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Challenging the place experiment

A critical take on the experiment as an urban planning strategy

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Abstract

Despite a recent interest among geographers and planners in experiments in and on the city, urban experimentation has yet to be examined critically. This thesis takes on the challenge by conceptualizing *the place experiment* as hermeneutical, transformative, co-creational and geographically bounded, and further by examining the strategic use of place experiments in municipal urban planning. The thesis draws links between an entrepreneurial governance paradigm and the experimental turn in planning, and revisits the experiment's journey from the natural sciences to municipal planning practice. Five semi-structured interviews with planners in the Municipality of Copenhagen make up the empirical core, and the planners' logics and arguments for producing place experiments in Copenhagen's disadvantaged neighborhoods are questioned in detail, aided by an intensive coding process. The study rests ontologically on critical realism and grounded theory, which is reflected in its iterative structure and continuous abstraction. An analysis of the five interviews give insights to the production of five separate place experiments in Copenhagen, each of which functions as a separate research case in this study. It is suggested that municipal planners in the Copenhagen Neighborhood Regeneration strategically employ place experiments in disadvantaged neighborhoods to I) incite local urban production, II) re-brand spaces III) develop local responsibility, IV) prepare locals for change, V) create local empowerment, VI) raise support and attention and VII) illustrate urban alternatives. Despite the good intentions, a critical analysis reveals that planners often fail to notice and act upon the challenges that these seven strategies entail. In order to use place experiments to advance some level of social justice and to challenge structural socio-economic inequalities, planners must consider more critically how to make sure that the experiment does not counterfeit democracy, marginalize existing place identities, suppress critique, depoliticize planning and governance, or empower false stakeholders. These precautionary actions require the planner to employ her agency in the confrontation with problematic or flawed logics within the municipal and political framework.

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PART I

CONTEXT & FRAMEWORK

1. Introduction

Over the last century, theory and practice in urban planning have changed along with contemporary political currents and in response to global transitions of society. In the Global North, governance paradigms and urban entrepreneurialism have recently replaced more management inspired planning policies and tasked urban planners with employing co-creation, demonstrating creativity and pursuing innovation in the urban production. In large and small urban planning projects, emphasis has been put on the strength of experiments and iterative test-processes to create the best urban solutions (Evans & Karvonen 2010; Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann 2017). As a response, the past few years, municipal planners in Copenhagen have turned to “place experiments” in their effort to create inventive and sound urban spaces in the city’s disadvantaged neighborhoods. However, despite a general support to participation, experimentalism and citizen involvement in urban planning and in municipal policies, there is not much discussion on why such experiments are conducted, and what urban planners intend to derive from them. Within the school of human geography, critique of urban planning experiments also remain unspoken, which is strange considering the current attention to experiments among geographers (Powell and Vasudevan 2007:1790).

In this thesis, my objective is to conceptualize the place experiment, to explore and challenge how and why such experiments are employed strategically in municipal urban planning, and to discuss the role and agency of the planner to create or advance a just city. Interviews with planners of five different place ex-

periments in Copenhagen make up my empirical foundation which I study with aid from critical urban theory. With a critical realist ontology I link place experiments with the co-creational and entrepreneurial turn in urban governance and draw on research on experiments from various schools as I seek answers to the question:

How do municipal planners seek to strategically employ place experiments in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and what challenges does this entail?

Problem area

The concept of *experiment* has been explored in the social sciences as well as the natural sciences, the humanities and many academic schools in between. In the field of urban planning, a newly gained interest in experiments call for a thorough inquiry in the concept and its strategic use. This is why I in this thesis pursue a critical examination of *place experiments*. As I will elaborate further in Analysis A (Chapter 5), a place experiment can be defined with the four characteristics: *Hermeneutical* (with an inherent aspiration to develop the experiment “as you go” and to learn from your mistakes), *transformative* (committed to make a change and to walk along “new paths”), *co-creational* (made in cooperation with and tested by citizens, institutions or other urban actors) and *geographically bounded* (constructed in a particular location and with a spatial agenda).

As contemporary governance paradigms emphasize co-creation, innovation and experimentation, urban planners are forced to reconfigure their role between expert planning authorities and risk-taking experimentalists (Munthe-Kaas 2015:219; Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann 2017:289). In this regard, the place experiment might be the perfect means for the planner to balance between the bureaucratic and the innovative. The geographers Andrew Karvonen and Bas van Heur, who are some of the most notable researchers on urban experiments in the social sciences, explain the dialectic character of experimentation in the urban production:

“Experimentation is helpful for opening up the evolution of cities to new conceptions and configurations, while nurturing innovation in a particular place — a laboratory — but it also introduces uncertainty and the potential for failure.” (Karvonen & van Heur 2014:381).

Place experiments seem to have an almost seductive effect on urban practitioners, as planners, citizens and other urban actors apply experimental methods and processes to their work in and on the city. This is something I have witnessed on close range working as a student assistant in Copenhagen's Neighborhood Regeneration¹ while and previous to conducting research for this thesis. But there is still a need to understand what tensions and challenges are related to these experiments. My proposition in this thesis is that a better understanding of how and why place experiments are adopted into urban planning practices by urban planners will inform and advise future experiments in the city. My analysis is therefore dealing with the place experiments from the angle of the planners that construct and conduct them. So far, scholars in human geography do not have much to offer in this regard, and despite a rising interest in urban experiments among geographers, the experimental approach in planning is perfunctory at best. A decade ago, the geographers Richard C. Powell and Alexander Vasudevan supported this claim with the following statement, which, I argue, is still valid:

“If geography has been rather lethargic in investigating the legacy of experiment for its own practices, the vocabulary of experiment has never been more common in geographical discourse - ranging through discussions of science and biopolitics as well as capital and modernity.” (Powell and Vasudevan 2007:1790).

In Denmark, the Municipality of Copenhagen has a history of conducting place experiments in “disadvantaged neighborhoods”² through municipal Neighborhood Regeneration programs. These programs are intended to secure that disadvantaged neighborhoods develop in line with local needs and wishes while advancing to the Copenhagen mean in terms of living standards. Traditionally, the planners' methods to reach this objective is based on network creation, empowerment initiatives, construction of meeting

1 The Neighborhood Regeneration, in Danish called “Områdefornyelsen”, is a five-year holistic intervention program in a geographically bounded neighborhood in a Danish city. New regeneration programs are initiated each year and consist of several physical, cultural, political and social projects. The objectives and projects in each Neighborhood Regeneration are decided and carried out in cooperation between a team of municipal urban planners and local stakeholders in the area (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017d:19). Neighborhood Regeneration is the name for the overall intervention program as well as for the Neighborhood Regeneration unit in each neighborhood. The overall objective for the Neighborhood Regenerations in the Municipality of Copenhagen is to “lift” disadvantaged urban areas on various parameters, in order to reduce inequalities between neighborhoods in the city (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017d:19).

2 “Disadvantaged neighborhoods” in the Municipality of Copenhagen are neighborhoods (defined by geography, culture and history) falling behind the municipal mean in terms of socio-economical parameters, physical standards and public resources. The five selection criteria for the municipal screening of disadvantaged neighborhoods are: Unemployed residents, residents without education, residents with low income, residents with non-western provenance (a particularly disputed criteria) and housing space per inhabitant (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017d:6).

places, cultural events, and a focus on health, environment and safety. Needless to say, the task is complex, spanning across social, physical, cultural and economical structures, and the road from planning project to socio-economic effect is rarely short and straight. For this reason, planners increasingly initiate place experiments in order to develop, test or create attention towards a local solution.

The place experiment represents a possibility for planners to meet and engage with citizens and other urban “stakeholders”³ on a local and practical level. Here is a chance to turn things around and let citizens, associations, local businesses and institutions co-produce their own local space in ways that normally would not fit the, let’s be honest, often quite inflexible municipal framework. In this thesis I explore how municipal urban planners employed in the Copenhagen Neighborhood Regeneration use place experiments in disadvantaged neighborhoods to address social, political, cultural and economic challenges, what problems and challenges this entail, and what the planner’s role might be in this regard. Hopefully, my conclusions can inform other analyses outside the scope of this thesis.

The five cases explained

In order to answer my research question, I have constructed a research framework with five particular place experiments at its empirical core. All five cases are experiments conducted by municipal planners in disadvantaged urban areas in Copenhagen. They are all initiated, facilitated and funded (at least in part) by the Neighborhood Regeneration program which is a part of the Municipality of Copenhagen’s Technical and Environmental Administration. My empirical inquiry consists mainly of five interviews, one with a planner of each place experiment, and is supported by policies, municipal road maps and other relevant documents. Casual field observations and my own experiences from working in the Neighborhood Regeneration adds to the empirical baseline. As seen in the map below, the five place experiments (illustrated with yellow) in this thesis are located in various Copenhagen neighborhoods.

³ “Stakeholder” is a word closely related to entrepreneurialism and neoliberalism, where stakeholderism or multi-stakeholderism is the contention that any space is an asset in which anybody can invest. By investing or planning an investment (economically or socially) in a particular space, the investor is assumed to automatically become a stakeholder who has “something at stake”, and who should therefore have power to decide over the space. The concept has been at the center of a critical discussion on land and water rights, particularly in the global peasant and small-scale fisheries movement (see for example Gleckman 2016), but is highly relevant in any discussion on space and power.

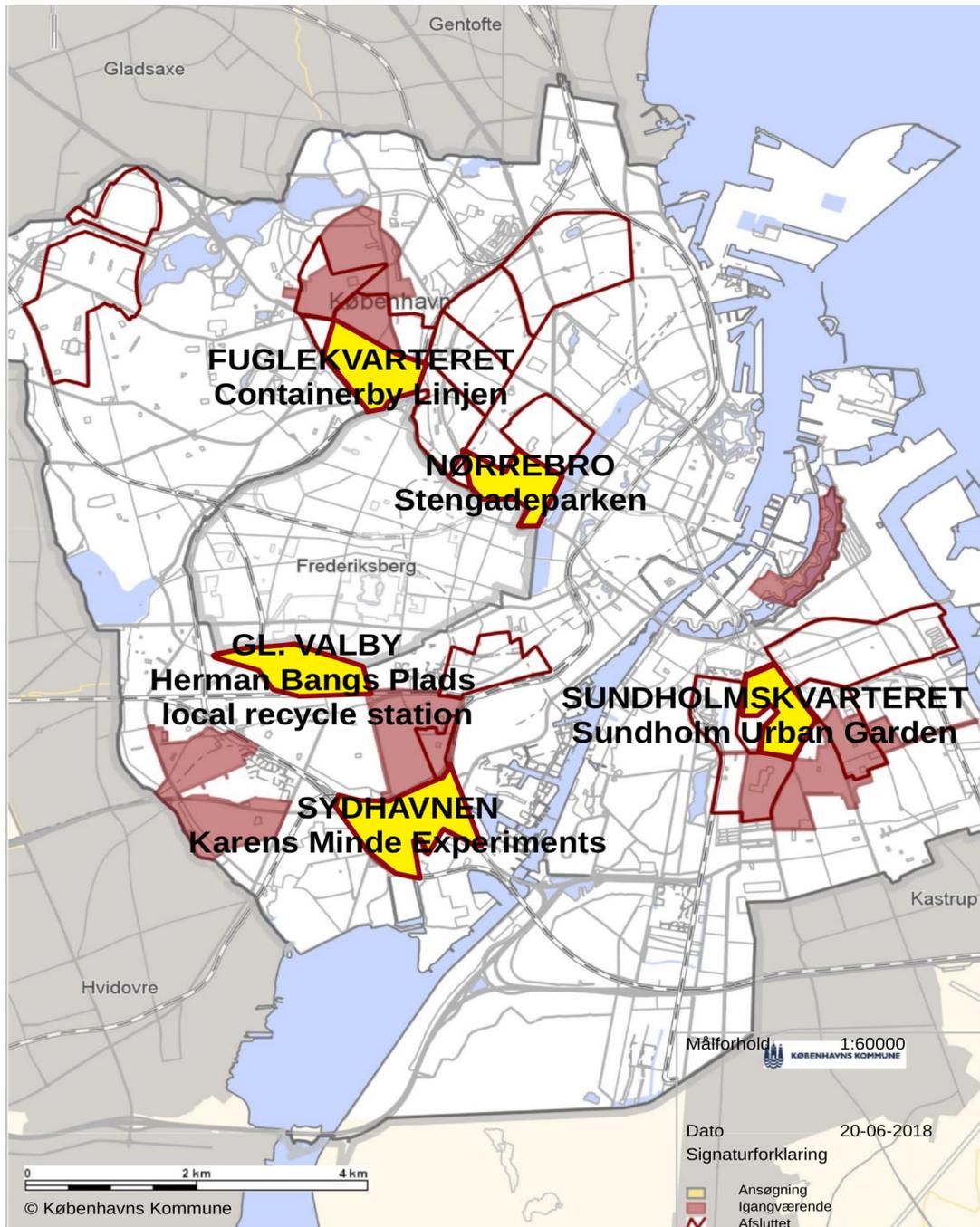


Illustration 1: The map shows past and present Neighborhood Regenerations in Copenhagen. Pink fills illustrate ongoing Neighborhood Regeneration programs while red contours illustrate finished. The yellow areas mark the neighborhoods in which the five place experiments are located. Two of these have ongoing Neighborhood Regeneration programs at the time of writing, namely Sydhavnen and Nørrebro. The map can also be found in Appendix IIX. Map: Municipality of Copenhagen.

Throughout the next five paragraphs I present a short narrative description of each of the five place experiments, providing the reader with a contextual understanding of each case.

Narrative introduction to the five cases

Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station

Neighborhood: Gl. Valby

Period: 2012 - 2012

Planner/interviewee: Ditte B. Døssing



Illustration 2: The open shipping container in Herman Bangs Plads was the core of the place experiment in its testing phase. Here municipal waste workers would host workshops on recycling, the local historical archive would teach visitors about the history of Gl. Valby, and neighbors could stop by to give new life to their waste or to just hang out. Photo: Valby Lokaludvalg.

In 2012, the Neighborhood Regeneration in Gl. Valby initiated, together with the Waste and Recycle unit in the Technology and Environment Administration, a place experiment in an abandoned bus terminal and its adjacent square, Herman Bangs Plads (Valby Lokaludvalg 2018). The Waste and Recycle unit's agenda was to construct more local recycle stations in Copenhagen in order to fulfill the municipal climate strategy (becoming "carbon neutral" by 2025) (Municipality of Copenhagen 2012), and the Neighborhood Regeneration caught the opportunity to let the local civil society influence the project. Their collective mission was to erect an interim meeting space by combining recycle facilities, cozy hang-out opportunities and a safe learning environment for all ages. The physical experiment, which would become known as Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station, was intended to be a temporary miniature proto-

type designed to qualify and strengthen a much larger, permanent recycle station (Døssing 2018:1p; Valby Lokaludvalg 2018). Co-creation, innovation and citizen involvement was key to the experiment, as the end product would be put together with help and feedback from local residents. Another objective was to create a place which was safe and green (Døssing 2018:2p). The combined experiment consisted of several phases. At the time of writing, the physical place experiment (the prototype in illustration 2) has been removed, and construction of the permanent recycle station is expected to start in the spring of 2019 (Valby Lokaludvalg 2018).

Sundholm Urban Garden

Neighborhood: Sundholmskvarteret, Amager

Period: 2008 - present

Planner/interviewee: Øystein Leonardsen



Illustration 3: The raised beds resemble an meticulous urban grid in Sundholm Urban Garden. Behind them, in the left side of the picture, is the greenhouse built by a team of socially vulnerable citizens. Behind the greenhouse is a corner of original Sundholm forced labor institution, now functioning as apartments for homeless. The copper building on the right is an experimental non-profit housing project, and the long building in the middle is a temporary kindergarten. Photo: The author.

In the back of a 100 year old social institutional village called Sundholm lies a garden which once provided fresh produce to homeless, outcasts and other unwanted citizens inside the walled and moated institution. The past many years, however, greenhouses and potato rows have yielded to a more wild nature, and the overgrown plot of land has slowly become a toilet, a junk pile, a battle ground and a place to withdraw for modern day outcasts. When a Neighborhood Regeneration program was launched in Sundholmskvarteret in 2008, the municipal planners saw the “unplanned” plot as an unique opportunity for the

neighborhood. Here, tugged in between a large social holistic housing plan⁴, a job center, a youth prison, a social activity center⁵ and several social institutions and homeless shelters, the planners invited neighbors and other local actors to participate in creating a more safe, more functional and less anarchistic space. There was no direct path to this objective, and the social and physical design was the result of an experimental approach allowing ideas to arise and take form along the way. “The plan was”, according to Øystein Leonardsen who were in charge of the Neighborhood Regeneration in Sundholmskvarteret,

“to give each [local actor] responsibility for something very specific and very tangible. So if it didn’t work, it could be taken down. Or it could be expanded.”
(Leonardsen 2018:4).

An urban garden took form, as a diverse group of participants asked themselves the question:

“How can we bring people together across cultures and social status? Can an urban garden do something like that?” (Leonardsen 2018:1).

Now, a decade later, Sundholm Urban Garden is a popular destination, particularly for children, homeless, and elderly people who reside in the neighboring institutions. The garden is operated by socially vulnerable citizens (guided by professional social workers) and a team of garden volunteers.

4 Social holistic plan is my dubious translation of the Danish concept “boligsocial helhedsplan”. The concept is closely linked to the role of the distinct non-profit housing sector in Denmark and defines a social initiative in a geographical non-profit housing area.

5 The social activity centre, in Danish “Aktivitetscentret Sundholm”, is a program in the municipality’s Social Administration, aiming to employ vulnerable and homeless citizens in flexible work programs (Aktivitetscentret Sundholm 2018).

