

Old Time - New Time

A collaborative art project for social experience



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Abstract:

There is a discussion on how to approach innovations in new ways in the public sector. There is an aim to develop knowledge about how art and design can contribute to this through cross-disciplinary processes. A selected case study is conducted both with scientific methods in a real public art project, documented from an artist-researchers insider perspective. Teenage-culture and aims from the local community is mixed with the artistic process. Eight seating sculptures open for social activities, reflection and development. As identity is integrated in the innovation process it can stimulate the communication. A specific practical competence in art and design enable researchers with an additional tool in the process of communicating and implementing new ideas.

Keywords:

Innovation, interactive research, material culture, user-oriented design, collaborative art

Problem relevance

The title “Old Time – New Time” refers to a novel about the changes in society from old values to new values, in this case from farming to industry. There are descriptions of the emotional tensions between people who relate to the old values but are forced into the new. In the novel it finally ends up in tragedy and death.[1]

The story is used as an inspiration to develop seating objects for pupils in the secondary school, located at the author’s hometown. The art objects are a part of a PhD project about how art and design can contribute to innovation. The objective is how artistic/creative methods can be developed in cross-disciplinary processes to contribute to innovation.

This project is seen in relation to The Division of Innovation in the Research Council of Norway. They have a new research program on R&D for Value Creating Innovations in the Public Sector 2005-2016 [2].

“The aim of this program is to promote user oriented and public sector agency based research and development for a smarter and more efficient public sector that is capable of providing higher quality management and services provision.”

What values should be emphasized to succeed in this aim? What does higher quality mean as it is experienced by the users? There is a discussion on how to approach innovations in the public sector. This is a new way of thinking about innovation. Traditionally, innovation theory and related research has been associated with the private, industrial sectors of the economy. The research in public sector has dominantly analysed policy, power and organizational aspects.

There is a wish to create innovation in public sector, but in this new research area, it is an open question on how. Research in innovation has in general a problem of not being realised in practice[3]. A metaphor for this can be that even if you have the knowledge of what an instrument is, it doesn’t mean that you have the skill to play it.

To do so, practice is required. A practical based research approach can create a deeper understanding of certain important aspects of innovation in public sector. Many contributions from a practical perspective might add up to a deeper understanding of how to succeed. This also creates a niche for a research view on how art and design can contribute to this knowledge field. To use art and design can help to identify some qualities which encourage or prevent innovation processes.

Objectives

How can creative methods be developed in cross-disciplinary processes to support innovation?

The propositions to this question are related to the users, the aesthetics in materialization and interdisciplinary processes, with a specific focus on the mutual benefit in the interplay of art and research:

- Innovation processes involve people with specific cultural values.
- Artistic knowledge is relevant to transform abstract values into concrete objects.
- Aesthetic artistic knowledge can be documented in a research project.
- Artistic experimental methods with materials and aesthetics can lead to new products.
- New cross-disciplinary learning processes in art and design practice can lead to innovation.

The propositions refer to expected important qualities in innovation processes in relation to art and design. These will be modified according to the case study.

Scientific methods

The study is constructed around a real case. This case has been chosen on a basis of a practical situation, an invitation to a contest. The task was to make a proposal of public art for a secondary school. This case is especially interesting because it is conducted both with scientific methods in a real public art project. The way of developing the project has not met much opposition, despite its somehow innovative character. Most important, it has been realized. How has the project developed, evolved? There has been communication with sketches, drawings and interviews. The information and data that is produced might not be as thorough, without using criteria from research methods. On the other hand, the information, which is produced, might not have occurred if it was not art involved. Art can stimulate conversation; it can open up for dialogue.

This is in particular true when the involved people know that the conversation is with a purpose of making art for the school. The focus have been to document what is actually going on in an innovative process in real life, seen from both an insiders viewpoint and to a certain extent from the other participants viewpoint.

An insider, a participant researcher, has another access to the project than a researcher standing outside the case. The point of the Norwegian philosopher Skjervheim [4]; is that researchers are subjective participants in the research field, if we want it or not, or at least, we are obliged to take an ethical standpoint in our actions.

Background - The state of the art

Some research articles and research presentations represent a background to the state of the art in the theme of how art can contribute to innovation.

