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# Urban Empowerment: Cultures of Participation and Learning

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## Background

In the global competition for investments, many cities are hit by gentrification processes focused on developing certain areas, while leaving others in deprivation. This process is being reinforced by the weakening of the public sector. In Sweden, as in other European countries, in this context suburbs in the outskirts of the cities increasingly are considered a problem: they are often labelled as 'peripheral' and 'different' (Dahlstedt 2005) – and attributed a 'territorial stigma' (Wacquant 2003). This pilot project, however, do not focus on stigmatized suburbs as a problem but instead search for knowledge about possibilities with an increase of citizen participation in urban development processes. There are many reasons for choosing such a focus. One is that a large part of contemporary urban development is driven by various stakeholders in partnerships, where governments are not always a strong party. The so called right-to-the-city movements (Harvey 2006) have risen as a response to the situation of citizens' rights not being sufficiently taken advantage of in governance processes of urban planning and city management (Stewart & Taylor 1995). Another reason has been stressed by planners and designers maintaining that inhabitants' participation may enhance the quality of our cities and make them more human (Gehl et al. 2006) as well as help to develop new aesthetic ideals (Blundell Jones et al. 2005). In this chapter we will not come as far as focusing on aesthetics, but concentrate on why 'empowerment' (Andrews et al. 2006) may be considered to have great value in planning and management and why inhabitants are considered key actors in governance processes aimed at developing the city (Swyngedouw 2005; Faga 2006). This will be done by describing how we, with a participatory approach (Krogstrup 1997; Argyris & Schön 1995) worked with urban empowerment in a stigmatized suburb called Hammarkullen, situated in the northeastern part of Gothenburg.

## Focus, aim and issues

The overall aim of the pilot project was to develop capacity-building processes including citizens, directly linked to ongoing changes in the study area of Hammarkullen. Of particular importance for these changes were a) the establishment of a university centre

in the area, b) the implementation of a new city administration which gives more planning responsibilities to the districts, and c) a development project funded by the EU. The capacity-building processes we developed implied empowerment actions that help involved actors (inhabitants, practitioners, researchers, teachers, students, etc.) increase their common ability to contribute to change – both social and physical. The pilot project concentrated mainly on *one* type of actor to be included in the processes: *the citizens* and with citizens we meant all people living in the area and not only them having formal Swedish citizenship. The concrete result of the pilot project is the capacity-building processes per se. In parallel, we have analysed how the capacity-building processes have worked, and critically reflected on how such capacity-building processes may be implemented and supported.

The project aim has been two-folded. First, we wished to contribute to civic and institutional capacity-building in Hammarkullen. We have done that by:

- creating forms for citizen participation in urban development processes at various levels
- participating, supporting and developing fora for outreach and networking between stakeholders in the district, where inhabitants also participated as actors
- together with others, capturing and disseminating knowledge about participation in urban development processes

Second, we wanted the project to generate knowledge concerning the more general and theoretical level of citizen participation in urban development processes. We have done this by:

- documenting what happened in the participation processes
- describing how these processes affected citizens, as well as influenced internal processes and the organization of the municipality and higher education
- reflecting critically on methods and results
- relating this to previous practical experience and research

In an overall perspective, we have tried to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the 'cultures of participation and learning' in which inhabitants participate?
2. How can we contribute to the creation of such cultures in urban development processes?
3. What are the opportunities and difficulties associated with working in this way?
4. How can we tackle identified problems?

In the following we will present the process and its outcome, and at the same time discuss pros and cons with our working methods.

## The process

We have regarded empowerment as a process where the inhabitants of the city become co-actors in urban governance and development, i.e. that they become producers rather than only consumers of the urban fabric. Empowerment thus releases and redirects energy, and to a certain extent it can also be considered as a source of new energy. Our main challenge has been *how to release, redirect and create* such energy in reality and further *how to learn* from these processes we have been initiated and involved in.

The transdisciplinary approach inquired for a project group to consist of both practitioners and academics and the group composition has been a fundamental prerequisite for our work and results. The term 'practitioner' however became a problem for us, as we quite soon understood that we are all practitioners – it is just the *kind* of practice we are involved in in our daily working life that differs. We started to use 'professionals' but this was not a good substitute, as we are all considered to be professionals. However, this confusion of concepts is in itself a good sign for us, even if we have not yet found appropriate concepts for describing the members of the project group, as the confusion is a logic consequence of the transdisciplinary point of departure that all of us are knowledge producers, knowledge bearers, and knowledge users.

Consequently, a proper description of the project group would be to say it consisted of professionals, and by that we mean people having a paid employment related to the pilot project. The professional platforms represented in the project group have been the city office of Gothenburg (1 person); the social resource administration of Gothenburg (1 person); the city district administration of the area we worked in (1 person); the public property owner of the square we partly focused on (1 person); a private consultant (1 person); Gothenburg university (1 person); Chalmers university of technology (1 person). The professional roles represented in the project group were planning manager, property manager, area developer, architect/planner, landscape planner, teacher and researcher. One person was often attached to more than one of these affiliations and moreover the professional platforms and affiliation changed over time. This description of the project group may make you think that inhabitants were not part of the project group, however this was actually not the case because one of the employed lived in the actual area when the pilot project started, even if she did not act as a representative of her city district. These circumstances show the importance to further develop the concepts when working in transdisciplinary projects. For example if talking about 'professionals', we should probably also include inhabitants having non-paid engagements in the area of focus, and perhaps also inhabitants living in other districts as the city is our common interest. As formulated by the founder of an interesting transdisciplinary academic institute:

