ARTISTICALLY DEVELOPED METHODS FOR USER INVOLVEMENT

By **Kenneth Balfelt Team**

Principles, themes and methods of ethic user involvement

From questions about ideas to questions about needs
From post-its ton profound dialogue
Strategic unpreparedness - to make room for what is happening

Museet for Samtidskunst

ARTISTIC METHODS FOR USER PARTICIPATION – PARTICIPATION

Kenneth A. Balfelt

(This text follows up on 15 years of working with urban development as an artist. Working alongside highly skilled colleagues from other disciplines in my teams, we have developed a range of new methods shaped by the individual requirements of each project. In what follows we will provide a five-step account of a range of principles, methods and practical examples of how the various stakeholders and agents within the field of urban development can work with *user participation*.)

Introduction

Citizen participation in urban development: everybody agrees that it is a good idea, many do it, but far too rarely do such participation processes realise their full potential for urban development and for the people who live there. And the potential is great: greater safety and less vandalism, area branding, better urban spaces, a stronger sense of community, skill-raising initiatives that can connect those involved more closely to the labour market or further education and much, much more. What is more, participation can also promote far greater quality in what is being constructed because of the insights generated by us into the area, the context and the residents' needs.

Taking our point of departure in a critique of urban development projects characterised by low or poor participation, we present a theoretical and normative tool that can be used to shed light on participation processes: their scope, quality and potential for actually affecting the projects under consideration. We will also present our takes on how different roles should be assigned to those who involve the citizens (consultants/mediators, also known as 'citizen involvers'), the designers and the citizens themselves, and how the citizen participation phase interacts with the design process.

Step one is about how we use participation to create

a shared platform where we, as citizen involvers, bring together the citizens themselves and bridge the gap between citizens on the one hand and architects and developers on the other. We propose (and present) the use of *context analysis* as a tool and specific product generated by citizen involvers and citizens *before* any work is done on generating ideas, designs and possible solutions. The context analysis comprises four things: 1) the citizens' analyses of the area; 2) the citizens' needs 3) our observations of the context – and 4) our reflections and qualifications regarding those inputs.

Step two is about how we enable and qualify citizens, enabling them to take part in urban development projects so that their inputs have an *actual* impact on the projects – rather than just a *symbolic* one.

Step three is about the *design phase*, where the citizens' inputs and needs must be translated into high-quality design and architecture. When negotiating the transition from citizen participation to design, citizens must not feel that the project is taken out of their hands, but at the same time the skilled professional must be given the freedom required for them to develop high-quality solutions.

Step four is concerned with the actual construction process – a greatly overlooked phase which can, if used correctly, contribute to the area as well as to developing the inhabitants socially.

Step five is about putting that which have been created into use and any subsequent adjustments.

Transforming areas


POLITIKEN

DANMARK

Politik Vejret Uddannelse Samfund Arbejdsliv

PLUS MERE FOR MINDRE

Fire personer i bil overfaldet ved Folkets Park på Nørrebro

En mand er kørt på skadestuen efter knivstik.

DEL GEM TIL LISTE

ELISABETH ASTRUP
Journalist

En bil med fire personer er her til eftermiddag blevet overfaldet i nærheden af Folkets Park på Nørrebro.


POLITIKEN

Mit sted i byen: Folkets Park er byens bedste umagelige sted

Julekalender: Journalist Katrine Hornstrup Yde fortæller om sit yndlingssted i København.

Folkets Park 2012, Folkets Park 2015

WHAT IS THE POINT OF PARTICIPATION?

Criticising traditional citizen participation

The starting point of this text was a sense of frustration at the inadequacy of much of the citizen participation we have observed within the urban development business – an inadequacy which is widely acknowledged by many in the business. A typical scenario might well, with only slight exaggeration, look something like this:
Citizens and users are invited for coffee on a Tuesday afternoon, filling in yellow post-it notes with ideas about what they would like to see, after which the consultants are left with 251 proposals for playground elements, street furniture and garden projects that they don't know what to do about – because the proposal presented at the meeting was in fact at such a late stage of the development process that there is little scope for adjustments! Whether or not the meeting was a success is mostly judged by the number of citizens attending.

Participation based on one-off workshops is, broadly speaking, either designed to 'waste as little time as possible' for those who ordered them, or as a quirky – but insignificant – sprinkling on top. Everyone realises that the architects' and engineers' work requires more than a single one-off Tuesday afternoon workshop – and the same goes for citizen participation! When user participation is not taken seriously, not thought properly through or used in the right way, it often results in solutions that are irrelevant to the users or to the overall quality of the project.

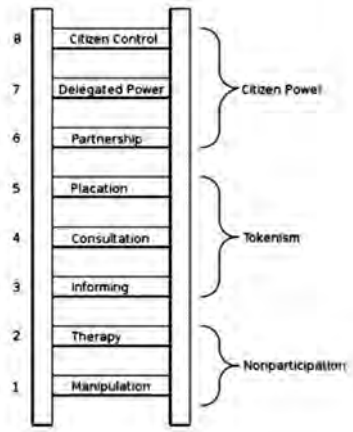
Participation is a special field and discipline that requires careful thought, insight and attention in order to work. And it is important – not for the sake of participation in itself, nor for the sake of the citizen involvers, but because deep and thorough participation:

* raises the quality of urban space projects – in terms of architecture and functionality
* ensures that the users' needs and insights form the starting point of the solutions created, thereby ensuring that these solutions are relevant and interesting to the users
* can help generate higher employment rates, a greater sense of ownership, community and safety, and reduce conflict.

In what follows, we will offer our take on how we can create better, deeper involvement that promotes *real* citizen influence as well as greater usage of and sheer joy in what we build.