In the article *Innovation and Identity in Information-Age Ireland* the author traces current trends in this transformative process and proposes that the interface of art and technology will come to play an important role for two key tasks for the informational society: the fostering of innovation and the construction of identity.[5] The author points out in the conclusion that there should be more interrelation between the two fields, innovation and identity, with an aim for more thorough analysis of the artistic processes.

The article "Art in the Workplace: Innovation and Culture-Based Economic Development in Canadian Small Cities"[6] points out

"the benefits of drawing out local creativity in and through the arts, with its focus on social capital, embraces ideas and practices associated with asset-based community development. This exploratory study provides support to initiate a more intensive study, in the small city setting, of organization cultures of innovation - connecting small city art and culture to creative thinking in the workplace."

The prize winning Danish researcher Lotte Darsø has written an article called "Is there a formula for innovation?" Her methods can create new situations and they can make people be more open minded for chaotic processes. She reflects upon the phenomenon of a new global world where there are high demands of innovation to the enterprises, institutions and organisations who wants to survive and grow. The use of creativity, represented by art and artistic thinking, is crucial in this strategy.[7]

However, to develop the field it would be interesting to have documentation and descriptions of the various ways this could be done.

These state of the art examples support the relevance of the primary research question:

How can creative methods be developed in cross-disciplinary processes to support innovation?

Definitions of terms in the research question. What do creative/artistic methods, cross-disciplinary process and innovation mean in this context?

Creative methods:

The creative methods refer to the interplay between my own practices in dialogue with the involved actors in the project. This practice is a specialization in drawing on

ceramic tiles. The craft practice refers to Louise Mazanti's and Anne Karin Jortveit's reflections on craft being an active, vital and important alternative in interplay with both fine arts and design. [8]

Cross disciplinary research :

When several different professionals work together, in this case the art consultant, the administration of the school, the cultural consultant from the town council, the pupils and the artist. There is an aim to be open for ideas which are generated during the process, and to learn from each others working areas.[9] There is also an aim to be inspired by the meeting of different cultures, and to use this as an inspiration for creation.

Innovation:

An innovation is defined as new method, an idea, a product, a change made in the nature or fashion of anything; something newly introduced; a novel practice, method, etc.

The word innovation origins from religion, although many people today associate it to economy or industry. In the 15th century the first occurrence of the word is used in relation to religion: **1641** (*title*) A Discovery of the notorius Proceedings of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, in bringing Innovations into the Church. [10], which refers to the Reformation of the church of England, leaving behind the catholic community. Innovation was thus originally thought of as a deep change of structure and life world. In this perspective it is relevant to see the innovative qualities as something else than mere economical or technical development, e.g. how can public art create new values for an institution?

The National Foundation for Art in Public Buildings Art points out that art contribute to variety and innovation: ¹

“Public art helps to mould the aesthetic shape of our shared environment. It also contributes new dimensions to places and spaces by being provocative and highlighting problematic issues, and provides different, sometimes surprising, perspectives on our preconceived ideas. Art generates debate and an exchange of opinions. The field of art is constantly changing, and in recent years contemporary artists have shown an increased interest in addressing the public sphere.”

Another view on innovation is represented in a Nordic research report from a industrial design perspective. The report is about the future in design: the competitiveness and industrial, dynamics of the Nordic design industry. It describes challenges and possibilities for industrial design in wider innovation processes and systems, and it is an aim to understand how policies supporting firm and institutional actors can be

¹ Retrieved oct. 4th 2006 from http://www.utsmykkingsfondet.no/html_english/creating.html

developed. Strengthening design through national and regional policy is a core focus of the project.[11]

Innovation is seen in different values, related to different theories. This article is oriented towards a methodology and theory based in the empirical field. The main aim is not to falsify or verify a theory. The theories are used on a lower level, not mainly as a theoretical discussion, but theory in close connection to practice, to describe what really happened? How can the case be better explained? Which are the terms that bring deeper insight?

This way it is an aim to find out more about the research question seen from a practitioner's viewpoint inside the project; how can artistic/creative methods be developed in a cross-disciplinary field, to support innovation?

There is a description of some empirical data generated from the case study methods, and highlights of the main results. This is a background to discuss the research question, and to see to how the research question and propositions might be modified. The contribution is knowledge generated from a single case in innovation, but it might have relevance to other areas as well, which is discussed in the end.

The empirical data

The empirical data generated from the methods are related to the physical buildings, documentation of ideation process, the interviews and the observations.



Fig. 1: Holmestrand.

