HANDLING INNOVATIVE TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES IN PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Design of environment is one example from which debates can emerge. Such public debates can influence public opinions and subsequently influence political debates and bureaucratic processes. Studies have shown that there is more difficulty achieving successful radical innovations if organisations have entrenched structures and bureaucratic processes. Design debates that influence bureaucratic processes are important to discuss in general, and in design education especially, because they can tell us something about how visual expressions are read and what kind of impact they have. Therefore, the present study investigated ways to overcome bureaucratic and commercial resistance to implementing visual changes in public spaces. To explore these processes and gain a deeper understanding of the different ways to deal with a range of opinions, a case study method was used involving participants from different types of organisations and fields of interest. The empirical data was gathered from the design of a public memorial project that created a fierce debate in Norway and even abroad, called *Smash Nazism*, a monument of a resistance group acting during World War II. The conclusion of the study explains how a confrontational process was handled in the permanent change of a public space and how aspects of such transformation process can be linked to radical innovation. This is essential knowledge in design education preparing students for how visual transformation processes can contribute to corporate social responsibility.

Keywords: Radical innovation, creative industries, public art, design of public space.

1 INTRODUCTION: VISUAL ENVIRONMENT IN PUBLIC SPACE

Creating a visual environment is one scenario in which debates can emerge. Although little debate emerges from the idea that people feel continuously bombarded by visual images with commercial content in the public domain, visual art installations in public spaces often create major debates and engagement. Although shopping centres and hotels are examples of visual environment that often is designed for a pleasing appeal, this style has also been criticised from being too much designed, with little authenticity left [1]. Therefore it is worthy to look to processes where the result is not only pleasing, but where conflicts and debate can occur in the process that lead to new and radical solutions.

2 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURES FOR RADICAL INNOVATION

A recent study by Green and Cluley, researchers in sociology and product development, explored the ways in which people make sense of organisational cultures for radical innovation [2].

2.1 Leadership in handling shifting views on an organisation

Green and Cluley claim that, through good teamwork, individual roles in various organisations can facilitate innovation by changing the understanding of what a product, service, or technology can be. Therefore, an organisation's structure should be organic and dynamic; that is, the people who administrate the organisation should be able to shift their understanding according to the meaning of a product, even in terms of radical innovations. The entrepreneurs in digital design in Green and Cluley's study created a radically innovative product and succeeded by gradually shifting from working with the product itself to becoming managers. Consequently, the attitudes of the other employees towards their leaders changed. Green and Cluley used the concept of field theory developed by the sociologist Bordieu [3], which describes the social segments that people belong to

and how they influence and structure the experiences that people have. Green and Cluley's contribution to knowledge building introduces dynamics to radical innovation through a longitudinal study that explains the dynamic relationship between managers and employees after a radical innovation [2]. They claim that it is difficult to achieve successful radical innovations if organisations have entrenched structures and bureaucratic processes with little room for reflection on the meaning of a product or service provided by the organisation. Therefore, the ability to openly see a product from a new perspective or from a radically different approach seems to be necessary to provide innovative solutions collaboratively.

2.2 Democratic versus authoritarian leadership

A pedagogical example of the ways in which new products can be developed through various types of leadership that include debate and discussion was shown by Lewin [4]. He demonstrated how experiments can be conducted in social spaces, and he established action research as a research approach for system change [4]. System change is also a type of innovation according to social anthropologist Barnett [5]. The ideology of participatory research, rather than objective observation, has been an established ideological standpoint in action research since Lewin's social and pedagogical experiments in the classroom conducted in pre-war Germany [4]. He divided a class into two groups, both of which were instructed to create masks. The first group was allowed to suggest ways to make masks, and they were also able to influence how long they had to make their masks. The decisions of the first group were transferred directly to the second group without dialogue. In the experiment, Lewin compared the level of conflict in the groups by counting each incident of conflict. In the decision-making group, there were few records of conflicts, while the second group had significantly more conflicts.

From this seemingly simple social experiment, Lewin developed a discussion on democratic governance versus authoritarian leadership. Discussions of how the democratic system might be more favourable than a more authoritarian system were sparked using the example of the United States as a more democratic government than Nazi Germany's more authoritarian rule.

The dialogue that arises in democratic processes creates a reflective space where debate can occur. Such reflexive space is also important in the development of inclusive, sustainable communities. In her vocational teaching, Schwenke showed the ways in which this can be accomplished through educational approaches that prepare people to change professional roles, which is a necessary skill that can contribute to lasting and sustainable solutions [6].

3   METHOD: VISUAL AND CONCEPTUAL TRANSFORMATION

Product innovation connected to complex organisational processes are important to discuss in general, and for designers especially, because they can tell us something about how visual expressions are read and what kind of impact such expressions have. Therefore, the research question in this study asked how to overcome bureaucratic and commercial resistance to transformative design of public spaces. To explore these processes and deepen the understanding of different ways of dealing with them, a case study method was used [7] involving participants from different types of organisations and fields of interest. By involving various participants, each will bring a variety of values. This will allow for an analysation of their ideologies, which is recommended by philosopher of artistic research Varto [8], who believes this is necessary for learning from and developing an understanding of unique processes. People have different values based on their 'fore-understanding', as described by philosopher of hermeneutics Gadamer [9]. In this study, different sources were used and their documentation was analysed using sociologist Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic capital [3], since the process was connected to matters of taste and power questions in moments of decision making. These perspectives were combined with concepts from product design researcher Monø's semantic theory of visual representation [10].