Levels of participation

We believe that participation should be a professional field and discipline in its own right – or at the very least a carefully thought-through phase that we take seriously and set aside time and resources for. But to



what extent should citizens participate – and what should they participate in?

Let us begin by taking a look at Sherry Arnstein's *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* as inspiration and as a way of measuring good and poor participatory practices.

In her 1969 article *A Ladder of Citizen Participation,* Sherry Arnstein presents a process typology that encompasses eight degrees of citizen participation. The lowest rungs of the latter actually consist in nonparticipation: *manipulation* and *therapy* are not about involving citizens in processes, but rather about project managers persuading or manipulating citizens to accept the changes or projects that those managers would like to see completed. They may also be aiming for a 'cure', implying that the citizens suffer from a distorted or downright sick idea about a project and require treatment in order to understand and accept it.

The next level, *tokenism,* applies to projects where the citizens are heard and given a voice – but where this does not necessarily have any real impact on the final result. This is where users are given a tiny corner of the project to make decisions about, ensuring that they feel heard. It is our claim that today, the vast majority of all participatory initiatives associated with urban space projects in Denmark are conducted at the level of tokenism. It is tokenism when citizens are invited to meetings (usually a large public assembly) about imminent projects – or to 'consultations' such as the aforementioned workshops with post-its. When participation takes place at this level only, there is interaction between project managers and citizens, but no structures or measures in place to ensure that the citizens' inputs will change or even be featured in the project. The main reason why this approach is used may rest on a lack of available methods for getting qualified inputs from users. We will offer our take on such a method later.

The highest level of participation consists in actual *Citizen Power* – here, citizens exercise actual influence on a project, for example in the form of partnerships or delegations where citizens are represented in committees with actual decision-making mandates. Urban development projects are often organised in this way. The very highest level of participation is *citizen control*, where citizens have complete control: they handle and manage all planning and operation, and no external agents (neither local authorities nor investors) have the authority to change the decisions taken by the citizens. Urban spaces such as *Byggeren* or Folkets Park (until the 1990s) in the Nørrebro region of Copenhagen were 100% citizen-run and self-organised projects. Similarly, the process of creating Enghave Plads in the Vesterbro region of Copenhagen in the 1980s was also initiated by the citizens, and the square did to a very large extent end up as designed by the citizens. These approaches to participation generate great ownership, but may at times also suffer from low degrees of professional insight and competence.

Deep user involvement – with clearly defined roles

Even though we are inspired by the model presented in the above, it also has its shortcomings. How, for example, may we combine a high level of citizen participation with a high level of professional insight and competence?

Users may be involved in every phase of the project, but this does *not* mean that the difference between citizens and professionals should be blurred or ignored. Differences *do* exist between citizens and pro-

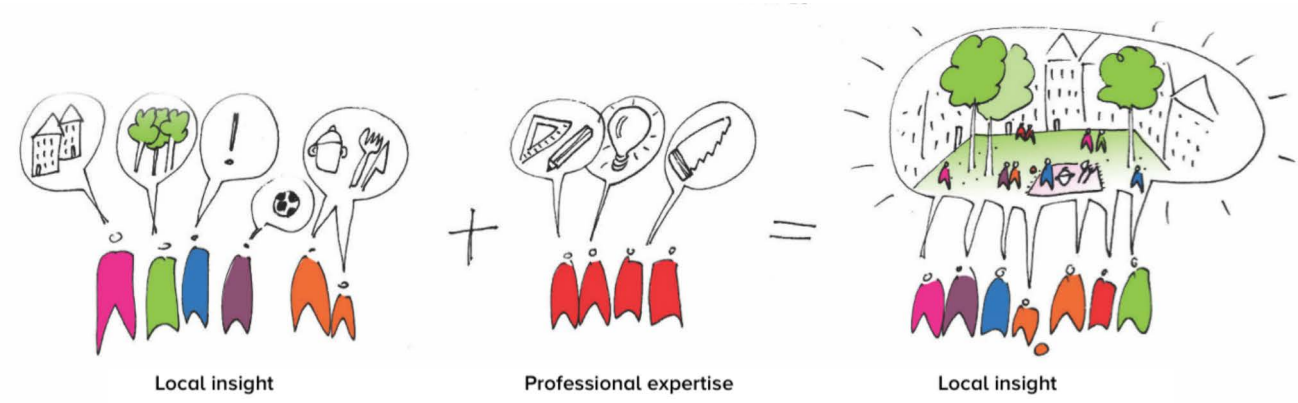
fessionals – and that difference should be clearly demarcated in every phase, but especially during the transition from the initial research and analysis phase to the design phase. The difference resides in the different fields of expertise. The users are not architects and vice versa. However, users *are* experts on the context and on their own needs. Any 14-year-old boy has greater knowledge about the context in which he grew up than any architect or anthropologist! Our job as involvers is to bring those insights to the fore.

Thus, user participation is about creating a basis of knowledge that we advisors *translate* and *build on.* User participation and design should not be regarded as a 1:1 relationship in which users state what they want and we then go on to supply exactly that. Rather, it means that the users' analyses, knowledge and needs are translated and *processed* by the project group, thereby facilitating a process where users and the project group both contribute what they are best suited to bring the process.

What is user participation supposed to achieve?

When working with urban development, it is certainly relevant to ask what it is we actually want to achieve, for example by creating a new urban space. This also means asking ourselves what we wish to achieve by promoting user participation. Many talk about user participation leading to a sense of *ownership*. To us, however, this is not the objective in itself; it is more of a positive side effect. Our main objective is to foster *quality* – and solutions of actual relevance.