Containerby Linjen

Neighborhood: Fuglekvarteret, Nordvest

Period: 2015 - 2017

Planner/interviewee: Kristoffer K. Thiesen



Illustration 4: Containerby Linjen in its heyday. The miniature container village which is constructed along the train tracks was complete with bike and craft workshops, a vegetable garden, free roaming chicken, a fireplace and plenty of good vibes. Photo: Andreas K. Haagensen.

Containerby Linjen was one of those places that made its visitors feel urban in the hippest and quirkiest sense of the word. The place experiment was a result of (at least) three things: 1) A fenced off plot of municipal land along the train tracks, 2) an ambition by Neighborhood Regeneration planners in Fugle-

kvarteret to support alternative culture production (Thiesen 2018:4), and 3) the activists in the grassroots entrepreneur collective Bureau Detours' search for a place to locate their urban utopia: A container village (Thiesen 2018:1; Bureau Detours 2017). Municipal planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration invited the activists to locate the container village on the specific plot for free and according to their own will and ideas, as long as they would adhere to general municipal requirements and host a number of public events and activities (Thiesen 2018:3). Kristoffer K. Thiesen, who (among others) planned Containerby Linjen on behalf of the Neighborhood Regeneration explains that the project consisted of two experiments: The activists' physical/social experiment which was the container city itself, and the planners' co-creational experiment testing how a collaboration between a civil society organization (Bureau Detours) and the municipality can work together on urban production:

“Our [the planners'] experiment was to say: Can we as the municipality use this [model of collaboration]? How can we use this and how can they [the activists] benefit from it - or how can the city benefit from it?” (Thiesen 2018:3)”

The container city was designed as a continuous experiment, always underway (Thiesen 2018:1; Bureau Detours 2017:6), but was closed down as after three years to give way to a bike route. However, the physical/social experiment continues, as Bureau Detours continue experimenting in other locations.

Karens Minde experiments

Neighborhood: Sydhavnen

Period: 2017 - 2018

Planner/interviewee: Karin D. Nordlund



Illustration 5: The use and purpose of the Karens Minde experiments is communicated on a sign by the Neighborhood Regeneration in Sydhavnen. The wooden construction in the background is a “library garden” co-created by various actors as part of the Karens Minde experiments. Photo: The author.

What do you do when you realize that the most popular and frequented spot in your neighborhood will be physically transformed to accommodate a climate mitigation project equip to handle an astounding 15.000m³ rain water? In Sydhavnen, where local residents and planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration were confronted with this issue, the planners set out to identify and catalogue the use and spirit of the

particular location which will undergo a complete physical transformation over the next few years. Karens Minde which, besides being an old farmhouse and a field, is as a vibrant community center (Nordlund 2018:1p), is the area's current pivot. The municipal planners invited local residents to take part in what they called "the Karens Minde experiments", consisting of seven separate experiments created to help local citizens define and test what a great urban space is to them, and how Karens Minde can be recreated and improved in the upcoming construction of the climate mitigation project "Karens Minde Aksen" (Nordlund 2018:4p).

All seven experiments are co-created, produced together with i.e. a university research team, a local school, and in all cases local residents. The experiments are physical constructions with social objectives, i.e. a library garden, local urban furniture, play sculptures, way finding elements, and other place identity creations. At the time of writing, the planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration are collecting and summarizing data on the experiments in order to pass this information on to the entrepreneurs and advisory team in charge of constructing Karens Minde Aksen. The ultimate objective of the Karens Minde experiments is that local needs and wishes for Karens Minde are incorporated into the new "climate resilient" landscape (Nordlund 2018:5).

Stengadeparken

Neighborhood: Blågård, Nørrebro

Period: 2017 - 2019

Planner/interviewee: Sia Boesen



Illustration 6: The long stretch of land squeezed in between a street and a non-profit housing association in Nørrebro has been cleared, tidied up, furnished with art installations and benches and named Stengadeparken. Through ongoing experiments, the Neighborhood Regeneration and local actors test and develop new functions in order for the space to become a green and social asset for local residents. Photo: Tina Saaby.

Compared to other neighborhoods in Copenhagen, Nørrebro has by far fewest “green square meters” (Boesen 2018:1; Municipality of Copenhagen 2008). Therefore, the planners in the local Neighborhood Regeneration saw the 5000m² in a little used avenue along Stengade as an unreleased potential to give local residents a few more green urban meeting places. Together with residents, the planners have attempted to make a small temporary park which they have named Stengadeparken. In the planner Sia Boesen’s own words, the physical experiment is a way to transform a non-place to a place (Boesen 2018:1). More specifically,

“it is an experiment in regards to how we can use a physical transformation to direct attention towards a particular space.” (Boesen 2018:2)

But Stengadeparken is not just a physical experiment. The planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration aim to create networks and make space for those who do not feel welcome many other places (in particular “wild boys”⁶, young girls and elderly residents), through the creation of a multi-generational park (Boesen 2018:3). On top of the physical and social experiment is

“an experiment in the collaboration between the municipality and the non-profit housing sector.” (Boesen 2018:2).

The land is owned by a non-profit housing association, but the municipal planners hope that residents and neighbors will be able to convince the association’s board to set aside money to co-fund a permanent park open for the residents as well as the public.

⁶ The past year (2017/2018), Nørrebro has been a territorial battleground, where different gangs have fought each other in the streets. Marginalized young boys are said to be particularly prone to recruitment by gangs. Boesen underlines how the place experiment in Nørrebro is an attempt to direct vulnerable young boys in the neighborhood away from gang recruiters and into places where they feel safe and at ease (Boesen 2018:9p).

Comparative overview of the five cases

While all the five cases presented above are defined by their planners as experiments, it is still unclear exactly what exactly an experiment in urban planning entails. This will be explored later, in Chapter 5, where I conceptualize place experiments. Meanwhile, in the matrix scheme below, the five experiments (vertically) are compared to each other by various parameters. The scheme is meant as a rough summary to skim and return to, but is not crucial to understanding the analysis in Part II.

PLACE EXPERIMENT	NEIGHBORHOOD	PHYSICAL OBJECTIVE	SOCIAL OBJECTIVE	POLITICAL/ECONOMICAL OBJECTIVE	CO-CREATIONAL OBJECTIVE	STATUS OF PLACE EXPERIMENT
HERMAN BANGS PLADS LOCAL RECYCLE STATION 2012 - 2012	Gl. Valby	Turn a non-place into a local resource and attraction by establishing a workshop based local recycle station.	Increase feelings of safety connected to a non-place by making it a social and green urban space for and belonging to local residents.	Attract municipal funding to up-scale the experiment and make it permanent.	Achieve synergies and combine resources from two municipal sectors in order to obtain a better result.	Physical experiment finished, a permanent, up-scaled construction of the experiment underway.
SUNDHOLM URBAN GARDEN 2008 - present	Sundholms-kvarteret	Turn a non-place into an urban garden for various social groups, operated by marginalised local residents and a local municipal institution.	Increase feelings of safety connected to a non-place by making it a social and green urban space for and belonging to different groups of local residents.	Attract municipal funding to make the experiment permanent.	Create local networks between institutions in order to increase feeling of responsibility of the urban space, and attract strong municipal actors to monitor the use of the space.	Physical experiment has become permanent.
CONTAINER-BY LINJEN 2015 - 2017	Fugle-kvarteret, Nordvest	Turn a non-place into an alternative culture center by lending the land to grassroots entrepreneurs building a workshop based container city.	Transform a non-place into a cultural resource for the neighborhood by supporting alternative cultures in the space. Support urban development from below.	Create political awareness of the social and economical potential of alternative culture centers.	Develop a model for co-creation between the municipality and grassroots entrepreneurs and culture creators.	Physical experiment is homeless, co-creational experiment is finished.
KARENS MINDE EXPERIMENTS 2017 - 2018	Sydhavnen	Create physical attractions to Strengthen place identity and to invite local residents to participate in defining their needs and demands for the urban spaces of a large upcoming climate adaptation construction.	Empower local residents, help them organise and mobilise them to make critical demands to the upcoming permanent construction.	Attract municipal funding for improvements of the urban space in the climate adaption construction.	Working with local organisations and municipal actors to strengthen local networks, local ownership and local support for the social experiment.	Physical experiments are ongoing and currently being processed and evaluated in order to influence permanent structure.
STENGADE-PARKEN 2017 - 2019	Nørrebro	Turn a non-place owned by a non-profit housing association into a local park, particularly for marginalised social groups, operated by themselves.	Increase feelings of safety connected to a non-place by making it a social and green urban space for and belonging to local residents.	Convince the non-profit housing association to co-finance the permanent park.	Develop a model for co-creation between the municipality and the non-profit housing sector.	Physical and co-creational experiments are ongoing and currently being processed in order to influence permanent structure.

Table 1: Matrix overview of the five cases. The overview can also be found in Appendix VII.

Reading guide

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part I which sets the frame and context, and Part II in which the problem is analyzed and conclusions presented.

Part I is made up by Chapter 1 outlining the problem and my approach to it, Chapter 2 presenting my ontological position, Chapter 3 unfolding the theoretical framework, and Chapter 4 explaining my methodological approach and reflections.

Part II is where the more analytical operationalization takes place. Here, in Chapter 5 the analytical context is established through a conceptualization of the place experiment (guided by working question A). Chapter 6, which is the main analysis, is an examination of seven strategic uses of place experiments (guided by working question B). Finally in the last analytical chapter, Chapter 7, I discuss the premise for my analysis by suggesting perspectives for further research on the topic of the planner's approach to a just city. My concluding reflections and statements are presented in Chapter 8.

Research design

I have built my research around three theoretical fields in a hierarchical structure: First a critical approach to urban experiments, second a theoretical overview of urban governance paradigms, and last a review of experiments in and on the city. The five cases of place experiments presented above constitute the empirical core. Whereas the theoretical elements help me generalize my research, the empirical cases allows for particularization. My analysis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) is an operationalization of theory and empirical data, closely scrutinizing the empirical while opening my research to larger societal perspectives. My research is problem-driven, and my approach is guided by grounded theory. As mentioned earlier, the following research question is the analytical guideline through the thesis:

How do municipal planners seek to strategically employ place experiments in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and what challenges does this entail?

In order to answer this question, I have broken it down into three more directly palpable working questions. I state below each of these working questions followed by a brief elaboration:

A) What is a place experiment?

My first analysis (A) is intended to help me contextualize my research. Here I develop a conceptual foundation for the following analysis and illustrate important links between the place experiment as a concept and the five cases which I study. The empirical foundation for this analysis is based on academic research and supported by empirical data.

B) What logics can be identified to explain municipal planners' strategic use of place experiments, and how can they be challenged?

The second analysis (B) uses the conceptualization developed in Analysis A to critically analyze planners' strategic use of place experiments. I take on this task by examining five place experiments in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Copenhagen as I identify and analyze seven strategic uses of place experiments. In my critical examination of each strategy I reveal the ideas and discourses that have shaped them and I challenge their applicability on a practical as well as on a theoretical scale. Interviews with planners of these five place experiments make up the empirical data for this analysis.

C) What is the planner's responsibility and space of opportunity in terms of advancing a just city?

I pose the last analysis (C) as a discussion because I see a need to reflect on the analytical premise, while I also acknowledge that the fundamental question of how to reach urban social justice through urban planning lies beyond the scope of my research. I discuss the planners' role and responsibility in regards to creating a just city. I build this discussion on social justice theory and empirically on interviews with the five planners.

Posed together, these three working questions guide my analysis and help me answer my research question. The objective of my analysis is twofold: 1) To contribute to academic research on urban planning by developing a conceptualization of place experiments, and 2) To challenge and improve the use of place experiments in planning by critically examining five cases in detail.

2. Ontological perspectives

Most social scientists, I suppose, have experienced the difficulty of choosing the right questions, or rather, the right empirical perspective in their research. Too theoretical questions make the analysis easily generalizable but unsatisfactory for concluding anything on the empirical matter. On the other hand, if the research is too particular, too preoccupied with the empirical, the Analysis is unable to produce conclusions about larger societal structures. Critical realism offers a place in between these two dialectics, following a notion that reality is stratified and not always accessible. I have constructed my research by combining a critical realist ontology with an iterative work process, shaped by ideas of grounded theory. I will explain in this chapter how these two ontological perspectives have contributed to my research.

Critical realism

In this thesis I employ Roy Bhaskar's (1978) critical realism as a theory of science in order to develop and clarify my ontological and epistemological outset for the central analysis. The process of developing my research question and the three working questions for this thesis, for example, is fundamentally driven by the epistemological aim of critical realism. By asking questions that require an inquiry to the causal explanations for an event, in my case place experiments, I urge myself to dig out, expose and critically study the mechanisms that connect and cause these experiments. In other words, *Why* are place experiments constructed and conducted the way they are?

Bhaskar warns us against “the epistemic fallacy” of critical realism, which essentially is to mistake

“the relationship between the nature of objects (realism as an ontology) and the social knowledge of them (realism as an epistemology).” (Yeung 1997:54).

Accepting that when I change my perspectives of a thing, the thing itself does not change, I also acknowledge that my empirical research may provide answers to my problem statement, but that there may still be other causalities that I do not know of or understand. Bhaskar argues that in order to escape the epistemic fallacy, we must see the world through a structured and differentiated ontology. The production of knowledge is a social activity (Sayer 1984:19p), and the world and what happens in it can be divided between three domains of reality (Sayer 2010:109), which in turn can be studied through either abstract or concrete

research (Sayer 2000:237). Following Bhaskar, *the real* is intransitive and intangible. We can study and try to understand phenomena all we want by analyzing and theorizing about its structures, correlations and processes, but we will never know if what we are experiencing are actual manifestations of the real. In order to study the real, we must apply abstract, theoretical research and accept the stratified domains of reality. With this ontology, my research and conclusions depend on my ability to transcend the empirical.

A critical realist singles out structures that can help explain why a situation has turned out as it has. In other words my task is to look for causal power relations. However, as geographer and social theorist Andrew Sayer points out (2010:118p), critical realism is not suitable to make general conclusions with reference to isolated studies of constituent parts of a bigger whole. For example, we cannot be sure that the larger society is a direct effect of individual actors and processes, just as we would not explain the power of water to extinguish fire by reference to hydrogen and oxygen, both of which are highly inflammable. With this in mind, I do not attempt to derive a generalized conclusion on societal structures from the five cases I explore in my analysis. This does not mean however, that I cannot aim to draw lines between my empirical findings and their structural or enveloping context. It does require, however, that I pay attention to the context of the field which I am studying. In this thesis, for example, it is important to understand how the idea of the place experiment has come to be, by considering what theoretical ideas and political discourses that may have contributed to its existence. This is the purpose of the theoretical chapter (3). Due to the particularity of the five place experiments serving as empirical cases in my research, my conclusions in this thesis are not intended to predict all possible outcomes of place experiments in urban planning. Rather, my intention is to analyze possible consequences of place experiments within the particular context.

Grounded theory

My work process throughout the production of this thesis has been guided by grounded theory principles employed primarily as a collection of methodological strategies and as a guiding set of principles for my critical inquiry. With an ambition to continuously raise the level of abstraction in my analysis, grounded theory has been a very useful method for inquiries about my empirical ambitions and about operationalization of theory and empirical data. The abductive nature of grounded theory allows me to go back and forth between analysis and data collection, each informing the other (Charmaz 2011:361). To me, the analytical process cannot be separated from theoretical considerations and methodological operationalization. In everyday life as well as in research, we move forward only by activating and building on what we already know. Often we are confronted by realizations that challenge our perceptions. Instead of discarding

or ignoring such new perspectives if they collide with my own, I employ them in my analysis to raise the level of knowledge.

In my research, I have shifted between induction and deduction, continuously moving back and forth between theory and empirical data (Tanggaard & Brinkmann 2010:207; Corbin & Strauss 2008:50). My interview guides in particular have been developed with grounded theory in mind, as I have allowed myself to apply and enhance my knowledge en route, thus improving my analytical questions as new perspectives emerge (see Appendix VI). I appreciate the methodological principles of grounded theory, as they encourage me as a researcher to engage deeply with my analysis, and compel me to remain critical to my own knowledge. In conclusion, Grounded theory offers a means to reveal implicit and discursive actions and positions, which makes it very applicable to my critical inquiry (Charmaz 2011:361).

3. Theoretical framework

Chronologically, my research process has started with curiosity, as I started asking myself why I encounter so many references to experimentation in my work with urban planning and disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. This question led me to critically explore the place experiment in relation to governance paradigms, which is materialized with this chapter as I provide a short overview of the development and connection of the three field(s), critical urban theory, urban governance and urban experiments. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the theoretical links of place experiments and to provide a theoretical context for my problem statement and subsequent research. As will become evident during the following pages, theoretical contributions to the use of place experiments in urban planning practice have ties to many different schools.

A critical approach to urban experiments

My analysis has its theoretical roots in critical urban theory. With strong ties to the Frankfurt School, critical urban theory is a theoretical school set out to improve human conditions through the studying of contemporary society, following the dialectical approach. By confronting what already *is*, it is possible to expose what *may become*. The school of critical urban theory was developed in the 1960's and 1970's, most famously by the French theorists Henri Lefebvre, in response to what we might call mainstream or neoliberal urban theory (Brenner 2009:198).

At the core of critical urban theory is the acknowledgement that society is a complex process and that existing structures and agencies should be assessed through a critical dialogue about alternatives, thus bringing the city closer to justice (Brenner 2009:204p). The employment of critical urban theory in my analysis is inspired by two things: 1) My own ambition that planners become aware of and encouraged to use their vantage position to steer urban governance and planning towards a just city, and 2) my experience with urban planners in the the Neighborhood Regeneration programs in the Municipality of Copenhagen who regard it as their job to improve particular and structural conditions in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods.

