FLATBREAD SOCIETY
GRAIN FIELD
AND BAKEHOUSE:
A COMMON IN
THE MAKING

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‘I’m not saying I told you so but rappers have been reporting from the front for years.’

Why is the British Council interested in the public realm? ‘The public realm can be simply defined as a place where strangers meet’. So says the eminent urbanist, Richard Sennett.\textsuperscript{2} If this is the case then the British Council, a cultural relations organisation that brings people together from different cultures, countries and continents, works squarely in the public realm. For around eighty years, through promoting the English language, the Arts and educational links, the Council has fulfilled its Royal Charter mandate to ‘promote cultural relationships and the understanding of different cultures between people and peoples of the United Kingdom and other countries’,\textsuperscript{3} bringing strangers together from all corners of the globe to encounter each other. While formal or mainstream diplomacy primarily involves bilateral relations between national governments, the pursuit of cultural relations happens largely among people – in and through educational institutions, cultural organisations, communities and cities.

Unlike the private realm, such as the family where we know each other well and close up, the public realm is characterised by incomplete knowledge and, significantly, by place:
'Traditionally, this place could be defined in terms of physical ground, which is why discussions of the public realm have been... linked to cities; the public realm could be identified by the squares, major streets, theatres, cafés, lecture halls, government assemblies, or stock exchanges where strangers would be likely to meet. Today, communications technologies have radically altered the sense of place; the public realm can be found in cyberspace as much as physically on the ground.'

While much of the literature on the public realm focuses on politics and citizenship, class and social identity, the so-called ‘performative school’ offers a more cultural approach, derived from anthropology, focusing on ‘how people express themselves to strangers’. Taking this as our starting point our interest was in how arts professionals and performers, policy makers, and citizens, connect through the arts in different public realms.

Cities exhibit a critical mass of social, educational and cultural organisations, concentrations of actual and virtual communities, public spaces, and physical and digital connections. As such, they present a unique opportunity to use the power of arts, culture, education and the creative industries to power city and regional economies, catalyse urban renewal and to promote and share our cultural assets. The British Council has a presence in five cities in the UK and over 180 cities around the world, with its work extending far beyond this to several hundred cities and their rural hinterlands. From this base we are working to support cities in the UK and abroad to be internationally inspired and globally connected.

By using our knowledge, experience and connections we can support cities to achieve their international ambitions, working in partnership to create more livable, inclusive and vibrant urban spaces and places and to improve the quality of life for their citizens through exchange of knowledge, people, ideas, insight, culture and experiences. Our cultural relations approach is built on a spirit of
mutuality and co-creation, which inform this collection and how we engage with art and the public realm.

Most would agree that a good city is one where people’s basic needs are met, where public services are delivered affordably and efficiently, where the economy thrives, the environment is protected and where public spaces are not only safe, accessible and affordable but also interesting and inspiring – alive places in which people can engage with each other and where creativity can flourish. Contemporary urban planners adhere to the view that beautiful cities are more liveable cities and culture-led development has become de rigeuer for urban planners in many places around the world. Within the arts the concepts of public art and public space are intertwined and as Geoffrey Crossick writes in *Understanding the value of arts and culture*, the cultural force of the city and its built environment plays a significant role in this. Yet as Crossick acknowledges, the tangible role that the arts play has been largely untested.

This is a contested area with some seeing the harnessing of the arts to promote creative cities and urban economies as the instrumentalisation of culture. Conventional public art can also be viewed as exclusionary, foregrounding the interests of elites over ordinary urban dwellers and artist-led gentrification. The conversation surrounding cultural value is engaging with such challenges and the need to develop appropriate means of engagement and participation in the arts. Cities, with their vast and growing populations, their density and networks of public services, spaces and institutions are central to this wider discussion.

Underpinning our approach and captured in the spirit of this collection is that cities are about people and the character of a city itself and expressions of its attractiveness and liveability is generated as much by those who live in it as by its built environment and infrastructure, its governing body or political leadership. Cities are the sum expression of all their people, civil societies and the institutions that define the experience of being in the city.
Where there is an inconsistency between political rhetoric and local reality then city diplomacy efforts will likely be undermined. We cannot project an image of a city as the ‘greatest place on earth to live’ if the reality is only that for some of our citizens.10

This collection focuses on what happens to both identity formation and place making when people engage in the public realm through the arts. Its starting point is to recognise artists less as individual producers of objet d’art and more as collaborators, participants or producers of situations, shifting the focus from ‘production to reception, and emphasises the importance of a direct, apparently unmediated engagement with particular audience groups’.11 It explores facilitating participation in the arts in everyday and extraordinary spaces and shares ideas and experience of the public realm internationally.

The collection shows public artists grappling with often complex, social dynamics and relationships as they play themselves out in and through public space. Because art operates beyond the rational and the functional, it often challenges urban planners who by definition are Cartesian in their approach. Yet planners do recognise that cities are social spaces and that social spaces continually change and in the process, that cities are constantly made and remade. Amin and Thrift see the city, ‘as everyday process, mobilised by flesh and stone in interaction’,12 growing and morphing around the actions and engagement of ordinary people. This is at the heart of the British Council’s cultural relations approach, sharing international experience in the hope of inspiring understanding and opportunity.
Footnotes


4 Richard Sennett, 2016


6 Richard Sennett, 2016


I am making my way along a train station platform in my home town of Bristol in the west of England. It’s early summer, a time in which this harbour city reawakens, its public character more extrovert and social for a few short months before hibernating come October. But this morning, most of those around me are moving with the speed of a ritual commute – already mentally occupied with the day. Though physically moving through the concourse of a railway station, these people are already somewhere else – their knees locked under a desk, their faces buried in a screen. There are very few bodies at leisure – unlike the lingering space of the public square, or, for some, the lingering time of the lunch-hour. This is a public space in which bodies are propelled onwards; this is not a place of looking, agitation or agency, nor unexpected encounter. And then something changes...

