Urban experiments exhibited: Exploring practice-based design research and agency in urban space

Knutz, Eva; Dankl, Kathrina

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EVA KNUTZ
University of Southern Denmark

KATHRINA DANKL
Design School Kolding

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the methodological considerations regarding the organization of a site-specific exhibition in urban space and the design research experiments that may be part of such an exhibition. The aim is to encourage design research as 'exhibition' and to propose a format that allows theory to enter the exhibition programme for the purpose of aligning exhibition contributions with theoretical contributions. Through the proposed analytical approach, we offer a method and a model to analyse interventions in public space in relation to agency and the participatory agenda for humans and non-humans. The main contribution is an exploration of the specificities of curating an exhibition in urban space as a distinct practice-based design research project, where programme, research questions and experiments create knowledge on scaling agency in regard to temporality, citizenship and the value of urban space.

KEYWORDS

design experimentation
citizen participation
public space
site-specific exhibition
urbanism
design activism

1. INTRODUCTION

This article explores the methodological considerations regarding the organization of a site-specific exhibition during the NORDES 2021 research conference. The four-day conference took place in Denmark, in August 2021, in the city of Kolding and was organized as a 'hybrid' by two institutions: Design School Kolding and the Department of Design and Communication, University of Southern Denmark. 'Hybrid' meant that conference attendees could participate in the conference as well as the conference exhibition physically or via an online platform. The urban design experiments that took place during this exhibition are the focal point of this article.

The exhibition call of NORDES 2021 was launched by the two authors of this article in an attempt to explore and challenge the concept of 'scaling' through design interventions in urban space. In this context, 'scaling' is interpreted as a programme that involves a (temporal) occupation of a city site (a territory) with an artistic experiment that negotiates agency among human and non-human actors.

Thus, the concept of scaling is expanded from a classical understanding of spatial dimensions and relationships towards an exploration of what happens to a 'site' (a piece of urban space) when it is territorialized by a work of art, a design experiment or an intervention. The perspective of participation is extended to include people, objects or materials in urban spaces; phenomena, such as wind or weather, and sensations, such as smells, tastes or bodily sensations. Together with the artistic intervention, these actors can exert influence, encourage new meanings, disrupt properties or manipulate power relations. This is how scaling is conceptualized and further explored in this study.

For this purpose, eight sites were negotiated with Kolding Municipality as well as with private owners of various sites. These sites included urban spatial objects such as two public benches, a building, a narrow path, a tunnel and sites along the river and the harbour that included different types of flora and urban wildlife. A call for intervention proposals for these sites was initiated one year prior to the conference, and after a review process and follow-up interview round with all participating design researchers, eight submissions and proposals were accepted. In this process, additional meetings were held with the municipality and with the private owners, as they had to approve all the submitted projects.

The design experiments that were executed during NORDES 2021 had a full physical presence in the city as well as a digital representative in the form of visual material exhibited via the online platform. In addition, extended panel discussions with the exhibiting design researchers as well as a digital and a physical exhibition tour were held during the conference. The latter was open to all citizens of Kolding.

2. THEORETICAL OUTLINE

2.1 *The city as contested space*

The concept of 'a right to the city' was originally introduced by French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre and first appeared in his 1968 book *Le Droit à la Ville*. Since then, the debate on how to build socially sustainable cities that engage and inspire its inhabitants has been a recurring and urgent

theme in design research (DiSalvo 2010; Fuad-Luke 2013; Markussen 2013, 2020) and in urban activism (Harvey 2003; Borasi and Zardini 2008; Mayer 2009; Purcell 2008; Brenner et al. 2012).

The city as a contested space has different and conflicting agendas that determine public policies. The overall aim of neo-liberalism is to shape attractive business climates and to optimize the conditions for investment capital with the argument that this will promote growth and innovation. This has inspired creative city policies and experience economists such as Richard Florida (2002). Within this model, business determines public policies, and questions concerning social justice, equality or environmental issues are often downgraded (Harvey 2003).

In an attempt to answer the recurring question – *Who and what is the city for*? – David Harvey advocates for a more humanized and participatory agenda in terms of how we experience, value and collaboratively 'make' the city (Harvey 2005, 2008). His research is directed towards exploring how our modern cities might be organized more socially and sustainably and resist capitalist 'growth' being the primary goal.

In quoting urban sociologist Robert Park's definition of what a city is, Harvey suggests that the city cannot be separated from our social lives, aesthetic values and desires for how we want to live (Harvey 2012: 3). In Park's words, the city is

> man's most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But if the city is the world which man has created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city, man has remade himself.
>
> (1967: 3)

Harvey's point here is that we 'are the city', so to speak, and the 'right to the city' is far more than our individual and collective right to access the resources and utilities of the city; it concerns our freedom and our right to reinvent and change the city according to our own desires.

A well-known artistic attempt to exercise the right to the city is the Situationist Internationale (SI) movement of the 1950s and 1960s which, for a period, collaborated with Henry Lefebvre. According to this group of avant-garde artists, capitalist society has made man a passive consumer, a spectator, whose life follows functionalist and rational ways of living (Debord 1961; Knabb 1981). Through art experiments and concepts such as *psychogeography*, *derivé* and *detournement*, this group experiments with different formats and tactics of how to experience city life and how to engage in 'non-functional' activities: activities of playing, of wasting time, of meeting strangers or of doing other things you would not normally do. In this way, SI promotes a sense of being in the city – using the city as a playground, a sanctuary or a free creative space – as opposed to using the city as a place to work, shop and consume.

Thus, the countermovements to the capitalist or (today) neo-liberal approach to governing and managing the city may come from the artists and designers but may also derive from the citizens themselves. Citizens around the world have increasingly become engaged in public movements with a social or cultural agenda. We see these in the form of *everyday urbanism* and

various DIY practices as described by Margaret Crawford and her colleagues (see Chase et al. 1999) or as organized *activistic movements* such as the empty space movements, which aim to occupy abandoned buildings in order to provide affordable housing; green city movements, such as vegetable gardens maintained by local residents; subcultural festivals that strengthen the community or the establishment of alternative economies through sharing, lending or gift practices. The agenda for these types of practices is to democratize the city, that is, to work towards a sustainable life for all the city's residents.

2.2 Frameworks of citizen participation

During the past decades, several typologies of citizen participation have been developed, such as Sherry Arnstein's 'A ladder of citizen participation' (1969) and Margaret Crawford's descriptions of DIY practices and 'every-day urbanisms' taking place in cities around the world (see for instance Chase et al. 1999: 22–35).

Arnstein's model is divided into degrees of citizen power, tokenism and non-participation and is useful for understanding degrees of citizen power. It represents an early attempt to understand how government and local authorities circumvent the concept of 'citizen participation' and how the relationship between those in power and the 'powerless' can be defined in terms of *participant roles*.