We redefined professionalism. Who is a professional? A professional is someone who has a combination of competence, confidence and belief (Bunker Roy, Barefoot College, Rajasthan, India, TED Talks 2011).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the entire film at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qqqVwM6bMM&feature=relmfu>

We now turn back to the basis of the project; we regard empowerment as a process that releases, redirects and creates energy and in this project the inhabitants are considered key actors in governance processes aimed at developing the city. The project group was formed to make it possible to both release, redirect and create that energy in reality and to learn from the process, which means that not only the represented professional platforms were important but also the personal skills. The professional platforms were important to consider since the idea was that the *city* should learn from the project and vice versa. The personal skills were important because we needed to develop a new way of working. For us, working transdisciplinary meant to start with ourselves. How could we, as a group, together form a process where joint knowledge production were in focus, but without suppressing each persons' professional knowledge? How could we avoid situations where academics 'take over' the knowledge production, claiming it is their table, or hide behind theoretical models and leaving the responsibility for finding solutions to professionals working for the municipality? How could we also avoid situations where professionals working for the municipality passively wait for researchers to come with the answers, for them to consume the academic knowledge? How could we also avoid being trapped in a constant fight about who's knowledge is 'the proper' knowledge?

Initially, our answer to these challenges in the project was the introduction of democratic meeting procedures. We had all experienced informal decision making and manipulative governing cultures. Lack of democratic routines and failures in their implementation are issues not only for academic institutions, but also for the realm of municipal administration. The tool we made use of for our meetings not only helped us to avoid undemocratic pitfalls in the beginning of the project but have been of use during the entire project period – not forget mentioning helping us through the final phase when the stress hit us and the academics easily could have acted as sitting on the 'truth box' when it comes to formulation of final results.

The tool was rather simple, containing a description of the different roles to alter (facilitator, time keeper, vibes watcher, power intervener, secretary, observer) in order to unburden the one person that often spontaneously and repetitively take the role of chairman – trying to embrace all these tasks. What also was a great help was to make a list of topics and divide the time available so that each topic was given reasonable amount of time. The usage of 'speaking rounds' and different kinds of workshops were also important parts of our working methods. The tool thus aims at increasing the democracy by giving voice to all participants in the group and we think that worked well for us. In the beginning we followed the model more strict and in the later part of the project we used it more as an informal support modell. We made the decisions together about how to act, even if not all of us were equally involved in the implementation of the project. We were also all involved in analysing the activities and coming to conclusions – as well as deciding the target groups and forms for presenting our results – even if not all of us were involved in carrying out the actual presentation work.

Already the outspoken aim to develop the work in democratic ways contributed to a culture of mutual respect and reflexivity. We also allocated quite a lot of time for our own socialization process throughout the project, to learn and understand each other's reference points and contexts. To our help we had a reference group with participants from different institutional platforms, with the aim to not only talk about project design

and results but also about how to spread knowledge and discuss implementation possibilities.

The activities we have carried out as part of the project are plenty and all of them cannot be described in such a short format as this. Still, we think it is important to give the reader the opportunity to grasp the complexity of the work. To show this, we made a picture (see figure 1) containing two things: the *capacity-building processes* we have been part of and the *actors* involved in or affected by the activities. One may see it as we with our activities created a kind of interspaces in-between the realms of the actors. We will in the following just describe two of the initiatives and through this description we invite the reader to join us in learning from some of the processes we have initiated and been involved in.