Lefebvre has been concerned with *the right to the city* though almost his entire career, and has presented thorough and illustrative discussions of the urban phenomenon (2003 [1974]). With his call for urban

dwellers to create an alternative urban life – less alienating and more meaningful, but still dialectical and playful – he has inspired many thinkers up until this day to challenge existing political paradigms, among others political geographer David Harvey (1973; 1985; 1989; 2013) and political scientist Susan Fainstein (2010; 2014). The right to the city relates directly to another theoretical concept developed by Lefebvre: *The production of space*. As a Marxist, Lefebvre regards space as being socially produced: Space is a social construct (this should not be regarded as equal to *imagined* or *not real*) influencing spatial practices and ideas about space (Lefebvre 1991). The persistence that space is political has animated many discussions on space and place (see for example Brenner 1999; Massey 2005; Harvey 2013; Soja 1989). The critical geographer Doreen Massey, for example, has taught us how globalist visions of a flat, apolitical space do service to entrepreneurialism, allowing corporate urban actors to claim space in the name of a “free market” and a “free world” (Massey 2005).

By insisting that space, and therefore also urban space is political, critical geographers have succeeded in drawing attention to issues of *urban, social* and *spatial justice* (Harvey 1973; Massey 1991, 2005; Lefebvre 1991 [1974]). Critical scholars agree that *the just city* requires a confrontation of capitalist and neoliberal structures, and that the notion of justice in all aspects of life in the city can be an empowering theoretical framework in this regard (Marcuse et al. 2009). However there is much disagreement in regards to *how* urban justice can be reached. Fainstein, in this respect, represents an incremental and pragmatic approach in her position that social justice can be implemented in neoliberal or capitalist urban regimes (Fainstein 2010). Harvey, on the other hand, is more radical in his insisting that capitalism must be *replaced* by socialism in order to achieve social urban justice (Harvey 1973). They both seem to agree with critical geographer Edward Soja, though, that:

“The geographies that we have produced will always have spatial injustices and distributional inequalities embedded with them.” (Soja 2010:72p).

Regardless of the road to urban justice, if, as sociologist Manuel Castells argues, the urban is a projection of society on space (1977:115), the place experiment may be an interesting means to challenge unjust social structures, and may offer critical alternatives to the existing paradigms.

Urban governance paradigms

International context and perspectives

Since the 1980's, the urban Global North's societal transformation from industrial to post-industrial

knowledge and service society has resulted in an increased focus on the city's competitive positions (Barber 2014). Urban theorists link this socio-economic urban transformation to a change from a managerial *government* paradigm to an entrepreneurial *governance* paradigm⁷ (Harvey 1989). This "new" paradigm differs substantially from the centralized welfare managerialism which drove urban policy and planning between the 1950's and the 1970's (Harvey 1989; Jessop 2000; Sandercock 1998b) and from the 1980's business inspired interpretations of managerialism, namely New Public Management. Where the management paradigms aimed at creating competitive entities (Hood 1991), it has been argued that New Public Governance and entrepreneurialism knit these entities together again in governance networks, reinforcing interaction between public and private levels (Osborne 2006).

In his citation classic *From managerialism to entrepreneurialism*, David Harvey (1989) turns to the city's reciprocal relationship with the social to explain how his interest in urban-social dynamics owes to a principal change in the foundation for the cities' economic development (Harvey 1989, 2013). Namely the late 20th century's accelerated globalization, economic restructuring, technological innovations and decline of the power of nation states (Brenner 1999; Soja 1989; Smith 1996). As a consequence of these transitions, cities rather than nation states now serve as the battleground for economic competition, as cities have the ability to create and strengthen economic investment and growth, often claimed to trickle down to the regional and national level. However, the trickle down effect has not been left without skepticism, and critical scholars maintain their argument that the entrepreneurial city encourages and supports unjust coalitions between political elites and corporate businesses (Harvey 1989; Jessop 1998; Swyngedouw et al. 2002), forcing social as well as ecological crises upon the entire planet (see for example Davis 2006; Swyngedouw 2005; Sandercock 1998b; Lefebvre 2003 [1974]). The shift from government to governance has also caused apprehension among critical scholars toward the entrepreneurial governance paradigm's deceptiveness, promising inclusion and redistribution of power (Arnstein 1969; Healey 1997) while its contradictory nature of governance-beyond-the-state is argued to lean towards a democratic deficit (Swyngedouw 2005). The entrepreneurial governance discourse is influenced by ideas of partnerships, network theory and collaborative dogmas as planners embrace co-creation and experimental bottom-up urban development (Healey 1997; Innes & Booher 1999) in an ambition to release and activate all possible resources in the city.

In her influential work *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, Sherry Arnstein (1969) has demonstrated the

⁷ It is important to note that the entrepreneurial governance paradigm is not a one size fits all. Some municipalities, for example, still regard their role as an authority rather than as an arena for entrepreneurial governance and co-creational practice (Tortzen 2016, Jensen et al. 2006:23pp). The concept of managerialism is being developed in academia and in practice as we speak, and my explanations are both simplified and generalized.

many levels of participation, and argued that different planning projects require participation of different citizens. However, with the entrepreneurial governance paradigm, not only citizens but also corporations, institutions and “investors” are invited to participate in the urban production. The paradigm represents a post-political discourse saturating virtually all dimensions of governance, in which politics is foreclosed by technocratic and consensus-seeking procedures⁸ (Žižek 1999:198pp).

Not only the role of the new planning paradigms, but also the role of the planner is discussed by critical scholars (Sandercock 1998a, 1998b; Lefebvre 2003 [1974]). Lefebvre introduces his readers to *blind fields*, a theoretical concept exposing urban planners’ inability to understand and act on all the dialectical complexities of the urban. In other words, Lefebvre argues that the hierarchical structures of any contemporary governance paradigm constrains planners (particularly those working inside *The System*) from acting in service of the citizens:

“The ‘decision makers’ [are] supported by those who own and administer the means of production, with the passivity of the ‘subjects’ who accept this domination.” (Lefebvre 2003 [1974]:43p).

Substantiating these tough words, Lefebvre steers towards “utopia” as he underscores planners’ responsibility to try to overcome their blind fields and refrain from perceiving citizens as a convenient means to sustain the capitalist system (Lefebvre 2003 [1974]:41pp, 188).

Local context and perspectives

While Lefebvre, Massey and Harvey’s contributions to the field of governance and planning are important in a global perspective, we still need to remember that place experiments are extremely context specific. Therefore, in order to understand what ideas may have inspired and influenced the planners’ approach to the five place experiments in this thesis, I briefly sketch the most relevant contributions to governance and planning theory in a Danish context.

In Denmark, the large top down welfare programs of the 1950-1970s have to a high extent been replaced by multi-stakeholderism and business-like project planning, outsourcing many previously governmental tasks to private companies and civil society. In many ways, this can be understood as an ideological turn

⁸ The post-modernistic depoliticization is a trait for which STS scholars too have been criticized in their attempt to merge laboratory studies with social science (Whittle and Spicer 2008:22). The discussion is elaborated in the following theoretical sub-chapter *Experiments in and on the city*.

for Danish municipalities and other political administrative institutions. Here, the keyword has become *co-creation* or *co-production*, in Danish *samskabelse*. As I will elaborate on later, this co-creational notion is an essential driver of place experiments. Despite being a conceptual addition to the New Public Governance tradition rather than a completely new paradigm, *co-production* or *co-creation* offers a catalogue of ideas about the relations between public administration and the citizens (Tortzen 2016; Agger & Tortzen 2015; Sørensen & Torfing 2005). Among the most important is the need for political administrations to engage in cross-sectoral governance networks and partnerships, and to actively put the citizens at the center of society's core functions. Not as consumers as in New Public Management, or as users, as in New Public Governance, but rather as participants and as partners. The same role is advocated for other so-called stakeholders, as they (particularly those with financial weight) secure financial stability and returns for property investments. Co-creation is thus covered in a veil of democracy and shared responsibility (Sørensen & Torfing 2005; Sehested 2003), while the concept may actually conceal a public handover of power to individual or market-based urban actors. This is where the place experiment becomes interesting.

Critical Danish scholars agree with their international colleagues that entrepreneurial and co-creational governance has become a battle for urban investments – a maneuver mimicking the game of *free market capitalism*, effectively curtailing urban democracy (Andersen & Jørgensen 1999; Torfing et al. 2012; Torfing & Triantafillou 2017). Increased competition, they suggest, may also drive entrepreneurs, investors and planners to favor safe and well-tested solutions rather than innovative and experimental solutions with high risks of failure. The Danish researchers on public innovation and planning, Peter Munthe-Kaas and Birgitte Hoffmann, have argued that a multitude of actors in a decentralized planning sphere may lead planners to target problems as single or individual problems to be solved with a technical approach, rather than as consequences of structural or systemic problems on a larger scale (Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann 2017:289). Another central critique questions whether current planning strategies and laws are apt to handle the complexity of an urban society (see for example Sehested 2003; Engberg & Larsen 2010). Ph.d. and researcher in urban planning and public administration Karina Sehested (2003; 2009), building on urban planning scholar Patsy Healey (1997), argues in this regard that urban planners' role becomes increasingly hybrid as urban governance paradigms become more entrepreneurial and co-creational.

Summary of urban governance paradigms

The entrepreneurial practices having characterized urban planning governance and practice since the 1980's have given incitement to collaboration across public and private sectors (Harvey 1989; Jessop

2000; Sehested 2002). Planning which was previously centralized and public is now increasingly outsourced to private entrepreneurs, civil actors and decentralized municipal offices. At the same time, discourses on governance have shifted from regarding the citizen as a passive client or customer to regarding her as a co-producer of welfare (Tortzen 2016). Together these trends in society have brought capital investors as well as citizens closer to the production of urban spaces in previously unconventional ways. The scales on which these “co-producers” of the urban have gained power may however be very different and co-creation has been criticized for leading to counterfeit democracy, favoring investors over citizens.

Experiments in and on the city

Understanding the genealogy of the experiment provides a sensitivity to the historic development and use of the concept and helps making sense of place experiments in a geographical perspective. Just like the review on urban governance and planning paradigms above, I begin this theoretical overview on urban experiments by exploring seminal international research on experiments before particularizing my review with more localized scholarly contributions on the topic.

International context and perspectives

The laboratory experiment originated in the natural sciences where it long has been regarded as a research entity separate from the surrounding society and natural world. Here, scientists may claim to make experiments without interference from the context in which the object of research is produced (Karvonen & van Heur 2014:381). In the late 19th to mid-20th century, the term *natural laboratory* was used by field biologists to contemplate scientific experimentation out in the field (Kohler 2002:214). Later, researchers have juxtaposed the field biologists’ ideas of an experimental space in the field to *the urban laboratory* and *the living laboratory*:

“Hugely powerful yet poorly defined, living labs offer a set of alluring promises: as idea factories for generating relevant and usable knowledge, as test-beds for applying this knowledge in real world-situations and as places to form the ‘blue-print’ for (...) adaptation elsewhere.” (Evans & Karvonen 2010:417).

As the quote by professors in geography at Manchester University, James Evans and Andrew Karvonen illustrates, urban laboratories are both constructed to develop, test and qualify urban productions of space.

While urban laboratories often have well-defined boundaries, distinctions between the field and the ex-

periment tend to be less defined in other types of place experiments. In the early 20th century, sociologists of the Chicago School became interested in the urban space as a space for experimentation (see Park 1929; Small 1921), marking the age of applied science (Karvonen & van Heur 2014:385). The Chicago scholars fell into two categories: Those who perceived the natural science laboratory as a way to make their own research on the city increasingly objective, and those who defied the claim that the urban fabric could be studied “out of context” (Kullman 2013:884). Researchers of the latter conviction insisted that the city provides a context for experiments not *on* the city, but rather *with* the city. Their claim was that the city must (and can only) be studied co-experimentally, that is, with the involvement of citizens, communities and every-day performances in the urban scene (Kullman 2013:884).

The natural science’s and the “white coat” Chicago scholars’ idealistic notion of the laboratory was later deconstructed by scholars in science and technology studies (STS) engaged with what came to be known as *laboratory studies*. These scholars emphasized the context in which the supposedly objective studies took place, and underlined how interests, materials, discourses and techniques performed in the laboratory all influence the experiment, and thus make it imbued with meaning and agency (Gross & Krohn 2005; Doing 2008; Klein 2008). STS scholars Bruno Latour (1983) and Karin Knorr-Cetina (1981) challenged the idea that the production of science is apolitical, asocial and universal (Doing 2008:279) and interpreted the laboratory as a theoretical notion (Karvonen & van Heur 2014:381). These scholars are themselves, however, criticized for depoliticizing their own role in social research, and for failing to recognize structural inequalities, norms and other underlying socio-political factors. Their critics stress, agreeing with the Lefebvre, that that depoliticization reproduces rather than challenges urban hegemonies (Whittle and Spicer 2008:22).

The geographic discipline is in the midst of an experimental turn, as geographers (belatedly, some would argue) have turned their attention towards the spatiality embedding their research practices as they study space and place (Powell & Vasudevan 2007:1790). Geographers and urban scholars now increasingly concede that their field does not just consist of empirical observations, but that methodologies such as field experiments and urban labs are themselves spatial and political practices. Despite the advancement of this perspective, scholars call for a more critical stance on the experimental turn (see for example Ronell 2005; Thrift 2009; Gross & Krohn 2005; Powell & Vasudevan 2007).

Local context and perspectives

The growing interest in experiments is not confined to the field of geography. Recently, scholars in design studies have shown interest in the experiment in design processes as a method for

urban planning (see for example Binder and Brandt 2008:115pp; Björgvinsson et al. 2010:41pp; Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann 2017). Peter Munthe-Kaas (2015) and Birgitte Hoffmann (Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann 2017) have explored the design and performance of place experiments from a design perspective. In a democratic experiment, Munthe-Kaas and Hoffmann argue, there should be no clear experts, exactly because the experiments is set out to challenge or test known facts, and to produce new knowledge. The test subjects must be in the center, whether human or non-human, and the owner of the experiment should only decide the experimental framework, not the scope of its results. The question remains whether the absence of power conflicts in the experiment fits the empirical reality. Munthe-Kaas and Hoffmann (2017:293), who suggest that agonism may in fact trigger Lefebvre's urban utopia (Munthe-Kaas 2015), anticipate this question by concluding that experiments in Danish urban planning are not democratic enough, criticizing municipalities and urban planning institutions for

“leaving too little space for alternatives and for disconnecting citizens from imagining the future.” (Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann 2017:289).

Summary of experiments in and of the city

The experimental turn in geography has led to a rediscovery of the Chicago scholars' theories on experiments in and on the urban, as the experiment with its co-creational and creative dogmas seems to be a perfect fit for the current governance policies in urban planning. However, despite its renewed popularity, the urban experiment is poorly defined and lacks critical assessment (Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann 2017; Powell & Vasudevan 2007). In particular, a critical examination of experiments in urban planning should consider the experiment's inside-outside dynamics, its political context and implications, and its internal and external conflicts of power.

4. Methodological and empirical framework

In this chapter I will try to explain how I have translated my analytical ideas into an operational research design. Rather than a complete analytical strategy, the choices presented in this chapter should be understood as methodological principles and ideas guiding my analysis.

Selection of empirical cases

Physical projects carried out through municipal Neighborhood Regenerations often diverge from other municipal physical construction projects because of their implicit and comprehensive citizen involvement and often unresolved financing (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017b:3; Municipality of Copenhagen 2017c:4). For this reason (among others), physical construction projects in the Neighborhood Regeneration can rarely be conducted as “business as usual” with top down approaches. With an inherent understanding of the importance of citizen involvement, the processes and value chains in the Neighborhood Regeneration are “less lean” (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017c:4), and the planners are more inclined than other project leaders to conduct experimental process. This explains why I have found all five cases through my work with the Neighborhood Regeneration, and this is also why I have decided to limit my cases to place experiments conducted by Neighborhood Regeneration planners.

I study several cases in order to allow a broader range of perspectives and dilemmas to my analysis. I do not claim to conclude on all planners’ rationales and reflections, but I strive to reveal a variety of perspectives and to locate patterns in these (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:134). The selection of the five cases is the result of an abductive reasoning. By going back and forth between my research problem and empirical data, each informing the other, I have been able to outline the emerging analysis and simultaneously delimit my research focus. As explained in Chapter 1, the five cases of place experiments are all funded (at least in part) by the Municipality of Copenhagen, and have been supervised by planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration. Their divergence and similarities are explained in the matrix scheme in table 1 in the same chapter (page 23/Appendix VII). As shown in table 1 and in the map in illustration 1 (page 12) I have chosen cases with a variety in terms of longitude, status (ongoing or finished), main objectives, co-creation (who are involved and how), inside-outside dynamics (how defined are the methodological or experimental boundaries), geographical location and immediate urban functions.

Reflections on qualitative case research

My research for this thesis is fundamentally problem-driven. What drives my inquiry are questions of *what* constitutes a place experiment, *how* these experiments are conducted, *why* it is so and *how* these experiments are given meaning. The nature of these questions is qualitative, as they are concerned with the qualities and meanings of a social process rather than with the measurement of frequency or quantity of the variables in said process (Denzin & Lincoln 2011:8). A qualitative methodology allows me to study problems deeply and to explore contingent processes in relation to their social and geographical context. The qualitative approach does not allow the same level of representation or generalization as a quantitative study might have. However, as previously noted, a case study is not about generalizing, but about particularizing.

With the ontology of critical realism I take the position that there is a reality out there, but that it can not be fully apprehended, only approximated. By studying the empirical I hope to understand the events that lie behind it and to propose theoretical arguments for and against what I can comprehend. This is not to say, however, that the empirical is just laying readily out there for me to pick up and use. All empirical data in this thesis has been selected, translated and presented, all of which requires methodological consideration of how to apply or discard each piece of data. Some methodological considerations have been taken before the empirical inquiry, others have been taken in the field, and others again are results of retrospective reflections back at my desk.