In order to reach this point, we must lay down the pa-rameters for our work. The illustration below present the parameters involved when we work with urban spaces. The lowest level on this stepped diagram con-cerns the efforts to create a high-quality physical so-



A simple model for collaboration and user participation between users and professionals – and one that may also be envisioned as a kind of contract with the local area. The citizen involvers turn up without being tied to any pre-defined ideas or sketches, listen to the citizens, get their input for the analysis and learn about their needs (local insight). Then, when these in-puts are to be translated into actual solutions, the professionals do the work (professional expertise). Their ideas will then be presented to users again to ensure that their needs and analyses have been properly under-stood. Each party has their part to play. Illustration by Spektrum Arkitekter.

Activity - and the advisors' role	Goal
Use - Ensuring access and use of site	A sustainable urban space
Social development - Employment, resolving social issues	Socially functioning urban space
Community building - Resolving conflicts, dismantling prejudice, creating transparency regarding the needs of different groups about the needs of particular groups	Well-functioning urban space
Analyses and needs of the users - Reflection and qualification	High-quality physical urban space

lution. This issue is generally the main focus of those involved – partly because architects are the main profession involved when creating physical solutions. However, a certain degree of community building and safety is also required in order for the urban space to work. That is why we address issues such as conflict resolution, dismantling prejudices between the various groups involved, telling them about the needs of other groups etc.

Urban spaces and urban areas can also be beset by social issues that prompt crime, vandalism, gang activity, poverty and hopelessness. These challenges can be far more difficult to resolve, but we believe that they should still be addressed by collecting information and sending it on to those who work with such problems. Last but not least we must ensure that the new space or area is actually used – and used well. Without users, there is no urban space in the proper sense of the term. This also means that the process may benefit from speaking to e.g. event-makers about scheduling activities in the new urban space.

Engaging in such thorough solutions that consider the totality of the new space or area also requires another type of problem solving, new agents and new ways of inviting tenders.

Coherence and integrity

An artist cannot resort to claims about the boss's orders, local authority policies or company guidelines if his or her work of art turns out to be no good. Artists must vouch 100% for the work they create and send out into the world. Conversely, artists also have the opportunity to express opinions that civil servants may agree with, but cannot voice because of solidarity with their institution or fear of reprisals.

Here at KBT, we take this as our firm starting point when developing new methods or working with participation in specific projects, for example on behalf of local authorities. Some might ask what the opposite of integrity in participation might be? Our reply is that a lack of integrity occurs when the knowledge generated by interaction with actual users is ignored or suppressed once it reaches the managers' or architects' offices. To ensure absolute integrity throughout the process, the agents responsible for citizen involvement must supervise the project and approve the designs prepared by the architects. They can only do so if those design solutions correspond to the analyses and needs formulated and identified during the citizen participation process. It would be beneficial if this can be agreed upon from the outset, ensuring that

everyone – including the developer/owner – is on board with the fact that proper participation requires different working methods and distributions of tasks. Because of this, we also require the owner/developer to take part in selected interviews and involvement meetings, and on creating a steering committee that meets regularly, ensuring that the owner(s) are regularly updated on the progress made.

Zoned lighting: The path is lit while other areas remain dark. This ensures a sense of safety and security for those passing through the area, for the homeless who occupy it, and for young people who use it to hang out.

Lighting in Folkets Park

When, at a late stage of the process of designing Folkets Park, we presented our take on how the park was to be lit at night, our proposal clashed with that of the city's urban planners. The objective was to pro-mote safety and security, and for the urban planners and experts on crime prevention, this equalled full il-lumination of the entire park. However, during the in-volvement process we encountered two groups of users for whom total illumination would have the op-posite effect, reducing their sense of safety: homeless people sleeping in the park and young men who come there to clandestinely smoke cigarettes and joints.

The solution was zoned lighting: some areas of the park are spot lit, while others remain largely dark.

STEP 1: ESTABLISH A SHARED PLATFORM

SETTING THE RIGHT FRAMEWORK FROM THE OUTSET

To ensure a successful project process, the initial contract negotiation phase – getting expectations aligned internally – is crucial. This applies to the relationship with the developer/owner and with the citizens alike. During this initial contract negotiation, those who involve the citizens must ensure that the work they create with and for the citizens has an actual and substantial impact on the finished project. If this is not the case, the involvement project remains at the level of tokenism where the citizens' actual influence rarely exceeds the scope of a single yellow post-it note.

Allow us to present a few examples from our own negotiations:

FORMAT

When the City of Copenhagen invited us to redesign Folkets Park in the Nørrebro area, the local authorities initially wanted us to prepare three proposals for a new park and decide on a winner through voting. That is more or less how most design competitions are conducted in Denmark. However, we did not feel that this approach was best suited here. When we engage in user participation and urban space projects, we always work on a single proposal – the one dictated by the specific needs, the analysis and our processing.

PARTICIPANTS

Ensuring that the owner/developer and other impor-

tant stakeholders take part in selected participatory interviews or meetings can be crucially important to the internal sense of ownership. Their attendance will help ensure that those remote from the participatory process still get somewhat 'under its skin' and get a feel for the atmosphere in which the analysis and needs assessment is conducted. Much can be conveyed in the context analysis (to which we will return shortly) about analyses and needs, but it is difficult to describe human moods, atmospheres and tensions.

It is also necessary to discuss *who* will be involved. Opinions often vary on the subject of which groups should be allowed a say (and the extent of that say) when planning and building e.g. an urban space. The purpose of the involvement process should be regarded as conflict resolution. When resolving conflicts, the needs of both parties must be met 100%. We do not aim for compromises where the participating parties only have some of their needs met. The same holds true when asking participants about their needs; we will return to this point in the section concerning the format of the participation interview. Good advisors aim at bringing these aspects together across different groups.