Crawford is more concerned with the concept of the participatory city and the dynamics of temporary urban spaces as sites for citizen participation. She attempt to capture various DIY practices that takes at commonplaces such
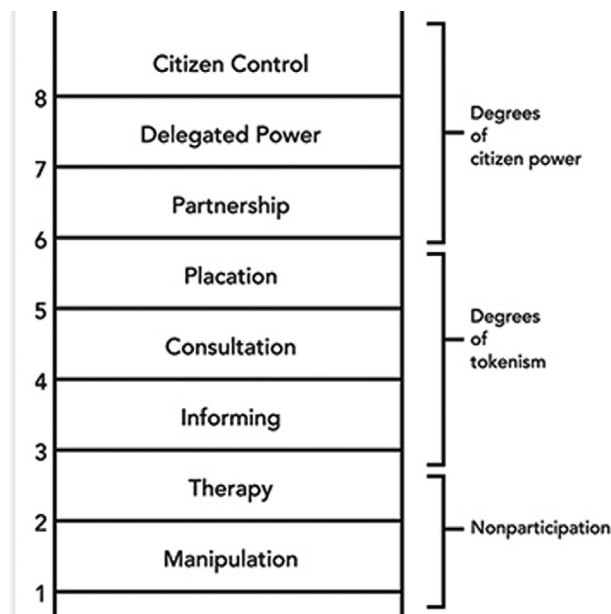

Figure 1: Sherry Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation.

as sidewalks, front yards, vacant lots and parking lots, which are being (re)claimed or re-used for new purposes. Key dynamics in these practices includes (1) identifying new opportunities in taken-for-granted spaces of the city, (2) reoccupying alienated spaces in the city, (3) asserting use values over exchange values, (4) recycling and gifting economies and (5) involving emergent rather than preconstituted subjects (see Iveson 2013: 942–43).

Crawford argues for a more expansive view of public space that includes demonstrations, sidewalk activities, artistic interventions and the presence of homeless people who live their lives in streets (Crawford 2016).

Inspired and informed by these various forms of citizen participation we attempt to understand the dynamics of experimental design projects and how people – as well as things, objects and materials – may participate and interact in urban spaces.

1. **Defamiliarization**
   (identifying new possibilities in taken-for-granted spaces of the city)
2. **Refamiliarization**
   (re-occupation of alienated spaces in the city)
3. **Decommodification**
   (the assertion of use values over exchange values in urban space)
4. **Alternate Economies**
   (such as recycling and gifting economies)
5. **Collaboration across Differences**
   (involve emergent rather that pre-constituted)

Figure 2: Margaret Crawford's key dynamics of shared urban space.

2.3 The concept of agency

The agency paradigm that has been emerging in sociology since the 1990s investigates the integration of structure and action theory (Sewell 1992). It explores the options of individuals to enact power and free will within the structures of society. Linked to the concept is its correlation to approved actors who can act out the agency. According to Latour (2005), 'actors' in a network may consist of humans (living beings, people or animals) as well as non-humans (materials, things, events, places). They all have 'agency' to act. Latour suggests that some humans or non-humans authorize, permit, allow, enable or forbid actions, while others do not. In allowing that things and materials as well as living beings may have the ability to mediate or configure certain forms of citizenship participation, the concept of agency can be used to inform our discussion on how humans and non-humans are interrelated in the city and how urban interventions may allow or deprive agency of the 'actors' that constitute a specific site.

The deeply integrated social aspect is like a grammar that guides social actions. From an Actor–Network Theory (ANT) perspective, it means that new objects and interventions may lead to a renewed repertoire of social ties (see Latour 2005: 233). Material culture studies, for instance, criticize the assumption that objects represent or symbolize only pre-existing culture or identity.

In contrast, they argue that things, through their properties and materials, allow and permit certain behaviours or cultural practices in the first place (see Woodward 2007).

Based on this theoretical outline, we pursue our research questions, namely: how may urban interventions be supportive (or restrictive) of the enactment of different 'actors' agency at a specific site, and how might that effect our experience of the city? What specific knowledge on 'scaling agency' do the design experiments generate? What roles are assigned to the citizens who voluntarily or involuntarily experience or become part of an urban intervention? In short, how may design experiments mediate/alter the participation of humans and non-humans in public space?

The main contribution of this article is an exploration of the specificalities of curating an exhibition in an urban space as a distinct practice-based design research project, where design experiments, programme and research questions create knowledge on agency in regard to temporality, citizenship and the value of urban space.
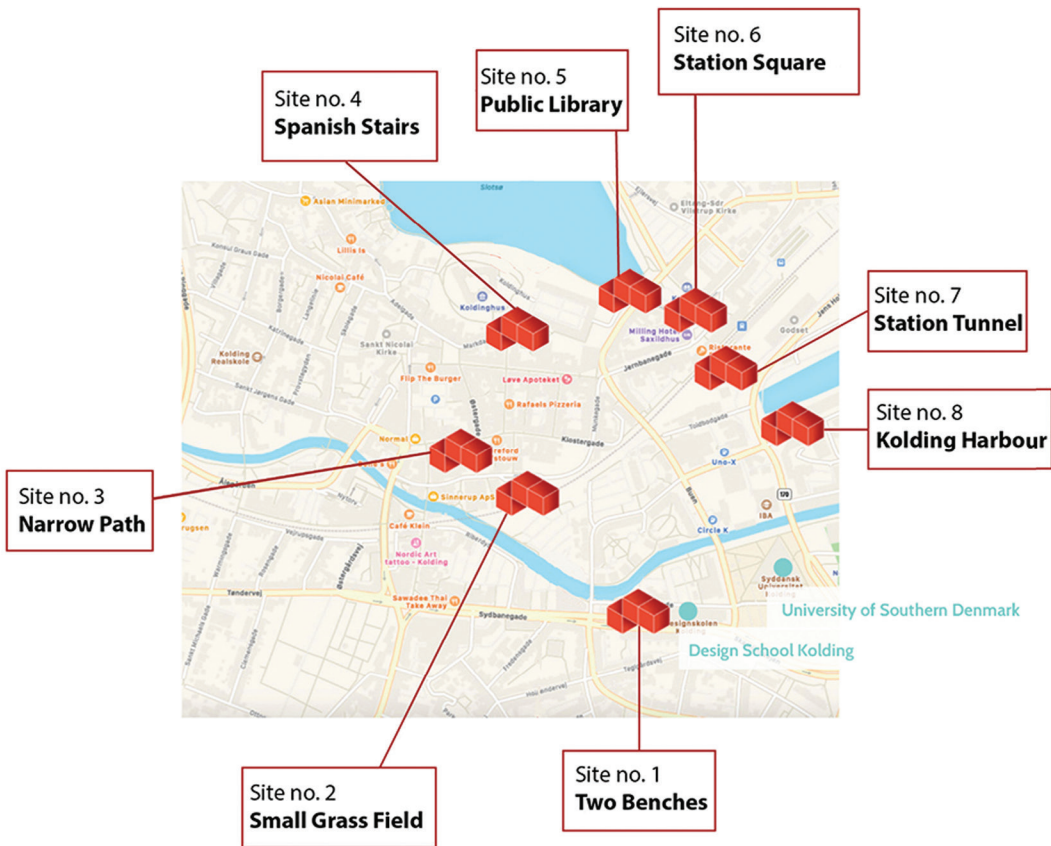