According to the Danish geographer Bent Flyvbjerg (2011), the most important question when deciding to conduct a case study is not so much which methods to apply, but rather what to study. Delimiting a case study is a difficult task that requires the researcher to reflect on the individual unit of study as well as on the setting of its boundaries (Flyvbjerg 2011:301). In this thesis, I have taken the liberty to apply methodological reflections of the case study to my research without insisting that my study corresponds completely to the framework of a case study. Hence, my use of the words *case study* should be taken as a reference to the epistemological arguments and the structure of my operationalization of the empirical rather than as a 1:1 example of a case study.

My position

My position as a student worker in Neighborhood Regeneration has opened many doors, given me a basic knowledge of the cases I have chosen to study, and eased contact to the interviewees. Since I share a professional background with my interviewees, my interview questions have been easy to understand for my interviewees, just as I have been able to understand and reflect promptly on their answers during interviews. A potential drawback to this, I realized as I conducted the interviews, is that because I regard my interviewees as colleagues, and perhaps more importantly as possible future employers, my interview questions have in some cases not been as critical as I had intended. I do not, however, regard this as very problematic, as my subsequent coding of the interviews has allowed me to critically analyze the empirical data. My position as part of the field, however should not be neglected, and I have tried to keep it in mind at all times.

Collection and operationalization of data

On the following pages I outline my reflections in accordance with the methods employed in the collection and operationalization of data for this thesis.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews make up the majority of empirical data in this thesis. My interest in planners' strategic reflections regarding place experiments made interviews a logical choice of source, because interviews are particularly suitable for exploring a person's perception of conditions in her life world (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:137). With reference to my analysis' ontological and epistemological outset in critical realism and grounded theory I acknowledge and adhere to my own learning process throughout the entire analytical work. This is for example reflected in my interview process and in my interview guide (Appendix VI). Since my working questions A (*What is a place experiment?*) and B (*What logics can be identified to explain municipal planners' strategic use of place experiments, and how can they be challenged?*) are both exploratory and explanatory, it has been necessary to balance between a circular and linear interview process. Anybody who has conducted qualitative research will know that new dimensions can be revealed in the middle of an interview, and that the researcher is then forced to decide whether to integrate these new insights into the remaining research structure, or ignore anything falling outside the "original" research framework (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:133). My approach to this dilemma (which has been recurring throughout my work) is to adhere to my ontological conception and continue to

push my research to higher epistemological levels by adjusting my interview guide after each interview. The guide in Appendix VI is the version used for the first interview (see Thiesen 2018).

All interviews have been conducted in Danish, since this is the mother tongue of all interviewees as well as myself. Any interview quote in this thesis is therefore translated from the Danish transcript into English⁹. I do not, however, find that translations are distorting the empirical data, because I, when encountering difficult translations, have paid attention to substance rather than exact words. This exercise is further eased by my close relation to and thereby understanding of the field.

Coding interviews

Initiating my research for this thesis, I thought I would focus on planners' objectives when conducting place experiments. After completing my first few interviews, however, I realized that looking for "objectives" might help me understand the planners' intention on an immediate basis, but not on a deeper ideological level. Instead I started examining how place experiments fit into distinctive planning strategies alluded to by the five interviewed planners. I found out that each experiment is a means to fulfill several particular strategies often accepted as valid in municipal planning circles beyond the experimentalist planners. By critically analyzing each of these strategies through extensive coding I expose the underlying ideas that feed into their production as I dissolve each strategy to answer research question B (*What logics can be identified to explain municipal planners' strategic use of place experiments, and how can they be challenged?*).

Operationalization of theory and empirical data is largely a matter of interpretation (what did she mean when she said that?), but because I understand the world as stratified I also accept that reality does not change in accordance with my interpretation. Grounded theory offers coding strategies to sort, synthesize and summarize data, all of which are methods essential to my processing of the completed interviews. Basically, my coding strategy has been to take data apart and define what constitutes it, linking each part to a theoretical category. Fundamental to this approach are questions about power (Charmaz 2011:363). I have analyzed my interviews according to Glaeser and Strauss' coding and categorization techniques, specifically developed for grounded theory in 1967, but applicable to many other studies (see Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:223pp; Charmaz 2011:359pp; Corbin & Strauss 2008). The process is duplex in the sense that I make two sets of codes by which I saturate my empirical data. First I code all interviews together by noting, underlining and commenting on important elements in the interview (theoretical linkages, surprising or repeated information, things emphasized by the interviewee, or links to the conceptual-

⁹ The original (Danish) transcriptions of all five interviews can be found in Appendixes I-V.

ization presented in Analysis A (*What is a place experiment?*). These *a priori* codes are broad, such as “the planner’s role” and “objectives of experiments”. I collect the codes in a code scheme along with explanations of the specific codes. Next, I create a (smaller) number of codes, I call these *emergent codes*, adding to the initial *a priori* codes. Examples of these codes are: “non-place” and “trial and error”. In the entire process of coding, I collapse, expand and revise the coding categories as I adjust my codes to the data. Finally I end up with 42 codes divided into nine categories through which I complete my analysis. It is difficult to explain in detail how I have developed my codes, and I hope that it is sufficient to say that the *a priori* codes rely on immediate interpretations of the empirical data, whereas the emergent codes have been developed through saturation of empirical data on a more theoretical level (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:224). The examples below are snapshots of three different stages of the coding process.

The image shows a screenshot of a text document on the left and a comment thread on the right. The text document contains several paragraphs with yellow highlights. The highlights include phrases like "de er meget bange for alt hvad der foregår i FP", "men det er meget sjældent at det er beboere der kommer op med den rigtige løsning for en plads", and "Beboerne er jo super vigtige, fordi det er dem der". The comment thread on the right shows three comments from a user named "Sif Juhl" dated "12:08 PM Apr 20". The comments discuss topics like "tryk/utryk", "plads til alle frem for pladser til alle", and "borgerinddragelse er ikke en perfekt metode".

Illustration 7: *A priori* codes in the making. Anything that sticks out or resembles a pattern is highlighted and given an *a priori* code. Often, the code is supported by a comment.

Code scheme				
Objective of experiment: Challenging established system/structures/ways				
A	B	C	D	
7	Planning in challenged neighborhoods is complex and needs to be experimental, co-creational and cross-administrational	<p>Fordi at det her sted, nu er det jo også en forforståelse, men det er dømt til at blive overtaget af uledsagede børn og problematiske unge, fordi der er så meget behov for steder. Der er simpelthen så mange børn og unge som ikke må være derhjemme og som ikke må være indefor og ikke må være i gårdene og ikke må være nogrsomtstet steder. Så hvis man lavede sådan et sted der ikke var nogens, så ville de være der. Og man ville sandsynligvis typisk ha lavet lækker boldbane, noget siddeplads, noget skate, som man jo gør mange steder. Og så ville man ha haft de her grupper af unge, man så ville skulle håndtere i BUF og i SOF og i byens drift. (22:54) Og det er jo bare en fordom. Jeg har jo ikke beviset for det. Men vi tror på, at hvis man gør det på andre måder, så foregriber man nogle af de her ting. Nu er der så også det ved det, at det er et alment område, så det ville ikke ske. Man ville sandsynligvis, når det er et alment område, hegne det ind med et to meter højt hegn. Og i bedste fald ville der være en meget traditionel legeplads. Og i værste fald ingenting. Måske græs og parkering. Asfalt. Det er i hvert fald hvad vi kan se mange af de andre steder. Og på den måde ville det jo ikke ha givet noget tilbage til kvarteret. Og vi oplever også at de der sidste områder, de er ikke tryghedskabende, ikke engang for dem som er inde bag ved hegnet eller lågerne. Fordi så bliver de brudt op og hærværket og så bliver man endnu mere frustreret. Det er i hvert fald hvad vi kan se i de andre områder hvor der er låst.</p>	<p>"Fordi så er vi blevet en aktør dermede som har sagt: Det er os der bestemmer over grunden fordi det er os der har ansvaret for den"</p>	<p>Formål for AG: i socialt formål (s parter, men mar komplekse udfo kommunen og i komplekst probl helheds-blikket. hvis man planla samarbejde me</p>
8	Social hosts (municipal institution)	<p>Min erfaring er at der ret ofte er brug for at der er nogle, som er på job, som har noget værtsrolle. Og det kan være KFF eller en boligsocial helhedsplan eller SOF eller hvem det nu kan være. Og de er nødvendige ift. et kontinuerligt understøttende element.</p>		<p>"Samtidig begy af og ligesom st "... og så tror je skabte mest liv netværk. Og at en legeplads."</p>
9	Traditional construction process/business as usual	<p>Hvis nu man havde grebet det lidt traditionelt an.. Hvis vi nu forestillede os at det var et kommunalt område, så man bare kunne gøre ting. Så ville den traditionelle måde være at kære en boerinddignelsesproces a la den i forbindelse med visionsplanen. Og så ville man ha lavet en høringsfase, og så ville der ha været nogle politiske røster. Så ville man ha håndteret dem politisk. Og så ville man ha sølet en eller anden fysisk forandring ud. Og så ville man ha ventet fem år og så så ku det være at man blev nødt til at lave det om. Ligesom man blev nødt til i folkets park</p>	<p>"Til at starte med syntes jeg det var fedt, for vi gav dem en legeplads, hvor vi kunne sige, til modsætning fra alle de private steder de har været tidligere, der sker der altid på et tidspunkt at når det bliver en stor succes - de er jo de der frit movers i kvarteret/okningen, det første lille hul i gentrificeringen og så begynder det hele at rulle - og når deres sted er blevet fede, så siger grundejerne: nå men nu skal i ud, for nu er det blevet penge værd, og så river vi det ned og bygger ungdomsboliger i stedet. Og det er det der sker alle steder."</p>	<p>"Så jeg tror at ..."</p>

Illustration 8: Combining a priori and emergent codes. This is a big and complicated task which is reflected in the number and size of code sheets.

Codes								
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
The role of the planner in an experiment	Creating place identity and showing future possibilities through experimentation	Empowerment of marginalised groups and mobilisation of social resources in a challenged neighborhood	Challenging established planning traditions through experimentation, co-creation and cross-administrational practices	Methods of experimentation	Proceeding from experiment to something else	Power, ownership and who's city?	Experiment as a strategy for political support	Description of the particular urban experiment
Liabilities and risks in a complex area	No place	Mobilise resources in challenged urban area	Co-creation experiment/ collaborating with other organisations or municipal actors	Defining experiment: Trial and error	The defining evaluation and Conversion of an experiment into something else	Power, ownership and rights to define an urban area	City with an edge	Description of experiments
Municipal bureaucracy is a challenge for experiments and co-creation	Create place/create place identity	Co-creation rather than citizen involvement	Planning in challenged neighborhoods is complex and needs to be co-creational and cross-administrational	Process of experiment: Pathway evaluation and adjustments	Capturing/anchoring knowledge from experiments after it is finished	Urban planning should give something back to the community/neighborhood	Strategic use of policies, and utilizing a public or momentum	
Planner with a co-story has: Balancing municipal bureaucracy and civil immediacy	Illustration of future possibilities of an urban area/no place	Social hosts (citizens)	Social hosts (municipal institution)	LABOR as experimental	Ways to make the experiment into a permanent structure	Ownership of experiment	Strategic branding of a place/challenged neighborhood	
	Experiment as a tool for dialogue	Experiments in challenged neighborhoods	Tradition of construction process/business as usual	Defining experiments: Open for ideas and possibilities		Experiments as a way to support urban development from below	Co-creation as an (re)discover municipal funding	
		Experiments in challenged neighborhoods must be physical as well as social	Objective of experiment: Challenging established systems/structure as ways	Process of experiment		Citizen involvement		
		Empowerment and local ownership as a strategy in challenged neighborhoods		Time/iteration time				
		Experiments in challenged neighborhood is a way to activate and mobilise human and physical resources that are already there		Experiment: Finding possibilities				
		Challenged neighborhoods: Feeling of safety and unsafety		Experimental method				
		Experiments create networks / Networks as a method to empower and organise a space						

Illustration 9: The process resulted in 42 distinct codes. Each color represents a category. Quotes and comments were added to each code in a separate sheet. The code scheme overview in the picture can be found in Appendix VIII.

Using the 42 codes as outset for analysis B, I determined that municipal planners adopt and internalize seven distinct planning strategies in their work with place experiments. Since these strategies are generally tacit, their appearance in my analysis is the result of the operationalization explained above. The strategies are thoroughly analyzed in Chapter 6 (Analysis B).

Coding secondary data

The five interviews contextualize each of the five place experiments, and as explained above they repre-

sent unique data in my research. This does not mean however, that they are my only empirical foundation. Working in the Neighborhood Regeneration for a year I have met my interviewees, heard about the experiments which I study, and become acquainted with municipal policies, reports and agendas on several organizational levels. Such tacit knowledge, policies and reports make up a substantial part of the empirical foundation of this thesis and function, along with observations in the field, as secondary or supplementary data. While the interviews as my main data source are subject to systematic coding (see above), the secondary data has been coded less systematically on top of the interview data. With this approach I acknowledge my position in the field that I study while assessing empirical data that I have gathered either consciously or subconsciously.

PART II

ANALYSIS

My initial interest in place experiments was evoked by my ambiguous impressions of the ones I already knew. On one hand, experiments in the city can foster social and cultural networks among neighbors, produce solid and democratic urban spaces and secure that a local park or a recycle station meets the needs and requirements of local stakeholders. On the other hand, temporary “creative” investments in urban spaces may drive up market prices and be a means to capital appropriation, ultimately benefiting private investors and the upper middle class. This made me wonder about the planners who conduct such experiments: What are their intentions really, and what do *they* expect to be the result of these urban experiments? Eventually I posed the research question presented in Chapter 1. I think a repetition of this question is appropriate before initiating the analysis:

How do municipal planners seek to strategically employ place experiments in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and what challenges does this entail?

A disciplinary hybrid, the place experiment is not easily examined, nor easily conducted. The place experiment is a complex entanglement of social, economic, physical and political sub-experimental pro-

cesses inseparable from each other. As shown in table 1, Chapter 1, each case in my research consists of several experiments with different physical, social, political/economical and co-creational objectives, often referred to by the planners as inseparable. I mention this because I want to make it clear that it is not always possible to isolate features and processes in place experiments, and that unambiguous answers can be hard to find, which will become evident in the following chapters.

The analysis in this thesis is divided into three analytical chapters (5, 6 and 7), (the latter being a discussion chapter) each addressing a working question (A, B and C respectively). In Analysis A I conceptualize the *place experiment* in order to set the framework for the next two analyses. In Analysis B I critically examine five municipal planners' strategic construction and conduction of place experiments, while I address problems related to this. In the discussion (Analysis C) I pursue a theoretical discussion of the planner's role in and responsibility for a just city.

5. Analysis A: *What is a place experiment?*

Over the next few pages I conceptualize *the place experiment*. As shown in the theoretical chapter (3), experimental methods have been practiced and studied in many different contexts apart from urban planning and human geography. Since place experiments have received much publicity among planning practitioners, but little geographic scrutiny, a conceptualization of the place experiment is necessary in order for me to proceed answering my research question.

Four characteristics of a place experiment

Place experiments come in different shapes, scales and intensities. Some experiments are micro-local, their subjects could be the residents in a house or the users of a trash can, some are local, confined to a park, a garden, a street or a building, while others are city-wide, collecting data from i.e. the users of a smart-city grid, a housing policy or a social visitation program. Some are limited to a certain period, a week, a month, years, while others are consecutive. Some measure only one feature or process, while others rely on and play with countless variables. Some planners seek to confine the experiment and its derived data to a controlled setting, while others see the experiment as dependent on and inseparable from its urban context. The design of some place experiments simulate the natural science laboratories, striving for reproducibility and controlled data samples, while others are based on more makeshift approaches.

By reviewing theoretical links to place experiments in Chapter 3, it has become clear that the place experiment does not belong to a single academic school, but owes its recognition to research in various scientific disciplines. A simplistic overview of some of the most important contributions to my research on place experiments illustrate the academic inspiration for the following conceptualization:

Contributions to the place experiment from various academic schools					
	CRITICAL QUESTION	THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION	DEFINING RESEARCHERS	SCALE	RELATION TO THE CITY
HUMAN GEOGRAPHY	How can place experiments contribute to a just city?	Critical urban theory	Lefebvre (1974), Karvonen & van Heur (2014), Evans (2011)	Global-local	The city is a political structure.
ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN	How can the design and performance of the place experiment be improved?	Urban design studies	Munthe-Kaas & Hoffmann (2017), Binder & Brandt (2008)	Local	The city is a human design.
SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY	How does the place experiment interact with everyday lives in the city?	The Chicago School	Park (1929), Small (1921)	Local-global	The city is the scene for human activity.
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY STUDIES	How can dialectics between natural and social sciences be overcome through place experiments?	Actor-Network Theory and post-modernism	Latour (1983), Knorr-Cetina (1995)	Local-global	The city is a network of human-and non-human actors/actants.

Table 2: Illustration of theoretical contributions to the conceptualization of place experiments by various schools.

By juxtaposing the five cases with theoretical perspectives on experiments in an urban context (see Chapter 3) I have arrived at a definition of place experiments consisting of four characteristics: 1) Hermeneutical, 2) transformative, 3) co-creational and 4) geographically bounded. I elaborate below the most important dimensions of each.