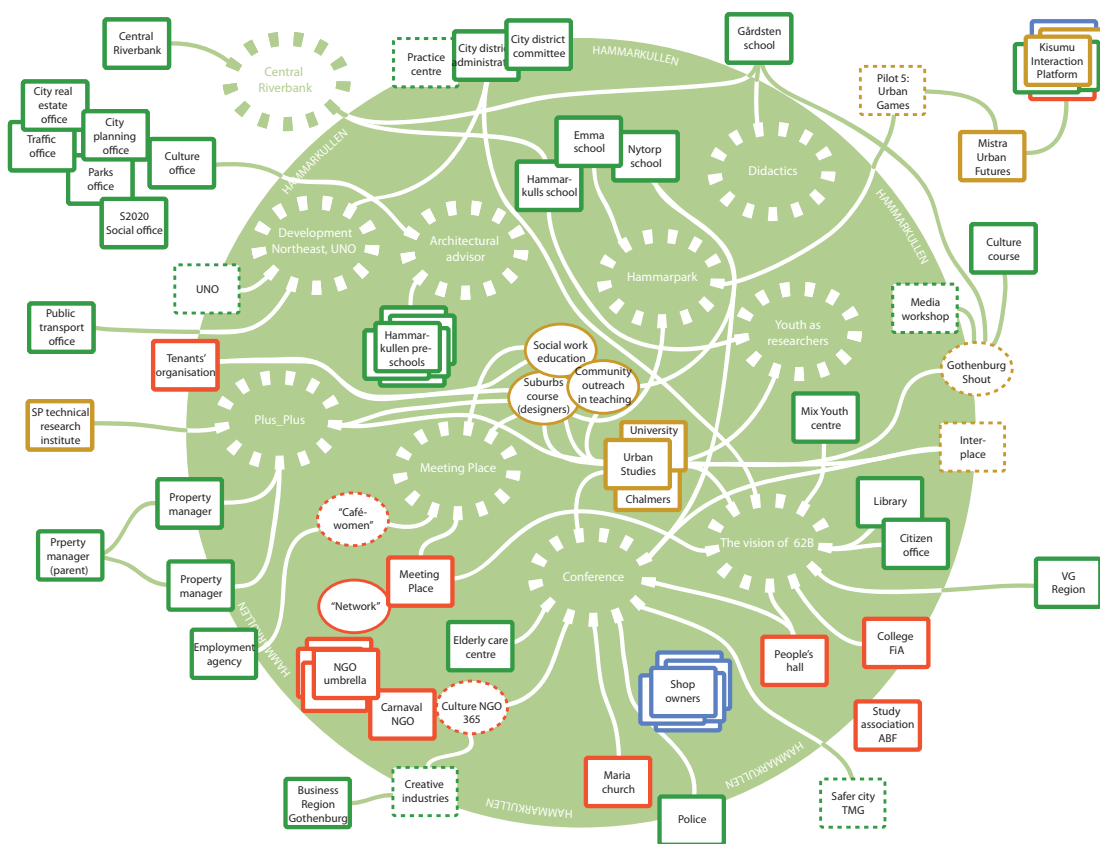


Figure 1: The ten capacity-building processes we have initiated or been part of and the actors involved in or affected by the activities.

## Hammarpark — workshops with Emma school

This part of the pilot project was initiated about one year before the actual workshops took place at Emma school, which is an elementary public school in Hammarkullen. The initiative was closely related to the newly started Centre for Urban Studies in Hammarkullen, and part of three different higher education courses at that centre: firstly, different bachelor courses in social work; secondly, a bachelor course in teaching

(Community outreach in teaching); and thirdly, a master course in architecture and planning (Suburbs—design & future challenges). The Centre for Urban Studies focus on developing knowledge in three areas in specific: widening participation; profession development; and the role of the citizens in urban change, and our strategy for working with that mission was to link between education, research and public outreach.

What we actually did was to make use of the students mentioned above as engines in the work we carried out in the pilot project. Based on the learning objectives of the different courses, the students were closely involved in the local context. Social work and teacher students e.g. made projects in the schools and in the social work sector and the design students worked with associations and companies. The main objective for the social work and teacher students was to learn more about the role of the two professions and develop knowledge and skills to challenge current working methods in order to strengthen citizens and the local community in their daily work. The main objective for the architect and other design students was to learn and practice how to involve citizens in design and planning, thus their tasks was to base their design proposals of certain areas in Hammarkullen on citizen dialogues. The task also included how to handle social aspects such as stigmatization, social exclusion, security and safety issues. One of the groups made a design proposal of Hammarpark which is a big public park in the area, situated next to the square where the only tram stop for the 8,000 inhabitants is placed – thus this was really an important spot to focus on for the inhabitants. The park, 40 years old, had not really been refurbished since this area was built in the 1960s and 70s, and therefore one of the local actors we involved, the public housing company, saw the opportunity to use the students' proposal for opening up a discussion about the park higher up in their company hierarchy.

As a result, the housing company decided to choose Hammarpark as one of two areas in Gothenburg where to design an 'event park' – which would attract children and parents from the entire city to come to this stigmatized area – and this was going to be realised quickly. The plan was to get it built within a year. Now we, the pilot project, initiated another activity to learn from and for the park to become something positive for the inhabitants in Hammarkullen: a series of workshops with school children in the ages of 6-12 years old (see figure 2). The reason why Emma school was involved in this work has to do with their tradition of community outreaching as part of their pedagogical work. This tradition, which was initiated by the teachers when the school started, has led to that they have many teachers considering our 'inreach' inquiries as possibilities for their pupils to learn, instead of considering them as an extra burden added to their already too demanding situation as teachers. We will come back to this pedagogy of Emma school later in this text.



Figure 2. Children from Emma school were involved in the process.

This part of the work we carried out together with our colleagues in another pilot project presented in this book, Urban Games, which was a group knowledgeable in didactic tools for communication. They wanted to test some of their tools, and we wanted to learn how the kind of tools they developed could be used as part of urban empowerment processes including citizens. We learnt several things from these workshops. One lesson was about the choice of tool for different age groups, where we easily could conclude that construction of board games was a great tool for communication on urban planning with children in the ages of 6-9, very well adapted to their impulsive creative capacity (see figure 3). At the ages of 10-12, on the other hand, electronic games would have been preferred, as these children seemed much more cautious to freely express their creativity and therefore needed something that would really catch their attention – e.g. computer-like games. Another lesson was about outcome, as it in our pilot project on urban empowerment was considered that the games were tools not only for creativity in itself, but also to be part of an urban planning process. Here, again, the smaller children stood out as very creative in a special way, which we believe had to do with two things that will be discussed below.





Figure 3. Construction of board games was an attractive way of working for children in the ages of 10-12.

One reason was mentioned above: if the tool had been electronic for the elderly it would perhaps have captured their attention better and freed their creativity more. Now they did not really succeed in using the game as a tool for urban planning. The other reason has to do with external causes in combination with the skills of the teachers – thus their personal capability of transforming problems into triggers for learning. The external cause was a phone call from the public housing company the day before the workshops were going to start: they told that the event park in Hammarkullen was *not* going to be built, because they were just told that a new European Union adapted law, three months old, forbid all Swedish public housing company to make investments that are not businesslike. Thus, they could only motivate refurbishing the park, if it really would show that it could increase the rents. And rising rents in housing areas like Hammarkullen, where many of the poor people in Sweden live, was not in question at all. Moreover, the current land was actually not even owned by the housing company, but by the park and nature administration of the city.