In amongst the moving crowd are two stationary figures – in worn, khaki soldiers’ uniforms. They are standing by the platform edge, waiting, occasionally catching the eye of a stranger. Incongruous due to the anachronistic nature of their historic costumes, they are all the more startling because of their stillness. They’re not drawing attention to themselves through any words or movements. They are not exactly theatrical, but they’re performing precisely because they should not be here. They are out of time and out of place.
On approaching them, I am handed a card in silence. It bears the name of a Lance Corporal who died on the first day of the Somme in the First World War – 1 July 1916 – and his age, 17. This is a memorial of sorts, but one that understands the public realm not as a stable site, but as a place and a time in a constant state of becoming; a place in which we are all implicated as actors and in which past, present and future are colliding. This is the progressive sense of place that geographer Doreen Massey once evoked as she described ‘place’ as a collision of events and times, memories, fictions, material culture and meeting points.¹

My encounter that morning in Bristol was later revealed to be one of over two million uncanny encounters of First World War soldiers in public spaces across the UK on 1st July 2016. Though it felt intimate and specific – it was an artwork of immense scale, disbursed through multiples times and places throughout that single day, accumulating online as a mass public encounter and public memorial.

A project by artist Jeremy Deller in collaboration with Rufus Norris, Director of the National Theatre for 14-18NOW, the UK’s arts programme for the First World War centenary, we’re here because we’re here became one of the most celebrated public artworks in the UK of recent years (explored in detail by Kate Tyndall in this collection), and it was a catalyst for my interest in working with the British Council on this new collection of essays: Where Strangers Meet.

We’re here because we’re here is representative of a diverse network of artistic interventions, projects, gatherings and actions globally that are challenging the way in which we think about ourselves, our pasts and our future potential, by changing our experience of the urban public realm. But even within the 12 months since Deller’s performers infiltrated my consciousness and changed my perception of the temporal limits of public space, the title given by the British Council to this collection – ‘Where Strangers Meet’ – seems all the more provocative, all the more politicized than the phrase used by Richard Sennett in 2009 to describe the anthropological character of public space.²
Within the past year, as a culture of fear has built around the fault-lines of intolerance, strangers have become the silhouetted figures of potential violence lurking in the shadows of public space. Sennett’s promotion of the ‘unfinished’ city plan, which allows for its inhabitants to adapt and change the public realm, seems all the more fragile.

“In a ‘post-truth’ world,” UCLAN’s Professor Lynn Froggett suggests in this collection, “the meeting of strangers in civic space demands ever more effort, reaching across gaps in recognition and understanding, and in urban environments beset by division and discrimination the need arises again and again. It impels the citizen to take a critical and self-reflexive perspective on their relations with civil society and the body politic. One of the key services that art can perform in urban environments is to change the conditions under which ‘strangers meet’ so that we can know each other better and imagine other ways to live together.”

*Where Strangers Meet* considers the recent artistic, technological and political shifts determining emergent new forms of cultural experience in the public realm and in turn, what is at stake in the emergent forms of our cities’ cultures. The voices included in this collection speak from disparate locations across the globe, distinguished from one another by their own set of conditions, and in some cases, distinct political positions. There are, however, some significant shared concerns which emerge globally. These include:

- The encroachment of privatisation on public space and the implications for freedom of movement or cultural expression and new cultural forms;

- The risks of ‘artwashing’ urban development, thereby disguising social implications and speeding the rate of gentrification at the expense of urgent community needs;³
• The growth of a culture of fear which threatens to infringe civil liberties, stalling the potential for individuals to freely adapt public spaces for personal or collective cultural activities, whether that be through exclusions due to political or environmental upheaval or the imposition of state forces of control;

• The rapid development of mobile technology and significant changes to the way in which people are authoring, co-creating and participating in culture and the emergence of simulated experiences and their ramifications for our understanding of what ‘public’ space might be and how it is constructed;

• A tension between self-initiated, self-directed cultural activity and organised programmatic approaches to city-wide cultural programmes for economic growth.

The collection embraces a broad definition of ‘art’ in the public realm which encompasses unexpected and unannounced artistic interventions, immersive, dispersed and networked performances and simulated experienced, direct actions and collective, grass-roots resistance through imaginative cultural activities. The collection gives insight into the concerns of architects and planners, but focuses less on form and design, than on the social, political and environmental implications of those creative practices in public spaces. It recognises residents, visitors, commuters and passers-by and new arrivals as active respondents – protagonists in, rather than just witnesses to, the stories unfolding in the public realm.

The meaning of ‘public realm’ itself is stretched and redefined through these essays by contributors who are concerned less with the theoretical discourse around the terms ‘public space’ and ‘public realm’ (see Habermas, Arendt, Mouffe and Sennett) than with the lived experience of publicness. There are clearly defined cultural differences of course in the conditions of public space across these distinct localities: for example, the provisional nature of public realm
from Mexico City to Rio to Cairo and Lagos contrasts starkly from one other, each with its own particular set of political and social conditions, ritualised public practices, architectures and topographies; furthermore the formal character of interior public space evolving through the privatised urban development explored by architect Diba Salam in Dubai contrasts significantly to that described by Karolin Tampere in her consideration of Oslo’s harbour area and the work of artist collective Futurefarmers or Dave Haslam’s exploration of the club scenes of Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham.

What does emerge are a common set of tactics that use degrees of subversion and collective action as a means to work as artists and cultural producers in the gaps between planning and lived experience. In his description of two consecutive forms of exclusion which emerged in Cairene public space following the momentous events of the spring of 2011, for example, Omar Nagati describes the revolutionary reclamation of public space by the public which led to exclusion through fragmentation, and the securitisation of public space by state control. “Art intervention in public space”, he suggests, “work[s] through the cracks of the system, both geographically and politically, using design as a negotiating tool, and subversive tactics to mediate the different forms of exclusion resultant from the periods of flux and of securitisation.” This responsive and agile mode of operating by artists, designers and creative practitioners is a common thread to emerge particularly where a city is in flux.