Hermeneutical

The process of a place experiment is deliberately rugged, spiraling to emphasize conscious reflection and recursive learning (Munthe-Kaas and Hoffmann 2017; Leonardsen 2018:2). The learning process is the spine of the experiment and can either be planned in advance, improvised, or anything in between. In any case, place experiments are essentially about trial and error (Døssing 2018:5, 13; Leonardsen 2018:3). While urban planning is soaked in “best practice”, the place experiment offers a space of exception. Here, success is not just measured in terms of sticking to the plan or following a predefined path, but rather in terms of learning. In traditional planning, mistakes, sudden revelations and unforeseen challenges are rendered as unintended consequences. But in the place experiment, the hermeneutical process makes *learning from one’s mistake* the most important methodological tool. In that matter, the place experiment mimics the critical realist ontology: Just like the stratified domains of reality, the experiment is a process

which cannot be understood by way of its separate parts (Sayer 2010:118p). Knowledge is derived by the planner in an experiment, but it may be impossible to trace exactly what mechanisms have caused a particular response.

Learning, however is not a simple concept, and how to actually learn and anchor the knowledge derived from a place experiment remains a relevant question. An evaluation strategy can be applied or partway workshops can be organized by the project planners in order to follow up on, share or draw meaning from the insights gathered throughout the process of the experiment (Boesen 2018:6). Such follow-ups can function as a track switch for the direction of the experiment. Here, objectives or means can be revised and an adjusted plan for the next experimental phase may be agreed upon (Boesen 2018:13). Not all place experiments use partway follow-ups, and some experiments are less formalized (Thiesen 2018:17). In such cases, the direction of the experiment might merely be adjusted by the project planner along the way, according to her own judgments. Common for place experiments is the emphasis of knowledge development *along the way*, and on adjusting the experiment according to the obtained knowledge (Thiesen 2018:18; Leonardsen 2018:5). In several of the five case experiments however, it is not clear who is supposed to benefit from these learning processes and how (Thiesen 2018:17; Nordlund 2018:2p).

Transformative

Though experimental knowledge development can be emphasized in its own right, place experiments always have a transformative element, inseparable from the learning process. This involves a process of testing ideas in order to transform something, either by informing other solutions or projects, or by becoming transformative in itself (Karvonen & van Heur 2014:387).

Place experiments are conducted to reform the way we think about things or the way we do things, and may for example intend to test how a certain infrastructure functions in a certain place such as park or a street. Place experiments always insist that something might be done differently, or that the testing of an idea or solution will make the final solution more robust, fair or sound. The composition of a test or an investigation might be based on a hypothesis predicting the experiment or it might be developed inside the hermeneutic loops explained above. In other words, the room for investigation may be linear, circular or anything in between, just as it may vary in its degree of rigidity and flexibility. A place experiment often stems from an idea or curiosity about society (“There must be a better solution to this” or “What if this could be done differently?”) If this sounds familiar, it may be because Lefebvre advocates the same thing in his effort to make planners and citizens strive towards an urban utopia (Lefebvre 2003 [1974]:108pp). Like Lefebvre’s quest for utopia, place experiments are forward looking, insisting that tomorrow should

be better than today (Nordlund 2018:5; Thiesen 2018:3p; Leonardsen 2018:3; Boesen 2018:1).

Co-creational

A place experiment is not a solitary thing. Just like the white coat scientists' experiments in the 1920's Chicago, place experiments are constructed with something resembling independent and dependent variables, say a park (which planners can alter physically) and human behavior in the park (which may be assumed to change as a function of the park). The equation might also be the other way around, and it is not always obvious which variable is independent and which is dependent, as planners often want to modify physical as well as social traits through their experiments. However, human participation, one way or the other is key to the place experiment as people take part, either knowingly in workshops, gatherings and hearings, or unknowingly by interacting with or walking past it (Boesen 2018:10; Nordlund 2018:1, 5). Participants, co-creators or test subjects typically consist of people living in or using the particular neighborhood in which the experiment is located, but may also include the planners themselves or their colleagues in other administrative units. Place experiments vary in their level of democracy in the sense that the participants might be involved directly in the conduction and evaluation experiment (Thiesen 2018:3,12p) or they might be observed from a distance in order for the planners to evaluate their behavior (Nordlund 2018:6).

Planners have various reasons to invite citizens to co-produce a place experiment. Besides citizens often being a crucial variable in the experiment, citizen participation may be important for an experiment not only in order to raise the level of democracy of a project, but also in order to mobilize human resources and to redistribute power and control in or of an experiment (Nordlund 2018:9; Leonardsen 2018:4; Boesen 2018:6; Døssing 2018:3). Citizens are often given power over parts of a place experiment (how much varies a lot), which can be a way to legitimize processes and results of a project politically or publicly, as citizen participation and influence is often regarded to foster consensus and common understanding of the city's or neighborhood's development (Sehested 2003:184; Leonardsen 2018:7). It is the planner's task to identify what level of citizen participation to employ (Arnstein 1969) and which co-producers to target with the place experiment. Co-creation may also function as a branding of the experiment in the sense that the experiment is made known and receives acknowledgement and affiliation in certain networks (Tortzen 2016; Sørensen & Torfing 2005).

Geographically bounded

The place experiment's geographical location is a determining factor for its prospects and objectives, as the experiment is fundamentally context-specific and can only test or treat processes in the specific place

or space, which does not, however, mean that it is impossible to draw generalizations. The boundaries defining the borders of place experiments vary, and may cover an entire city or a single bench, street, park or neighborhood. The boundedness is important because it makes it possible to define what is *inside* and what is *outside* the experiment. This inside-outside dynamic, however, has proven to be one of the more challenging dynamics to keep track of, when conducting a place experiment (Døssing 2018:3, 5; Nordlund 2018:6). In Karvonen & van Heur's words,

“The main difference, of course, between the production of novelty in the natural-science laboratory versus the urban laboratory is that in the latter the boundary conditions can only be controlled to a very limited extent.” (Karvonen & van Heur 2014:386).

James Evans, in turn, explains how the Chicago School's “scientific sociologists” would move back and forth between the city as a (specific) field and as a (generalizable) laboratory in order to legitimize the knowledge derived from their urban experiments:

“As a field site, the city exhibits a specific reality that is found, and that possesses an incontestable, singular truth by virtue of its lived materiality. In contrast, the city as lab becomes the cipher for any city, interchangeable and controllable through the manipulation of variables, possessing a truth borne of replicability” (Evans 2011:226).

A persisting question is how to conceptualize the boundedness of an experiment without compromising its integrity and while still keeping it open for unexpected ideas and impacts (Caprotti & Cowley 2017:1446). As we shall see in the following analysis (B), drawing boundaries around a place experiment is not only a theoretical, but also a practical challenge.

Five cases of place experiments

During my research I have often questioned the legitimacy in my framing of the five cases as experiments. (Am I just trying to label these planning projects as experiments to make them suit my analytical framework?) However, my empirical data collection convinced me that the place experiment is not just a make believe even though “place experiment” might not be the only name for it. The planners themselves

insisted, during the interviews, on an experimentalist rhetoric confirming the validity of my conceptualization of the place experiment. In order to demonstrate how the five empirical cases (Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station (Døssing 2018), Sundholm Urban Garden (Leonardsen 2018), Containerby Linjen (Thiesen 2018), Karens Minde experiments (Nordlund 2018) and Stengadeparken (Boesen 2018)) fit the characterization of a place experiment, I will briefly go through each of the four characteristics presented above (hermeneutical, transformative, co-creational and geographically bounded) and connect them to the five cases.

When Karin Nordlund, planner of the Karens Minde experiments notes that the experiment

"is an iterative process. I have often called it prototyping, what we're doing. (...) Yes, a prototype which can develop." (Nordlund 2018:2),

she refers to the experiment's *hermeneutical* characteristic. The key to an experiment in whatever science tradition is iteration: In the place experiment the planners allow themselves to collect and process knowledge during the process of the experiment, and they are able to react on new insights by pulling the experiment in whatever direction they find fit. Time, therefore, is crucial to place experiments, allowing the planners to increase their comprehension through multiple hermeneutical loops. As Sia Boesen, planner in Stengadeparken, notes,

"[it is] very important that we have much time (...) so that we can adjust [the experiment]. It takes some incubation time." (Boesen 2018:4).

Particularly the time allowing correction is vital to the experiment, as the experiment is essentially a matter of trial and error:

"I experience, and I must often accept that many things fail. And we have to be very ready to not feel defeated when things fall apart. And this is exactly the nature of the experiment. That the mistake is just as important as the success." (Boesen 2018:2).

However, time does not equal permanence, and among the five cases, one experiment, Containerby Linjen, has been (somehow) deliberately temporary (Thiesen 2018:1). The four remaining place experiments, on the other hand, have a transitional character, as the (temporary) experiment is intended to morph into a permanent structure.



Illustration 10: Local women produced the orange urban curtains in Stengadeparken. However, not everybody thought that the installation was pretty, and the planners now regard this as a lesson to be learned from. Photo: BOGL.

The experiment's *transformative* characteristic is often highlighted by the planners as the experiment's overall objective:

“We have created some experiments in order to test what the urban space should be able to accommodate. (...) So with that [we are] maybe securing that there will be allocated funding for improvements in the urban space and not only for climate mitigation.” (Nordlund 2018:5).

“The main objective was to visualize that there is a space and that it can be used for something. And show that local recycling also can be interesting. (...) and that it might have the function that it leads to increased safety.” (Døssing 2018:5).

The two quotes above illustrate the ambition to create something better by being open for the best possible solutions. I take this as a testimony of the planners' trust in the place experiment to unlock some degree of spatial justice (Soja 2010:72p; Fainstein 2014). Through my research, I became aware that the experiments' transformative objectives are often stressed as the *real* objective, while the experiment's other purposes are suggested to be sub-objectives (Thiesen 2018:7; Leonardsen 2018:1, 3; Døssing 2018:5p;

Nordlund 2018:5p; Boesen 2018:5p).

Despite this apparent hierarchy in objectives, another purpose of the experiments seemed almost as important to the planners as transformation: **Co-creation**. There is no doubt among the planners that good urban solutions and spatial justice must be developed in co-production with local experts: The local residents (Nordlund 2018:6; Thiesen 2018:3p; Boesen 2018:12). In all five cases, citizens are invited not only to give feedback to a fixed design, but to develop and give life to their own ideas. The planners are quite aware that citizens should not be generalized, identifying different citizen groups and approaching them according to their particular position. The activists constructing Containerby Linjen, for example, were considered to be strong and creative civil actors and were given free reign as long as they adhered to the municipality's (arguably quite restrictive) conditions (Thiesen 2018:8). Conversely in Stengadeparken and in Karens Minde experiments, marginalized or vulnerable citizens are approached with affirmative action as the planners construct workshops equipping particular social groups with tools to participate in urban production and to demand their rights (Nordlund 2018:7; Boesen 2018:12). But co-creation is not only about citizen participation. In all five cases, the experiment has also been developed in cooperation with another professional organization. This professional co-creator could be a municipal unit like the Social Administration (Leonardsen 2018:3, 4, 8) and the Waste and Recycling unit (Døssing 2018:1p). Or it could be a non-profit housing association (Boesen 2018:5), a research institution like University of Copenhagen (Nordlund 2018:3) or a collective of grassroots entrepreneurs like Bureau Detours (Thiesen 2018:1, 3, 7, 13). My research reveals that co-creation of place experiments with another professional organization stems from a recognition that urban mechanisms are inherently complex (Harvey 1973:22; Døssing 2018:13; Boesen 2018:5) and need co-creational solutions (Døssing 2018:1, 13; Leonardsen 2018:1, 7; Leonardsen 2018:7; Nordlund 2018: Boesen 2018:5, 8).

The planners' ambition to conduct an experiment in a **geographically bounded** area in order to affect the particular place, space or neighborhood is another important feature of the place experiment. All five experiments aim to reach their social and political objectives by strengthening or developing a positive identity of a particular urban space (see table 1, Chapter 1). Often, the intention is to turn an unsafe place into a safe and attractive place for local residents. This approach takes its outset in local residents and in the local characteristics of the neighborhood: What do the residents wish for, what synergies can be found between these needs and municipal functions, and how can the hidden resources of this particular space in the city be activated?

Summary and conclusion of Analysis A

Based on the four characteristics, hermeneutic, transformative, co-creational and geographically bounded, the place experiment can be summarized with a single sentence:

place experiment

noun

a social and/or physical approach to urban transformation based on hermeneutical learning and co-creation in a geographically bounded space.

With this conceptualization I provide a general definition applicable in other research of practice based contexts besides the empirical examples in this particular thesis. By applying the conceptualization to the empirical data from five interviews with planners of place experiments I have now established how five local planning projects in disadvantaged Copenhagen neighborhoods can be understood as place experiments. In the following chapter I will analyze how the place experiment is used strategically in urban planning.

6. Analysis B: *What logics can be identified to explain municipal planners' strategic use of place experiments, and how can they be challenged?*

In many regards, actions by planners “on the ground” reflect the political system in which they are employed. While urban planning is as political as ever, the 1950-1970's welfare planners' upfront political discourses have been replaced by an ideological rhetoric downplaying its political stance - an approach sometimes called a *post-political discourse* (Žižek 1999:198pp). This depoliticization of something inherently political may be one of the greatest threats to a just city.

Depoliticizing urban planning

Polanyi (2001), Marx (1887) and Lefebvre (2003 [1974]) (among others) have made it clear that market based societies are not natural, but rather deeply historically contingent. However basic this claim may seem it remains one of the most crucial tools to oppose capitalist fundamentalism evoked in any dimension of the urban, and re-politicization is perhaps the single most important feature of critical geography. In essence, fictitious commodities, rent gaps, territorial stigmatization, gentrification and capitalist investments in land and built environment are all political processes which do not simply appear, but which are actively produced via economic and political tactics and legal instruments (Slater 2015:119). This is a strong argument to resist the depoliticization (or naturalization) of economic speculation that we see in the rhetoric of planners and politicians who use expressions such as “non-place”, “urban regeneration” and “investment potential”, and who celebrate and internalize concepts of “innovation”, “economic growth” and “branding”, often in a neoliberal rhetoric (see for example reports on Danish planning strategies published the past 15 years: Jensen et al. 2006; Plan09 2008; Realdania 2016). Because the municipality is a political organization, municipal planners in Copenhagen are also encouraged to think along these lines, while experiments and experimental approaches to local urban planning are regarded in municipal policies and visions to be democratic, sustainable and innovative (see for example Municipality of Copenhagen 2015a; Municipality of Copenhagen 2017a; Municipality of Copenhagen; 2017e).

David Harvey (2013) has encouraged us to change our conceptual universe, and the political journalist and activist George Monobit (2016) has highlighted how the downplay of ideologist rhetoric that we see in municipal strategies and policies has made it difficult to challenge their inherently political power

structures. Both agree that entrepreneurial discourses tend to conceal more than they elucidate, disguising deeply political power relations as natural laws. As with so many other critiques, Lefebvre had already captured this in *The Urban Revolution*, commenting on how the urban dwellers have become blinded by neoliberalism (Lefebvre 2003 [1974]:153). Exactly *because* of this common sense neoliberalism (Hall & O'Shea 2013), the city can only become democratic if its citizens reject passivity and challenge decision-makers and experts. But we cannot challenge something which we cannot see. Among the planners of the five experiments in this thesis, there is an undeniable emphasis on the strategic use of place experiments, often perfectly in tune with the entrepreneurial governance discourse. It is the logic and reasoning behind these strategies that I set out to dismantle and confront in this analytical chapter, in order to critically examine municipal planners' use of the place experiment.

Strategic use of place experiments in urban planning

As explained earlier, seven strategic uses of place experiments emerged from an exhaustive coding of five interviews with five municipal planners. I present each strategy as the planners perceive it and expose what political paradigms and reasonings might have shaped it before I proceed to critically examine the strategy in an empirical as well as in a theoretical perspective.

The seven strategies that I have identified are: I: Inciting local urban production, II: Re-branding spaces, III: Developing local responsibility, IV: Preparing locals for change, V: Creating local empowerment, VI: Raising support and attention and VII: Illustrating urban alternatives. The strategies are divided into sub-chapters below, but their order is not prioritized.

Strategy I: Inciting local urban production

All five place experiments in my research have an explicit transformative objective as their planners aim to use the experiment to develop *local solutions* to particular problems. Hence, a rationalization shared by all the interviewed planners is that local challenges require local solutions and that a good city is produced by the people who live in it. Place experiments are often claimed to challenge standard procedures and traditional solutions through local innovation. Sometimes the strategy to develop something new stems from a happy-go-lucky planning ambition to create something out of the ordinary. And sometimes, challenging the conventional is a deliberate strategy to innovate or contribute to methods in urban planning.

The nourishment of local uniqueness is not only a pragmatic planning strategy but also a political ambition in the municipality. In the political vision *Fællesskab København*, the municipality of Copenhagen declares its objective to

“make it possible for the city’s differences and unique characteristics to become more visible. Copenhagen should have more edge. There should be space for the wild, creative initiatives and constructions. (...) There should be space for experimenting projects that perhaps have a shorter life-span. There should be the freedom to initiate and test new ideas.” (Municipality of Copenhagen 2015a:9. My translation).

As we will explore later in *Strategy VII: Raising support and attention*, this municipal objective to produce unique and experimental urban spaces may be interpreted by planners as a political go-ahead to place experiments. Often, traditional construction processes¹⁰ target broad populations or those who do not require special caution or care. When asked whether a traditional construction process could have led to the same result as the place experiment Sundholm Urban Garden, Leonardsen reflects that

“It would perhaps have meant that resourceful [residents] would have had more space.” (Leonardsen 2018:7),

and explains that some particular needs of the homeless residents in the neighborhood only became apparent to the planners through the experiment’s co-creational process. He goes on to explain how, after realizing that the homeless needed more private space in the garden, the planners developed a semi-private “buffer zone” as a central feature in the garden’s final design (Leonardsen 2018:7).