By using case study methods for theory building [7] and concept mapping [11], a concept framework was visualised that included the relevant issues to consider for overcoming bureaucratic and commercial resistance in the development of a visual environment. A visualisation of the concept map was utilised using Tjalve's methods for the visualisation of concepts in product design [12]. The concept map with the issues that emerged from the relevant theory explored how a practical case can be useful in both design education and in professional practice.

4 FINDINGS: A DEBATED PUBLIC MEMORIAL

Figure 1. The debated memorial Smash Nazism*, 2015, by Bjørn Melbye Gulliksen, with the mock up on the left and the final version on the right. The text on the monument says: 'It was worth fighting for freedom - for all countries, for all classes, for all people'–Asbjørn Sunde*

The empirical data was gathered from a public memorial project, *Smash Nazism* (Figure 1), that sparked a huge debate in Norway on how a war monument in memory of a resistance group should be raised. The resistance group in question was very active during World War II and accomplished several of the most effective attacks against the German occupying forces including bank robberies to finance their activity, cracking and railway sabotage. Only after many years was initiative finally taken to erect a monument commemorating the team's efforts, and a competition was announced. The project was funded through unions, the National Rail and municipal authorities in Oslo. The jury was unanimous in its decision and chose a draft that matched well with the group's profile of the resistance's struggle using the title 'Smash Nazism'. After the jury declared *Smash Nazism* as the winner of the competition, a fierce debate began in Norway and abroad about the monument. A commercial mentor, Christian Ringnes, that donated a sculpture to the city of Oslo, located in the same square, initiated this debate (Figure 2).

4.1 The Osvald group and the monument to commemorate their efforts

The Osvald group was named after the alias of the leader of the group, Asbjørn Sunde. He had previously been fighting against Franco and fascism during the Spanish Civil War. The Osvald group of resistance accounted for some of the most effective and important acts of sabotage in Norway during World War II. Perhaps the most memorable action was when they blew up the Eastern Railway Station at Central Station Oslo on the day that Nazi traitor Vidkun Quisling was installed as minister-president in 1942. Quisling is the man behind the term *quisling*, meaning traitor. The Osvald group also carried out bank robberies to finance their resistance movement, the liquidation of Nazi informants and numerous other acts of sabotage. It is estimated that they performed nearly 200 operations together. Several members of the group died in battle or were executed after fierce torture by the Gestapo soldiers.

Asbjørn Sunde was a communist convicted of spying for the Soviet Union a few years after the war. The verdict was controversial, and many believe that Sunde fell victim to the Cold War. The team members of the Oswald group were regarded with suspicion, and their resistance effort was made invisible.

Only in 2013 was the Osvald group recognised by the Norwegian public for their fight for Norway's freedom when the last eight members of the group were honoured by Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, who stated in a speech, 'You were saboteurs and soldiers of darkness, who remained in the dark. Today we regret that many of you were seen as suspicious and rejected'. According to Strøm-Erichsen, the group performed most of and the most potent sabotage operations in Norway during the war.

The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions took the initiative to erect a monument to commemorate the saboteurs' efforts in 2013. Its significant placement outside the old Eastern Railway Station was agreed upon by authorities in advance as the location of one of the group's most important sabotage operations, which became a symbol of the armed resistance movement. A competition was announced, and a jury was established. One of the authors represented the artist organisation The

Association of Norwegian Sculptors. The competition was completed, and the jury unanimously decided on the proposed artwork, *Smash Nazism*, by Bjørn Melbye Gulliksen. The jury explained their decision by stating, '. . . the draft will retrieve both a clear political background and point to what this fight was really all about'.

4.2 The meaning in public environment

Figure 2. Financier Christian Ringnes donated The Tiger *by Elena Engelset and* Kate Moss *by Marc Quinn to the city of Oslo*

Financier Christian Ringnes bestowed the city and city antiquarian with a sculptural park of female statues as 'a tribute to the woman'. He also donated the sculptures *The Tiger* and *Kate Moss* to the city of Oslo. Christian Ringnes believed the sculpture *Smash Nazism* was too fierce, being in the same space as *The Tiger* by Elena Engelset, which he donated to the City of Oslo. This was cited in an article in a major Norwegian newspaper, *Aftenposten*, on 15 September 2014, along with Ringnes' statement: 'I do not think that statue deserves to be anywhere at all, horrid as it is. But that is a matter of taste'. He added that he believed that the Osvald Group should be honoured for their efforts. About 'Smash Nazism', he said, 'It belongs in the 60s in the Soviet Union. It is a superbrutalistic and old-fashioned sculpture. It is wrong to place it in the fine tuned square of the Central Railway Station which is quite picturesque as it is'.