ETHICS

It is also important to engage in a discussion of who has the right to use the space and on what terms. Often, some stakeholders do not want certain groupings – such as the socially marginalised or groups of young men – to be prominent or present in a given space. But surely these groupings have rights too? Cities and municipalities must be able to accommodate the different behaviours and needs of all people – within reason. The challenge is to establish particular formats and settings that enable people to coexist. For example, access to a toilet and a range of different spaces will often make it much easier to have e.g. the socially marginalised, children or young adults coexist alongside other groupings.

TIME

Time is another factor that should be discussed and decided upon during the initial contract phase. Avoid restricted schedules and definite deadlines when engaging in user participation. Time is key for involvement, building trust and quality assurance. Having enough time creates the freedom to be present and to act on various things that emerge. And it takes time for users to get used to the idea of, accept and support the changes that urban space projects impose on their local areas and themselves. It takes time for proposals and changes to settle in – and it takes time to disseminate knowledge throughout the local area.

The process concerning Folkets Park lasted a total of eighteen months from the time we first began to interview participation until we cut the ribbon and threw the opening parties. This was followed by another 6 months of subsequent adjustments and ensuring that the park is used by local event makers.

START-UP: ARRIVING STRATEGICALLY UNPREPARED

We suggest turning up 'unprepared' when first launching the project, arriving with an entirely blank slate – by which we mean without having begun developing any ideas, concepts or sketches. This does not, however, mean that you should just show up knowing nothing of the relevant area. Quite the contrary: it was very rewarding for us to arrive in Nørrebro armed with in-depth knowledge about the area's history in general and about Folkets Park in particular. Indeed, this earned us the respect of a local community that is

very protective of its tradition for activism and self-determination.
When we talk about turning up unprepared in terms of *solutions*, the objective is to place ourselves in a situation where we depend on establishing collaboration with people in their context: on working with those who live in, work in and understand that context. We always develop a specific method for the particular context in which we work. Each project is entirely individual, rooted in its own specific history and combination of users – and the methods used and solutions found should both reflect this.

THE PHASES OF CONTENT-BUILDING

1. An open-minded approach. No ideas, drawings or concepts. > 2. User needs and analysis. Physical records. Desktop research. > 3. Outline. Concept sketch. Values. > 4. Almost fully finished drawings. Concept. > 5. Tender.

Self-determination in Folkets Park

Pictures from contractor Logik og Co.

Before our project was launched, Folkets Park (The People's Park) on Nørrebro had already had forty years of history full of conflict and joy – greatly shaped by an ongoing dispute about whether the local authorities or the local citizens should decide what happens in this park. Obviously, it would be hugely counterproductive if we arrived in this area as external artists, architects or urban planners with partial solutions already planned, thereby ignoring the area's tradition for self-determination.

Context analysis – connecting user participation and the design phase

Context analysis – Courtyard space in Odense

The context analysis encompasses a review of the social situation at the site in question, of its physical layout and of the users' needs. Above is an excerpt (in Danish) from the context analysis for a courtyard space in Odense. The landscape architects Land+ took this analysis as the starting point of their design phase.

The initial stage of every KBT participation project aims at establishing a common platform in co-operation with the locals. They are the ones who will equip us for the task at hand by sharing their expert knowledge about their own needs, the current situation in the area and its many agents.

As described above, a successful urban space comprises many different parts. Hence, it makes sense to look beyond specific professions and their particular concerns, taking a wider outlook in one's inquiry into what defines this particular urban space and its potential. Are there any prejudices at play between different groups? Any conflicts? Any dominant groupings? What is the history of the site in political, social, inter-relational terms? And so on. Matters to be considered include the physical settings, groupings and social conditions.
This is to say that the entire initial participation phase is about collecting materials for the context analysis which may, among other things depending on the context, include the following:

1. SOCIAL CONTEXT: What is the history of the place? Who uses it? Who doesn't use it? Why? How do the different groups of users feel about each other? Do certain user groups clash with others – or do they inadvertently do things that makes others feel uncomfortable or unsafe? Does the area have the resources required to handle any social issues involved? How do various stakeholders, business owners, retailer etc. view the area?
2. ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT: What agents/stakeholders are present? What do they do? How do they maintain operation? Who arranges events and how do they work? Who are the neighbours, and what is their relationship with the place?
3. PHYSICAL CONTEXT: How do users perceive the place? What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are their needs? Registering the actual usage of the site and its facilities, their condition and usability. Traffic, sun, seasons, night and day, weekdays and weekends.

A key message in this context is the fact that it is not enough to simply consider what might pave the way for purely physical solutions. Only rarely, if ever, are the physical settings enough to create a successful urban space.

Transforming an empty courtyard into the lush walled garden

The exact contents of any context analysis will, of course, depend on the input from participating users.

The process of transforming this courtyard in a charity-run shelter was greatly unfused by ideas about values: it focused on the situations and values that the users wanted the new space to promote between them: greater calm and safety, less chaos etc.
The courtyard garden at the Kirkens Korshær shelter was created to promote safety for the social marginalised citizens of Odense.

Not a single line will be drawn and not a single creative idea voiced until this analysis has been carried out and the context analysis has been approved by the users with (and for) whom we create the project. Of course, the developer/project owner must also approve it, ensuring that we all agree on the shared foundations on which this work will build. This is to say that the context analysis is the product that connects everyone: the project owner, the citizen involvers / consultants, the citizens and the designers / architects.

Reflection

After conducting interviews, making observations and collecting materials, we sit down to reflect on what we have collected. This is an approach imported from the realm of art; in contrast to e.g. film thrillers or newspaper articles, where explanations and story resolutions are part of the piece, art cannot be simply and straightforwardly understood in a one-to-one manner. Art requires us to be active and reflect on what we see actually means. We often find that these reflection sessions turn out to be one the thing that raises the quality of the project by 10-20-30% because it incorporates the viewpoints of different professions and personalities on *how* we should understand all that was said and seen. And this is often where we discover correlations between different inputs. For example how the placing of a bench along the wall of Folkets Hus causes its residents to feel unsafe in the park – because they feel observed by young men when passing through it.