Not only in Sundholm Urban Garden, but also in Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station, where a particular spot with afternoon sun became a deciding factor for the experiment (Døssing 2018:3), the physical place experiment was adjusted according to local needs and to features attributed to the particular geography – issues discovered in the hermeneutical process, which might not have been noticed without special attention to the local context.

¹⁰ Based on the municipality’s own value chains, a traditional construction process (opposed to a place experiment) means that a team of project planners develop a design idea followed by a public information meeting or hearing before entrepreneurs construct the project and a professional team is hired to operate it (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017b; Municipality of Copenhagen 2017c).

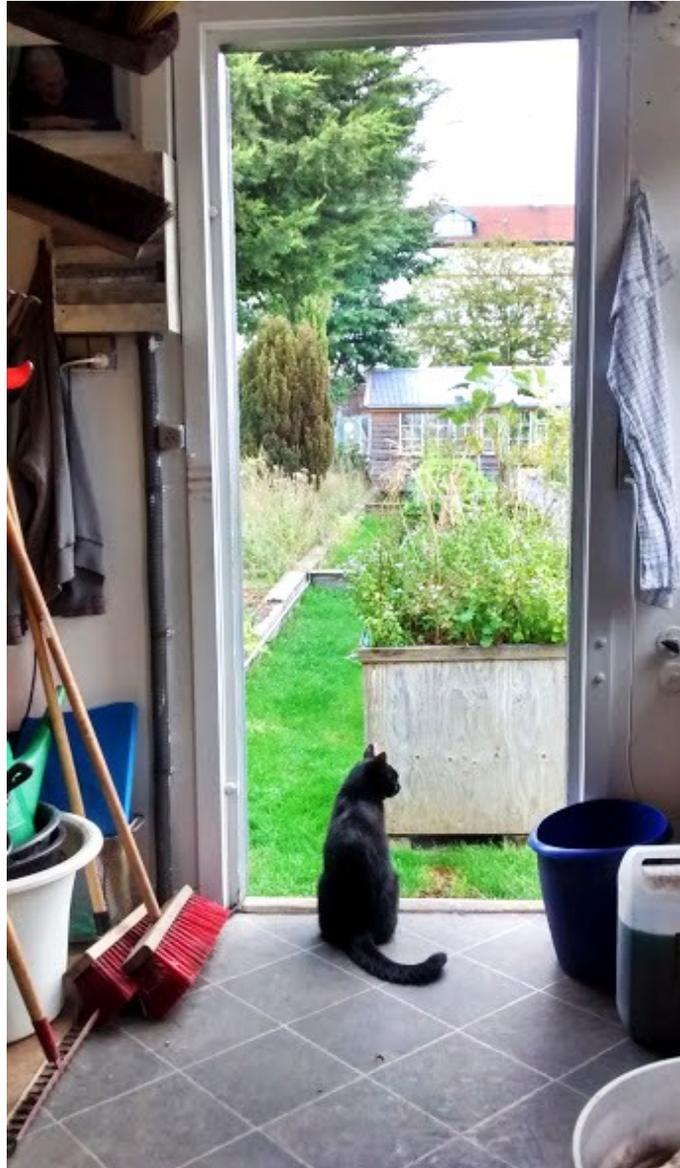


Illustration 11: Despite Sundholm Urban Garden being a public space, the garden is designed with many semi-private spaces where socially vulnerable residents (human and non-human) can withdraw and perhaps feel at home. Photo: The author.

Social objectives of place experiments are often context- and place specific, requiring a localized knowledge base. Inclusion of citizens in the urban planning process may therefore not only be an ethical strategy paying homage to the democratic city, but also a valuable means to deliver the local solution which the experiment set out to produce.

Co-creation and other alternatives to uniform or cursory citizen participation have entered urban planning

practice as a response to a broad critique of centralized planning models and instrumental views of citizens (see for example Sandercock 1998a; Lissandrello and Grin 2011). A widely accepted idea among urban planners and scholars is that citizen participation in planning processes may be a way to redistribute power from the *haves* to the *have-nots* (Thiesen 2018:15; Boesen 2018:10, 12; Municipality of Copenhagen 2015a; ALS Research 2017:55p). This is an idea which I will elaborate further in *Strategy V: Creating local empowerment*. However, despite the fact that many important insights are derived from co-creational processes, Boesen in Stengadeparken believes that citizen input are employed into place experiments in terms of invaluable contextual and localized knowledge (i.e. where is the best afternoon spot) rather than innovative solutions to a problem (Boesen 2018:10).

Planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration share a moral perspective that citizens have the right to (co-produce) their city. In place experiments, co-creation often happens through innovation and idea development, feedback, and direct production and adjustment of place experiments. The strategy of local production of urban spaces is particularly evident in the experiments' *temporary* phases, such as the first version of the local recycle station in Herman Bangs Plads and the entire temporary process of Containerby Linjen. What we also see, however, is that once the place experiment starts being converted to a *permanent* urban structure, external advisors and entrepreneurs are trusted with creating a place that corresponds with local needs. The interviewed planners are aware that this transition is a change of power as decision making levitates and the planners must convince the residents that their experiment is in safe hands (Nordlund 2018:6). This change of hands contains a risk that the local production is lost in translation. Since none of the place experiments in my research have entered a professional construction phase in an attempt to make the experiment permanent¹¹, I will not be able to conclude to what extent local contributions are maintained when a place experiment is made permanent. It is, however, interesting that Thiesen seems to regard Containerby Linjen's uncontrollable and anarchistic elements (traits that the planners deliberately trusted the grassroots entrepreneurs in Bureau Detours with) as the *reason* that the experiment could never become permanent:

“The idea [to make the experiment permanent] actually never ceased to exist. It is still there. The problem was that we didn't have time to organize all the tech-

11 In Nørrebro, the non-profit housing association which owns Stengadeparken will decide whether to fund a permanent park by fall 2018, In Sydhavnen, the entrepreneurs, architects and advisors are currently developing the final program for the climate mitigation project “Karens Minde Aksen”, and in Valby, the construction of the permanent local recycle station at Herman Bangs Plads has been delayed due to a lack of funding, but is expected to start in spring 2019. Containerby Linjen has been dismantled and will not become permanent – at least not in the particular location. In Sundholmskvarteret, Sundholm Urban Garden was made permanent and self-sustaining directly in the experiment by homeless, social workers and local volunteers.

nical stuff and safeguard the juridical requirements on responsibility and permissions and so on. And we didn't have time to make everything down there legal in order for it to continue in line with the building regulations. So that idea would die, and then there is an incentive to build something real instead of shipping containers." (Thiesen 2018:14p).

In other words, there is a conflict between the local producers (the citizens and their (co-)production of the experiment) and the experiment's opportunity to become permanent (which requires that it meets the municipal building, competition and security requirements), and there is a risk that municipal regulations in fact make the place experiment's transformative objective impossible to reach. I will expand this critique further in Analysis C.

A more common critique asserts that citizen involvement in urban planning may be an empty ritual counterfeiting democracy with no other purpose than deluding the public to think it is given power (Arnstein 1969; Dalton 2017). This critique may also be applied to place experiments if they for example pretend to give way to new ideas when the process is in fact pre-planned and lead solely by the planner or the entrepreneurs. Hence, if residents who have participated in the construction and development of a place experiment do not recognize their contributions in the final (temporary or permanent) urban space, the entire co-creational effort is likely to end up as a perfunctory procedure (ALS Research 2017:56). If citizen feedback is not actively implemented, the process may even backfire as experiments thereby risk undermining the power of citizen participation and eroding local trust in the municipality. (I will return to this critique in *Strategy IV: Preparing locals for change*.) Conversely, if citizens are given actual power, the place experiment can be used strategically by planners to develop local, well-tested urban alternatives.

Ditte B. Døssing, who worked as a Neighborhood Regeneration planner on Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station in Gl. Valby, imply that the ability to reduce flaws in the experiment's final (and sometimes permanent) construction is another quality of the experimental method in urban planning (Døssing 2008:2p, 13). Leonardsen expands Døssing's comment by explaining how an experiment reduces both the risk of getting stuck with solutions that do not fit the local problem *and* the risk of being forced to ignore better solutions which are revealed in the construction process (Leonardsen 2018:6). In the place experiment, a bold idea can be tried out in an specific environment and local residents can contribute by testing the solution and providing their feedback on it.

To sum up on *Strategy I: Inciting local urban production*, local residents can be included in the produc-

tion of an urban space as a strategy to exercise two parallel co-creational processes: One of innovation and idea development and another of testing and (re)configuration. This dual and responsive procedure may, if taken seriously, ultimately result in a final product meeting the exact local needs, though satisfying everybody is probably an impossible task. In any case, the planners must redistribute power to local contributors in order to secure that the processes are in fact co-creational and not just make-believe. However, all is not in the might of the planners, and there may be a bureaucratic dissonance between the experiment's co-creational immediacy and the standard municipal requirements, making it difficult for planners to hand over an entire production to the civil society.

Strategy II: Re-branding spaces

As I will demonstrate on the next few pages, *re-branding spaces* is a strategy employed through place experiments for two reasons: To invert the reputation of a neighborhood or to improve the reputation of and feeling of safety in a particular place. Often the strategy is explained with both rationales, as planners aim to cultivate or nourish particular place identities in places which were previously neglected or stigmatized (Leonardsen 2018:6; Thiesen 2018:8).

In Fuglekvarteret, Containerby Linjen became an identity marker for many locals who, according to the planner Kristoffer K. Thiesen, started expressing feeling of uniqueness and proudness towards their local neighborhood, referring to the place experiment:

“Most of the local value - except that there was an urban garden and stuff - was that many people now knew the place and said ‘over at Linjen’ or ‘around Containerbyen’ or so... People could see their projects in Politiken [a newspaper], and their neighborhood received some attention. So in that regard it [the place experiment] gives branding and perhaps a local sense of proudness.” (Thiesen 2018:8).

Similarly, Sundholm Urban Garden, now a well-groomed garden frequently visited by local kindergartens, families and the occasional urban dweller, was, prior to the experiment, according to Leonardsen,

“a non-place. No-one had any responsibility towards it. Which meant that it was used... Primarily by drug addicts and the like. So it was... Needles were everywhere.” (Leonardsen 2018:2).



Illustration 12: Containerby Linjen was a popular urban space, not only for local residents in Fuglekvarteret, but also in other parts of the city. The container village's parties drew more people than the planners had hoped, and makeshift signs in the neighborhood made sure that visitors would find their way. Photo: The author.

Leonardsen explains that the neighborhood, Sundholmskvarteret, suffered from the bad reputation of the social institution to which it owes its name (see the narrative description in Chapter 1, page 15 and 16). Neighbors would keep away and nothing would challenge the negative reputation towards Sundholm and the space which would later become an urban garden. As the experiment evolved into an urban garden, the planners perceived the space as much less stigmatized than before, and just like in Fuglekvarteret, local residents started to have positive feelings towards the particular place as well as the neighborhood:

“Suddenly Sundholm was talked about as something people were actually fond of, or a little bit proud of. (...) And it is important in the sense that belonging means something to humans. And the fact that we are happy, proud of living where we live... That we feel safe.” (Leonardsen 2018:6).

As we see in the three quotes, planners may use the place experiment as a means to produce a more positive or favorable place identity. When Leonardsen (2008:2) uses the term “non-place” to describe the

space existing previous to the urban garden, he refers to its presumed lack of urban importance and to the observation that few people besides drug addicts used to frequent the garden. His assertion may also refer to the fact that the area's social and territorial activities was beyond municipal control, but we do not know this for sure.

In planning discourse, the conception of places without “importance” or with low “value” or “undesired” use is often connected to a feeling of “unsafety”, the absence of non-marginalized or “non-problematic” people and, conversely, the presence of marginalized groups or individuals. Several place experiments in my research have been conducted, according to the interviewed planners, among other things as a means to create *a place* where there used to be *a non-place* (Boesen 2018:1, 8; Leonardsen 2018:2, 6; Døssing 2018:1p). The articulation of a particular space as being more or less important is probably something we all find ourselves doing once in a while. But when a (planning) authority suggests that a space has no identity or no use because of these characteristics, it may be understood as a depoliticizing maneuver. I want the reader to understand in this regard that not only the physical production of space in place experiments can be problematic, but also the planners’ seemingly lack of recognition of the following conditions of “non-places”. There are several issues at stake here:

- A. Space is relational and not objective. Therefore a place is always embedded with place identities, even if they may not be immediately visible. *Someone* has a relation to the space, and even if it seems chaotic, the space is always subject to *some* kind of territorial or organizational control.
- B. It may be necessary (and fair) to recognize particular social affiliations towards the space. Places considered to have little value by power holders tend to be used by marginalized and vulnerable groups and individuals: People who are not welcomed many other places in the city.
- C. Safety is important, but safety for whom? Is it possible that not only the passerby but also the marginalized groups occupying or using the “non-space” feel threatened or unsafe i.e. by the uncertainty of their right to the space?
- D. Space is power. Ask yourself: Who controls this space? Who depends on it? What negotiations of power are already taking place here, and what happens if we interfere?

What I am trying to assert here is that while these place experiments are conducted to cultivate a particular place identity in order to strengthen local affiliation to an urban space, it is important to remember that

spaces are not just empty entities but relational spaces immersed in social and cultural networks (Lefebvre 1991) and embedded with conflict and history (Massey 1991).

Aside from the depoliticizing planning discourse, it may, in a socio-cultural perspective, be difficult to disagree with the planners that a safe city is imperative and that stigmatization of urban neighborhoods constitutes a problem. It may be easier to detect problems in the strategic development of place identity if we consider its potential socio-political or socio-economical effects. Let us take a look at that.

The Municipality of Copenhagen and its politicians encourage “edgy”, “experimental”, “innovative” and “creative” urban planning (Municipality of Copenhagen 2015a:9; Nikogrunfeld.kk.dk 2018). These are also words that can be used to describe some of the place experiments in this research (Thiesen 2018:4p; Boesen 2018:16). But not everybody buy into their positive connotations. Critical perspectives on strategic cultivation of urban spaces was popularized in urban geography when Lefebvre published *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]) almost 45 years ago and the topic remains paramount in urban critique today. Particularly creativity and innovation are concepts closely related to gentrification, as entrepreneurial actors reduce creative urbanism to urban consumerism (Hansen et al. 2001; Larsen & Brandt 2018).

While much urban development is gentrifying per definition, deliberately cultivating “creative” urbanism on a temporary basis in order to brand a particular location and widen the rent gap, this does not seem to be a strategy supported by the five interviewed planners in this thesis. Thiesen, for example, explaining ambitions for Containerby Linjen, stress the municipality’s possibility and perhaps even its responsibility to create urban spaces with *use value* rather than *exchange value* and to not only produce spaces to increase their “highest and best use”:

“It is not the case that when the ground rent increases, they [the activists and co-producers] are kicked out. That is what normally would have happened. We could say that the municipality is different than that. Because for the municipality, even though it [the place experiment] is not a money machine, having an alternative culture scene represents a great value. (...) We as a municipality don’t need to say, ‘what can we sell to develop housing’. Instead we can say that what is created in Bolsjefabrikken¹² etc. has an enormous value in the city. (...) So that was our ambition [in Containerby Linjen].” (Thiesen 2018:14).

¹² Bolsjefabrikken is an alternative culture house in Copenhagen. Thiesen (2018:2, 8, 12) explains that there is a strong core of enthusiastic and skillful activists who have been the driving force of many alternative and creative culture houses Copenhagen, among others Bolsjefabrikken and Containerby Linjen.

Besides insisting that the municipality has a socio-economical responsibility in terms of urban planning, Thiesen argues that the municipality's bureaucratic procedures often obstruct the possibility for alternative place experiments to take to the air and survive (Thiesen 2018:14p), something his colleagues the Neighborhood Regeneration also point out (Boesen 2018:15p; Leonardsen 2018:7p; Døssing 2018:9p; 12; Nordlund 2018:9p). Thiesen further notes that if regulations on the use of municipal land were less restrictive, the municipality could support alternative culture production while preventing private investors from capitalizing on it (Thiesen 2018:14p). This is an important aspect of the municipal place experiment which I will expand further in Analysis C.

Thiesen and his colleagues seem convinced that the cultivation of a local place identity supports spatial (distributional) justice rather than gentrification. Unfortunately, their good intentions do not guarantee that there are no negative effects of the strategic branding of spaces through place experiments. While too little municipal economic investment and public attention in an urban area can lead to deterioration of public services, too much and too uncoordinated public investments may, coupled with an (articulated) creative place identity, spark private interests in the area, which in turn may drive up living costs for those who live there (Smith 1987; Slater 2015). It would be interesting in a follow-up research study to look into the actual effects of place experiments in terms of ground rent and capital appropriation, and to examine for what reasons politicians in the city council support place experiments and Neighborhood Regeneration, in order to determine whether the five planners are in fact (unknowingly) contributing to gentrification.

I will try to summarize *Strategy II: Re-branding spaces*. With this strategy the place experiment is used to create positive associations towards a particular place or neighborhood, something which the five planners often equate with a change from unsafe to safety. On the socio-cultural level, the planners' tendency to regard certain places as "non-places" or "with no value" is problematic in several ways, as it disregards relational qualities and identities which already exist in the particular space. In a socio-economical perspective, deliberate branding of urban spaces or place experiments as "edgy" and "creative" may be grist to the gentrification mill, even if this is not the planner's intention.

Strategy III: Developing local responsibility

Another strategic use of place experiments is to establish local affiliation and thereby (presumably) *strengthen responsibility* towards an urban space.