He was supported by city-planning authorities that were also in charge of the cultural heritage buildings such as the one in front of the railway station. Representative Janne Wilberg strongly discouraged the placement of *Smash Nazism* in front of the Central Railway Station in Oslo, as cited in an interview in the newspaper *Klassekampen* on 7 February 2015.

Among the group of people who reacted was Harald Stanghelle, the editor of the country's most important newspaper. He thought that the place was totally ruined by Smash Nazism, described in a headline on *Aftenposten* article 27, April 2015: 'An urban space blown up'.

An example of a voice that raised support of the chosen memorial monument was cited in *Aftenposten* on 15 September 2014 by war historian Borgersrud. He said, 'It was a very important sabotage that protested against the insertion of Quisling as minister president. It marked a new turn in the resistance movement in Norway. The square is an anti-Nazi symbolic place'. He added that he would prefer that Ringnes' statue *The Tiger* was moved, stating, 'It's a foolish statue that has no historical connection to the place'.

A member of the jury, Gundersen, was cited in the web paper Khrono on 30 April 2015. He stated, 'It's a shame how these war heroes have been treated in retrospect, and it is also a shame that critics allow personal taste to decide. It seems that the monument has irritated elite taste buds'. In addition, many criticised the aesthetic expression, visual form and size of the monument. After a lengthy struggle against authorities and other public and private stakeholders, the project was still realised.

4.3 Transforming the meaning of a public square

'Smash Nazism' was unveiled on 1 May 2015 with the last four surviving saboteurs, the representatives of the trade unions and several thousand audience present. The monument finally had its place, and the debate gradually calmed down. The monument now belongs to the trade unions, which have stated that they are ready to fight for both the monument and its location in the future. The meaning of the square has changed and has become symbolic of the fight against Nazism as a place that remembers the actions taken during the war, not only in the history books, but also in the physical

environment. After the unveiling of the monument, flowers and greetings such as letters and cards to the Osvald group, has been placed by the monument in appreciation of the efforts and sacrifices they made during the war (Figure 1).

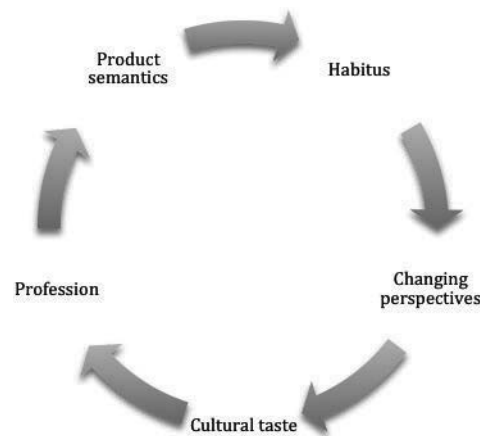## 5   DISCUSSION: TRANSFORMING THE VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

Figure 3. A visualisation of concepts put into play by handling innovative transformation processes in public environment

By combining the theory initially presented in this study, it is possible to learn something from a unique event such as the process connected to 'Smash Nazism' [7, 8]. Using pattern matching theories and concept mapping practices [11], it is possible to determine whether specific theories are relevant in development of public space. Further, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus was exemplified in the project by showing how they had different agendas and values [3].The concepts that was put into play was visualised (Figure 3). The various participants had various taste preferences, which became apparent in their debates. Some participants understood a more bourgeois public sphere with a commercial interest in the place, but others, such as union members, felt that the Osvald group that worked hard during the war should be honoured. In this case, the intervention of establishing the structure on a specific area caused by the donation of a sculpture together with the political context was too provocative for the establishment.

The discussion that arose showed how visual representations in the environment can influence the whole meaning of surroundings. It also showed that an object can change the meaning of a location. The meaning of the square was transformed into a symbolic place representing the fight against Nazism. It changed from being a square of entertainment to including more serious war history. This is in line with Monø's theory of semantics for product understanding [10]. Monø emphasises that understanding the significance of a product requires an understanding of its various meanings and how these different meanings are created. This applies to the cultural context of the product's location and the syntax of the item. The product here is a sign to be interpreted. Further, Monø also highlights the idea of product semantics: what does the product communicate as a sign? He cites four key concepts: what a product sign calls for, what it describes, what it expresses and what it identifies. Monø's theory of understanding a product can also be seen in relation to a change process where products play a key role, as in the example of 'Smash Nazism'. Green and Clueley [2] showed that leadership competence included understanding a process and organisation where multiple aspects of Monø's theory [10] might be helpful in further understanding how and why products and environments can create debate and conflicts. If leaders lack expertise in understanding the meaning of an environment, they will face problems in understanding the conflicts between different groups. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus contribute to this idea by further highlighting the importance of personal and cultural backgrounds and how both influence the ways in which one thinks about different signs and products [3]. This example can be linked to radical innovation by showing how environmental design include unique objects and that one object can change the symbolic meaning of a place.

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