a formal public hearing.

I proposed to her and to the city that the art project could perform a “parallel consultation procedure”, based on a different mode of enquiry and documentation of the views and reactions from local citizens. This was what would become the second phase of *PARK LEK*. The city approved and Karin and I jointly applied to Statens Konstråd (The Public Arts Council Sweden) and were later granted funding to realise this phase, in 2011.^[9]

So, from September 2011, two different public consultations were offered in Sundbyberg: the city performed its traditional public consultation procedure, introducing the proposed programme in the library and in the local paper. Two meetings were held during which the city and the builders explained their visions and the programme to interested citizens. An average of 20 to 30 people took part, and later sent their views in writing to the city. Meanwhile I performed a different format of public consultation process. I undertook a series of visits or walks with locals and other agents in the area. The people I spoke to had invited me as a response to a poster I had put up everywhere, expressing my interest in “lending their eyes to the area”, and to closely read the proposal for a new urban development plan with me.

Each conversation was recorded on video and edited in order to represent, as closely as possible, the lived experiences, views and thoughts of each individual participant. After being approved, they were posted on YouTube, and on a project website. One conversation led to another, and in the end I produced over 50 videos, engaging more than 140 participants. As the two areas involved are linked to long-term social stigmas, these videos in fact were the first proper representation of both areas and everyday life in this part of Sundbyberg.

Due to the unexpected degree of participation in *PARK LEK*, the city approved a longer consultation period for the art project. Upon request of the participants, a joint workshop was also arranged across two weekends in February. From this point and on, I engaged the architect Marie Cathrine Trabut-Jørgensen and urban planner Peter Schultz Jørgensen to assist me in the process. They would both turn out to be very important contributors to the end result. Especially as several hundred people participated, working in self-organised groups, and subsequently gathering for intense critical discussions around an almost six-metre-long architectural model of the two areas.



Figure 4: One of the PARK LEK-conversations, included as a part of the program of the group exhibition Hembyg(g)d, at Marabouparken Konsthall in 2012.

The second part of *PARK LEK* was concluded with a design of the model as a proposal for a different urban programme than the one proposed by the city in September. The model, the videos and a detailed presentation folder by me, were presented at the group exhibition “Hembyg(g)d”, at Marabouparken Konsthall in 2012.^[10] But more importantly, it was approved by the city council as a “legitimate public consultation response” in June 2012. The material I proposed to conclude on the process, showed that the original programme could not be said to respond to the actual needs and dilemmas of the area. This became so evident that it led to the municipal retraction of the original programme, following the decision by the City Council in 2013. The actual result of the *PARK LEK* second phase was that the planning phase for the urban development of the area was re-opened, because the participants had re-defined the scope and nature into a different but viable plan.



Figure 5: In the group exhibition Hembyg(g)d, at Marabouparken Konsthall in 2012, and in addition to a very large model introducing the counter-proposal for the urban development elaborated by the participants in the art project, Kerstin Bergendal mounted a mock-up of a living room. Visitors could click and choose a video among the 53 videos with participants Bergendal had produced. All items in the

room referenced to specific participants and their "lived knowledge".

Sanne: *A third phase was then a quite open and inclusive intervention in a shopping centre in Sundbyberg where you and people from the municipality would meet local residents quite directly. That seems to me to be quite an unusual strategy in relation to city planning, but it ended up being successful as a strategy of intervention in existing procedures. What happened in that shopping centre?*



Figure 6: PARK LEK PARLIAMENT was inserted into the local shopping mall, right by the food stores and the metro station. The pink colours are a reuse of the colours of the local metro station. Design in collaboration with Studio Feuer, 2013.

Kerstin: In light of the retraction of the proposed plan, the city wished to perform a third phase of *PARK LEK*, officially aiming to concretise the proposals put forward in *PARK LEK II*. And you're right, this was highly unusual in all aspects. I understood this request as connected to the fact that within 11 months general election were to be held. Planning is a very slow affair. People might be expecting a much faster response to the process. To the municipal leadership, not continuing could constitute a risk of awakening public disappointment. I was therefore very much aware of the fact that I had to avoid being instrumentalised in simply stalling a local political discourse. So, I made a counter-proposal: I requested that any extension was to be based on a concrete participation and commitment from the city.