As this collection unfolded in 2017, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake hit Mexico City, rendering contributor Gabriella Gomez-Mont’s words all the more resonant, as she spoke of cities who are in the process of imagining themselves out loud. Yet equally, whilst some are becoming acutely attuned to the need to adapt to environmental shifts and changes, so for others the public realm is increasingly mediated and filtered; this is a disbursed and connected public, largely occupying a virtual public space. Rather than explore specifically the internet as a form of public space, however, three writers have considered the implications of creative technology on our experience of physical spaces.
Professors Lynn Froggett and Jill Stein explore how ‘play’ through digital interaction in this shifting landscape holds out the promise of integration and connection. Stein surveys the digital platforms for collectively authoring spaces, such as location-based and location-specific mobile ambient storytelling; location-based mobile games; augmented reality experiences; and social location tagging/sharing, all of which, she suggests, “blur the lines between the digital and physical public realms by engaging city dwellers with a persistent layer of ambient information.”

Froggett asks: “What is the impact on the public consciousness of this repetitive simulation, widespread engagement in flow states... and the ‘Disneyesque’ aesthetic of much game design? How does it affect human interaction in public space?”

Both authors look at critical, creative practices which are emerging as a form of resistance to a simulated, anodyne public realm to enable what Froggett refers to as a kind of ‘deep play’ whereby critical reflection and individual agency is triggered, rather than repressed. Furthermore, Tony White offers an insight into a live-streamed takeover of libraries by young people in the West Midlands of the UK as a means of considering the library as a public place free from judgement and catalyst for co-created content and unregulated behaviour. This chimes with Dave Haslam’s assertion of the need for self-organised, uncontrolled spaces. “The fact is,” he suggests, “great ideas come from the margins.”

There is no shortage of future forecasting against which to set these reflections on arts and the public realm, but as William Gibson suggested, “the future is here, it’s just not very evenly distributed.”

Froggett suggests, “The capacity to affect and be affected by the needs and claims of others – who are not of one’s friendship group, community or kin – is a neglected aspect of civic life. Affect flows in public space, as it does in private lives, informing how we act into the public realm as embodied and emotional subjects.”
In a recent research inquiry into the civic role of arts organisations, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation identified common characteristics and operating principles shared by arts organisations committed to a strong civic role, namely they are rooted in local needs; develop community agency and build capability and social capital; as well as championing artistic quality and diversity and provide challenge. Such principles are shared by the artistic projects gathered here which work upon the public realm, modelling new civic acts of tolerance, of resolution, resistance and challenge.

This collection tracks starkly different approaches to addressing the inequities of the present – through direct action, through collaborative exchange and by modelling potential new behaviours or processes. In his study of Utopia, Richard Noble suggested that, ‘for artworks to be utopian, they need to offer two things which seem to pull in rather different directions: on one hand a vision or intimation of a better place than the here and now we inhabit; and on the other some insight into what Ernst Bloch terms the “darkness, so near”, the contradictions and limitations that drive our will to escape the here and now in the first place’.

Former Queens Museum Director, Laura Raicovich spoke, when spearheading a new vision for the museum in 2017, of the importance of the civic role cultural institutions play with reference to the museum’s Immigrant Movement International, a community space in Queens that provides free educational, health and legal services. IM is a partnership between the museum and Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, who is interviewed by Gal-dem editor, Liv Little for the collection. Bruguera describes her notion of arte util (useful art) as art which is “the elaboration of a proposal that does not yet exist in the real world and because it is made with the hope and belief that something may be done better, even when the conditions for it to happen may not be there yet. Art is the space in which you behave as if conditions existed for making things you want to happen, happen, and as if everyone agreed with what we suggest, although it may not be like that yet:
art is living the future in the present. Art is also making people believe, although we know we may have not much more that the belief itself. Art is to start practicing the future.”

The approaches considered in this collection can be seen to embody this contradictory pull: between the dream of an ideal society and the circumstances of the world in which we live. Some, such as Tania Bruguera’s Arte Util and the work of Futurefarmers here explored by Karolin Tampere, draw upon the aesthetic strategy of ‘modelling’, as a process through which ideals are tested as types of micro-utopia, whilst others are more assertively direct actions. This difference is often determined by the ways in which the artworks have emerged: some are the result of commissioning processes, outreach programmes or as part of larger-scale urban developments, others are self-initiated and/or the result of collective action.

A consideration of these provisional, unfolding set of works and movements reveals the potential of art in public to expose and respond to the encroachment of corporate interests on public space, to the diminishing opportunities for social cohesion and to the invisibility of the displaced and dispossessed in public life. The significant risk, however, as outlined in the recent discourse on ‘artwashing’ and critiques of the ‘creative city’ is “the deliberate use of arts and culture to secure future profitable gain rather than social inclusion or commentary.”

But what emerges from this collection is a more subtle set of arguments for the involvement of artists and artistic practices in the development of our cities through collaborative action, resistance, creative invention and by offering productive alternatives through the occupation of the centre to reassert the periphery. Futurefarmers’ proposition for a public bakehouse in Oslo for example operates as the means by which radical approaches in food production enter the space of corporate urban redevelopment.
Alongside this utopic modelling of potential futures are the equally resonant issues of grappling with a city’s contested past. It is worth remembering that Jeremy Deller’s soldier performers disruption of the temporal limits of public space in Bristol last year also occurred in a centre promenade in Bristol overlooked by a statue of slave-owner Edward Colston – a site of consistent and increasingly urgent debate in a city built on the slave trade. Historian David Olusoga explores the implications of public monuments as sites of contested histories through the protest movement for the removal of the Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town and the subsequent violent rallies which erupted around the confederate statue in Charlottesville this August.