The teachers involved in the workshops at Emma school that day reacted in different ways. All of them got angry of course. And some immediately dropped the idea of working with Hammarpark as a case, and chose other objects in Hammarkullen (which our pilot project were also involved in so this was not a problem for us). Some teachers, however, chose to continue working with the park that day. This was the teachers of the smaller kids and they had had Hammarpark as a theme in focus for quite some time, making interviews with their parents about how the park was earlier (it had goats, lambs, hens and pigs) and how the parents wanted the park to develop. The kids had been to the park at school hour, looking at it and talking about it, and they had been visiting other parks in Gothenburg to be inspired by others. We had also before that day been involved in a workshop with them where they went out in the woods and collected



material for their board game. When the teacher told the kids the sad news from the housing company, she also said: 'but we will do the park anyway, won't we?' This was approved. So they built the model during that day, formed as a board game, a fantastic creation and to a great extent also feasible (see figure 4).



Figure 4. The urban games workshop was turned into a proposed design layout for the park.

After that workshop day it was quiet for a week or two from Emma school, but we expected lots of criticism to come sooner or later. Instead, one teacher called and told us that they decided to make a manifestation. They were going to march all the way from the school to the Peoples hall (Folkets hus) at the square and they expected us to be there (see figure 5). They also had invited the public housing company to the meeting. They came – one of the local staff and one from the city centre, the man responsible for green spaces in the company. The hall was filled with about a hundred kids and the model of Hammarpark was handed over to the housing company representative together with documents showing the results of their creative process. After that, the children raised many questions to the employees (see figure 6). They really wanted to understand the reasons for stopping the project, and they also asked over and over again: *when* is the park going to be built? The straight answer they got was 'probably we cannot do it all, but we will try, and if we succeed it will take several years from now, perhaps 4-5 years before you can use it'. The people from the housing company promised to bring the model into town and place it just outside of the board room. We were afterwards told by some teachers that the kids actually were pleased with that answer, they felt they were taken seriously and could walk on. And the teachers themselves told us that they were also pleased, because the children obviously had learnt so much about decision-making, laws and democracy.



Figure 5. The children marched all the way from the school to the Peoples hall where the model of Hammarpark was handed over to the housing company.

This is not a sunshine story. We would never belittle the deep disappointment most pupils and teachers felt when the negative news about Hammarpark showed up the same day the workshop started. Of course, it would have been much better if the reconstruction of the park within a couple of months would have been out on procurement and built before next summer, which was the plan. Instead of being there unattended, like a barrier between the square and the homes. However, the pilot project need to learn from negative experiences as well, and they have actually often been more telling than our positive experiences. We have after this experiences been occupied with the question of *how* the involved teachers – as part of their ordinary professional work – could turn their disappointment into a learning experience. What was it they had, as individuals and as an organisation, that gave them the capability of handling uncertain and rapidly changing processes such as this?





Figure 6. The children raised many questions to the employees from the housing company, they really wanted to understand the reasons for stopping the project.

Here we take a break from the case description and turn to the 1<sup>st</sup> of the four questions we are going to answer in the pilot project: *What are the characteristics of the 'cultures of participation and learning' in which inhabitants participate?* This question may perhaps be understood as describing cultures of participation and learning as something normatively 'good' but our interest has not really been to position ourselves in that way. As is hopefully obvious above, participation and learning can be considered both as positive and negative at the same time, depending on what perspective you have. However, we still of course want to search for the answer of that question. When discussing our analysis of all our different activities, we came with this answer of that question:

It is *creative*, it is a process facilitating creation. This means there is *trust* between the participants, thus they experience the process being *respectful*, *permissive* and in some way *warm*. One dares to try, failure is allowed. At the same time, in parallel to this feeling of *freedom*, there is *structure* in the sense that the process is in some way *democratic*, there are discussed *game rules* for how the participants communicate and decisions are made. The process is *transparent*. The agenda is discussed and known, it is obvious who owns the process, it is possible to follow it and it comes *feedback* to the participants about what happens and on decision-making. These things are building trust, not only between the participants but also between them inside and outside of the process. To achieve trust, *time* is important to consider: time in the beginning for getting to know each other; time to discuss agenda and game rules; time in the end for, in a respectful way, presenting the results and spread knowledge, within the group and towards the outside. Who has the right to allocate time? This is the one who has the most power – time is thus a use of force. Time is also considered when thinking of

participators having unequal conditions for meetings, when for example civil servants may be involved in working hours and inhabitants spend their leisure time. *Mix* is another concept to consider, regarding the mix of actors involved (inhabitants, civil servants researchers, teachers, students etc), or the mix of sex, ethnicity, age, class, income, type of housing, residential location, workplace, etc. Perhaps the most important experience was that such processes are *reflective*. It holds various elements where critical reflection is important and all participants are considered as knowledge bearers in this reflective process. Being reflective also means that *conflict* is considered as an opportunity for learning rather than as a problem to avoid. The process exposes these '*triggers*' and facilitates learning from them. Thus, the aim is not consensus. Last but not least, such processes also hold '*celebration*' of different stages of the process, as this is essential when striving for a creative environment where trust can be developed. It can also be a way to *give back* something to the involved, which is essential in terms of trust.