Figure 3: *The exhibition is programmed as a site-specific exhibition that allows artistic interventions at eight different locations in the city of Kolding.*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Experimental programmable approach*

In this study, we explore practice-based design research from an experimental 'programmable' approach. This approach is well established and has been used and practised in various design experiments – both in relation to urban space and the ANT approach. For instance, Jönsson and Lenskjold (2014) examines the 'terrain vague' between people and urban animals through design experimentation and co-design activities with elderly citizens; Munthe-Kaas (2015) argues for an agonistic urban development through the analysis of urban design interventions and the notion of *Urban assemblages* and Binder et al. (2015) discuss democratic design experiments in relation to collaborative practices offered by the ANT tradition.

By applying Brandt and Binder's well-known model (2007, 2017), we can diagram the *NORDES Exhibition* as a 'large' design research experiment that results in a series of eight 'small' experiments and interventions in public spaces.

Each of these small design experiments views the city as a contested space with a participatory agenda that involves humans (e.g. the artist/designer/researcher, the citizen who interacts with the artwork and the owner of the site) as well as non-humans (e.g. the objects, materials and items that constitute a site, before and after the intervention).
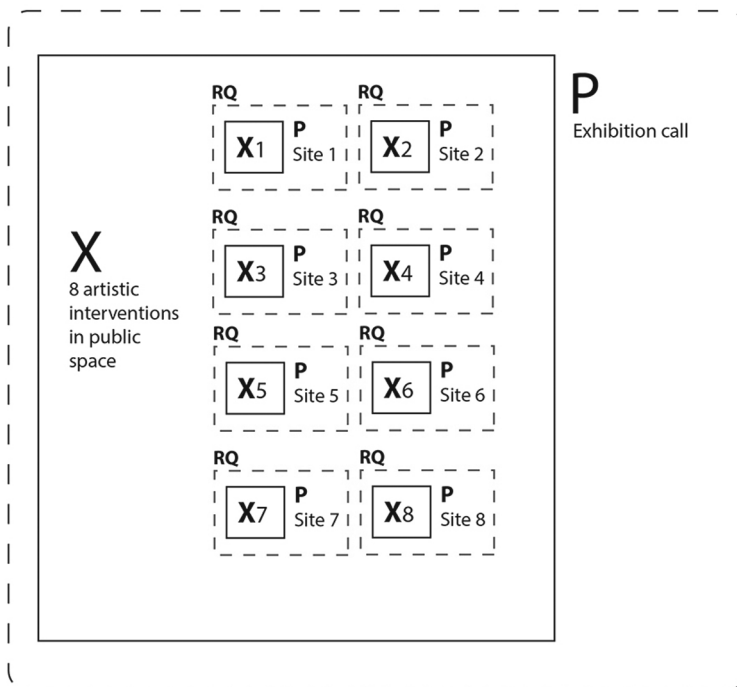

Figure 4: The NORDES Exhibition *(2021) diagrammed.*

Figure 4 illustrates that each small experiment (small X) has its own research question (RQ) and its own programme (P). But at the same time, it is part of the large experiment (large X) that also has an overall research question (large RQ) and its own framing in the form of an exhibition programme (large P).

3.2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, we analyse three small experiments in detail and treat these as individual case studies. We have selected these three interventions due to their experimental nature but also based on the fact that the exhibiting design researchers behind these interventions signed up to participate in an extended panel discussion. In other words, we know more about the origin of these experiments than the other works. We will refer to these as 'Experiment 1', 'Experiment 2' and 'Experiment 3'.

Each experiment will be examined according to an analytical framework that describes:

☐ the site prior to the intervention (empirical data = photos);
☐ the project proposal for that particular site (empirical data = written proposal);
☐ the design process/the process of making (empirical data = photos and video recordings);
☐ the actual intervention (empirical data = photos and video recordings);
☐ the participatory agenda of humans and non-humans (depicted through diagrams) and
☐ the generated knowledge (discussed through a framework/model).

Our methodology is thus informed by Arnstein (1969) and Crawford (2011), since the 'participatory agenda' is included as part of our analytical framework in order to understand the participants' roles that unfold. The concept of agency, as suggested by Latour (2005), allows us to analyse how programmed interventions in urban space may influence human/non-human actors involved in the process of making, disturbing and intervening (see Section 4, Figures 8, 12 and 15). The application of Brandt and Binder's programmable approach enables us to compare various design interventions (experiments) and discuss the outcomes of these in terms of knowledge production.

Through the proposed analytical approach, we offer a method and a model to set up as well as analyse programmed interventions in the public space. With this method of analysing design experiments in depth, we are able to synthesize and propose a provisional model for future use of exhibitions as research; we thus generate new insight on how urban interventions can support, disrupt or restrict the enactment of agency of different actors in an urban context.

Below are the descriptions of the three selected experiments, documented through photos, video recordings, annotated screenshots and written proposals. Concept films behind each experiment can be seen via the online platform, https://conference2021nordes.org.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Experiment 1: 'One Square Meter'

The site prior to urban intervention

The first urban site and associated experiment we want to present in this article is located along the river, in a remote part of the city of Kolding. At this site, two worn and dilapidated public benches uphold their loyal positions (Figure 5). They are worn because they have been used intensively for years, and cigarette butts, emptied beer cans and other human detritus testify to the daily use of these benches by a multitude of human bodies. When being approached about the use of this site as part of the *NORDES Exhibition* and discussing the options, the municipal manager of the site said, 'you can do anything with these two benches – you may even paint them yellow. We'll just remove them afterwards'. This statement clearly reveals the value the municipality attached to the place and to the two worn benches: they had no value whatsoever.

Project proposal for the site

Berlin-based artist Ekaterina Feil chose this site among the curators' selection of potential sites to work with. With her project 'One Square Meter', Feil wanted to pay tribute to a man named Steve, who for years had lived on a public park bench in Berlin (similar to the one in Kolding). Her ambition was to transfer Steve's values, thoughts and writings from the bench in Berlin to the bench in Kolding.

