

Day 1: Poverty as raw material

22 March 2013

2:35 p.m.

Extreme Participation

Born in Denmark in 1966. Kenneth A. Balfelt has been involved in a series of highly participative urban art projects, from the scale of indoor spaces to urbanism. He will present his recent projects “Enghave Minipark/Relocation of Beer Drinkers” where he took initiative to find a new space for beer drinkers that had been evicted because of a metro station construction from a square they had used for years. He used an extreme degree of involvement of the beer drinkers, whom he considered “super users” of the public square.

<http://kennethbalfelt.org/enghave-plads/>

Extrême Participation : Né au Danemark en 1966, Kenneth A. Balfelt a pris part à plusieurs projets artistiques urbains extrêmement participatifs, depuis l'échelle intérieure jusqu'à celle de l'urbanisme. Il présentera certains de ses projets récents, comme « Minipark Enghave / Relogement de buveurs de bière », où il a pris l'initiative de trouver un nouvel espace pour des buveurs de bière qui avaient été expulsés d'un jardin public où ils se rassemblaient depuis des années, à cause de la construction d'une station de métro. Il mit en place une extrême implication des buveurs de bière, qu'il considérait comme des « super utilisateurs » de ce jardin public.

EXTREME PARTICIPATION

KENNETH BALFELT / DEN

Artist. Denmark. He is involved in participative projects with a strong social implication. In Africa or in Europe, his researches are leading to different issues as jail, immigration, etc. He is invited in Biennales all over the world.

<http://kennethbalfelt.org>

Relocation of Beer Drinkers

In collaboration with Vesterbro Lokaludvalg (Local Council of Vesterbro), Spektrum Arkitekter (architects), urban sociologist Simon Mertner Vind, architect Charlotte Vad, and the users.

2010–12

On 31 September 2010 at 9.00 the last corner of Enghave Plads under the chestnut tree was closed to beer drinkers because of the Metro construction. From this point on, a group of 30-100 beer drinkers who had this space as their social network, had no place to gather.

This was obviously not my responsibility. But I think it was interesting as an artist to show another way to do it. So I went into partnership with Thomas Egholm from Vesterbro Local Committee, Spektrum Architects, urban sociologist Simon Mertner Vind and architect Charlotte Vad about finding a new place for them, do a process which ensured a good atmosphere from the local area and to design and build the place.

We've created a process that to an extreme degree has involved the beer drinkers. They have participated in choosing the new location, plan, decide and build. One example was the situation where the municipality said no to installing urinal, lighting, water tap, fountain and fireplace. Instead of us, the so-called resource-rich group (architects, local committees and artist) deciding on what to do, we took it down at the site and discussed it with the beer drinkers. They chose what to prioritize and came up with arguments for it: a urinal was essential. Otherwise, they would urinate all sorts of places, then the place would stink and others would not use the mini park. As we had a stated goal of the park to be pro co-existence, it was a decisive argument. Then we went to the municipality in which, after long discussions, emails and leader involvement, they went along with giving us a urinal.

Furthermore the group of users would contribute with:

- Cleaning and care of plants;
- Ensuring that the site is open to all;
- Music and song.

A goal of mine has been to show that people with their contextual understanding can contribute just as much as a professional. Beer drinkers are 'super users' of this kind of public space. They sit there, much of the day, all year round. No city planners, anthropologists, architects or municipal people have so much experience with the public space. It was our task in the project to articulate this knowledge and translate it into physical and procedural solutions – and raise awareness that they have this knowledge.

This meant they were qualified to participate in the process. Unlike the kind of user and citizen involvement we normally do, where there is a group working a lot with the project and then ask users to provide their opinion. Here, users are not eligible to participate, and their contribution is often disruptive. Therefore, there is no question of 'ownership' as we normally know this concept. We have no ownership of our children – they are ours. Similarly, beer drinkers feel for Enghave Mini Park.

The project is a continuation of the report for the Ministry of Social Affairs 'City as a Living Room' which is made by Hausenberg, Spektrum Arkitekter and artist Kenneth A. Balfelt. The report provides guidelines on how to create public spaces with socially marginalized and recommend a high degree of involvement of them.