The act of commemoration has always been closely aligned to strategies of storytelling, by which a particular history of the past is sanctioned by those in the present to bring about a particular future. As Boris Groys suggests, ‘The future is ever newly planned – the permanent change of cultural trends and fashions makes any promise of a stable future for an artwork or a political project improbable. And the past is also permanently rewritten – names and
Where Strangers Meet

events appear, disappear, reappear, and disappear again. The present has ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future – of constant proliferations of historical narratives beyond any individual grasp or control.”

As Deller’s significant work of art in the public realm indicated on 1 July 2016, the potential of art in the public realm is to assist us with rewriting and reimagining how we live together in the future, but essentially by revisiting the past with new eyes, lifted from our screens, to feel the materiality of being in the physical environment and to look the stranger in the eye.

Footnotes

3 See journalist Jack Shenker’s recent article in The Guardian who characterised the threat of privatisation as the “insidious creep of pseudo-public space” where the control of ‘acceptable behaviour’ ranges from covert policing and surveillance to the less obvious ‘planning-out’ of free movement
4 Gulbenkian Foundation, Rethinking Relationships, downloadable from civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk
5 Tania Bruguera, ‘Refl ections on Arte Útil (Useful Art)’, available to read or download at www.taniabruguera.com
Flatbread Society Grain Field and Bakehouse: a common in the making

Text by Karolin Tampere

This text is baked with ingredients derived from conversations I have conducted with a few of the many agents of Flatbread Society Grain Field and Flatbread Society Bakehouse who have contributed to the ‘commoning’ of Losætra, an urban farm embedded in the waterfront development of Bjørvika in Oslo.

Bjørvika is the former industrial harbour of Oslo, the capital city of Norway, land currently being transformed into a new and central area for residential housing, commerce and culture. It is located next to the main central train station, directly at the fjord. The city motto of Oslo: ‘The Blue and the Green and the City in Between’, might not get a better illustration. It is understood that this housing development is the biggest (and most expensive) of its kind in the country. The most recent activity in this area has been day-to-day harbour-related industrial work with containers, ships and transportation. This part of the history, which is related to the actual physical fundament where Bjørvika now lays, and which has provided the reason to build the physical foundation in the first place, has been wiped out and swapped for a new identity. Bjørvika now rests on well-edited narratives collected from as far back as the Middle Ages. Remaining medieval ruins nearby are anchor points for sight lines, emphasising views from the city centre to specific locations of selected historical relevance. On the way the sight lines guide spotlights onto the past, and as with a magic
wand, they are ‘caressing’ Bjørvika, giving it historical weight. Dronning Eufemias gate, the main street connecting the whole area and the monastery ruins far out on Hovedøya island, are two examples of such anchor points using the Middle Age narrative.

Losætra was initially known as Loallmenningen, the Low-common, one of the seven commons parts of the overall urban plan. At this land a web of intricate social structures intertwines with the highway infrastructure along the coast of Oslofjord. New layers of soil and stories now cover this land, and a polyphonic choir of voices gathers: insects, people, soil, sea, birds, buried Viking ships, cars, mycelia, microorganisms, plants, and seeds. They are all kneaded together, contributing to the emerging narratives and goingson on this land at large: Bjørvika, and locally at Losætra. It is a “porous world always in the making”, transforming the public space of Loallmenningen into the common space of Losætra. I quote Stavros Stavrides to let his definitions appear as guidelines to look into and reflect on this land and art project at large. In his words ‘Public Spaces are primarily created by a specific authority (local, regional or state), which controls them and establishes the rules under which people may use them. ‘Common Spaces’ are those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in.’

The conjuring call that brings all of these agents together at Losætra originates with Flatbread Society, a durational public art project consisting of two interconnected parts: Flatbread Society Grain Field and Flatbread Society Bakehouse. Amy Franceschini of Futurefarmers and Flatbread Society introduces the diverse activities in a letter: Losæter has become a nexus of many different working groups. Each has their own program on the land with the employed urban farmer Andreas Capjon as a guide and flag post. On any given day the site is bustling with immigrant teens, adults with dementia, recovering drug users, forest students, enthusiasts, bee keepers, fruit tree specialists, a man who donated Pinot Noir grapes to reestablish
the historic flora of the monks who once occupied Hovedøya and many more. The Bakehouse serves multiple functions. Of course with three types of ovens at the heart of the boat shaped structure, it is a space of transformation – raising and spreading of flour into flatbreads or high sourdough loaves. A long wooden table hosts organized meetings, but most often an informal gathering of people speak there and ideas flow, new projects emerge, “problems” get ad hoc solutions and collaborations form.

The project was initiated in 2012 by Futurefarmers, an international collective of artists, designers and architects as part of Slow Space, the public art programme conceived by Situations and commissioned by Bjørvika Utvikling AS (BU). BU, which consists of the owners and developers of Bjørvika, have agreed on a common ambition for this area, a strategy including implementing both permanent and temporary art projects in conjunction with the ongoing city development. “With the aim to make Bjørvika a place where different art related expressions are clearly present and where the public can experience projects at an international level”.