The process of making

To understand this work, we need to go back in time and account for the process of making.

Ekaterina meets Steve through her daily walks through a park located close to where she lives. As the months pass, she builds a relationship of trust with Steve, shares food and cigarettes with him and talks to him about his life and the little messages he writes on pieces of cardboard, not long conversations,

Figure 5: Photo documentation of Site 1.

but small daily interactions. He allows her to record these conversations, as he wants to be heard and listened to, and he also allows Ekaterina to document the objects and things that constitute his home as well as his cardboard writings that change from day to day.

Unfortunately, Steve's health is going downhill – he gets sick and dies suddenly. This happens after Ekaterina has submitted her proposal to do a documentary about Steve and take part in the *NORDES Exhibition*. Ekaterina preserves his bags and leftover possessions (which no one claimed) and continues her research on Steve to learn what he has meant to other citizens who knew him. Among these are the local florist (referred to as 'the flower lady') and a local café owner, whose business is located at the corner of the park and who also talked to Steve and helped him with food, clothes and shelter.

If the reader of this article has a chance to experience the work and films about Steve (see online platform), they will meet a very reflective person, a human being who has built his own home, who has an opinion on sustainability and who would like to be recognized as a citizen, even if he lives on 1 m², a public bench in a park in Berlin. You also meet a woman (Ekaterina Feil) who has established a relationship with a man living in a park, who does not walk past indifferently but asks him questions about how he feels, what he is thinking about and what he believes.

Figure 6: Video screen shots of Steve's bench in Berlin / from concept film/online platform.

The actual intervention

During the NORDES conference, Ekaterina builds the installation at the two benches at Site 1. It is made up of Steve's belongings (his sleeping bag, his cup, his cardboard writings, etc.) and is supplemented with name tags that indicate how Steve valued his belongings. For instance, cigarettes are referred to as 'luxury goods'; empty bottles are referred to as 'savings'; a plastic sheet as 'the roof' and a large plastic bag as 'the kitchen'. Steve's writings are materialized on the many pieces of cardboard such as the statement, 'the poor are not the problem. They are part of the solution'. Or the brief message, 'I am happy about everything. You not'.

During the exhibition tour, Ekaterina tells the participants about her encounters with Steve and she explains the connection between the materials and Steve's conception of home, for instance that an open 'roof' means that you are welcome, while a closed roof means 'not home' or 'no visits'. Ekaterina kept the same logic during the exhibition; during the daytime the plastic sheet was open, and during the evenings and nights it was closed.

The intervention is experienced differently, depending on whether it is an 'informed audience' (those who are part of the exhibition tour and who can ask questions about the work and the questions the work raises) or random people who encounter the work accidentally without knowing the context. Unintentionally, the latter become part of a staged situation. This is manifested by some passers-by leaving food (fruit, etc.) at the installation during the night, not knowing that it is an artistic intervention (see documentation, Figure 7).

Participatory agenda

Participation takes place on different levels and with different intensities and prerequisites for participating. The municipality participates by allowing us (the curators) to use the site, but the site has little significance to them, and they demonstrate no ownership. The two benches are (to them) simply an insignificant part of the public urban space.

Steve participates in the documentary and invests time and effort; he shares his life with Ekaterina and knows that she is attempting to convey his way of life to another audience. He participates consciously by sharing his belongings, his writings and his thoughts.

The 'informed' visitor, who experiences the work (physically or online), participates in a dialogue about the work and participates by asking questions, by engaging in a dialogue with the artist or by engaging in the work itself and the questions the intervention evokes. The citizens who experience the physical intervention by coincidence (the passers-by) may participate as involuntary, instant or emotionally unprepared participants who unknowingly become part of a design research experiment and a staged scenery.

Knowledge generated through Experiment 1

Based on what we know about the site and the framework of the exhibition prior to the actual intervention (e.g. site selection and permissions); the way the urban intervention has been researched and shaped by the design researcher; the actual execution of the intervention and the way the work is

being perceived by the public who interacts with it, voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously, we can identify and outline a range of participant roles that unfold over a timeline or narrative scale between Berlin and Kolding. This alignment of actions between people and things that takes place in the process of 'making' (in Berlin) and the actions that take place between people and things (another group of agents in Kolding) is depicted in the Figure 8.

In the process of aligning the design intervention to a specific urban space (a site, a territory) and a programme (the exhibition), agency among human and non-human actors is being negotiated. Essential human actors in 'the process of making' are the design researcher Ekaterina, the homeless man Steve, the local florist ('the flower lady') and the café owner in Berlin.

Figure 7: Photo documentation of Site 1. Photos above: Video/screenshots from intervention. Ekaterina Feil installing the work at the physical site with Steve's writings and objects labelled 'luxury good' and 'savings'. Photos below: Overnight passers-by have left a bottle of coke (unopened), fresh bread and bananas.

Non-humans:
Steve's bench in Berlin

Steve's belongings:
Food bag
Sleeping bag
Plastic sheet
Empty bottles
Cigarettes

Cardboard messages

Humans:
The design researcher
Steve
Flower lady
Café Owner

Aligning design
experiment
to urban site

Process of
making

Urban
intervention
at Site 1

Exhibition call

Generated knowledge:
Actants construct relations
and empathy and voice
citizenship for the
homeless person

Non-humans
The bench at Site 1

Steve's belongings/ re-installed:
Kitchen (Food bag)
Bed (Sleeping bag)
Roof (Plastic sheet)
Savings (Empty bottles)
Luxury goods (Cigarettes)