The five place experiments in my research have been co-produced by municipal planners, local residents and other local actors. All five experiments entail lengthy and resource intensive processes requiring more than just a public meeting in the local gym hall (Arnstein 1969; Boesen 2018:9p). In fact, co-creation of a place experiment often requires a periodic voluntary attendance and a deep personal investment in the experiment from the participants (Nordlund 2018:3p, 9; Døssing 2018:4; Boesen 2018:12p; Thiesen 2018:8, 11). It is widely accepted in practical urban planning (Municipality of Copenhagen 2015b) as well as in academic planning circles (ALS Research 2017; Tuan 1974), that citizens who engage in this type of local engagement develop a personal attachment and “ownership” to the particular place and product (Boesen 2018:4; Nordlund 2018:2; Døssing 2018:3). A feeling of responsibility which is assumed to be the cornerstone of well functioning, self-sustaining and robust urban spaces. This conception, which is specifically relevant when dealing with disadvantaged urban neighborhoods characterized by particularly complex challenges (Boesen 2018:4, 9), is materialized as a deliberate strategy in all five place experiments in my research (Døssing 2018:3; Boesen 2018:3p; Thiesen 2018:11; Nordlund 2018:8p; Leonardsen 2018:4, 7), namely the development of local responsibility towards urban spaces. In Sydhavnen, where one of the Karens Minde experiments involved producing signature chairs for the neighborhood, Nordlund explains the strategy in simple terms:

“One of the things we have done together with Rubinen¹³ is a ‘future workshop’ with some of the most vulnerable youngsters who have been involved with some criminal stuff and who have been vandalizing and making trouble here at Karens Minde. So it is also an ambition to include them in a positive way and give them the feeling of being a part of Karens Minde and taking care of stuff around here. So they have helped us piece together the furniture. And we have included them when we could. And we have been listening [to their needs]...” (Nordlund 2018:8p).

Is the cultivation of responsibility through co-creation a unique trait of the place experiment then? Not quite, but the experiment’s hermeneutic and inherently co-creational character suggests that it may be easier to create local affiliation towards an urban space through a place experiment than through a more traditional planning process for several reasons. First because citizens are closer to the process and for a longer period of time in place experiments than in traditional planning processes. Second because the place experiment’s transformative aspect strengthens the incentive to *make a difference*, for example by trusting vulnerable youngsters with urban production.

13 Rubinen is a public after school program in Sydhavnen.

In the other end of the city from Sydhavnen, Leonardsen stress that in Sundholm Urban Garden, the participants' personal and perhaps even *bodily* engagement in the experiment has been crucial to the project's success:

“It really means a lot that things become visible and tangible and gets materiality. That you are part of the process also means that you understand why this is even important. And this goes for the municipal employees who took part as well as the families who participated, and the homeless and so on.” (Leonardsen 2018:7).

In Leonardsen's perspective, if the garden was created *the traditional way* rather than as a place experiment, local residents could have watched architects, engineers, entrepreneurs and construction workers erect an urban garden without themselves having a say. They would neither be personally nor economically committed to the garden. Leonardsen's and Nordlund's logic of local co-creation of the experiment is unmistakable: When local stakeholders physically engage in the experiment – by showing up, pointing out challenges and qualities, suggesting and criticizing ideas – they are inclined to learn about and eventually understand its socio-spatial complexities. This engagement eventually raises their respect and recognition of issues that they did not previously know or fully understand (Leonardsen 2018:7; Nordlund 2018:8p).

An external evaluation of the co-creational method in Sundholm Urban Garden supports the planners' theory that participation leads to affiliation which in turn leads to a sense of responsibility. The evaluation, which uses Agger and Tortzen (2015)'s term “efficiency co-creation” (in Danish, *effektivitetssamskabelse*)¹⁴ to caption the strategy, concludes that planners in Sundholm Urban Garden have succeeded in designing and conducting a co-creation process through which local residents have developed a feeling of attachment and responsibility towards the place experiment (ALS Research 2017:63). This said, despite the seemingly general acceptance of this participatory planning strategy, its scientific foundation remains questionable. Not being able to find any sound research on the strategy's effect, I am starting to wonder whether its logic is merely a self-sustaining discourse held in place by the co-creational governance paradigm.

¹⁴ The external evaluator ALS Research interprets Agger and Tortzen's concept “efficiency co-creation” this way: “The assumption is that the co-creation contributes to the citizen's responsibility towards and therefore incitement to take care of projects that they have co-produced.” (ALS Research 2017:55).



Illustration 13: A team of homeless residents and municipal social workers with carpenter skills designed and assembled this beautiful greenhouse in Sundholm Urban Garden. Their care for and the level of activity in the greenhouse among members of the garden association and homeless garden workers could be seen as a testimony to the success in regards to develop responsibility through co-creation. Photo: The author.

It should be added, that the development of responsibility is not only directed at citizens and have-nots. Along with a shift from managerial government to entrepreneurial governance, the current municipal co-creation agenda has meant a change in the planners' perception of urban actors, and in particular in who are considered "stakeholders" (Municipality of Copenhagen 2015a). Rather than advocating control and management of capital investors and civil interests, the municipalities now promote their inclusion and involvement (Healey 1997; Innes & Booher 1999). Essentially this means that co-creation is applauded with reference to a stronger democratic city, while it is often ignored that co-creation in many cases is directed even more at corporate and private investors than at local citizens. As we will explore further in *Strategy IV: Preparing locals for change*, municipal planners tend to invite local citizens to imagine and visualize place experiments, while the design, construction and maintenance of the final product is trusted with private entrepreneurs and advisors who are not required to grant the wishes of the local residents.

This has inspired critics to ingeniously rephrase co-creation as “collaborative capitalism” (Cova, Dalli & Zwick 2011), which should serve as a reminder for the planner to ask herself *who* the strategy is targeting, and accordingly *whose* sense of “ownership” and “responsibility” is strengthened.

To sum up *Strategy III: Developing local responsibility*, the place experiments allows much more intense and far-reaching citizen participation than traditional planning processes. This is commonly equated with stronger local responsibility towards urban spaces with reference to the participants’ deeper understanding of the spatial complexity and to their personal and bodily attachment. But planners must be critical towards whose “ownership” they are encouraging if they really intend to redistribute power from haves to have-nots and not merely use governance discourses to win citizens’ trust while sustaining a power balance favoring capital interests.

Strategy IV: Preparing locals for change

Large planning projects such as infrastructure, new housing areas and climate change adaptation are often linked to the city’s ability to compete on a global scale and to cover the needs of the growing urban population (Barber 2014; Andersen & Jørgensen 1999). A place experiment’s ability to draw attention to a place, a process or an issue makes it a perfect democratic add-on to large scale municipal developments of this kind. By constructing an experiment with a time span of one or more years, planners can introduce citizens to an imminent change in the urban scene. Place experiments, in other words, can be used strategically to *prepare* for something by giving citizens an idea of what is coming, create attention, invite for dialogue, and encourage local residents to express their ideas and reflections about what is about to happen. This is exactly the objective of the Karens Minde experiments. The Karens Minde experiments consist equally of physical and social experiments aiming to test out functions in the urban space in order to secure that local needs and wishes are implemented into an upcoming climate mitigation project (Nordlund 2018:5).

Karin D. Nordlund, planner of the Karens Minde experiments, explains how the place experiment is a way to pass on local knowledge and power to the upcoming physical climate construction, Karens Minde Aksen¹⁵, even after the place experiment is finished and Nordlund and her colleagues have no influence:

¹⁵ Karens Minde Aksen is a large physical climate mitigation project which will be constructed in Karens Minde, Sydhavnen. The planning, projection and construction of the climate project will be carried out by a team of professional entrepreneurs, architects, engineers and advisors. The construction is expected to start in 2020 and be finished in 2021 (Orbicon 2018).

“Now it is CUA¹⁶ and then it is the advisory team who will run the process in relation to Karens Minde Aksen. But we [planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration] can prepare those [participants] who have been part of the working group, (...) So they can pass on [their knowledge and demands]. So that they, as citizens, are ambassadors ensuring that this knowledge is implemented into Karens Minde Aksen.” (Nordlund 2018:6).

As we see in the quote above, place experiments can be conducted as a strategy to include the voices of local residents in the planning and conduction of large physical development projects – projects that typically contain very little and rather perfunctory citizen involvement (Boesen 2018:9; Nordlund 2018:7p). By timely informing local residents about “the inevitable”, local feedback can improve the final project. Further, local residents will have time to “adjust” to the new conditions, and the risk that residents feel misinformed or ignored is reduced.

However, a critical look at the seemingly sympathetic strategy to prepare local residents for an inevitable change reveals what could be a somewhat less noble municipal agenda. In a critical perspective, the Neighborhood Regeneration’s place experiments may in some cases serve as precautionary or defensive mechanisms with the purpose of “softening up” these large physical projects by deflecting critique.

Citizen involvement may either be benefiting democracy – as the planner in Karens Minde experiment suggests – or it may be an empty ritual (Arnstein 1969:216). If the latter is the case in the Karens Minde experiments, the place experiment is not co-creational, but merely a disguise of the municipal politicians’ power to decide what is being produced in the urban, and in effect a means to keep citizens in check (Harvey 2013:22p). The experiment may then be a strategy to warn local residents about a large or controversial alteration, namely the climate mitigation project, in order to soften up or halt their complaints and critique of the project: Essentially reducing shock but not necessarily effect. While I doubt that this is the planners’ personal or professional ambition (nothing in my research suggest this), there is a risk that the planners unknowingly carry through an objective for someone above themselves in the municipal hierarchy. For example, public critique of the climate mitigation project may slow down and raise the financial costs of the project, which could be a reason for municipal decision makers to try to muffle complaints. Meanwhile, Karens Minde Aksen is just one project in a city-wide climate strategy, which many would regard as crucial for the future of the city (Municipality of Copenhagen 2011), and one might argue that

16 CUA is the abbreviation of Center for Udvikling af Anlægsprojekter, which is the municipality’s center for construction projects.

the climate strategy is more important than the right for local residents to put their mark on a lawn in their neighborhood. Before ending up in a discussion of whether the end justifies the mean (Whether climate mitigation justifies “pretend co-creation”) I will propose another critical perspective on the strategy to prepare locals for change through co-creation.



Illustration 14: An art installation created as a part of the Karens Minde experiments. The sculpture, created in collaboration between the University of Copenhagen and the after school program Rubinen, could serve as a metaphor for an experiment's deflecting mechanism, drawing attention to its inclusive methods and away from the citizens inability to genuinely influence a top down decision. Photo: The author.

As concluded in Analysis A (*What is a place experiment?*) the hermeneutical, transformative and co-creational methods are key features of place experiments. As we have seen, these methods can potentially incite local urban production (strategy I), re-brand spaces (strategy II) and develop responsibility (strategy III). There is however a limit to the thrill. Hermeneutical, transformative and co-creational methods and qualities are embedded within the place experiment, and in this case within in the Neighborhood Regeneration, which means that the planners have no control of the experiment once they have left the scene. In this regard, Nordlund's concern with the transfer of insights from the place experiment to the entrepreneurs and advisors who will realize the climate mitigation project is very legitimate (Nordlund

2018:6). My point here is that no matter how just and important a place experiment might be, there is a considerable risk that the experiment is co-opted, distorted or simply replaced by something with “higher and better use” in the minute the ties to the flexible realm of the Neighborhood Regeneration are cut and the experiment becomes part of a bigger process with decisions taken on a higher political level. In any case the strategy to prepare locals for a change through co-creation may be an excellent method to dilute citizens to think that their right to the city is being taken seriously.

To sum up *Strategy IV: Preparing locals for change*, place experiments may be employed as a strategy to prepare citizens for a controversial or encompassing development project. The strategy may be employed with two different objectives. Either to democratize urban planning by facilitating dialogue, collecting and communicating feedback and critique, and by making local residents aware of their democratic rights. Or or to reduce shock by muffling complaints and critique. While planners may employ the strategy with pure intentions, the place experiment is conditioned by its municipal and political level, which involves the risk that its hermeneutic never surpasses its own boundaries and hence that the experiment never succeeds reaching its transformative objective.

Strategy V: Creating local empowerment

Until now we have examined strategies that may be conducted through place experiments anywhere in the city (I: Inciting local urban production, II: Re-branding spaces, III: Developing local responsibility and IV: Preparing locals for change) However, the strategy I am about to analyze in this sub-chapter is particularly relevant in disadvantaged urban areas: The place experiment as an *empowerment* strategy.

Empowerment as a method is not confined to place experiments, but is one of Copenhagen’s Neighborhood Regeneration’s five key methods¹⁷ (ALS Research 2012:3; ALS Research 2017). In the Neighborhood Regeneration, the reasoning behind empowerment as a method is that while citizens with high social capital have the ability to exert their opinions through popular mobilization, individual voting, workshop participation and public hearing processes, the case is different for citizens with socio-economic challenges (Arnstein 1969). In disadvantaged urban areas where the percentage of citizens who are unemployed and who have little or no education is higher than the municipal mean (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017d:17p), there is a risk that citizens are not being heard. Both because the voices of more “resourceful” citizens are louder (even if their number is small), and because people who struggle in their

¹⁷ Apart from empowerment, the Copenhagen Neighborhood Regeneration’s five methods are: Neighborhood approach, co-creation, local organization and local presence (ALS Research 2017:5).

daily life may not have the means to engage in a participatory process about their neighborhood (Arnstein 1969:217; ALS Research 2017:68pp; Andersen 2006). In planning practice, particularly in local strategic planning such as the Neighborhood Regeneration, there is a strong belief in the importance of creating the city *with* the citizens, and, as mentioned earlier, citizen participation is often regarded as a means to redistribute power from haves to have-nots (Arnstein 1969:53; Municipality of Copenhagen 2015a; Thiesen 2018:15; Boesen 2018:10, 12).

Empowerment, however, is not merely directed at the individual citizen or at marginalized sub-groups. As elaborated in Chapter 3, a clear focus in the entrepreneurial governance paradigm has been on networks and co-creation (Healey 1997; Innes & Booher 1999; Sehested 2003; Sørensen & Torfing 2015). In his magnum opus, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2001) sounded the alarm over the decline of active citizenry in the United States. His concern is shared by many urban planners, who, besides acknowledging the democratic benefits of public participation, subscribe to the idea that better neighborhood equals better cities (Irvin & Stansbury 2004:2). Accordingly, by encouraging local residents to engage with each other, perhaps even across social classes (Boesen 2018:1), place experiments may have empowering effects for entire neighborhoods (Boesen 2018:6; Døssing 2018:5p; Leonardsen 2018:4; Nordlund 2018:1, 7). The logic here is that marginalized or socially vulnerable citizens engage less in local politics and in development of their city and neighborhood. It is therefore crucial for a sustainable and democratic city that citizens in these neighborhoods are encouraged and empowered to take part in the urban production (Municipality of Copenhagen 2015a:7; Municipality of Copenhagen 2017d:3). In the Municipality of Copenhagen, place experiments appear to be a popular means to try to fulfill this ambition. Though I cannot conclude on the direct effects of the empowerment strategy in the five place experiments, the external evaluation of the Neighborhood Regeneration's methods (mentioned in Strategy III) shows that 90 pct. of the participants in six Neighborhood Regeneration projects (one of which is Sundholm Urban Garden) think that the empowerment approach is important or very important. The same percentage agree that civil society actors are able to gain influence in local Neighborhood Regeneration's projects if they make a "serious effort" (ALS Research 2017:69). Together these conclusions reveal that locals in disadvantaged neighborhoods have faith in the empowerment strategy.

Ditte B. Døssing who was planning and conducting the place experiment Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station stress that temporary place experiments give way to alternative forms of communication. This, she explains, has the potential to provoke reactions from people who usually do not engage in citizen democracy:

“We get to another group of people [than] when we communicate through more traditional platforms. [The place experiment] is *in your face*, you can almost not help but see that something is on its way. And you can be angry or curious. And it is probably this reaction we wish to provoke. Because when we removed the first experiment, there were some who were really upset that it had been removed. And then there were some who thought it was wonderful to get their quiet area back. And these reactions are good because then we can build a group of citizens who want to fight for this project we have launched, or which we work to launch... In a version that we have tested already... So it was really powerful when there was a petition [by local residents for making the experiment permanent].” (Døssing 2018:8).

A place experiment may thus serve as inspiration and as a catalyst for local demands. In the case of Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station, the experiment sparked not only an interest, but a civil demand for a permanent product based on the experiment.

This is of course just one of many possible responses to a place experiment. An experiment may also provoke local residents and motivate them to challenge the municipality’s suggested production of space. While it may seem counter-intuitive for the municipality to create experiments that cause negative reactions, being challenged by local residents can actually be an intentional strategy by area-based planners. This might best be explained with a common joke among municipal planners that the Neighborhood Regeneration measures its success on the number of complaints from the residents: The more complaints, the bigger the success. In this perception, the resource to file complaints is a proxy for active citizenship and urban democracy. This oddity testifies to the social objective of the place experiment to engage citizens in their local neighborhood.

The external evaluation of methods in the Neighborhood Regeneration (ALS Research 2017) concludes that despite the planners’ awareness of potentials and challenges to empowerment in urban planning, there is a strong tendency that citizens participating in this type of co-creation are predominantly those who are already “resourceful” – the “haves” as Arnstein would call them – and more rarely the vulnerable – the “have-nots” (ALS Research 2017:69p). However, whereas empowerment methods are often conducted in more traditional planning processes as a means to an end, i.e. an inclusive urban space, empowerment can be an independent objective of a place experiment, where the form and product is less fixed. This was the case in Stengadeparken, where Boesen regarded the empowerment of isolated immigrant women and of young girls as an experiment in itself (Boesen 2018:1pp). Hence, if conducted with cau-

tion, a place experiments may serve as an effective empowerment tool in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

In a summary of *Strategy IV: Creating local empowerment* I should emphasize that all place experiments conducted by the Neighborhood Regeneration in Copenhagen are located in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and that their planners regard place experiments as a strategic means to empower local residents through co-creation. Particularly the experiment's alternative communication platforms may encourage other people to participate than just the most "resourceful". Unfortunately, an external evaluation suggests that strategic empowerment often only reaches the already resourceful citizens, which makes empowerment an even more difficult task for the planners. Empowerment is often measured in terms of feedback to urban production, and the planners use both positive and negative responses as a proxy for empowerment. The place experiment could be a good place to develop and test new empowerment methods because it allows experimentation not only in the product but also in the process.