BU has set itself the task of imagining and realizing, giving the art projects with their processes a minimum of 20 years to evolve. With such a long timeframe anything can happen, and the already ongoing art projects are “regularly negotiated backstage” with the different owners and developers of Bjørvika, as Anne Beate Hovind, the project manager of the art projects of BU, tells me. The context for this slow development of art projects lies in the overall urban planning of Bjørvika. Here the built environment is to become clustered within seven main areas that carry the word ‘commons, allmenning’ in their name, to probably underline an ‘access for all’ policy. These areas are (like already all public space in Norway) open for everyone and include, amongst others, public swimming spots, canals, sports places, small parks and premises for commercial activity. All seven commons have streets that run from the fjord across Bjørvika and towards different areas of the city centre. In addition to the commons there is a ‘Harbour Promenade’ which also aims to create more public access between
the city and the fjord. The urban plan was made by the Danish firm Gehl Architects. The suggestion was to generate a plan that gave way for a more diverse and perhaps more lively structure for buildings of different size and use, giving high priority to supporting a good quality of life in the city by opening up a close proximity to the fjord and outdoor activities. Bjørvika has one landmark that is internationally well known: the Opera House, designed by Snøhetta Architects, which lies like an stranded iceberg on the shores of the city, covered in white Italian marble, glimmering from afar. This building has gained huge popularity amongst city dwellers and tourists, and one reason – aside from the spectacular architecture – might be that it is possible, for no admission fee, to safely stroll around and linger on the rooftop of it. Next door the new public library, Deichmanske bibliotek, is in construction, and the new Munch Museum is also on its way. Both buildings underline the cultural axis set side by side in the new commercial district of Oslo.

It is on the seventh common you will find Losætra, and this is where The Flatbread Society Grain Field is set to play out with its Bakehouse and ten years of artistic programming.

**Gather: on the commons**

With the establishment of Losæter at Loallmenningen, we mark our commitment to support and highlight agriculture as a central part of the Bjørvika cultural landscape. We hereby declare Losæter a cultural commons. [...] ‘The Flatbread Society Grain Field’ is an expression for this agreement. Unlike museums that collect and preserve works of art, ‘The Flatbread Society Grain Field’ is a museum without walls that preserves through sharing and distribution.

**Excerpt from the Land Declaration**

Loallmenningen was officially renamed Losætra in 2014 to reflect the nature of the ongoing activities and the conceptual framework of the durational art project. The name comprises ‘Lo',
from Loallmenningen, and sæter, which refers to a house, or a collection of houses, traditionally used as a summer dairy farm in the high mountains. The right to a sæter implies that one can put animals to pasture and to put up a mountain pasture house. The Norwegian word for the English ‘commons’ or ‘common lands’ is allmenning, which defines an area of land put aside by the state for recreational activities. It also defines a privately owned parcel where individuals apart from the owner have rights to use the area for livestock grazing or other activities. In Norway the common is connected to allemannsretten or allmennaretten, which grants citizens free access and camping on the waterfront, and on non-cultivated land, everywhere in the country. Allmennaretten has a strong foundation in the general population of both Norway and Sweden. The right to access and use our common good – nature at large – is considered part of our cultural heritage. Long before outdoor life became a concept, there was active practice of free roaming in Norway. To wander in the mountains, to swim in lakes and fjords, or to pick berries in the autumn forests, are all part of a commons which many inhabitants still practice. At its best, the law prevents individuals from building gated communities around common resources such as views, coastlines, lakes and forests. Access for all and access for free has a strong foundation in collective awareness. The combination of sæter and allmenning are therefore what conceptually roots the Flatbread Society Grain Field activities to this land.

Losætra sits as on a mountain top, peculiarly above one of the country’s busiest highways. With cars speeding through the tunnel directly below it, the Grain Field stands in stark contrast, culturally and physically, to the rigid rationality of the new mixed-use development in surrounding Bjørsvika. It connects Norway’s agricultural heritage to the present, and lends the metaphor of cultivation to larger ideas of self-determination. The Flatbread Society Grain Field foregrounds organic processes in the development of land use, social relations and cultural forms. It brings forth important aspects of the potential of commoning, giving examples whilst openly and inclusively practicing on site with the aim of not letting common rights to land, water, access and knowledge be privatised or forgotten.
Just as water runs under a glacier, the flow of cars, trucks and buses steadily streams underneath the daily activities at Losætra.

**Mix: new neighbours by the shore**

On June 13, 2015 a procession of farmers carried soil from their farms through the city of Oslo to its new home at Losæter. Soil Procession was a Ground Building Ceremony that used the soil collected from over fifty ecologically run farms as far north as Tromsø and as far south as Stokke to build the foundation of Flatbread Society Grain Field and Bakehouse. A procession of soil and people through Oslo drew attention to the historical, symbolic moment of the transition of a piece of land into a permanent stage for art and action related to food production.

In the middle of the urban capital of Oslo, through a collaboration between the Losæter association and the Norwegian Farmers Union, Andreas Capjon has been employed as the caretaker and farmer at Losætra. On Wednesdays during dugnad (open field works) the public is invited to join the farm work, contributing their labour and partaking as active agents in presentations, talks or workshops. These workdays have expanded and are now ending with having a bath in the close by floating sauna on the fjord. Through this collaboration with the Norwegian Farmers Union, Flatbread Society Grain Field is also visible as an active space that is not only symbolically but also politically grounded. The Union’s first ever urban farmers local group has also been established as result of the art project. By representing agriculture, it points towards national and global politics that are rapidly replacing smallholdings in rural areas with agriculture that is industrialised and rooted in large-scale monoculture. Locating a day-to-day activity funded by the Farmers Union next to the power centre of the country’s decision-makers is a strong statement.

From a bird’s eye view, Losætra could look like an island in the city – a rural environment entangled in an urban landscape,
which is not only a place for growing crops, but also a space for bodies being present and critical reflection through practical work. The parallel art programme of Flatbread Society Grain Field incorporates other perspectives through the poetics of art and music, as well as discussions that bridge the complexities of shaping and producing the realities of the public realm.

‘We don’t need a museum for conserving varieties, what we want is to grow them.’ (Johan Swärd of Vestre Aschim Farm, the only farm/gene bank in Norway).