Transparency

When all the information from the various meetings has been collated in the context analysis, we send it back out to the participants via email, social media and the local press. It is hugely important that the knowledge obtained from user participation – knowledge to which we have primary and privileged access – is shared with the locals. This importance resides partly in ensuring that our findings are further honed and qualified in an ongoing interplay with the citizens involved so that our knowledge base is as comprehensive and accurate as possible. It is also about generating transparency throughout the process while aiming at building trust. The participants must be able to see what we are doing throughout the entire process so that they don't get any unpleasant surprises along the way.

We, the user involvement team and the users, essentially 'hold hands' throughout the process. From this point on the users are familiar with the analytical basis on which we stand, and from this point on we can safely progress to the design phase.

Conflict resolution

The information and insights obtained can also enable conflict resolution and community building, thereby adding extra benefits to the participatory process.

During the interviews conducted for the context analysis, the team of advisors gain access to stories, prejudices and myths about the area's various groupings. The result is in-depth insight into the given site's hierarchies: who is friends with whom? Who seem scary to others? What do certain groups do that generate a sense of insecurity or threat? Might there be erroneous beliefs in circulation – people thinking that others are up to things when they are not, eliminating any real reason to feel uncomfortable or afraid? In other words, the various groups may engage in plenty of mythmaking, prejudices and misinformation about each other. This means that we can actively contribute to banishing many myths and misunderstandings.

The Folkets Park project provided an example of this, specifically the myth about there being many gang members and drug dealers in Folkets Park. The commonly held belief that *all* the young men sold cannabis turned out to be untrue. As a result, part of our work consisted in debunking myths and disseminating the 'real' story to the local area: that the young people truly loved their neighbourhood and that only one of them sold cannabis. That some of them had jobs, some had completed higher education, but were currently unemployed, that some of them were in a gang while others were not. You could say that we spread (true) gossip, actively employing direct dialogue, the local press and social media to disseminate correct and nuanced information.

'It also turned out that the young brown men were in fact entirely *for* families with children and *for* being neighbourly. And that there is only one cannabis seller in the park; not a flock of fifteen as many believed.'

STEP 2: THE USER'S ROLE

RAISING THE USERS' SKILLS


Park mod kniv

»Det viste sig også, at de unge brune mænd virkelig var *for* børnefamilier og *for* naboskab. Og at der kun er én hashsælger i parken, ikke en kæmpe flok på 15, som mange troede.«

"It also turned out that the young brown men were in fact entirely for families with children and for being neighbourly. And that there is only one cannabis seller in the park; not a flock of fifteen as many believed."
Conflict resolution. A cutting from Weekendavisen in which we set out to deliberately eliminate prejudices – partly through social media and weekly newspapers.

As advisors, we must build the knowledge necessary to solve a given urban space project – and similarly we also need to facilitate the users' participation by raising and qualifying their skills.

If the users are to be qualified to participate properly – and if their insights are to be useful – we cannot simply invite them to take part in a one-hour citizens' meeting. No-one can become an urban planner or come up with qualified input for an urban planning process at a one-hour meeting!

We realised this in connection with the Enghave Minipark project, where the local 'beer drinkers' were involved regularly, taking part in every phase of the project – the *idea phase,* the *design phase,* the *planning phase,* the *construction phase* and during *operation*. Obviously, this involved quite a lot of meetings along the way. When users take part in shaping the project all the way through, as they did in the case of Enghave Minipark, the advisor essentially have a very valuable extra player on their team. This was also apparent when difficult decisions had to be made, for example when budgetary constraints required priorities

'Solid, strong wood that can take a beating, and lots of natural greenery. None of all that "artistic shit"; it'll get busted up in seconds'. The 'beer drinkers' know better than anyone what kind of materials will survive city life and do not mince their words.

to be made and when the local authorities rejected certain proposals. Instead of greeting necessary com-promises with anger, the 'beer drinkers' embraced the decisions constructively on an equal footing with the project managers.

Super users

Everyone is an expert on their own situation, on the specific context they occupy, the social relationships in the area and the significance of the site. This also – and especially – applies to socially marginalised groups who are far too frequently underestimated and avoided in urban development projects. The 'beer drinkers' of Enghave Plads are 'super users' of that square, of that particular urban space. They sit there almost all day, all year round. No urban planner, an-thropologist, architect, municipal official or artist can match the sheer experience they have of that public space.

One of the beer drinkers, 'Bornholmeren', suggested using a sun cross pattern in the paving instead of just straight lines – and did it himself. His relationship with this goes beyond the conventional management-speak sense of 'ownership'; it is his 'child'. And if it should be damaged he knows how to repair it. He understands it – much more deeply than if he had simply attended meetings about the idea.

Co-ownership – more than ownership

One concept in particular has been bandied about by the urban development industry to the point where it has no value: the concept of *ownership.* No matter how superficial the efforts at citizen participation, they are always presented as wanting to promote cit-izen ownership of the project.
We employ the concept of co-ownership instead because we endeavour to co-create our projects with the citizens we get involved. In the Folkets Park project, the citizens and stakeholders were not just heard and seen. Their inputs and analyses formed the basis for the entire design phase – and they kept tabs on the process so that they could correct us if we got something wrong. And at Enghave Minipark, the local 'beer drinkers – who were involved in the entire process from beginning to end – have embraced the park to such an extent that they have practically rendered the municipal cleaning and supervision services su-perfluous.

Different citizens require different kinds of meetings

City demographics encompass widely different group-ings – families with children, homeless people, young men, local home owners etc. – which means that we need to use a range of different methods and meeting formats. As most urban planners know only too well, not every relevant group will attend a meeting on the basis of an email invite or Facebook posting.

