

Site-Responsive Public Art on Overlooked Places of Urban Fringes- Revisiting Places and People after 20 years

Authors: Frank Sleegers ¹

¹*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

This paper focuses on revisiting places of a public art project that transformed underused areas of the port of Hamburg (GER) as short-time, two-to-three-week summer festivals from 2003 to 2009. The artwork consisted of temporary art installations and performances that intended to discover the various facets of overlooked urban space on the fringes of the core metropolitan center. An essential characteristic of the project was the execution of guided tours along the temporary site-responsive art objects. The art projects coincided with three major and correlated projects of urban development and revitalization in the city of Hamburg; the HafenCity, “Europe's largest inner-city urban development project on the water”, the International Building Exhibition Hamburg (IBA) 2006-2013, and the International Garden Show (IGS) 2013. The projects targeted to see places before the “drastic changes” in the port area as one catalogue explained in 2007. In this context, the initiators of the project, one urban planner and three landscape architects, anticipated an intriguing dialogue between conventionally planned or revitalized areas and random, interstitial spaces close by. A general mission was to explore a broad range of facets of place through multiple forms of creative and intellectual engagement including visual arts, performances, music, poetry but also talks about specific topics such as history and plant ecology. The pioneering project received national and international recognition. Each of the six projects was well documented an exhibition catalogue with the route of the art tour, descriptions of the artwork, and photos in relation to the site.

This paper investigates how the six fringe areas transformed over the last 20 years. How have the interstitial spaces of the past been transformed? Are they still considered urban fringe areas that convey an unplanned “wilderness” or are they significantly altered through development?

This study is a start to examine the art project through revisiting the places and providing new narratives through photos and interviews with individuals that were involved; founders of the projects, artists, and individuals that were involved as property owners or permitting agents. The interviews will be conducted through open-ended photo elicitation along historic and recent photos documenting the change. It is anticipated to gain more new knowledge about the places, themes and questions through this examination. Research questions around perception of placed and impact of transformative art in urban environments will be substantiated as the results of the investigation will progress.

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Authors Biography:

Frank Sleegers is Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where he teaches studios and design laboratories in urban design. Sleegers is the Associate Director and co-founder of the UMass Amherst Design Center in Springfield, MA and active as a maker and facilitator of transformative public art. His recent artwork experiments with spontaneous urban vegetation on urban brownfields.

Sleegers' research encompasses design theory in landscape architecture. Currently, he focuses on the design philosophy and language of German landscape architect Gustav Lange investigating the long-term perception of transformative art projects in areas of urban fringes.