The ancient grains grown at the Grain Field are made available in a seed library located in Flatbread Society Bakehouse. This library is more than an archive for storage. It emphasises use, redistribution and knowledge through practice. It is situated at a junction where the inhabitants of the former working-class neighbourhood meet their new neighbours in the more upscale development. In its hybrid form, the function of this building is extended. The Bakehouse is both a sculpture and a gathering space that facilitates artistic production and exchange between communities. The building itself is a common, and ‘commoning’ is a process. For the Bakehouse to exist, it needs to be nurtured and activated over time. In this space both people and seeds, with inherited knowledge and need for care, are interacting.

Knead and Rise: heterogeneous, uncontrolled and unstable

Long-term collaborator of Flatbread Society, Mads Pålsrud of Growlab Oslo\(^\text{18}\) says: “The balance between the production that gives a so-called profit, and the production of thoughts which gives room for visionary ideas, critical analysis and speculations, are all in need to have equal attention and care in this place. There is always a risk of discrepancy between what we aim for, what we do, and how it is perceived.”

In order for a plant to be registered in the System of Plant Variety Protection, it must be ‘distinct, uniform and stable’.\(^\text{19}\) In contrast,
the grains in the Bakehouse express resistance, resilience and cultural heritage. Social relations and togetherness can, like these ancient grains, be defined as heterogeneous, uncontrolled and unstable. This urban common can be seen as a prefiguration, enabling inclusion by promoting sharing and listening. These initiatives are geographically inclusive, as they are happening outdoors and centre-stage in Oslo.

According to some, Losætra is a successful urban development tool, and its transition has been managed cleverly. What happens with the continuity of a place that is multilayered – conceptually, practically and politically – as well as diverse in terms of its use and users? Is it too complex to communicate at a large scale to a general public? Is the actual work of art reduced when it risks potentially becoming a stand-in for green city branding? Futurefarmers’ Flatbread Society has initiated a place where several interests are put into play – some ignited by the artists and their collaborators, and some out of their control. The multilayered narratives of this place and the diverse goings-on might both confuse and unite. It is a porous space with multifaceted transmitters and receivers: shaping, producing, connecting and mixing. The narrative is in flux, it is non-linear. It is a constant trial and error, experimenting with being in the world in this ever-changing micro society.

What would happen if this project were communicated in a distinct and outspoken way? Perhaps it is the porousness of the narrative that attracts and protects this project artistically. Which narratives, amongst the many, are the ones that are being kept alive, the ones that give foundation to the project publicly at large? By tapping into the narrative of ecological farming to promote sustainable food production and slow movements, there is always a risk that Losæter could be used to ‘green wash’ the development. Then the question is, who wants which kind of attention, and for what purpose?

The Losætra Association (LA) was established in March 2016 and consists of stakeholders, artists and other users of the place. The main purpose of being organised is to negotiate and secure the
diversity of activities and the actual allowing of existence at this location. LA is historically grounded in the narration of having been initiated by the artists involved in Flatbread Society, but the place already lives a life of its own.

The current on-goings of the project are maintained by a growing web of people and other living beings, cross-pollinating through activities and meetings in this multi use space. Continued grassroots activity at this common space is a mode of resistance to the ways in which developments often get to take advantage of similar projects, both in the cultural or social policy field. Losætra has multiple voices and several narratives. The meaning of this place is generated by each and every agent who finds their way across the fjord or the highway to create its soundscape, with tones and tunes stretching across the whole spectrum of sounds and frequencies. The metaphor of a polyphonic choir could be useful. In such a constellation all voices are heard united, but also individually. The strength of each voice depends on who is present. This is also the case at Losætra, the presence of the daily farming activities is from time to time more visible than the investigative, critical and experimental in form – artist initiatives.

Form: a new cultural institution was established

Losætra shall contribute to the free and open exchange of seeds, knowledge and relations growing out of this place. By signing the document, these living traditions will be protected from laws that could potentially interfere with this activity and could hinder distribution and future use of the biological material that is being cultivated on this land. From the Flatbread Society Land Declaration.21

A central aspect of this project is that a declaration has been prepared and symbolically agreed on. The declaration states the goal of securing the rights of the soil and microbes therein. Are such legal acts the only way to secure the commons for times after ours? Futurefarmers works with strategies that can be thought of as soft
guerrilla techniques. They slink through small cracks and holes, and in this way establish, from the inside, a place with the potential to last. In this case they have found invisible entrance points within an urban development process, which is determined by capital and city politics. The act of shining the spotlight on something as basic as soil (remember, the word human derives from humus), the common matter that we depend on for our nutrition, life and death, is to find in one of those invisible cracks.

**Rest: places which last**

‘How can we adapt to people we don’t know? What is interesting about Losætra is the ongoing non-eventful happenings at the place, such as the allotment gardening\(^2^2\) alongside subtle or sparkling celebrations of the seasons and workshops. It is all tested out here, entangled with tight human-plant-critter inter-actions. We cannot avoid each other and therefore are able to learn by doing. It is like a Utopian island where we try out future systems of survival. Perhaps it is so that the general public might be more perceptive of this place and the overall project when there is a farmer being the front person? It creates sort of a trust. This is a cultural and green space, answering to several challenges in a capital city today. The overlapping identities are very rich.’ (Hanan Benammar, visual artist in the core group of Flatbread Society)

After the first ancient seeds had been planted in the form of the navigational constellation known as the Shepherd,\(^2^3\) Hanan staged ‘The Human Scarecrows’, a ritual performance during which the birds were asked to let the seeds grow. A week-long series of live music and sound happenings ensued, dedicated to the birds and other living organisms as their core audience. After eight days of human scarecrowing, the seeds grew strong enough to repel the birds on their own. The live acts where anchored in electronic arts and music, some of them streamed through Radio Ramona.
She is the radio of the town. Since the beginning she is the voice, a voice, a tune, interviews, concert, field recordings, compositions... dealing with strange affairs between bread, astronomy, migration... a character which witnesses, interacts, tells stories; a constant collective becoming in Flatbread Society. Radio Ramona is a living archive in lots of different languages, ages, gender, a hybrid between a body and a living organism interaction.\(^{24}\)

**Radio Ramona**

Flatbread Society project points to the fact that artists often arrive early to work on social issues, sometimes too early for people to understand the message. Artists trigger the imagination and instigate the important conversations that must take place before permanent changes occur. In this way, the processes developing at Flatbread Society Grainfield reflect on future possibilities – following the seed into the soil, traveling through the life of a plant, and giving the grain which become the flatbread to be shared.