Two different participatory situations from the Enghave Minipark project. 1) Choosing a style, overall aes-thetic and street furniture, and 2) involving the Greenlandic community, a group that tended to keep itself to itself.

You need to go out into the streets to connect with the young. The same applies to the 'beer drinkers' – but in that case you need to see them as early in the day as possible before they get too drunk. Families with children need to fit meetings into a schedule that includes picking up the kids from day care, cooking dinner and tucking them in at night. Engaging with homeless people from abroad may require an interpreter. And so on. With some people, many conversations are required in order to get them to open up and to translate their latent knowledge into actionable knowledge – others only need a few. In other words, we need to meet and involve users on their terms – not on the planners' terms.

Interview technique is important

When we interview citizens and other users of a space, we place great emphasis on establishing meetings characterised by respect and on creating interview situations where we ask about the things we want to get answers to – not the things we think they can answer! The moment we start applying our own ideas about what we think they can reply to, a certain condescension creeps into the relationship.

An important precondition for respectful interaction is the basic premise that we ask questions about the users' area of expertise, which is *context analysis* and *their own needs* – not ideas and solutions. We know from experience that users will often think that they are supposed to offer up specific, concrete solutions for the project at hand. They're not! Developing the actual solutions is our job as professionals. The users' part consists in informing us about the social *situation* or contributing to the physical *analysis*.

Photo: Simone Cecilie Grytter

We seek to address this balance between needs and solutions directly while interviewing, telling users that together, we must endeavour to speak only about needs. We find that this creates a different kind of sit-uation where we try, together, to rethink the conver-sation and navigate it. This also presents opportunities for evading fixed frameworks and roles, looking at things afresh. We also speak directly about how the roles are dis-tributed between them as users and us as profession-als, as illustrated in the model for collaboration and the distribution of roles between users and professionals in the section 'What is the point of participation?'.

From swings to playground furniture

In the Folkets Park project, the citizens expressed a strong wish for the park to include more fun activities to attract children and families with children back to the areas. If we had asked for specific inputs for so-lutions and implemented them unmediated, we would probably have built a set of swings and a basketball court. After all, those are the design references that

most people have. But instead we asked about their *needs*, which included greater safety, facilities for families with children, more activities and more places to sit. The architects translated all this into an imaginative piece of playground furniture that can be used for games and parkour. Something that no-one had ever seen before. An example of how the users' needs underwent professional processing and translation.

Multifunctional seats

The seats on the rounded hills in Folkets Park combine several functions in one. There was a need for seats, seats with backrests, places that allowed visitors to play and exercise, places to soak up the sun and places for the homeless to sleep. All these needs are met by the large oak plinth furniture. They also serve as dividers that create smaller spaces for groups to occupy, allowing them to simultaneously form a private space while still remaining part of a wider community.

The longest bench in Denmark

The bench in Enghave Minipark is the longest bench with a backrest in Denmark. It allows users to sit separately or closely together in groups – and it is long enough to allow everyone to use it, deciding for themselves how close they want to sit to the 'beer drinkers'. The bench is a communal seat – shared by everyone. Here, the values that underpin Enghave Minipark are given physical expression.

Quality and quantity

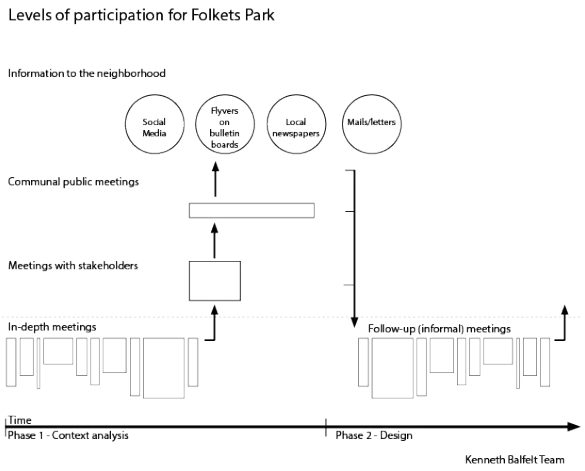
When have we obtained the information we need to resolve an urban-space project?

Ideally, all citizens, users and professionals who are affected by or have an interest in the relevant project should have the opportunity to be heard. But for us, the *depth* of a participatory process is as important as its *breadth*. We aim to get the in-depth knowledge we require – and to get it from every group.
The urban development industry often uses large public meetings to involve citizens. Public meetings are certainly relevant, especially when the objective is to inform and reach wide audiences, or to invite further collaboration. However, such public meetings cannot

stand alone.
Public meetings may make *symbolic* sense (look at us, we're getting the public involved!), but the *real* impact on the projects may be negligible. The opportunities to speak and to gain influence are too limited when you take part in a meeting with 20-30-40 other people and groupings with their own agendas and particular vested interests.

We distinguish between whether we aim for deep insight (quality) or to disseminate information to a wide audience (quantity). When aiming to collect deep insights, we do so in conversational interview situations that involve one to five participants and have a duration of 1.5 hours – using just one hour far too often proves to be too little. For such encounters, we loosely outline the subjects we would like to cover – but we very rarely prepare questions in advance. We engage in conversation and may show pictures and drawings, but we do not use generic process tools. There are always at least two of us present – one to engage in the conversation and one to take notes. We may swap roles along the way.

In between the interviews, we often set aside time to sum up what we have learned so far, mull it over and be present and visible in the local area. This often creates opportunities for briefer, informal conversations and for building trust over time. Users often find se-curity in knowing that they don't just have one chance and one chance only for offering their input.



Model describing the relationship between in-depth interviews and widely disseminated information.