Fig. 2 and 3: The entrance halls under reconstruction

The fjord of Oslo situates the small town Holmestrand (fig.1), and the school is set on a hill above the town. There had been a political process to modernize the school (fig. 2 and 3). According to Norwegian law, a part of the project should be used for art. There had been a discussion between the administration of the school, who wanted to use art from their own art teachers, and the cultural consultant, who preferred to use art developed in cooperation with the National Foundation for Art in Public Buildings. There was a decision to do the later alternative, which demanded the integration of an external art consultant. After a contest, a panel consisting of the school administration, the art consultant, the cultural consultant and the architect chose some artists. One idea was to develop art based on two local artists with international recognition. The artists were the author Olav Duun and the painter Harriet

Backer. Their highly respected work created a basis of energy to develop something from, which might create identification for the local users. It might also develop into something, which might be seen as controversial from their fans.

Inspiration from Olav Duun

Olav Duun was an author who was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature many times. His work is seen as a part of the cultural heritage in his hometown Holmestrand. A museum has been built around his home. It is an official aim in the town to make this recognised author visible in several ways. The Duun-themes on the seating objects would be a new nuance of an already vitally existing culture in the community. Duun could be seen as a modern myth.

The pupils were interviewed about their relation to the book title "Fellow man" (Norwegian; "Medmenneske"). The questions were sent to the pupils some days in advance, with an example of the concept. (fig.4). The teacher chose 6 pupils, 2 from each level.



Fig. 4. Example of seating object shown to the students before the interview.

A teacher from the school was an expert on Duun literature. He presented a summary of the most important books of Duun. He explained the most famous citation from the book "Fellow man"; "The evil you don't kill with an axe." (fig. 5) One pupil proposed a sign of "not permitted", with an axe behind, for the seating objects.



Fig. 5: Teachers summary of the best known citation from the author: “The evil you don’t kill with an axe”. (Norw: Det onde drep du ikkje med øks.)



Fig. 6: The room where the interview were recorded, in addition to the walk in the school.

The pupils were asked to reflect on the book title related to their everyday life. As the interview was recorded, the group strolled around in the school to evoke memories or stories. This created a more informal atmosphere. Themes were meetings with pupils from different levels in the entrance hall, girlfriends and boyfriends, too much white walls etc. In relation to the book title “fellow man” they started to talk about mockery. A mental handicapped child had been pushed, and this they thought was unacceptable. They thought that in general mental handicapped children would be better off in their own schools². It later turned out that there were also other children who were not accepted in any social circles.

Interviewer: “When some children experience mockery, is it like their bag is being thrown in the snow, the clothes are damaged etc?”

The children said; “oh, no, it is almost never something physical!”

This comment reflected a high consciousness in interpersonal relations. I suddenly remembered how insensitive the teenage-culture could be. The comment I found important in my later work. It represented a value frame to choose suitable words and phrases to be integrated in the seating objects.

The phrases on the seating objects became in the end:

Backer-group: psychological portrait; influence from a friend, secure basis, fundamental importance. (English text phrases from biography in English³)

Duun-group: always apart (alltid på utsida), the kindest person in the world (verdens snilleste person), Sorry, should we be a couple (jæ spør på’ræ : local dialect). (the texts are phrases from the interview with the pupils)

² In education in Norway it is a goal to integrate all children with handicaps, both mentally and physically.

³ Retrieved January 5th 2006 from <http://www.answers.com/topic/harriet-backer>

Inspiration from Harriet Backer

Harriet Backer was a Norwegian female painter who was ahead of her time. She travelled extensively around Europe, and her motifs were exceptionally colouristic studies. The art consultant supported very much ideas related to the use of colour in the art project, and experiments with colour. This was an important basic common understanding, which developed into the coloured concrete seating objects.

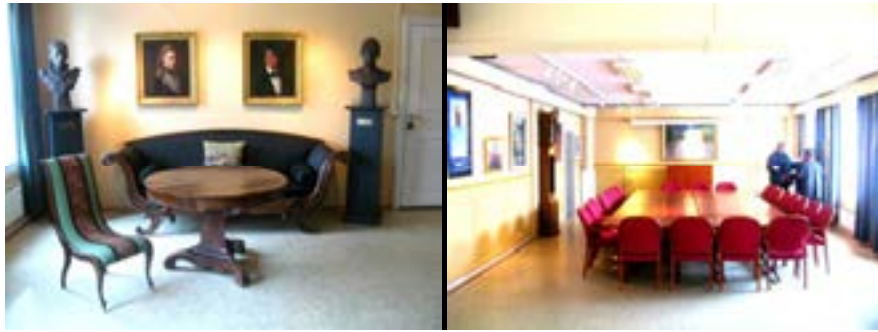


Fig. 7 and 8: the room for the town council, with furniture and items related to Harriet Backer.