I asked for the planning department to allow the civil servants who would be responsible for re-formulating the urban programme in future, to be allowed to take part in the conversations, and work and co-produce the next phase with me and the participants. Participants had until then joined basically a speculative art project. I now wished for them to be gradually included in a realistic municipal re-organisation of their own local area. This basic condition is why the third phase was labelled *PARK LEK PARLIAMENT*.

In late spring 2013, the Head Planner of the Department for the Environment in Sundbyberg, Åsa Steen, landscape architect Helena Dunberg and urban planner Lisa Brattström thus relocated a municipal planning secretariat to an empty shop in the shopping centre. At the same time, I re-organised a neighbouring open corner in the shopping centre, in collaboration with architects Studio Feuer. We painted it bright pink, as this is the colour of the local tube station.

From October 2013, participants jointly performed a series of complex public negotiations in the Pink Room over a period of six months. We invited everyone to organise themselves in groups. Each group would meet in the Pink Room to work with a given problem area, and to make their proposals for solutions concrete. The municipality also allowed for a broad range of other civil servants to join the conversations of any group of their choice they were in fact paid to be present during these conversations that took place during evenings. This meant that the discourse in each group could flip between professional and everyday knowledge, formal and informal levels, and all the time could also be seen as a sort of collective act, performed in the middle of the usual shopping centre goings on. I posted documentation of all activities on the Pink Room wall, always open for everyone to follow. Sometimes we would hold larger assemblies of all the groups together to come to conclusions, or to highlight disagreements.



Figure 7: Kerstin Bergendal during a public conversation during PARK LEK PARLIAMENT in the The Pink Room, the epicentre of all activities performed within the art and urban planning project PARK LEK PARLIAMENT in 2013 and 2014. Each project and contribution was gradually documented on the wall in this open corner of the shopping mall. Second from the left is Kerstin's essential co-producer of the parliament, Åsa Steen, head of the dep of environnement and planning of the city of Sundbyberg.

The result became what rightly constitutes a catalogue of proposals, even if it later became known as the "PARK LEK- plan". It was a series of proposed solutions and formats, responding to problems and obstacles that had been long overdue, and that now could be realised in connection to a densification of the areas.

Methodology

Sanne: *I would like to ask you about your strategies and methods in this project, as well as in your artistic practice in general. You conduct a certain kind of in an academic sense unconventional research. It seems to be merging methods from various academic fields, but also with a personal, artistic approach. You also seriously invest yourself in the projects you undertake. How would you characterise your strategies and methodology, and how and if do you relate it to artistic practice as research?*

Kerstin: I am acutely aware of the fact that I am not strictly academic in my methods. And I am not, as I always depart from an entirely open position. I don't formulate a specific hypothesis and I don't have specific aims, but rather take on a position of listening and observing which I guess is quite a classical artist's position. Some

people call this pure improvisation. Others see this as connected to methods of site-specificity, where you take your point of departure in the specific situation and context you work in.

This kind of approach of observing and listening can be compared to what Nuno Sacramento and Brett Bloom have called *deep mapping*.^[11] I really like their way of describing the initial part of a project as a slow journey *into* a context. It is an excavation of what is hidden within the site itself, as well as looking for the crucial parameters that has given the place its character and social structures. One thing I have become aware of, through the Public Enquiries project, is how mapping itself in fact consists of a series of subtle acts of reaching out, in combination with strategic acts of distortion.



Figure 8: One of the self organised groups in conversation during the workshop with participants during PARK LEK II, in 2012. This particular dialogue focussed on proposals for using the money from sale of municipal grounds, to finally re-open a real and well functioning Youth Center, to offer large groups of young people normally hanging out in the shopping mall, a place to go.

At first glance, a mode of listening might seem quite peripheral to someone from urban planning, ethnology or the visual arts. You know, just asking someone about something and then returning to this person with something one learnt from the conversation might not seem like advanced research or action. But each act of enquiry in fact establishes a relation between me and someone on site. When this act is performed again and again over time in public, a net of relations widens. Things are set in motion. People will accidentally meet each other and strike up new conversations about shared local issues, which would often otherwise be neglected. These conversations are repeated, and gradually, when different types of knowledge are joined together, it opens up the possibility for what I often call the “Seven Mile Boots”. That is, a sudden awareness of the potential that lies in jointly addressing issues and from very different perspectives. Or in defining a range of solutions just based on shared lived experience. From a small repetitive moment, a co-owned *local* change can emerge.