A moment from one of the three stakeholder group meetings at which we presented and received feedback on the context analysis, drawings and solutions produced while developing the Folkets Park project.

Our approach is to conduct a series of in-depth interview meetings, collect the information gathered and then go on to host a public meeting where we speak about the insights achieved so far. In this way the public meeting takes on a more informative nature where guests can respond to, comment on and correct what has already been collected. We also communicate the results – specifically in the form of a context analysis – via emails, social media and the press and invite people to comment on them. Responses, it must be said, are rare. However, it gives everyone the opportunity to see what has been done and to see that, hopefully, the process has involved groupings with which they identify. Similarly, they can also see what these groups have contributed in terms of analyses and the needs identified.

Stakeholder groups

We have been particularly pleased with the results created by forming stakeholder groups. These groups consist of people and representatives from the local community who have special insight or play a special part in the context with which we work. The scope of such groups can range from a single individual who shows a great commitment and insight into his local area to a large organisation.

We usually form such stakeholder groups after having completed the initial participatory phase and the context analysis. After this point, our primary source of dialogue with the citizens is the stakeholder group, to whom we regularly present and discuss our findings, analyses and design sketches. This is to say that the stakeholder group shapes and informs our work on the project, and at the same time they can act as project ambassadors to the local community – but they are not required to do so. Not just anyone can be a member of such an advisory group. We generally invite members who we believe will offer up the best insight into an area and are best suited to reflecting on and informing the design work. We also prefer people to be able to look beyond their own personal interests.

Sequence of events

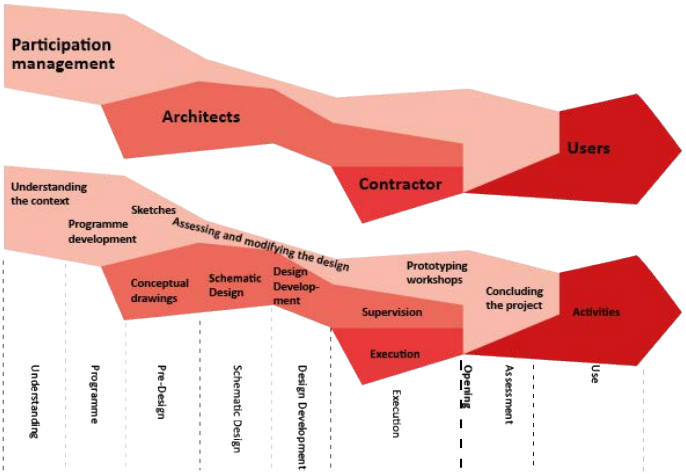
A project sequence involving all of the above aspects might comprise:
- Interviews, observations and reflections regarding needs and analysis. Sharing and discussing the knowledge and insights obtained.
- Presenting concept design and sharing/discussing these proposals
- Presenting almost finished drawings/designs and sharing/discussing these proposals. This results in three separate rounds of sharing results with the public and discussing that particular step.

One project – several meeting formats

For the Odense Courtyard project, we used a mixture of the two meeting/interview formats. We would often begin our day with an information meeting offering a brief account of where the process was at and the contents of that day's programme. We then forme small groups and worked with them individually. For the Folkets Park project, almost all meetings/interviews were done in small groups to promote deep, focused and thorough dialogue. When we held large-scale public meetings – advertised via social media, local press and posters – we mainly did so in order to reach the entire local community and to reach out to those who had not yet been involved.

STEP 3: THE DESIGN PHASE

When the time has come to transform the *needs* identified in the project into *solutions*, the architect does of course hold much of the responsibility. But let us make one thing absolutely clear: we do not believe in transitions where a project repeatedly changes hand time and time again. For example, a project may transition from citizen involvers to architects who in turn send it out for tender via the developer's consultants, ultimately ending up with a given contractor. We believe that the process must involve a number of people who remain involved throughout, ensuring that the deep understanding achieved during the participatory work permeates the entire process – right to the point where the builder makes the final adjustments to the final bench.



Roles throughout the process
A process diagram describing how the theme of participation permeates the entire project and how the architects are involved in most steps. In what follows we will present two real-life examples of how we transition user inputs from the participation phase to the design phase. Illustration by Spektrum Arkitekter/Kenneth Balfelt Team.

Design – on the spot

We – and the architects with whom we work – never do fully finished drawings in one go. We find that fully finished drawings impede dialogue and inspiration and are often too overwhelming for users to take in. Instead, during the initial design phase we deliberately work with incomplete sketches in order to render the design phase dynamic and relevant to users. Doing incomplete work and presenting it to the public can be quite daunting! But we have found that within a controlled setting, it yields high-quality inputs from users. They are given access to the engine room, and that trust is often repaid in the form of carefully considered, respectful input.

Spektrum Arkitekter and Kenneth Balfelt Team use sketches to discuss possible solutions for the Enghave Minipark project with users.

For the Enghave Minipark project, the first drawings shown to the users were sketches and loose outlines: 'we thought the bench might go here', 'the pergola could go in here', and 'if we can afford it, the toilets might look like this'. Things did not get any more detailed or accurate than this. More detail was gradually

added every time we discussed the plans with users.

The architects could then return to their office and continue their design work based on the inputs provided. This is to say that the architects deliberately presented 'incomplete' work that was then developed further in a process of ongoing interplay with the users – on site.

The next time we presented the drawings after the architects had re-worked them, the bench might be in a different loca-tion, the pergola may have been turned 45 degrees, and the toilet building might have a different design.

Folkets Park: from context analysis to sketches to finished drawings

The plans for Folkets Park were not complete until the stakeholder group had approved and understood all our design choices. The stakeholder group was where we engaged in focused sparring on the designs – the group was intimately familiar with and had con-tributed to the context analysis to which the design solutions responded.