Now we turn to the other case description, where it will probably be more clear what these concepts may mean in reality and further develop the answers of our 2<sup>nd</sup> question: *How can we contribute to the creation of such cultures in urban development processes?*

## **The Meetingplace – workshop with the Café women**

The next case was also a prolonged and infinite process. Also here we used higher education students as engines and it has been interesting to see – which to some extent answer the 2<sup>nd</sup> question above – that this way of integrating education, research and public outreach seem to be quite successful. It has also worked as a transfer of taxpayer resources and institutional power to areas that are normally bypassed when institutional power is placed in city centres. When the Suburbs course with architects and other design students were going to have a lecture and workshop organised by an invited South African architect, skilled in managing codesigning with citizens in poor areas in Capetown, our pilot project also invited some inhabitants in Hammarkullen to be part of the workshop. The people invited were two different but to some extent already related groups: one wanted to start a meeting place at the square; the other wanted to start a restaurant or café at the square – and they were interested in the same vacant building situated in Hammarpark at one corner of the square. The first mentioned group consisted of one part of a protest movement, which had started some years earlier to fight cutdowns in the area. The meeting place people were still part of that network and its struggles for Hammarkullen, but they also wanted to focus on something positive and therefore wanted to start the Meetingplace. The Café women came on board on a request from one of the social workers in the city district administration, as the women for a year had been involved in a catering course as a labour market arrangement and were very skilled in cooking (see figure 7). Both groups were mixed considering ethnic backgrounds and ages but with the difference that the Meeting place people more often had jobs and spoke Swedish well, several of them were born in Sweden, and there were also men in that group, while the Café women were all born abroad, they were all unemployed and several of them did not speak Swedish so well.



Figure 7. The pilot project carried out a workshop lead by a South African architect where ten women involved in a catering course as a labour market arrangement took part.

What the South African architect brought to the groups was the same skills as the Urban Games people described above: didactics. She started with the students (design and teacher students mainly but also some social work students) and during one day first talked about how she and her staff worked with codesign in poor areas and how they also raised fund and organised the construction – with local unemployed staff as involved professionals – in order to get the inhabitants’ ideas built. She then described some examples of communicative tools they used and the students then tried the tools out – it was about how to build trust, creativity and in a short while come to an end with a joint design proposal. The next day the two groups of inhabitants joined the workshop and they were all split into five groups for carrying out the workshop. During that day the students acted as assistants in codesigning; the teacher and social work students in each group took the role of translators and the architect students of shapers – of the ideas of the ten women (see figure 8). The translation the teacher and social work students did was however not mainly about ethnic languages, but about helping the designers to understand what the Café women wanted with the building in focus, and vice versa, as they soon found out that architects and inhabitants obviously do not speak the same language when trying to communicate on the physical environment (see figure 9). What the students brought to the workshop was the skills they learned in their courses respectively, in supporting cultures of participation and learning. We will come back several times to the concept cultures of participation and learning later in this text. The Meeting place people chose to take a quite passive role during the workshop, even if they also took part in the shaping process. This was partly the result of the South African workshop leader stressing democratic aspects and focusing on what the ten Café women wanted to do. She obviously quite quickly understood that the Meeting place people had a stronger position in the society and she had tools for handling such internal power



aspects. The Meetingplace people – by taking a step back – contributed in a most sensitive way to this shift in focus for the workshop. The final result of the workshop was five built models of how the actual building at the square could be refurbished in order to fit for a café and a meetingplace (see figure 10).



Figure 8. The students acted as assistants in codesigning; the teacher and social work students in each group took the role of translators and the architect students of shapers – of the ideas of the ten women.

We cannot describe the whole following process in this short format but it went on and is still ongoing when this text is written. The Meetingplace people and the Café women got the key to the building (owned by the municipality and managed by the city district administration) about half a year after the workshop and there they have initiated lots of activities that attract many people. The house thus have become a wide and open meetingplace for all inhabitants and not a house for associations to borrow when wanting to carry out activities directed towards their members only – this was an important goal for the Meetingplace people as they wanted the building to increase integration between certain groups locally, but also develop it into a strong voice in the entire *city*, combating the stigma of Hammarkullen. However, to become such a house which is not just a place where people can rent or borrow premises, it also needs to have present ‘culture bearers’ there most of the time, facilitating for the cultures of participation and learning mentioned earlier to develop. The economy for the Meetingplace is not yet solved, the inhabitants work voluntary and the manager is paid with a labour market arrangement, which is a very weak construction in the long run. Moreover, the rent has to be paid sooner or later.



Figure 9. Architects and inhabitants obviously do not always speak the same language when trying to communicate on the physical environment.

Many of the Café women are still involved in the Meetingplace but their café idea did not go as expected. When inhabitants become co-actors in urban governance and development, they also become producers rather than mere consumers of the urban fabric. Empowerment thus releases and redirects energy, and to a certain extent it can also be considered a source of new energy. What the actions of the social worker that supported the women gave to the them, was time to learn some skills they lacked. Thus, he made it possible for them, while on welfare, to get training in catering, business economy and health issues. Additionally, this training was organized so as to empower them as a team, which was why he had decided to take part in the workshop with the design students in the first place. In this way, he also enabled the social work and teaching students to be part of the learning process – which was very much in line with the learning objectives for their courses.

However, the empowerment process not only gave the women the strength to fight for their idea to start a café, but it also got them involved in a process of putting pressure on the city district administration to change their notions of how they could support this kind of local empowerment project. In doing so, the women put the social worker in a complicated situation because his administration claimed that the competition law forbids the women from testing their ability to run a business on municipal premises, as this would give them an unfair advantage over the other two entrepreneurs selling lunches at the square. Obviously, the existing societal support therefore failed to help these ten women turn unemployment into self-sufficiency. Why did this happen? In our



experience, this is partly related to organizational learning (Argyris and Schön 1995), thus to how organizations learn from the employees, and vice versa. The social worker in charge is not part of an organization that has learnt. It has, as an organization, not found a way forward that falls within the boundaries of the competition law. The social worker, however, had quite a lot of 'negative capability' and found another way forward: the women will now start a cooperative café in the premises of a learning centre in the city centre instead. This solution is of course very satisfactory for the women, but unfortunately the suburban residents and employees lose the chance to eat the wonderful food they produce.