Cardboard messages

Gifts/ Signs of Empathy:
Drinks
Fruit
Bread

Humans
The design researcher
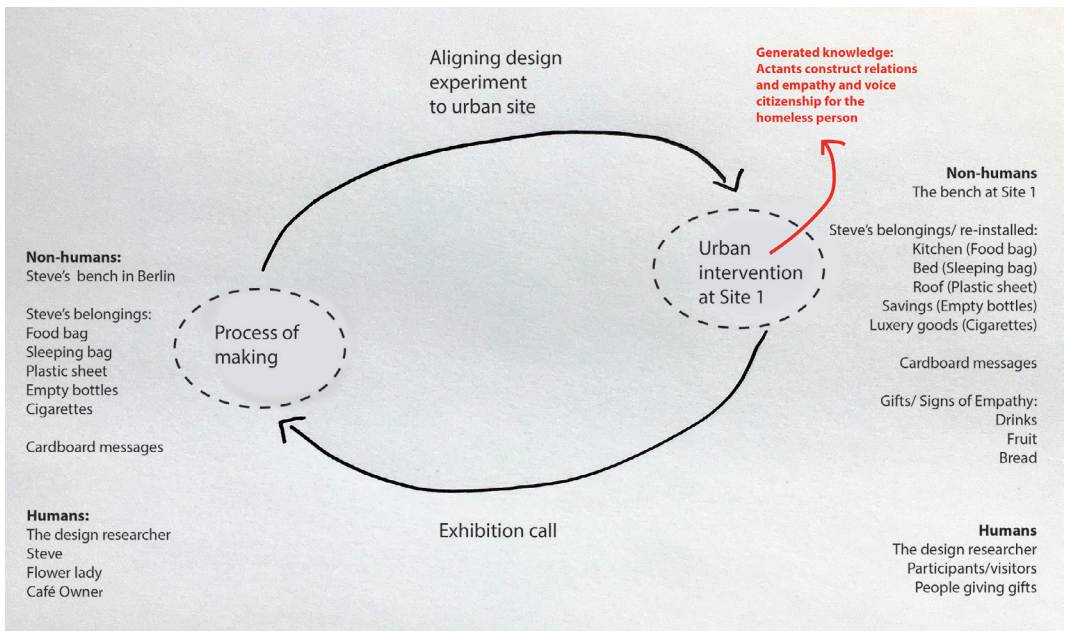Participants/visitors
People giving gifts

Figure 8: Outline of the network of humans and non-humans in 'One Square Meter'.

Essential non-human actors that shape the intervention at Site 1 are Steve's belongings that constitute his home. These have been reinstalled at the bench in Kolding as 'kitchen', 'bed', 'roof', 'savings', 'luxury goods', and together with Steve's cardboard messages as well as the gifts (food and drinks) and signs of empathy that people add to the intervention, these non-humans are equal 'actants' that actively construct relations and *voice citizenship for the homeless person*. In this transformation, agency is given to Steve's belongings.

Thus, in answering the question, *how a design experiment may mediate or alter the participation of humans and non-humans in a public space*, we can argue that prior to the intervention, Steve's possessions (such as his food bag, sleeping bag, plastic sheet, empty bottles and cigarettes) were of no value to anyone else than Steve. After he passed away, they became anonymous leftovers of a man who died in a public park in Berlin. Through Ekaterina Feil's design research practice, these non-humans form a performative intervention that disrupts the existing properties in the urban space and transforms an anonymous public bench in Kolding into a domestic area, someone's possession, an area that has agency by mediating relationships and allowing for a renewed repertoire of social ties, as suggested by Latour (2005).

4.2 Experiment 2: 'I AM U'

The site prior to the urban intervention

The second urban site and associated experiment concerns a small grass field, situated at the so-called Graffiti Tunnel, which is a popular gateway to the inner city of Kolding. This gateway is the underground transit route from the large parking lots towards the busy café areas and nightlife. Before entering

the tunnel, citizens will pass this site – an urban non-space the size of a grave site, which is surrounded by a solid, concrete wall.

Negotiations were needed to include this small piece of urban space in the exhibition programme. For example, the municipality asked us to get official permission from the public subdivision called 'Road & Park', which is responsible for the approximately 4 m^2 piece of land. Although it did not appear to be a space that was used, cared for or in any way maintained, we applied for – and were given permission to – the use of the area on condition that it was restored and 'handed back' in the same (original) condition after the exhibition.

Figure 9: Photo documentation of Site 2 'Graffiti Tunnel' before intervention.

Project proposal for the site

For this site, Leah Ireland (Sweden) suggested an intervention named 'I AM U'. The project was conceptualized as a deliberate 'slow intervention' that would grow and become a design research experiment throughout the summer and autumn. The work involves bean plants and trellises (in the form of letters), explicitly experimenting with site-responsive graffiti language. As the summer progresses, the bean plants will climb upwards in a special formation authoring a form of spatial poetry.

The process of making

Soon after Leah's exhibition proposal was accepted, the border between Sweden and Denmark closed down due to COVID-19, and Leah was not allowed to travel to Denmark and prepare the site as originally planned. Hence, a special work team in Kolding was put together to assist Leah with the actual planting process that had to start six weeks prior to the exhibition. The beans were sprouted in the windows of the work team's kitchens; workshop assistants helped build the 3-m-high trellis; a gardener helped move the depleted soil, and over the summer design students helped build an irrigation system that could keep the soil moist during dry periods. On the concept video (see online platform) the reader can watch the preparation and maintenance of the site and experience how people help each other, build things, collaborate and invent new tools.

Figure 10: Photo documentation and video screen shots of Site 2 in the process of making.

The actual intervention

On the opening day of the *NORDES Exhibition*, the 'I AM U' intervention is in full progress. The bean plants have established themselves – they grow (fast) – and during the exhibition tour Leah talks about the intelligence of the plants, the relationship between the plant's body and the human body and the possible meaning of the wording I AM YOU.

The days go by, August turns into September, and local citizens start picking the beans (for cooking), and when autumn arrives, the colours of the bean plants have changed from light green, to dark green, to orange, just as the graffiti around the artwork has changed appearance up to several times.

Figure 11: Photo documentation of Site 2 as it looks today – January 2022.

Unlike the initial request of returning the site in its original state, at the time of writing this article, the work is still there; the bean plants have withered, but the municipality has announced that it will plant new beans in the spring. The city has adopted the work, and it is now common property.

Participatory agenda

The municipality participates by allowing the curators to use the site, but we have to ask for permission from a third party. The public officials demonstrate ownership but not attachment or responsibility. For the municipality, this small grass field is a regulated urban space that must be returned in the same original condition, even if this condition is poorly maintained.

Workshop assistants, international students and garden enthusiasts participate as co-design team members, together with the design researcher. Together they build the trellis and prepare the ground so that the beans can germinate and grow. This lasts for many weeks and requires that people, who do not know each other, who do not speak the same language or have the same skills are willing to collaborate. The work still exists, but it needs citizens to maintain it, sow new seeds and water them. It requires volunteerism, commitment and care.