In the official room (figure 7 and 8) for the town council meetings there was a collection of furniture from her time. There were photos from different stages in her life and reproductions of her works. Her sister was a recognised composer and was also represented in the room. At the moment there are plans to make a centre dedicated to their life and work at the summer resort of the Backer sisters.



Figure 9 and 10: A sketch of the local Peregrine Falcon, in combination with words and transformed into ceramic tile in a concrete seating object..

Bird motifs were developed. (fig. 9 , 10 and 11) The relation between drawings on paper and drawing on ceramic surfaces was a constructive interplay. A combination of words and birds, created new meanings. This created a reference to the birds in the environment. In the seating objects they created some experiences on a more intimate level.



Fig. 11: Phalacrocorax carbo and texts from the book Odin in Fairyland[12].

The architecture

The space outside the school had a theatre with seating stairs (fig 12). This had similarities to the old Greek theatres, with their open spaces, inviting for activities (fig. 13).

Inspired from the relation between the theatre space and the Athena temple (fig 14) in Delphi an idea developed of having something inside the school, as a reference to the theatre outside. The concept with the four seating objects (fig. 15) originates from an earlier cooperation with a clinical therapist⁴. A workshop⁵ in Athens focused on

⁴ Britt Selmer, participant at workshop.

old and modern myths reflected in art and architecture. The idea of Delphi as an open, empty space, generated the idea of the seating objects, with an open, empty space inside, inviting for activities. One can sit inwards, or outwards. Words on the seating objects can work as ice breakers and stimulate to conversation.



Fig. 12: Outdoor theatre at school



Fig. 13: Theatre⁶ at Delphi, Greece



Fig. 14: Athena Temple⁷ Delphi



Fig. 15: Seating objects creating open empty space.

The seating objects were installed after a process of about a year. A carpenter cooperated to do this. During the installation there turned out to be several obstructions for the art objects. There was glued a carpet where the objects should be. A tank for drinking water was put in the installation place. We cut off the carpet, but the water tank could not be moved. The comments from the cleaning personnel were that more seating objects created more rubbish.

⁵ Institute for spatial arts Oslo arranged a cross disciplinary workshop in Athens the spring 2004, focusing on the myth in ancient and contemporary art and architecture. Parts of the workshop was exemplifying open, inviting architecture, guided by the Juhanni Pallasma, Finnish architect and writer. Institute for spatial arts is now developed into www.r-o-m.no.

⁶ http://www.juergen-reichmann.de/europa/gr/sueden/sueden_006633.html

⁷ http://www.odysseyadventures.ca/trips/greece/delphi_tholos.jpg

“They just throw rubbish down if they get anywhere to sit”.

Some represents for the administration were worrying that girls might ruin their dress on the rustic surfaces of the concrete, or get injured on the sharp edges. A request to make something in relation to the walls came up after hand. A frieze of plexi-glass images was developed.

Later at the opening there was an article in the local newspaper, describing a sceptical rector who had now been convinced that the result was good. The pupils who were cited especially liked that the art could be used - they could sit on the art.



Figure 15. The seating objects installed.

Discussion and conclusion

How can creative methods be developed in cross-disciplinary processes to support innovation?

A cross-disciplinary design project can be seen as a humanistic project about people who interact and collaborate, where they all come in with values, identities and their own projects.

Focus group interviews are based on co-operative experiential inquiry.[9] Observation methods are based on “Image based research” [13] and consist of photo documentation, drawings, sketches, motifs, realistic drawings, abstractions, texts and writings. This is in accordance with Schöns view on being a reflective practitioner[14].