Figure 10. The final result of the workshop was five built models of how the actual building at the square could be refurbished in order to fit for a café and a meetingplace

Our challenge in the pilot project – which is part of answering our 3<sup>rd</sup> question: *What are the opportunities and difficulties associated with working in this way?* – has been to discuss this kind of catch-22-situations, within the project group and with related actors. As the project group consisted of people from all the different professional platforms described above, several with a clear stake in this kind of cases, the discussions have often been intense. It has been obvious that problems such as these are not easy to solve within the existing systems. One strategy of the city district administration has, as mentioned above, been to involve a company skilled in the field of social economy – we do not yet know where this will end. One contribution of the pilot project has been to continue working with higher education students as engine by welcoming a new course to cooperate with the Meeting place and the Café women; a master course combining business and design run by the School of Business, Economics and Law and the School of Design and Crafts. Also this is an ongoing activity.

These were two cases we learnt from in the pilot project. One thing they, and several of the other interesting cases, had in common was the focus on *didactics*. This is a broadly

used concept and therefore a clarification of how we have understood it may be important to present. For us didactics is all factors influencing the learning and its contents, thus it not only amalgamates social and physical aspects but has also a strong focus on *process*. Didactics may therefore be considered as one of the answers to the 4<sup>th</sup> question we have focused on in this pilot project: *How can we tackle identified problems?* Didactics is for us a thorough and well-considered plan of how to combine certain tools into a tool box suitable for the kind of task one is set to carry out in a special moment. Didactics has proven to be a central aspect to consider when facilitating for cultures of participation and learning to develop.

## Where are we heading?

Although the two presented cases have taken place in Hammarkullen, they have been related also to a wider context. As was described above, the Emma workshops e.g. communicated with the board of the public housing company, and the Meetingplace with the Café women challenged existing municipal systems for support of citizen initiatives and movements. The activities and the learnings in the pilot project have also been important for Gothenburg as a whole, because of an administrative change implemented in January 2011 when the 21 city districts in the city became 10. When this change was carried out they simultaneously modified the regulations for the city district committees and gave the districts a quite extensive responsibility for citizen participation in urban design processes – thus a decentralization of the responsibility for citizen participation concerning the physical environment in the city has been implemented:

4 § The district committees shall act to strengthen all citizens' participation and engagement that reinforce and prepare for a locally positive societal development, and have the respect for the equal value of all human beings as point of departure [...] and, in particular, aim to influence the design of new and old housing areas (quote from the proposed new regulation for Gothenburg's ten city districts).

Also in the written budget document for Gothenburg this strong focus on citizen participation is stressed:

Urban planning should be an inclusive process facilitating for participation and provide opportunities for influence. The citizens' influence in urban planning will be strengthened in Gothenburg (quote from the budget 2011 and 2012).

Thus, this focus is not only important for the city district, but for all municipal committees and boards – these goals are also followed-up once a year. One could regard this as the participatory approach in the Agenda 21 document now finally reached the most local level, after being processed in the municipality for two decades. In parallel to this very interesting process which will now bear fruit in the districts, the city managed to get EU-funding 2011-2013 from the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) for a project called City Development in the Northeast (13 million euro) and to carry out the project they started a public company called Development Northeast AB (Utveckling nordost UNO). UNO focus a lot on citizen dialogue as base for their actions and is closely related to the new regulation for districts. UNO's activities are mainly in other parts of northeast but, as a result of

cooperation with the pilot project, they also focus on two places in Hammarkullen: an exhibition hall in the tram stop and some sort of covered meeting place at the square. The city district will also, as part of UNO, employ a person for facilitating the process of transferring knowledge about citizen participation from the pilot project to the city district committee and administration of Angered.

Another very interesting process related to the pilot project is the activities of the Central Riverbank City (Centrala Älvstaden). This project 2011-2012 was initiated by the city council to develop visions of the huge area of former harbour areas in the city centre. One of their strategies has been to work with civil dialogues and one type of such dialogue was to work with one school in every city district and an eleventh schools, Hammarkullsskolan, will be in charge for putting all the visions together – with help from the design and teacher students mentioned above. One of the tools in use has been to make a boat tour on the river, and with help from an urban game learn about the historical background of the harbour areas. The result of the entire work with the schools will be an electronic exhibition with the visions. Our role was to act as link between Central Riverbank City and the schools in Angered, and to reflect on and learn from their working methods. Based on these experiences, the pilot project proposed the Central Riverbank City staff to further develop their tool box and making it function for involving pupils in primary schools on a regular basis (one per district, every year, as part of their school work) in proposing a design for a certain and current (real) planning task. The tool box could also be developed to include interested colleges, high schools and associations to be part of such a design process on a regular basis.

So where have this knowledge lead us? If putting these experiences together, what does it mean? This linking of levels have lead us to start discussing the relationship between such capacity-building processes including citizens we have been involved in, and societal changes in an overall perspective – both changes on municipal level as described above on democracy but also world wide societal changes such as globalization and climate change and its impact on stigmatized suburbs such as Hammarkullen. Geography as the focal point around which nations can plan for the future, in confidence that stability is a force to be counted on, is gone. Capital, human resources, business, information, and more and more bacteria move freely across the world. Urbanization has the consequence of more and more people moving to the bigger cities. Cities become goods at the global market scene and compete to be the most creative, most interesting to place companies in and the best prospective tourist city. The society is facing constraints and challenges that are new and this puts pressure on institutional capability, as the institutions were not originally organised to handle complex and rapidly changing problems but instead was stability the base. Rapid changes in governance have had considerable influence locally. An example is how the possibility of starting independent schools quickly changed the prerequisites in everyday life for people. This is why this pilot project took an interest in understanding more about the capacity of the *institutions* to meet the kind of challenges we face. How prepared are representatives from the welfare state to be involved in capacity-building processes including citizens? How prepared are they to learn from such processes? How can a learning process be supported where institutions that have already started to develop such skills can share their experiences with others?