Knowledge generated through Experiment 2

As in the previous work, we can identify and outline a range of participant roles that unfold over a timeline, and we can draw the actions that take place between people and things in a process of aligning the work to this specific urban site and a specific programme (the exhibition). This design experiment does not start in a park in Berlin; it starts with experimenting with bean seeds,
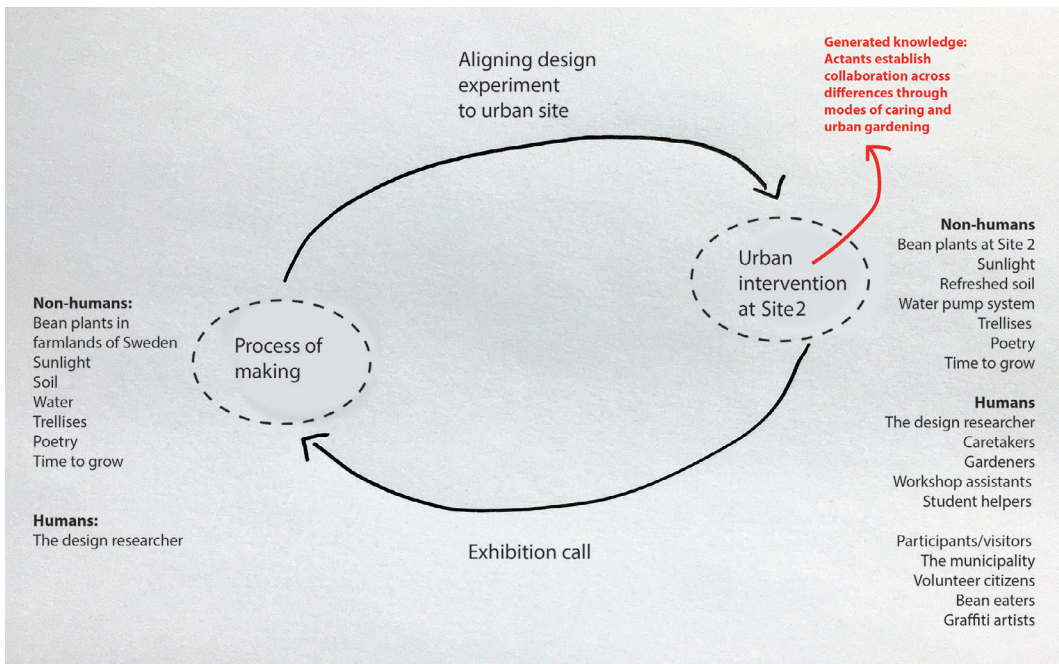

Figure 12: Outline of the network of humans and non-humans in 'I AM YOU'.

soil, water, light and heat in the garden/farmland of Leah Ireland in northern Sweden. To transfer her knowledge to the work team in Denmark, she is dependent on collaboration across differences and on the commitment of local citizens to maintain the work. The site is constantly in the process of transformation, and non-human actors such as the wind, the sun and the rain become agents that are just as essential as the human agents who can grow new plants, apply graffiti to the site or pick beans for the purpose of cooking.

Figure 12 outlines the network of humans and non-humans in the case of the intervention 'I AM YOU'. It depicts the alignment of actions between people and things that takes place in the process of 'making' and experimenting with bean seeds and poetry (one group of agents) – and the actions that take place between people and things at Site 2 in Kolding (another group of agents).

In this transformation, agency is given to Site 2 through the bean plants and the collaborative efforts of the caretakers. Prior to the intervention, this space was considered a non-space, regulated by the municipality which demonstrated no actual responsibility or did not seem to care about the plot. Through Leah Ireland's intervention, bean plants and poetry are used to territorialize urban space and to enhance participatory aspects of community relations, modes of caring and urban gardening.

4.3 Experiment 3: 'Motion of Scales'

The site prior to urban intervention

The last urban site and associated intervention is located in a narrow alley between two old buildings in the inner city of Kolding. This narrow path

Figure 13: Photo documentation of Site 3 'Narrow Path' before intervention.

guides citizens and tourists down to the city's popular pub area, where people congregate, meet friends and hang out.

Getting permission to use this site as part of an exhibition was not an easy task. Both buildings were worthy of preservation, and for that reason the masonry was not to be touched, drilled into or painted on. In addition, the municipality asked us to contact the private owners of the two buildings to get their permission. Last but not least, since many people (drunk as well as sober) pass through the alley at night, there were a number of safety precautions to be met.

Project proposal for the site

For this particular site, the Polish/German design research duo Wonderforma, Marianne Czwojdrak and Mara Trübenback, proposed to rebuild the narrow passage as a performative stage and to challenge the embodied knowledge experienced by passers-by. Their project included two large woven pieces of translucent fabric to be installed in the alley, placed in such a way that a new space is formed between the two pieces of fabric. This space measures exactly 1 m^2 in length and width but has infinite height (see Figure 14). The materiality of this fabric and the adaptation of the fabric's measurements to the dimensions of the narrow path were important details. The fabric had to be woven in such a way that you could faintly sense shadows and light but not see directly through it. Wonderforma wanted to explore how citizens would pass each other in a confined public space. The woven fabric assisted in disrupting the embodied awareness of 'the other'. In doing so, they assumed

Figure 14: Photo documentation and video screen shots of Site 3 during intervention.

that citizens (due to COVID-19) have become insecure about how to relate to proximity to strangers, in confined public spaces.

The process of making

The challenge of this proposal was to install the two large pieces of fabric in the middle of the passage, as nothing could be mounted on the walls using screws, nails or glue. The solution to this problem came from one of the building owners who happened to feel attracted to the project. It turned out that this narrow passage was important to him and contained valuable childhood memories. In the old days, he told us, the entrance to his grandparents' basement antique shop was right in the middle of the alley; the outline of this entrance, we realized, was still faintly visible in the masonry. The building's owner became involved in the planning and suggested that we use the same technique as when attaching a training bar to a door frame with a spring system. Such an iron bar is designed to be able to carry the weight of a human body and could thus easily carry a piece of fabric, he thought. This became the solution to install the fabric between the two walls. Furthermore, a string was attached to the pole to prevent it from being pulled down, and a camera was attached at the top to observe the behaviour of people passing through the alley (see Figure 14).

The actual intervention

For four days and nights, local citizens, tourists and exhibition participants are exposed to the intervention and enter the experiment. Sometimes they enter alone, at other times they are with others, sometimes in full daylight or in complete darkness, in a sober or in an inebriated state. During the exhibition tour, a woman describes what she feels and senses the moment she passes through the woven fabric:

> I do not have a very good relationship with my body. I feel too heavy. But the moment I step into the space between the two pieces of fabric, a strange void arises which gives a new kind of being. I suddenly feel light, I completely forget my body, until I step out on the other side again, then my body returns.

Participatory agenda

The participant roles that unfold and the actions that take place between people and things in the process of aligning the experiment to its urban site is different, when comparing this experiment to Experiments 1 and 2. In the two previous experiments, we are dealing with sites in the city for which the municipality feels no responsibility. These are non-spaces, or urban sites that are considered to have little or no value. Apart from having to ask and fill out forms, they were easy to negotiate as sites for exploration and experimentation. This is the crucial difference with the narrow passage. The municipality feels responsible for the listed buildings for historical reasons, and the owner of one of the buildings feels responsible because this site has a special family significance and is linked to his childhood. The responsibility for the intervention is thus shared with both public managers and private owners. This collaboration arises during the actual construction of the work and ceases to exist after the work is dismantled.