**Bake and Eat: the whole body is engaged**

The social network of Flatbread Society has been created over a long period of time, and today one can see concrete results in the diverse activities that take place at the Bakehouse and Flatbread Society Grain Field. One fruitful example is the workshop at the back then temporary bakehouse in collaboration with Tenthaus Oslo\(^{25}\) and their long term youth group.

The whole body is engaged by Flatbread Society, not only the intellect. Baking flatbread was actually connecting people[...] This workshop was part of our long-term work with Hersleb School of adult education and especially young people from different countries, such as India, Eritrea and Somalia. Many came to Norway alone as refugees. In the process of baking, these youngsters became specialists in their different local varieties of flatbread, and whilst sharing the meal
afterwards, the comparison of bread and discussions around it was very fulfilling... Memories that are created through such a project where the whole aspect of human life is present, are potentially as strong as encounters with landmark monuments.

**Tenthaus Oslo co-directors artists Ebba Moi and Stefan Schröder**

This summer Tenthaus Oslo hosted a new workshop with Kunstkantina, two artists from Trondheim. They will be working with a group of immigrant teens from Hersleb High School over the summer to seed, cultivate and harvest vegetables to pickle in August. By sharing their ideas at Losætra they got in touch with UNG.no who also works with immigrant teens to instructing how to sail and fish. With their four traditional wooden sailboats they are now located next door to the Bakehouse. Cross-pollination of these two initiatives and youth will culminate in a collective sailing and fishing trip, which also ties back to the boat architecture of the Bakehouse.

The aforementioned baking workshop highlights the elegant and precise methods of Futurefarmers where people find potential in flatbread, letting it becoming a ‘guide’ to moments of sharing knowledge, previous memories and rich experience: a thin piece of bread that makes possible vital connections between society, body and mind.

How to communicate that this place is long term and that one’s contribution makes a real impact? How to reassure sceptical voices and state, in a trustworthy manner, that it is not a branding tool utilised by developers and other interests? Would it make sense to engage in-depth research to include a moment of empirical evaluation? Does one need academic proof that such a project has succeeded in being an open space for diverse activities, or can one come up with other forms of documentation allowing for future planners or artists to learn from this project?
Distribute

The idea of ‘rescue’ in relation to the Bakehouse is of utmost significance. Fashioned after a 19th century rescue sailboat, her form connects the ideas of exploration and loss to new ideas of rescue and findings. Sitting upon a piece of common land surrounded by a sea of ancient grains that have been ‘rescued’ from various locations in the Northern Hemisphere – from the very formal to the informal, she becomes a lighthouse, a functioning symbol of resilience.\(^2\)

Futurefarmers

Flatbread Society Grain Field is, like the soil, made up of several layers of meaning. Over time more sediment will accumulate, allowing the common, planted with care in the soil with well-travelled microorganisms, to grow strong roots. Today’s actions will leave marks that can be read in the future. The soil already conceals the remains of the labour, failures and successes of former generations. In what form will our presence and labour be visible in, let’s say, 50 years? We can only speculate, but for this reason the inclusion of legislative policies to secure the future of Losætra is wise.

The foundation of a new common space requires in-depth attention and care. Flatbread Society Grain Field and Bakehouse show us that the way out of today’s industrialised food production and uneven distribution of wealth begins by changing attitudes and going against the grain. We must reintegrate agriculture into our lives if we want to create a sustainable and non-exploitive society. An awareness linked to the cultivation of soil is now slowly pulsating straight into the heart of our cities. In a world governed by extractionism, attempting to exploit all available natural and human resources, we must raise awareness through daily practice. The Grain Field carries multiple seeds for growing and nurturing communities, knowledge, and direct action, a common in the making, for now and for the times to come.\(^2\)
Footnotes

1. The Fjord City of Oslo www.norwayexports.no/sectors/articles/blue-green-and-the-city-in-between

2. Dronning Eufemia was a queen of Norway from 1299–1312. She was of German decent, and played a part in moving the capital of Norway from Bergen to Oslo

3. Common Space as Threshold Space: Urban Commoning in Struggles to Reappropriate Public Space. pg.11, FOOTPRINT 16, Communing as Differentiated Publicness, Spring 2015

4. ‘Public Spaces are primarily created by a specific authority (local, regional or state), which controls them and establishes the rules under which people may use them.’ by Stavros Stavrides, Common Space as Threshold Space: Urban Commoning in Struggles to Reappropriate Public Space. pg.10, FOOTPRINT 16, Communing as Differentiated Publicness, Spring 2015

5. ‘Common Spaces are those spaces produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community they participate in.’ by Stavros Stavrides, Common Space as Threshold Space: Urban Commoning in Struggles to Reappropriate Public Space. pg.10, FOOTPRINT 16, Communing as Differentiated Publicness, Spring 2015

6. Flatbread Society uses grain as a prismatic impetus to consider the interrelationship of food production to realms of knowledge sharing, cultural production, socio-political formations and everyday life. www.flatbreadsociety.net/about (16.05.17)

7. The initial title Slow Time was, due to copyright issues, renamed Slow Space, which was the official title of the Art programme of Bjørvika Utvikling AS