A thorough cooperation with practitioners can make the analytical work more insightful, varied, innovative, even more exciting and creative. The plurality of views

and the creativity, which is stimulated with the cooperation with the practitioners, creates a basis for interesting development of theory.[15]

A specific practical competence in art and design enable researchers with an additional tool in the process of communicating and implementing new ideas. This relation between art and research is exemplified in Maarit Makelas work. [16] she works with ceramic surfaces in a research context. As a researcher-practitioner she develop knowledge about feminism.(fig. 18). She produces, changes and carries possible female identities. She explores and exemplifies how remembering and autobiography build up the narration in the process of ceramic art.



Fig. 18; Maarit Makelas ceramic surfaces, contributing to feminist knowledge. ⁸

Wolfgang Welsch discusses contemporary art in public space. Is public art a feast for the eyes or an annoyance? He criticises the aestheticization of society in general. He says that beautiful art would be indistinguishable from the dominating beautiful designed environments. He therefore thinks that art should stand out from the beautiful design:

“Art should not impact accommodatingly as an article, but rather strike like a meteor.” [17]

The specific skill to document artistic competence is explored at Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design. The conference “Firing thoughts” explores the relationships between ceramics and drawing.⁹

⁸ Retrieved 12/09/2007 from <http://www.uiah.fi/page.asp?path=1;1456;2180;2793;2953;8966;10206>

⁹ Retrieved 12.09.2007 from <http://www.firingthoughts.co.uk/exh.php>, MIRIAD is the Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design, the North West of England's lead Higher Education centre for the study of the creative arts and for the development of the quality of cultural industries.



Fig 16; Sharon Blakey demonstrate a visual notebook.



Fig. 17: Sharon Blakeys ceramic surfaces demonstrate the relation to the drawings.

Sharon Blakey records her process with drawings and notes. There is a strong relation to the methodical and beautiful documentation, which show the dynamic coherence between the ideation and the realisation. The drawing contributes to a deeper understanding and perhaps that time-spent recording is giving more to the artist than just a visual record.

This experiential knowledge from unique cases can have a more general relevance. Art and design can be used in transformational processes related to the public sector. An example is an identity project in relation to the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer in 1994. There was a successful, design oriented, innovative process of separating the

Airport Express Train from the National Railway.¹⁰ [18] Similar processes happen with official organisations reorganised into smaller interplaying institutions, both private and public. One example is East European countries that have been strongly dominated by state organisations. They experience transformations from state governed corporations to private corporations ¹¹[18].

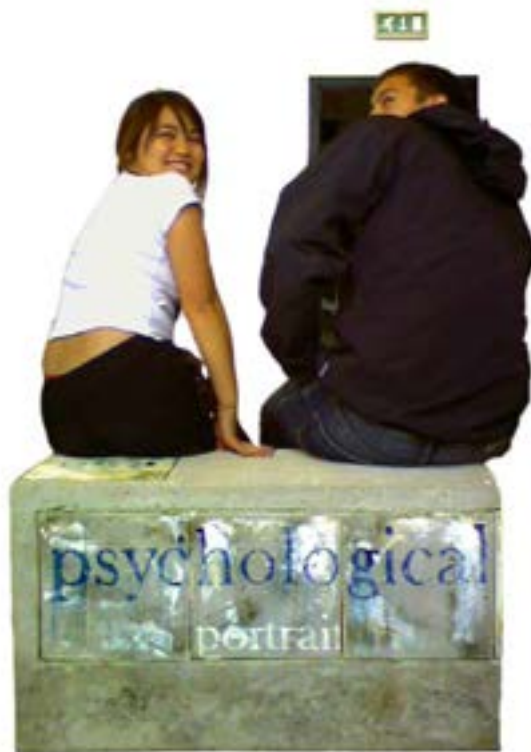


Fig. 19: Sira and Jørn seated on art

The constellation (fig. 19) demonstrates the result of a research interview. A cultural interplay is constructed between object, people and environment. The objects reflect both tradition and innovation, by referring to both history and everyday themes for young people. The concept, the function and the phrases, open for social activities, reflection and development.

Art and design can contribute to innovation processes. As identity is integrated in the innovation process it can stimulate the communication. A holistic process with interplaying cultures can emphasize users experience. A specific practical competence in art and design enable researchers with an additional tool in the process of communicating and implementing new ideas.

¹⁰ Case presented by Judith Gloppen, Norwegian Design Council, at the seminar: Design Management; Basic design knowledge project for the industry: Project title: The status and importance of design management in the mobilization and execution of design processes.

¹¹ Katri Ristal, Design Innovation Centre, Estonia, participant in Seminar Design Management.

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