As was told earlier, one of the institutions we have collaborated with was very easy to approach: Emma school. Other schools sometimes declined our inquiries and teachers explained that, although being very interested themselves, they thought it was hard to find the time for collaboration because of the strong pressure they felt to focus on the pupils' factual knowledge and grades. At Emma school, not only the principal welcomed our proposals but many teachers spontaneously did it too and as described above the capability of using our offers for capacity-building in their own mission was high – they seemed to already gone through a kind of a change to meet the society we face, and to some extent already have in suburbs such as Hammarkullen.

When discussing this change they seemed to have gone through – which obviously contained both social and physical aspects – we found reason to give it labels such as *reshaping, remoulding, re-formation, re-creation*, but perhaps the best English word would be to call it *transformation* (in Swedish: *omgestaltning*), which may then be considered as the social counterpart to the generally accepted environmental concept *adjustment* or *transition* (*omställning*). With this concept of institutional transformation in mind, we continued trying to understand more: What would it mean if other institutions initiated or continued to go through such a transformation? For example other parts of the city district administration than schools? The social services office? The civic office? The public housing companies? The city management administration? The social recourse office? The city planning office? The city real estate office? Or the Centre for Urban Studies, and Chalmers and the University of Gothenburg? The approximately 50 associations in Hammarkullen? The 150 private companies? As all these actors, and many more, are potential partners in codesigning the future society in this direction we labelled *transformation*.

Interestingly, our focus on Hammarkullen have revealed that there is a critical number of people, associations, organisations, institutions, and an academic centre, that has gone through, or is about to go through, the kind of transformation described above. However, this changing reorganisation of institutions coexist with structures based on other ideas. What we hope to contribute to, is inspiring an active process of putting more words to this transformation process and a more systematic reflexion about it.

## Reflections

In this final part of the chapter, we want to deepen our reflections about how the joint production of knowledge has led to our results and if/how this way of working – and the results – have affected us as belonging to different institutional platforms. Perhaps this way of working may be described as shaping an ‘interspace’ (Forsén & Fryk 1999) or ‘interplace’ (Stenberg 2004) inbetween our professional domiciles: the city office of Gothenburg; the social resource administration of Gothenburg; the city district administration of the area we worked in; the public property owner of the square we partly focused; the private consultants; Gothenburg University; Chalmers; and the Centre for Urban Studies in Hammarkullen. An interspace or interplace where listening, curiosity, respect, confidence building and ‘negative capability’ (ability to act in uncertainty and chaos, Dewey 1934) aimed to be prevailing. What have we learnt from working in this way? And have this knowledge influenced our professional domiciles in any way?

Before that we would however like to further comment the importance of focusing on the constellation of group members. We have mentioned our different professional roles and we obviously have a variation in experiences of knowledge production on a conceptual level. This demanded from each of us to be genuinely interested in each other’s perspectives and taking a great interest in learning from the other person’s experiences and knowledge. This was something that did not come naturally and there were several situations when one or two of us lost ourselves in fighting for our own truth. We would like to point out three levels of responsibility which have been a great help to bear in mind. As long as at least one or two in the group could keep the three levels in mind, there was a great chance to recover the climate of curiosity and trust which is significant for cultures of participation and learning.

The first level of responsibility is in relation to oneself and has to do with the willingness to stand up for once own ideas, thoughts and emotions. This level is most often the easiest, as most people want to stress their own point of view – even if not all people are skilled in expressing it clearly. The second level has to do with the awareness that we are creating each other in a dialog – we are relational. As a result of this awareness, each person has to give his or her view in a way that gives the other person a chance to be a good listener. A good listener opens herself or himself up to feel moved or to be unsettled by the information. In many situations we just listen to get help to sharpen our own already established arguments, but here we are talking about collective knowledge production. The listener has the same responsibility as the speaker to show interest and take responsibility for the social construction of the other. This second level of responsibility we call the relationship level.

The third level is each person’s awareness of what kind of culture is being produced by the way we are interacting. The introduction of democratic meeting procedures mentioned earlier, where we altered the different roles to help our interaction, had the ambition to give support to this third level. Conflict has obviously been part of the democratic process, and so have strong emotions, which have focused the awareness of these three levels of responsibility as important for the selfreflection of the group. If

returning to the concept cultures of participation and learning, it is interacting members, and physical structures, that manage to create that kind of cultures which shapes and carries the structures enabling energy to make sense in development processes. This is the birthplace of interspace or interplace.

When discussing in the project group what we had learnt from the project, and if this had effected also our professional institutional platforms, we very much agreed that we as professional individuals learnt very much from the project and we to some extent also experienced that our professional institutional platforms respectively had been influenced as a result of this learning process. Most obvious was the development of a common language: the conceptualisation of our learnings made it necessary for us to talk and learn from each other. Now we can communicate! As part of that work we got insights about each other's perspectives, e.g. the prerequisites and constraints each professional platform normally restricted each person's working tasks. How should we handle that kind of limitations, in the interspace or interplace the pilot project had shaped for us? The project was not a traditional research project, neither was it an ordinary development project initiated by the municipality. What was it then? How 'free' could each of us feel from our institutional constraints when producing knowledge together?