8. Bjørvika Utvikling AS has overall responsibility for all public space construction in Bjørvika and is owned by HAV Eiendom AS and Oslo S Utvikling AS. Bjørvika Utvikling has established Bjørvika Infrastruktur (BI), a 100% owned subsidiary of BU, and is formed with the purpose of having the overall responsibility of all technical infrastructure in relation to the development of Bjørvika. They are commissioning and producing a temporary and permanent art programme in the area. Part of this was to publish thematic “guidebooks” aimed as a learning book for other developers, which introduce art and public space at large, how to produce and commission (in Norwegian only www.bjorvikautvikling.no/kunst/temaheftekunst). The first temporary art project was Common Lands – Allmannarettet, curated by Åse Løvgren and Karolin Tampere. It was a temporary exhibition project taking place from 2008–2010 in conjunction with the seven commons (commonlands.net). Kunsthall Oslo (kunsthalloslo.no/) has been established as part of the art programme of BU, and Slow Space is the title of the long-term art projects commissioned by BU. This programme also include Katie Paterson’s Future Library www.futurelibrary.no

9. Quoting: Bjørvika Utvikling AS (BU) satser på kunst i utviklingen av Bjørvika og har følgende ambisjon i sin kunststrategi: Å gjøre Bjørvika til et sted der ulike kunstuttrykk er tydelig tilstede og der publikum vil se og oppleve kunst på et internasjonalt nivå. www.bjorvikautvikling.no/kunst/ulike-kunstuttrykk. This author’s translation, 25.05.17

10. Here is a map highlighting the commons in this urban plan: www.bjorvikautvikling.no/allmenningene/bakgrunn (20.06.17)

11. www.kulturyggene.no/munch/

Quote by Elizabeth Thomas from www.flatbreadsociety.net/about

Webpage of Flatbread Society www.flatbreadsociety.net/actions/29/soil-procession

Capjon has been employed since 2015, and the collaboration with the Farmers Union is currently a three-year project. The employment is funded 50% by NorgesGruppen and 50% by the Farmers Union

Dugnad is the Norwegian word for voluntary communal work and especially common within small sports organisations, kindergartens, schools, neighbourhoods and so forth

www.onthecommons.org/work/what-commoning-anyway (06.08.17)

Mads Pålstrup has been part of the Flatbread Society collaboration from the beginning and is a user of the allotment gardens on a daily basis. Growlab Oslo is a design studio he was part of establishing in 2012 in Oslo, Norway. www.growlab.no

As defined in the UPOV System of Plant Variety (www.upov.int/about/en/upov_system.html#iv_a) visited 10.04.17

www.bjorvikautvikling.no/loseter


HERLIGHETEN (THE GLORY) is an ecological initiative and project about urban food production initiated in April 2012, and consists of 100 allotments which are free to use by the inhabitants of Oslo. It is a project initiated by Bjørvika Development. loallmenningen.blogspot.de/p/info-in-english.html

Flatbread Society Grain Field was replanted in the form of the navigational constellation Boötes, also known as the Shepherd. Each star in the constellation expressed as a circle on the field with Arcturus as the central navigational star. Heritage grain seeds were sown by members of the core group: Growlab, Jørund Aase Falkenberg, Herbanists, Food Studio, Emmanuel Rang, Oslo Apiary, Herligheten and Northern Company. Nine circles lay upon the field at Losæter, each hosted by one of the core members and surrounded by one variety of ancient grains. Three of the stars in this constellation are located at host farms outside of Oslo. These three farms are part of the Circle of Grains project initiated by Johan Swärd. www.flatbreadsociety.net/actions/33/into-the-ground-and-up-to-the-sky

From an email conversation in April 2017 with Marthe Van Dessel flatbreadsociety.net/ramona

Tenthaus Oslo is an artist-run exhibition space in Oslo, run by artists Helen Eriksen, Ebba Moi and Stefan Schröder and workshops www.tenthaus.no/workshops/19-flatbread-society

Ung.no is an official information channel for youth. Here you will get answers to your questions. The website is run by The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir). www.ung.no/om

From an email conversation with Amy Franceschini of Futurefarmers, March 2017

This section has been partly reworked. The original version is published in ‘People, Seeds, Belonging, Together’ by Karolin Tampere. Available as a booklet, ‘People, Seeds, Belonging, Together’ (2015) and at www.flatbreadsociety.net/stories/view/31, both published by Flatbread Society
Karolin Tampere

Karolin Tampere is an artist and curator based in Lofoten, Norway. Currently she is engaged as a curator at the North Norwegian Art Centre in Svolvær, and has a particular interest in interdisciplinary collaborative practices, sound and listening. Since 2004 she has regularly contributed to the “forever lasting” art project Sørfinnset Skole/the nord land, and together with Åse Løvgren she initiated the ongoing collaboration Rakett in 2003. Tampere is part of Ensayos, a feminist research program through which artists, scientists and local agents contemplate and engage in matters related to the political ecology of Tierra del Fuego (CL).

Claire Doherty (Editor)

Claire Doherty is the Director of Arnolfini, Bristol.

Previously, Claire Doherty was the founding Director of Situations. Over the past decade, Situations emerged as one of the UK’s most innovative and pioneering public art producers, commissioning and producing temporary and long-term public arts projects, creating public art strategies and visions for city-wide initiatives and leading publishing and research initiatives to improve the conditions for, and skills to produce, new forms of public art worldwide. Claire has developed an international reputation as a leading thinker in new approaches to public art policy and planning, and is dedicated to engaging those for whom the arts might have seemed irrelevant or inaccessible through transformative art and cultural experiences; advocating for the social value of the arts, and finding ways to catalyse positive change in specific places.

Claire was awarded a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Award for outstanding cultural entrepreneurs, 2009, and appointed MBE for Services to the Arts in New Years Honours List 2016.
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