Participation from the public depends on people's ability to engage and be part of a staged and performative intervention, where they are observed and video-recorded. The woman who spoke (above) participated by contributing with her reflections and is just one example of what the intervention might do to one's sense of body, of space and of intimacy. In general, the public is aware that they are entering a framed, artistic, set-up. This was not always the case with the intervention 'One Square Meter', where its materialization blurred the borders between reality and staged set-up.

Knowledge generated through Experiment 3

Agency among human and non-human actors is negotiated before and during the intervention itself. The human actors include the two artists/research-ers, the building owners, the municipality and the citizens who allow them-selves to be disrupted by the intervention. Among the non-human actors are the site itself (the narrow alley), the old historical walls, the hidden entrance, the specially woven textile (its materiality and interaction qualities) and the memories, sensations and embodied experiences this fabric evokes. The site is transformed into an experimental performative stage, but just for a short moment in time.
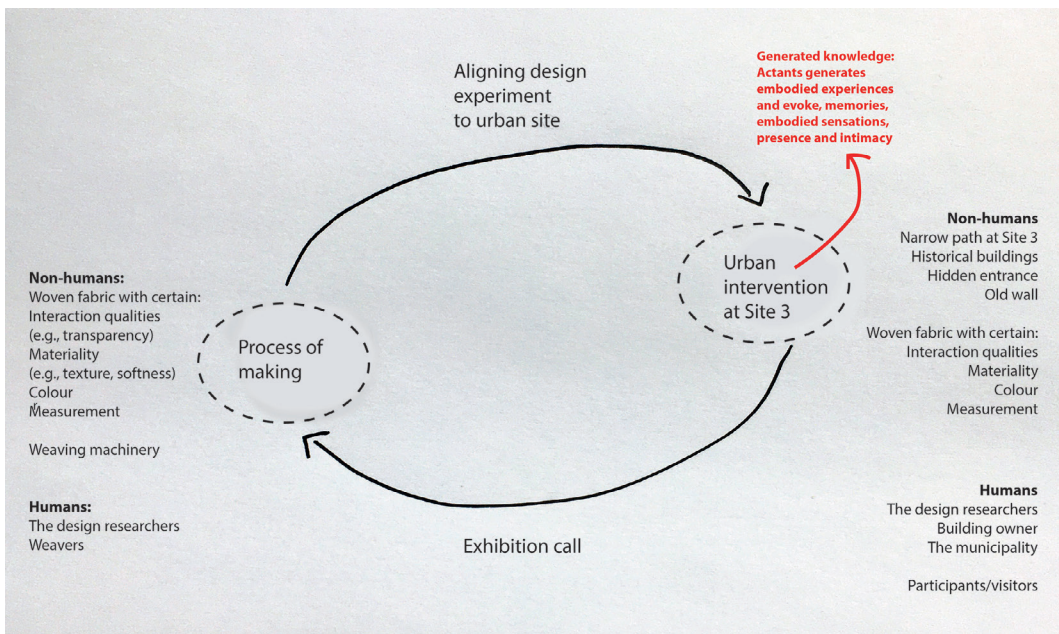

Figure 15: Outline of the network of humans and non-humans in 'Motion of Scales'.

Figure 15 outlines the network of non-humans and humans in the inter-vention 'Motion of Scales' and illustrates the alignment of actions in the process of 'making' and the actions that take place at Site 3. In this transforma-tion, agency is given to the site through the woven fabric and its interactive qualities that allow people to engage with the narrow space in completely new ways. Prior to the intervention, this space was a highly regulated area due

to the historic buildings and the value that the municipality attaches to such architecture – a site not be touched or changed. Through the intervention, a new space is shaped – a void that allows people to transcend in time, place or bodily experience. Thus, the temporal intervention generates embodied experiences. For some, the intervention evokes memories of the past; for others, it evokes embodied sensations, presence and intimacy.

5. DISCUSSION ON GENERATED KNOWLEDGE

The process of diagramming helps us identify and outline a range of participant roles that unfold over a timeline and enables us to draw the actions that take place between people and things. It assists us in aligning the work to its specific urban site and at the same time it uncovers relations, dependencies and hierarchies among various agents. As the analytical diagrams are constructed inductively from each case, they may only say something valuable related to the understanding of the three interventions analysed in this article. Yet the diagrams form an essential part of our analysis towards formulating what type of knowledge has been generated.

On the basis of the three case examples and the diagrammatization process, we have identified three concepts which run like a common thread between the process of making and the actual interventions at Sites 1, 2 and 3, namely:

the aspect of temporality,
the notion of citizenship and
the value aspect of urban space.

The starting point for the first intervention is the citizen Steve, a homeless person who lives on a public bench in Berlin for months and years. His possessions, his writings and his thoughts are transported from one public bench to another public bench: from the German capital with 3.6 million residents to a Danish city with 60,000 residents. In this process – within this time frame – thoughts about citizenship, about happiness and about sustainability are conveyed from a homeless citizen to his fellow citizens.

His bench in the park in Berlin is his home. His belongings are essential to his survival, and everything in this house is valued ('savings', 'luxury goods', etc.). In Kolding, a similar public bench stands in a corner of a green area. It is used intensely, perhaps as a sanctuary – perhaps as a refuge. Either way, this urban site has no value for the municipality, but it has value for those who use this space and who live with (in) it. And that is what the intervention 'One Square Meter' brings to our attention: the value of urban space can be perceived differently by various actors and is determined not so much by objective parameters but rather by the mundane everyday practices of citizens such as Steve. Objects like the bench and its surrounding space symbolize or represent culture or identity, but the material and property of the bench also permit certain behaviours in the first place.

In the second intervention 'I AM YOU', the aspect of temporality is closely linked to nature and to nature's rhythm and seasons. It is dependent on external help (from nature and 'helping hands'): for a seed to sprout, it needs water, warmth, light and time to grow. The intervention starts invisibly, deep underground, and over time it conquers its place in the urban space. What was once considered temporary recurs over time. 'I AM YOU' calls for a dependency

relationship between plant–human–beans and thus an invitation to community and co-ownership of a small urban area which, prior to the intervention, was forgotten, poorly maintained and owned (by the municipality) but not valued. It is now re-owned by the municipality and its citizens, and the value of this site, such as use value, emotional value, symbolic value, depends on this sense of citizen ownership.

In the last intervention, 'Motion of Scales', the temporality moves along different axes. Along one axis we have the intervention itself, which is very controlled. The participant moves forward (4 m) through a narrow alley. In the middle, the participant enters an artificial space (1-m wide and infinitely high) after which the person may move forward again (4 m) and leaves the performative stage.