We were able to adjourn the third stakeholder group meeting thirty minutes ahead of schedule: every participant understood and agreed with our decisions to prioritise some solutions and opt out of others on the basis of the preceding analyses and user needs.

We subsequently informed the local community of the results by presenting finished sketches via the local newspaper (see illustration) so that everyone knew about the current direction of the project and could ap-proach us to offer their critique, advice, proposals etc.

Before and after – sketches and end results sent out to everyone to align expectations.

Prototyping – local engagement

Thorough citizen participation in construction projects is an excellent way of getting a local community to 'rediscover' urban spaces that are mainly associated with negative aspects. For example, few used

Folkets Park in Nørrebro after a violent attack that took place in 2012. The park was worn-down and dull, serving mostly as a hangout for a group of homeless people and groups of young men with reputations for aggression. Educators even warned children and young people against entering the park.

As part of the design phase of the Folkets Park project, we arranged a series of participatory building projects that aimed at getting locals to engage in Folkets Park as well as to dismantle the feeling of being unsafe.

Prototyping and furniture workshops

Here, we and local residents jointly built a range of tables, benches and other wooden furniture. These workshops served a dual purpose: as a prototyping exercise exploring the need for further seating, and as a method for inviting the local community to build along.

Previously warned against using Folkets Park, school children were now invited to decorate the piers of the former bridge in splendid colours in a workshop arranged by artist Frederik L. Hesseldahl. *'We're doing this so that people will feel safe in this area,'* one of the young people related. At a subsequent event, the entire local community was allowed to take part in the development of the park when the companies Logik og Co. and Stenbroens Træpleje invited everyone to take part in rolling out 800 square metres of grass in the park one Sunday and to help plant bulbs. Eighty people from the local area – of all ages – took part.

Children and young people used to avoid Folkets Park in Nørrebro. It was dull and unsafe. Now they have helped create it.

STEP 4: CONSTRUCTION

User participation should not stop once the designs have been fully finished. What usually happens is that the owner/developer uses the finished designs to invite tenders, after which point a contractor is brought in to do the actual building and construction.

Let the locals do the building

But why not let the entire construction phase – or parts of it – be carried out by locals? Construction projects can make a real difference to the social wellbeing of entire areas and those who live in them. We find that unemployed participants in these projects grow professionally and as people: their confidence and sense of self-worth is boosted as they gradually acquire new skills and competencies that improve their chances of meeting the requirements of the labour market.

The construction firm Logik & CO., which joined Stenbroens Træpleje as the main contractor of Folkets Park, hired two local young people to take part in the construction project 'in order to give them a fresh start'.

For the locals, the effect of all this may be greater safety and a stronger sense of community. A number of examples of participatory construction from Enghave Minipark and Folkets Park demonstrate how they also support community building.

Bringing back forgotten skills – and discovering new ones

The construction phase of Enghave Minipark marked the return of many forgotten skills. One of the 'beer drinkers', who had previously worked with paving stones, but been out of the labour market for 23 years, took part in creating an artistic path. Another user carved the beams used for the pergola, adding Viking-style ornaments. Not only did the 'beer drinkers' rediscover old skills; they also made them visible to themselves and to the entire local community. After this project, this group of 'beer drinkers' were no longer just a group of self-destructive men on a bench, but a valuable resource: they had built something that benefited the entire community and themselves.

Construction projects can act as test processes for the unemployed, giving them a safe environment to test whether the construction business might be suitable for them.

Jan doing paving work and Michael carving wood in Enghave Minipark.

These initiatives also support what we might term 'internalisation'. The 'beer drinkers' have helped plan and make decisions about the project, they have sorted, handled and put in every paving stone, bolt, beam and brushstroke, and as a result the project has become part of them. Enghave Minipark has become a project that transcends the idea of 'ownership'. Enghave Minipark is not just a project for which they feel a sense of ownership. Enghave Minipark is theirs.

STEP 5: OPENING AND ACTUAL USE

From the openings of Folkets Park, attended by Lord Mayor Frank Jensen, and Enghave Minipark, with a speech by popular folk entertainer and filmmaker Erik Clausen. The entire local community were invited to both events. Young men, 'beer drinkers', families with children and all sorts of other people side by side at the same party.

Subjectification

Letting your urban space form the setting of festive events can be an excellent idea to mark the conclusion of a project – and can be beneficial afterwards too. These may consist of small-scale local celebrations or more substantial events such as demonstrations and Copenhagen's Distortion festival. Apart from the obvious purpose of such celebrations, they also serve to launch a positive, communal culture of usage of the new site, demonstrating how the entire city can use it in many different ways. Having had a pleasant experience in a given place makes us more favourably disposed towards that site – and, by extension, towards groups that usually make us uncomfortable. Seeing e.g. socially marginalised people or groups of young men attending the same event that we do introduces a process of subjectification between us, them and the site. Our own subject becomes part of the overall situation.

If a given site has been largely avoided due to a sense of anxiety and lack of safety, it can be beneficial to speak to various event makers throughout the process, calling attention to the fact that they can help re-establish a safe environment by staging events there. Urban renewal projects give them the opportunity to help them do this – and gives them a new venue for their events.

Subsequent adjustments

Once the ribbons have been cut, the mayor has left, the project is concluded and everyday life sets in again, you may well find that certain flaws and shortcomings turn up. Hence, we always allocate time and funds to returning to the area, speaking to people about the current state of affairs and inspecting what was built. If there is a need to make adjustments – and there almost always is – they can be done at this point. This also allows us to demonstrate that we take our responsibility seriously, ensuring that things end up the way that was agreed and promised. At times we find that even very small shortcomings can end up becoming the main narrative told about a specific place because no steps were taken to remedy the matter.
And then it's time to set out for new projects. Good luck.