These questions came back on our agenda several times, but in different shapes. In the beginning of the project we actually initiated to formulate common 'ethical rules' to relate to, but as the project went on we realised these problems were far to complex to be put on paper on such a short time frame. However, in the end of the project the question came back, but again in another shape, when we realised that, even if the project was not considered to be a traditional research project, we were still expected to afterwards produce traditional academic articles based on the knowledge we produced. For professionals with an academic degree this is naturally not a problem in itself – if working as professionals at universities they need to carry out this kind of work for their career to proceed and of course they very often also enjoy it – but for the project group this kind of external demands made us confused. After producing knowledge together, did we all feel comfortable with such an ending of the project? How should the didactics for this part of the work be formed?

Now afterwards, we have a slightly changed view on this problem. We rather regard these outcomes as *products* and we do not in the same way as earlier consider them as production of knowledge in themselves – even if one of course cannot do anything without learning from it. But we realised that professionals employed in the municipality will also produce different kinds of products in their everyday working life, that will be partly based on the knowledge production in the pilot project. It will e.g. perhaps take place in the written and orally presented yearly follow-ups of the budget, and maybe in next revision of the business plans of one of the public real estate owners – activities where neither all participants of the pilot project will be involved. Even this kind of activities should be highlighted and regarded as outcomes of the pilot project – and we still do not know which these activities will be, but we do have reason to believe there are going to be plenty of them. And this is important – because this shows the relationship the pilot project has to reality.

# Deliverables

## Capacity-building processes per se

- Hammarpark as a democracy project
- The Meetingsplace – a capacity-building process
- Development Northeast UNO in dialogue with the inhabitants
- 62B: the vision for 'a house of people, culture and learning'
- Central Riverbank: a matter for the whole city
- Architectural adviser meeting preschool children
- Research as youth summer jobs – a film about Angered
- PLUS\_PLUS house: energy and social aspects meet
- Capacity-building in a secondary public school
- Conference: From integration to urban planning

## Implementation

### Artefacts:

- Exhibition hall in the tram stop in Hammarkullen, to be completed in 2013.
- Covered meeting place at the square in Hammarkullen, to be completed in 2013.
- Possibly (not yet decided) printing of 'urban empowerment playing cards' containing a dictionary for 52 concepts related to capacity-building processes including citizens.

### Impact:

- Employment at the city district of Angered, as part of UNO 2012-2013, of a person on half-time for facilitating the process of transferring knowledge about citizen participation from the Mistra Urban Futures pilot project to the staff of city district of Angered.
- Proposed formulation of advertisement or work description for the above mentioned employment.
- The pilot project mentioned as one important knowledge resource in the follow-up of the budget 2011, considering the goal to strengthen citizens' influence in urban planning in Gothenburg.

## Web page

- [www.urbanempower.se](http://www.urbanempower.se) in Swedish, with the headlines *home, film, about, results, contact, method, done, concepts, presentations, conferences, literature tips, publications*. The web page will be translated to English and possibly (not yet decided) to the seven most common languages in Sweden.

## Conference

- *Från integration till samhällsbyggande* (From integration to urban planning), Conference with 110 participants, Folkets Hus, Hammarkullen Oct 20-21, 2011.



## Publications

- *Urban Empowerment: Cultures of participation and learning*. Authors: Jenny Stenberg et. al. Book chapter in anthology published 2012 by Mistra Urban Futures.
- *Urban empowerment through community outreach in teaching and design*<sup>2</sup>. Authors: Jenny Stenberg and Lasse Fryk. Peer-reviewed academic article presented at the 4th World Conference on Educational Sciences in Barcelona, February 2-5 2012 and after that and published in *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Journal* (ISSN: 1877-0428).

## Applications

- *The interplay between citizen initiatives and invited participation in urban planning: An interaction research project*. Project application to Formas 2010-04-08, for a project 2011-2013 of 630.000 euro. The application was approved. Project leader: Jenny Stenberg.
- *City Development in the Northeast*. Application to the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (Tillväxtverket) for a project 2011-2013 of 13 million euro. The application, made by the municipality, was approved.
- *Capacity-building including citizens – linking soft and hard issues in urban development processes*. Project proposal to Mistra Urban Futures 2011-04-29 for a project 2012-2015.
- *Urban Empowerment—Citizens Participation in Housing Design: Cross learning between IP Gothenburg and IP Kisumu*. Project proposal to Mistra Urban Futures 2011-04-29 for a project 2012-2015.
- *PLUS\_PLUS: Plusenergy buildings for plus-social living environments*. Project proposal to Mistra Urban Futures 2011-04-29 and in 2012 application to the FP7 Cooperation Work Programme under the topic 'EEB.ENERGY.2012.8.8.3: Demonstration of nearly Zero Energy Building Renovation for cities and districts'.
- *Urban Games 2.0: Transdisciplinarity as action!* Project proposal to Mistra Urban Futures 2011-04-29.
- *Translation and Replication of Sustainable Urban Development Best Practices Between Different Local Settings*. Project proposal to Mistra Urban Futures 2011-04-29.

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<sup>2</sup> Abstract: At the newly started Centre for Urban Studies in a stigmatized suburb of Gothenburg, the academic fields of teaching, social work and architecture are collaborating with the local community. This cooperation is part of the Centre's mission, which is to work with widening participation in higher education, developing professions, and focusing on the role of citizens in urban design. The collaboration is also part of the research project Urban Empowerment funded by Mistra Urban Futures. The present paper will discuss the potential of working with urban empowerment by using students as engines – linking education, research and community outreach – and reflect on the accompanying problems and possibilities.

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