When entering the 'void' in the middle, temporality moves along another axis: the relationship to time shifts and is no longer controllable. The experience of time can be connected to the body's perception of space or to time as a procession of past, present and future. Last but not least, there is the relationship between the perception of one's own body in relation to the bodies of others or, more specifically: the brief moment when we pass a stranger in a confined public space. Thus, 'Motion of Scales' questions the concept of proximity in relation to citizenship and disrupts our sensitivity towards strangers in the public urban space, in a post-pandemic age.

6. PROVISIONAL ANALYTICAL MODEL

In this article, we offer a method and a model to set up as well as analyse programmed interventions in the public space in relation to agency and the participatory agenda for humans and non-humans. This model can be condensed into three steps.

The first step consists of identifying the core non-human and human actors of the design experiment – as outlined with our three experiments. The

1. What are the design experiment's core non-human and human actors?

2. How do modes of alignment with the urban site, temporality, notions of citizenship or the value of the space interact or interfer with the experiment?

3. What knowledge about scaling agency has been generated?

Core non-human actor/agents

Core human actor/agents

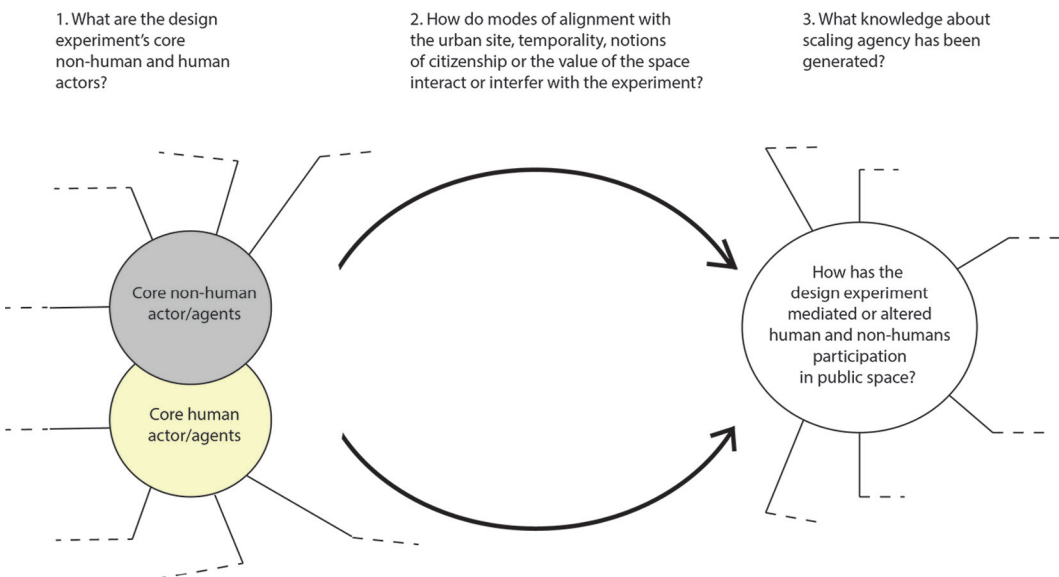How has the design experiment mediated or altered human and non-humans participation in public space?

Figure 16: Model of scaling agency.

second step aligns the design experiment with the site of intervention. This process is influenced by multiple modes of alignment that connect to temporality, participatory aspects, notions of citizenship or notions of value – for instance, in relation to how an urban site is 'owned' by somebody or valued by the public etc. We are aware that temporality, the notion of citizenship and the value aspect of urban space can take many forms and may have very different starting points. The last step consists of formulating what type of knowledge has been generated – and how a particular design experiment can serve as a vehicle for knowledge production.

These three steps form the basis of a provisional analytical model (Figure 16) that aims at capturing the dynamics in the knowledge production in relation to *how design experiments may mediate/alter the participation of non-humans and humans in a public space*.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, the focal point concerns design experiments being exhibited and programmed according to a specific conference call that investigates matters of scale. Through the exhibition of NORDES 2021 and the selected experiments, we demonstrate how a site-specific exhibition in urban space can be approached from a design research perspective – viewed as small experimental interventions within a large programmed framework – and serve as a vehicle for knowledge production. Our method consists of diagrammatizing the connection between the processes that precede an intervention and the network formations and forms of participation that arise during the intervention. Here, the negotiations between the human and non-human actors play a central role. By making these connections visible, the process of aligning urban interventions to a specific site and the combinations of urban practices and design research strategies are clarified, thus expanding the general understanding of scalar contexts.

Through the proposed analytical approach, we offer a method and a model to set up as well as analyse programmed interventions in the public space in relation to agency and the participatory agenda for humans and non-humans.

On this basis we encourage design research as 'exhibition' and propose a format that allows theory to enter the exhibition programme (of NORDES and other design research conferences) for the purpose of aligning exhibition contributions with theoretical contributions. This could be a first step towards democratizing the gap between the 'full paper' contribution and the 'full artistic contribution' – which currently do not seem to be integrated. We view the usage of analytical models, such as those proposed above, as a way to theorize the discussion. Additionally, pre-talks and interviews, panel discussions during a conference, appropriate documentation as case material for others can further open the debate and the integration.

This should benefit the research community, curators, the art and design community as well as the art/design/Ph.D. students who want to strengthen and explore the relationship between the research question, the experiment and the applied method, and who, last but not least, wish to conduct 'research through exhibitions'.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Eva Knutz is an associate professor and the co-founder of the Social Design Unit, at the University of Southern Denmark. She is interested in methodologies of practice-based design research and cross-disciplinary exchanges between social design, participatory design and design futures. In particular, she has a keen interest in politics of participation and how to involve citizens in participatory design processes leading to social value for the individual, the community or society at large. Her portfolio reflects an intensive collaboration with public sector institutions and citizens exposed to social or health-related challenges.

Contact: Department of Design and Communication, University of Southern Denmark, Universitetsparken 1, DK-6000 Kolding, Denmark.
E-mail: evak@sdu.dk

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4875-8868

Kathrina Dankl is an associate professor at the Lab for Social Design at Design School Kolding, Denmark, where her research focuses on experimental methodologies for an active involvement of various stakeholders in the design process. She has a key interest in using co-creation to generate knowledge about passages of life through childhood and adulthood, supporting agency, democratic participation and active citizenship. Particular fields of interest include welfare and healthcare design where she is currently involved in the large scale European Union project '4D Picture', supporting inclusive cancer care pathways.

Contact: Designskolen Kolding, Ågade 10, DK-6000 Kolding, Denmark.
E-mail: kad@dskd.dk

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5481-5614