For this to be happening, however, two conditions are key: first, the physical encounter between people face to face. It is different standing in front of someone listening to them explain their point of view than just reading it on a piece of paper. Second, it is crucial to recognise what or who it is that defines the conditions for this face-to-face conversation. In both aspects I see a possible role closely linked to my profession, to the artistic licence, if you wish.

Sanne: Can you explain in greater depth how you relate this to artistic practice and artistic method, and in what way the role of the artist, or what one could call artistic licence, is significant?

Kerstin: I understand or you could say I exploit the classical licence of the visual artist in relation to contemporary society, as a *transitional* role. We have one of the few professions with license to cross otherwise relatively fixed territories, limitations and regulations. Through history we have been expected to act unpredictably, and to claim the right to be idealistic and subjective. As a result, our profession is not linked to any position of concrete influence or power. Even when I walk around asking about the proposed urban programme, I continue to be considered an outsider.

To me, this lack of formal influence is an operational field I can use strategically. It allows me to open up, in the midst of the otherwise strictly programmed public space, a “vague architecture” or context, where the everyday definitions, rules and hierarchies can momentarily collapse in order for something else to be formulated and tested out. In this time in history, this position is essential to set in motion new and strategic ways. And the contours of this possibility is the focus of my research.

Throughout the process of initial deep listening, critical research and invitations to conversations in public space, the artist can not only act as a kind of host or driving force of public, open-ended conversations. We can also continually propose different readings of the world around us than the one made by investors, planners and politicians. We can add facts, add nuances, challenge all kinds of logic and point at forgotten parallel possibilities. I think it is essential to understand and strategically consider this role, but also be attuned to when *not* to enter into a given context. When not to act. When not to conclude. When it is better to wait.

This is also why I never work with a pre-fixed project plan and simply continually consider the responses I get, on site. Take the first phase of *PARK LEK*, for instance. If you remember, I invited two municipal directors for coffee and cake. I intended for it to be only one conversation, giving me a direction to go on. When they unexpectedly expressed the wish to return and to bring others with them, again asking yet others to join in, it opened up a new process that I accepted, and then tried to understand why this happened.

About twelve people working in some capacity with parks in the municipality contributed. The conversation came to work organically, like a relay. A relay is a format of play, where the end result depends on the collective. But as this dialogue was also performed away from any usual hierarchy between them at the office, a gradual co-mapping could take place. In addition, the conversation would later become very important to the entire *PARK LEK* project, as all of the participants also came to play new roles in the subsequent process. This process was not something I could have planned beforehand. But I have learnt to recognise it when it happens.



Figure 9: Public conversation in the mall around the model of the two urban areas, performed as a passage between PARK LEK II, and the PARK LEK PARLIAMENT. One inhabitant living right by the bus station carefully expresses his concern about the first version of the PARK LEK counterplea. The noise from the traffic would be unbearable.

Sanne: *In PARK LEK part 2 you introduced another tool in your methodological construction, namely that of the “parallel public hearing process”. Why did you do that and did you see this as a strategical tool to open up the process for further investigation?*

Kerstin: Yes. It basically offered me a mental public space to intervene. You know, it is important to remember that any urban plan is in fact a fantasy or an image a Utopia or imagery of a future city. And each production of such an image is always based on a static division of roles: the professionals are asked to imagine an ideal urban context and visualise it. The inhabitants of this context can only respond and react. In a normal public hearing, the public can access the image through digital presentations and two face to face meetings, where planners and developers are present taking questions. And yes, details can be discussed. And yes, letters with longer complaints can be sent to the municipal office within given time limits. But the actual original image of the future build can rarely be reformulated or contested by the public. Minor details can be adjusted, but the fantasy most often remains intact. This means that the definition of any concrete urban reality around you, is largely defined and performed by agents disconnected from the experience of actually living in the given area. With the *PARK LEK* public hearing, I simply introduced an alternative division of roles, and thereby also a different right to speak.

I recently read an article by the Danish educational sociologist Christian Sandbjerg Hansen, in which he introduces Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “auctor”, which I find relevant in this precise context.^[12] According to Sandbjerg Hansen, Bourdieu understands the “auctor” as “an authority who states things ‘in front of and in the name of everyone, publicly, and officially’.” Our right of speaking in front of others is, however, linked to our social, economic or professional status as understood by those who listen. Sandbjerg Hansen reminds me that *any* mandate to speak is socially produced. It always comes with a link to the production of a political or professional group. This to me confirms that the role of the artist is at play in the alternative division of roles in *PARK LEK*: I open a zone of conversation as part of an art project. Everybody involved is aware that this is an exceptional situation. But as this zone disconnects the usual mandates, we can momentarily imagine a quite different order of things. We can give each other different mandates, even if it is just for a short while.

Sanne: *How did you perform this role of providing the mandate for people to speak up during the parallel public hearing?*

Kerstin: Taking oceans of time ensured that the project could grow organically. I first met each person individually, in a location of their choice. From the start, I had expected to speak to around the same number of participants in normal public consultation procedures that is, about twenty people. But, after an initial period of hesitance, more members of the public began to engage than I had ever expected. In February 2012, I had produced 53 eight-minute-long videos with inhabitants, shop owners, security guards, bus drivers, headmaster of the local school, day-care staff, and so on. This meant that the public consultation of *PARK LEK* not only engaged a large number of contributors, but also that their contributions would be uninterrupted, detailed and illustrated.

Once uploaded on YouTube, these videos generated a very local publicness, which again attracted new participants. When participants asked for opportunities to meet and discuss things directly with each other, without city planners or developers, we responded by arranging the earlier mentioned four days of collective workshops. Here, about 300 participants self-organised and co-created different alternative plans and priorities, as described before.

In order to create a supportive structure for these groups, I inserted two more tools, rarely seen in urban development processes or public hearings: one was the huge architectural model of the whole area. Simply because of its size, this model offered each and every one the option to experiment by adding elements to the existing urban fabric, and immediately seeing the result. The second tool offered to each group was an architect, acting as their assistant and translator of ideas. Being on their side. Producing their imagery.

Sanne: *Throughout the three phases, you have used various tools, like the one just mentioned. Some tools have drawn on your artistic experience you were trained as a sculptor, right? But you have also used more affirmative tools associated with city planning. Did you to some extent appropriate the formal language of city planning to emphasise a point?*

Kerstin: Yes, and perhaps this is how the normal division of roles momentarily was taken out of its normal order. Participants could first unpick the proposed plan and formulate their critique and suggestions for alterations just like in any normal public consultation meeting. But during the workshops, I included the help of the especially assigned architects in *PARK LEK*. The contributions could thus be translated into precisely the same “language” and formats as those used by professional planners and politicians. This altered the formal status of the imagery produced by participants. Again, referring to Sandbjerg Hansen’s point their status as “auctor” can be said to have been altered through the translation.

But practically, it also meant that their alternative view or imagery could be juxtaposed with the proposed one. The strategic power play in this is evident the different images could be compared. And when they were, it became quite obvious how the original proposed programme in fact was *not* going to solve any of the challenges of the local area, albeit referred to as original reasons for the planned densification. The proposed plan was mostly based on the aim of maximum economical gain for the developers.



Figure 10: The original regional plan of the area in question, on which the proposed District Plan was based, and which the PARK LEK process used as their point of departure.



Figure 11: The final PARK LEK plan, proposing different locations for the new urban areas, different target groups for the new apartments, and in addition two new green areas, denominated The Green Cross, connecting green areas north and south, east and west, into one green infrastructure. The city further elaborated on this version, and approved it in 2016.

Sanne: *Did you see it as some kind of subversive esthetical method or strategy?*

Kerstin: Yes, of course. But again, I never work with a pre-set plan, so this was not a purpose from the start. It was part of the experience afterwards. It became evident that the methods and strategies used for *PARK LEK* could generate a discursive process. In particular, this was the experience of each of the workshop days. These conversations, performed in a small room filled with people around a large architectural model, were... animated... to say the least. Loads of laughter. Loads of open conflicts. A good memory, today.

And the conversations would also trigger a much wider public discourse about the lived experience and knowledge of the citizens in the so called “Million-programme” areas, which played itself out in almost all types

of media for some time.^[13] Hopefully, it can also still serve as an image of a possible alternative mode of public consultation, that is, in the sense of living proof of how an open-ended public consultation can benefit from locals adding missing links.

However, this version of a public consultation process and the artistic method it springs from is based on extensive use of time. Every step is durational in order to maintain an open, hyperlocal conversation. And time is very expensive within urban planning. This basic condition for *PARK LEK* in itself therefore makes it a kind of anti-image. Perhaps this aspect is what artist and theorist Mick Wilson referred to, when in the Public Enquiries book he states that this mode of working is “always already the political”.^[14]

The discursive process was concluded two years later, with *PARK LEK PARLIAMENT*. The catalogue of proposals was presented to the public in May 2014 in connection with the publication of the conclusions of the art project. It also defined new specific locations for new settlements in places where the new buildings would fill out voids, rather than maximise profit. Not all of these proposals were realised, but many were. Not all of these will genuinely alter the basic conditions of everyday life for the residents of the areas. But some actually will.

But as a whole, I see the very making or production of this catalogue of proposals, with its co-produced imagery of a possible way forward, as an image in its own right. It proved that it was possible to generate a parallel planning mode alongside the one that squarely facilitates privatisation of parts of social housing areas, and of the local green common. This imagery to me is the tangible result of the art project, and I hope it demonstrates how the visual artist’s mode of enquiry momentarily can intervene in relation to the world around us today.

Footnotes

1. Zachia, Giorgiana, Wilson, Mick et al (eds.). *PARK LEK and the Scandinavian Social Turn*. London: Black Dog Press Limited. 2018.
2. Public Enquiries collaborators were Helena Selder, the initial curator of the original *PARK LEK* project at Marabouparken Konsthall; curators Stenka Helfach and Ulrikke Neergaard from Somewhere (Art and Public Space Agency) in Copenhagen; and professor Mick Wilson and curator Giorgiana Zachia from Valand Academy. Three symposia with speakers from Europe and US were organised in three different locations—Sundbyberg, Copenhagen and Gothenburg—in the period 2016–2018. The project was concluded by the publication *PARK LEK and the Scandinavian Social Turn*. Contributors were Mick Wilson, Janna Graham, Helena Selder, James Houlston, Mary Jane Jacob, Andrea Philips, Alexandra Ålund, Christian Björck and René Léon Gonzales. Kerstin Bergendal herself contributed with an illustrated timeline of the four-year-long project, co-produced with the artist Johanna Adenbäck.
3. Selder, Helena. “Park Lek Parlamentet”. 2014. Available at <http://marabouparken.se/park-lek-parlamentet/> (accessed 2020-10-30).
4. *Ibid.*
5. Pehrsson, Bettina and Selder, Helena. *PARK LIV*. Sundbyberg: Marabouparken Konsthall. 2010. Participating artists were Dave Allen, Kerstin Bergendal, Martin Boyce, Nathan Coley, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, Martin Karlsson, Matts Leiderstam, Margret Morton, Paola Pivi, Ingo Vetter, Anette Weisser, Elisabeth Westerlund, Kohei Yoshiyuki and Christine Ödlund.

6. The Design of Public Spaces was a collaborative project organised by The Public Arts Council Sweden, The Swedish National Heritage Board, The National Board of Housing, and The Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design. Se Boverket (ed). *Gestaltning av offentliga miljöer*. 2013. Available at <https://www.boverket.se/sv/om-boverket/publicerat-av-boverket/publikationer/2013/gestaltning-av-offentliga-miljoer/> (accessed 2020-10-30).
7. Selder, "Park Lek Parlamentet". For more details, see: <http://www.parklek.com/index> (accessed 2020-10-30).
8. Börjesson, Johan and Selder, Helena, Lindman, Åke E. (eds.). *Marabouparken / The Marabou Park*. Stockholm: Fälth & Hässler. 2005. p. 24.
9. Boverket. *Gestaltning av offentliga miljöer*, pp. 164-176.
10. "Hembyg(g)d" was a group show at Marabouparken Konsthall, which ran from 8 September until 25 November 2012. Participating artists were Pavel Althamer, Kerstin Bergendal, Catti Brandelius, Anna Högborg & Johan Tirén, Kateřina Šedá and Anna Witt. See <http://marabouparken.se/hembyggd/> (accessed 2020-10-30).
11. Bloom, Brett and Sacramento, Nuno. *Deep Mapping*. Auburn, IN: Breakdown Break Down Press. 2018. Available at https://www.academia.edu/37786062/Deep_Mapping (accessed 2020-11-20).
12. Sandbjerg Hansen, Christian "Visions of the North-West: Making a Working Class Neighbourhood in Copenhagen, Denmark 1900-1950". *Scandinavian Journal of History*. Vol. 45. No. 4. 2020. pp. 479-505.
13. "Miljonprogrammet" was a Swedish housing project that took place from 1965 until 1975 and was based on an idea formulated by the Social Democrats. The intention was to provide good housing for all citizens as part of the welfare state strategy.
14. Wilson, Mick."Introduction: The Social as Always Already the Political". In *PARK LEK and the Scandinavian Social Turn*. p. 18.