Illustration 15: The temporary "trade corner" at Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station became a popular meeting place in Gl. Valby. After a while, local residents who took an interest in the experiment, began speaking their minds and making political demands for its upscaling. Photo: Valby Lokaludvalg

Strategy VI: Raising support and attention

Place experiments employed by a municipal entity like the Neighborhood Regeneration come into existence through a political system. Experiments need political approval, need to fit current municipal strategies and policies, and finally they need to be constructed, operated and maintained. This requires either financial funding, political support, voluntary commitment or, as in most cases, all of these things. Luckily for the planners, as I will show in the next few pages, the place experiment itself can serve as a strategy to *raise support and attention*. I will examine how planners use place experiments to build pressure and gain

support to effectuate, finance, operate or sustain a specific urban solution, and how planners may introduce the place experiment as a means to level out economic inequalities between neighborhoods in the city.

Physical place experiments are often conducted as a means to direct attention towards a space or product. It is therefore often considered a success by the planners if their place experiment causes a place to go from being “unnoticed” to suddenly become a point of reference, as it happened in Sundholm Urban Garden (Leonardsen 2018:6), Containerby Linjen (Thiesen 2018:2) and at Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station (Døssing 2018:4). This renewed attention towards a place (some would say that the *place identity* was strengthened) may be achieved as an unexpected *result* of the experiment. Or it may be an intended *strategy*. Generally, drawing attention to the experiment from different groups in society is a common means of improving the experiment’s future prospects. The strategy can be applied to raise attention on different scales:

Political attention, particularly if strategic, can provide financial funding to continue the experiment or feed into a permanent solution. This was an independent objective (and success) in Herman Bangs Plads Local Recycle Station (Døssing 2018:10; Valby Lokaludvalg 2018).

Academic attention may illustrate the importance of the experiment on a theoretical or scientific level. This was the case in Sundholm Urban Garden, where two researchers teamed up with the planner Øystein Leonardsen and used the place experiment as a research case (Agger et al. 2016; Leonardsen 2018:5).

Popular attention is often assumed to come with a feeling of affiliation and responsibility towards the experiment or the place it occupies (see *Strategy III: Developing local responsibility*), and is a common way to mobilize public support for the experiment’s existence and continuity. The popularity of Containerby Linjen is an example of how an experiment became an attraction for people all over the city, which presumably would have been beneficial if the experiment was to become permanent (Thiesen 2018:8).

Local attention can empower neighboring residents to engage in a debate over the particular urban space (see *Strategy V: Creating local empowerment*) which again may trigger a civil demand and eventually a political pressure to acknowledge and act on challenges connected to the urban space. This was the case when local residents in Gl. Valby initiated a petition to demand funding for the transition of the experiment from prototype to a complete and permanent recycle station and meeting space (Døssing 2018:4, 8). Similarly, at the time of writing, planners of the Karens Minde experiments aim to mobilize local resi-

dents in order for them to engage critically in the upcoming construction of a large climate mitigation project (Nordlund 2018:5, 7p). And in Nørrebro the planners in Stengadeparken hope that co-creating the park with local marginalized social groups will enable and encourage these citizens to demand a communal park in a now fenced off and little used urban space (Boesen 2018:11).

These examples illustrate how attention towards a place experiment may contribute to its future existence. But an experiment is rarely an objective in itself. As concluded earlier in the previous analysis (A), an experiment is always an instrument to reach a higher transformative objective, be it innovation (Boesen 2018:11p; Nordlund 2018:2), de-stigmatization of and higher feeling of safety towards an urban space or neighborhood (Leonardsen 2018:2; Døssing 2018:2; Boesen 2018:4, 9p), illustration of a solution to a problem (Døssing 2018:5p; Leonardsen 2018:4, 7), empowerment and mobilization of citizens to take back control of their city (Nordlund 2018:7p; Boesen 2018:12), or something else. Particularly in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods, physical and visible experiments can direct attention towards challenges in the neighborhood. The publicity of an experiment, in other words, can be a way for planners and residents to raise awareness in a place that normally receives very little or only negative attention (and thus financial resources) from politicians and the public. However, as concluded in *Strategy II: Re-branding spaces*, positive attention is not always desirable, and an experiment may easily spiral out of hand and become a benefit for investors rather than local residents.

According to Leonardsen, designing Sundholm Urban Garden as a place experiment rather than through a traditional planning process was crucial for the experiment's chances of coming into existence in the first place. Leonardsen asserts that "traditional" planning resources were unlikely to have found their way to a neighborhood like Sundholmskvarteret, located in the financial margins of the city. It was much easier to convince the municipal politicians to support the less expensive place experiment¹⁸:

"You could have called 3-4 landscape architects and said: Make a nice design. An urban garden in that scale would probably need 20-25 million [DKK]. (...) But first of all, it would have required a very big [political and financial] decision. And the question is whether Sundholm would be attractive enough for a big decision. Or if they [the politicians] would have said: 'Oh, such a big decision should be for another place in the city where there is more attention.'" (Leonardsen 2018:6).

18 Place experiments are often cheaper than traditional urban planning due to the voluntary workforce and maintenance. Further, due to the development of well-tested and ingenious solutions in the experiment, the risk that the construction does not meet the actual needs and therefore requires further adjustments when completed in its permanent form is reduced (Boesen 2018:11).

The quote illustrates Leonardsen's doubt that a large social and recreational garden in a disadvantaged urban neighborhood would have been prioritized financially by the city council. A concern shared by Nordlund with reference to Sydhavnen, where no funding was reserved for the urban space in Karens Minde Aksen, but only for the technical climate mitigation project (Nordlund 2018:7p).

With this perspective Leonardsen and Nordlund subscribe to a critique of the policy to concentrate financial investments in the most central "growth" areas of the city, sustaining a geographic economic inequality (Liliegreen 2018:18p; Massey 1991). A geographic inequality which the Neighborhood Regeneration is meant to terminate (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017d:19). It is in response to these geographic inequalities that planners employ place experiments: By creating visible physical as well as social spectacles, planners can draw awareness to urban spaces that have been ignored in the municipal budget so far. The logic is that if the planners succeed in directing attention to a disadvantaged neighborhood, the result may be that a bigger share of the municipality's yearly budget is allocated to local schools, infrastructure, cultural institutions in the particular neighborhood.

This does not mean of course that financial attention from politicians is ultimately positive for residents in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. Contrarily, as many critical scholars have concluded, financial "investment" is a double-edged sword which can be used on one hand to improve living conditions (i.e. by maintaining infrastructure and allocating resources to schools) and on the other hand to widen the rent gap, ultimately propelling gentrification and increasing inequalities (Smith 1996; Slater 2015). Though this flip side of political attention is a recurring concern among Copenhagen Neighborhood Regeneration planners¹⁹, none of the interviewed planners drew direct attention to the problem during the interviews. Instead, their concern was the comparatively worse living conditions for those who live in Copenhagen's disadvantaged neighborhoods than those who live in the rest of Copenhagen (Municipality of Copenhagen 2017d). The planners stressed the following issues as problems caused by (among other things) a political reluctance to allocate financial resources to disadvantaged neighborhoods: Disadvantaged neighborhoods' few "green spaces" (Boesen 2018:1; Municipality of Copenhagen 2008); stigmatization and lack of tolerance towards "wild" young boys (Boesen 2018:9p); lack of safe meeting spaces (Leonardsen 2018:1; Nordlund 2018:8); lack of cultural activities and creative spaces (Thiesen 2018:3); and the disadvantaged neighborhoods' gap in "social capital" between the haves and the have-nots (Boesen 2018:4).

¹⁹ It is my impression, based on my time as an employee in Copenhagen's Neighborhood Regeneration, that many municipal planners are genuinely concerned with the risks of gentrification.

To summarize *Strategy VI: Raising support and attention*, “spectacular” place experiments can have a seemingly seductive effect on citizens and politicians, which can be used strategically by planners to draw attention and support to a local challenge, idea or solution. This strategy may also be a way to ensure the experiment’s existence in its temporary or perhaps more permanent form. Since financial resources are often concentrated in more privileged (contrary to disadvantaged) neighborhoods, place experiments may also be a way to attract funding to these economically neglected areas in the city. Despite their acknowledgement of the risk of strategic attraction of investments backfiring and propelling gentrification, the municipal planners insist on the need to draw financial resources in order to increase living standards in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Strategy VII: Illustrating urban alternatives

Until now, I have presented strategies employed to make a transformation in a particular place or neighborhood. The following strategy, which is also the last, have a slightly different focus, as it is employed by the planner, not only with her professional task as a planner in the Neighborhood Regeneration in mind, but above all to reach a more far-reaching objective: To change not only the local but the urban in itself. Incitement of local solutions, as shown in Strategy I, is a strategy to enrich or refine physical or social constructions in the urban. Despite some similarities, the strategy in this sub-chapter, *Illustrating urban alternatives* is more more occupied with cultivating hope and optimism in disadvantaged neighborhoods than with actual physical productions. Here, the *illustration* is in focus, and not so much the *innovation*.

All five experiments in my research are used strategically by their planners to illustrate how the future *might* look. By conducting experiments *in* and *with* the urban context, planners blur the inside-outside dynamics with which the late 19th century field biologists tried to come to terms (Evans & Karvonen 2014:417). According to the STS scholars Bruno Latour (1983:166) and Karin Knorr-Cetina (1995:145), a planner’s focus on an urban experiment should rather be on how its practices are transferred onto the world outside it, than on the exact processes inside the experiment. Essentially, the STS scholars echo Brenner and Lefebvre’s call for exposure of alternatives and utopias as they insist on turning a critical dialogue into an actual improvement in the urban. In short, it is the ability of the experiment and its planners to strategically control and distribute inside- and outside dynamics between the laboratory and the society that makes the place experiment a powerful transformative space. The place experiment can be a place where imagination is let loose, where citizens and planners can play with the urban space and where solutions and success may be both unexpected and unplanned. In Containerby Linjen, for example, the

plan was never to come up with a specific solution for anything, but rather to unleash creativity and invite people to take part and see what can come from 20 feet of idle terrain, an unknown number of containers and planks, and a whole lot of skills and ideas. Yet, among the key results was, according to Thiesen (2018:13, 15p), a higher understanding of how the municipality can collaborate with civil society actors.

Essentially, the strategy of demonstrating urban alternatives comes down to the place experiment's transformative objective. In their development and testing of alternative ways of urban planning, planners hope to create a change in the urban production. Particularly experiments trying out new partnership models seem to be employed with an ambition to change status quo, as both Thiesen and Boesen hope to develop a co-creation model between the municipality and another urban co-producer, which can pave the way for more and better cross-sectoral co-creation in the future (Thiesen 2018:7; Boesen 2018:15).

Lefebvre has stated that utopia can only be reached by aiming for the impossible and imagining what could be different (1976 [1973]:36). Despite his somehow cryptic definition of this utopia, it seems obvious that our urban society and life can only be improved if planners acknowledge their vantage position to challenge the well-known and remain critical towards our established ideas of the urban production (Munthe-Kaas 2017; Lefebvre 2003 [1974]:142p). The place experiment's co-creational character ensures that its derived knowledge is shared (at least to some extent) by its participants. However, as several of the interviewed planners admit, the experiment's recursive learning process, and thereby its ability to inspire and motivate an urban utopia, is a part of the experiment which can be improved and extended if only the importance of sharing knowledge and experience from these urban alternatives is acknowledged and acted upon by planners and their municipal leaders (Thiesen 2018:15p; Boesen 2018:13pp).

I will sum up *Strategy VII: Illustrating urban alternatives* by highlighting that place experiments may be used as a strategy to accelerate and incite urban alternatives. That is, urban productions challenging the norm. This way, citizens and politicians are exposed to unconventional urban production, and Lefebvre's utopia becomes a bit more tangible. However, in order for a place experiment to release its transformative potential and truly inspire the urban production, planners and co-creators need to learn how to switch back and forth between its inside and outside and share with others what they have learned from the experiment.



Illustration 16: All shipping containers and most constructions have been removed with Containerby Linjen's official shut-down in late 2017. A fire place, a few raised beds and a rabbit shed are some of the only remains of the experiment in Fuglekvarteret. A neighbor stopping by to feed the rabbits shared her regret that the community spirit and the level of activity had declined since the end of the place experiment. Photo: The author.

Summary and conclusion of Analysis B

In this chapter, I have analyzed and challenged five municipal planners' strategic rationales for conducting place experiments in five disadvantaged neighborhoods in Copenhagen. My analysis has revealed seven ways in which place experiments are used strategically by planners in order to I) incite local residents to produce urban spaces, II) brand or re-brand spaces III) strengthen or build local responsibility,

IV) prepare local residents for big changes, V) empower local citizens, VI) raise financial and popular support, and VII) illustrate urban alternatives. My analysis rests on an empirical foundation which I have examined in detail through critical urban theory and theories of governance and urban experiments.

It is evident from the analysis that place experiments have potential to enable planners as well as citizens to challenge the established planning system and to develop and propose alternatives to urban spaces, productions and practices offered in the current governance paradigm. It is also clear, however, that despite the planners' good intentions, many strategies may have unintended consequences. My research shows that possible consequences, and thus challenges to the place experiment as a strategic urban planning tool, are gentrification (Strategy II and VII), counterfeit democracy (Strategy I and IV), lack of recognition of existing place identities (Strategy II), suppression of critique (Strategy IV), depoliticization of planning (Strategy II), empowerment of actors without an actual stake in the particular place (Strategy III), and empowerment of citizens who are already participating in local democracy rather than those who might need support or encouragement to take part in urban production (Strategy V).

7. Analysis C (Discussion and further perspectives): *What is the planner's responsibility and space of opportunity in terms of advancing a just city?*

In this chapter, I apply Fainstein (2010) and Harvey (1973)'s perspectives on *urban justice* (see Chapter 3) in order to examine whether place experiments may be a means to reach (something resembling) *the just city*. I will present a few perspectives to my analyses, calling for further research, as I discuss the planner's role and options in regards to the just city. To approach this discussion I first discuss briefly whether urban social justice can be reached incrementally or whether it requires more radical approaches. Next I suggest exploring the interviewed planners' (actual and perceived) room for maneuver in the municipal framework. I follow up on this by proposing that planners' dualistic perception of their own role as mediators and experts directly affect their approach to urban justice.

Changing the system from the inside?

Critical geographers have often accused urban planners of neglecting their responsibilities. The Berkeley urban theorist Melvin M. Webber, for example, criticize planners' instrumental views of urban structures and argues that planners tend to blindly follow a

“deep seated doctrine that seeks order in simple mappable patterns, when it is really hiding in extremely complex social organizations, instead.” (Webber 1963:54)

Harvey, supporting Webber's critique, argues that urban planning (in its current form) could never lead to justice, since planners operate within the political (capitalist) system, and by adhering to its rules, planners reproduce this system (Harvey 1985:75). Other scholars oppose Harvey's radicalism with a more incremental take on urban justice. Fainstein (2010), for example, is more pragmatic in her view that urban justice may be achieved by simply improving the system from the inside:

“I consider that the system itself will change incrementally as a consequence of continued pressure for justice. Forcing decision makers to make justice a principal consideration in urban policies would (...) add to overall pressure for restruc-

turing capitalism into a more humane system.” (Fainstein 2010:6).

I argue that Harvey is mistaken in his suggestion that planners have no agency or power to challenge the contemporary (planning) system, and that Fainstein’s belief in a humane capitalist system is equally flawed. My point here is that while a just city can be (relatively) easily imagined, a more difficult discussion regards who has the power, the agency and the responsibility to pursue it. However, instead of proceeding with a theoretical discussion on the planner’s role and agency, I will turn to my informants for a more empirically grounded discussion on the topic.

Planners with cowboy hats

While the place experiment is inherently transformative in its outset, a pressing question among my five interviewees is how to actually make the transformation happen. For the municipal planners this, in many respects, comes down to the difficulty in finding a balance between social or moral responsibilities (for the just city) and municipal jurisdictions.

My research reveals that municipal planners are caught between the “new” flexible and co-creational planning paradigm and the “old” bureaucratic and hierarchical municipal structures. Hence, what the planners consider to be good or just decisions are often accompanied with serious risks and liabilities for their project or for themselves because such decisions tend to interfere with municipal policies and regulations. A former project manager in Copenhagen’s Neighborhood Regeneration has dubbed the municipal planner’s binary role “being a planner with a cowboy hat”. Four out of five interviewed planners regard their role as “wild west” planners in the sense that they are unable to conduct place experiments without ignoring or bending legal and municipal requirements in the process:

“You are a part of the municipality, but you see it from the inside as well as from the outside. So you are ready to take some chances instead of saying: These are the rules. And that’s what being a planner with a cowboy hat means.” (Thiesen 2018:18).

The municipal place experiment challenges the planners’ role and their relation to the citizens and to the experiment. This entails that the planners act on gut feeling, take quick decisions without the necessary precautions, and often side more with residents than with “The Municipality” (Boesen 2018:16; Thiesen 2018:18; Leonardsen 2018:8; Nordlund 2018:10). Døssing, who actually discourages the wild west ap-

proach to planning as she believes that it discourages team work and solidarity, acknowledges that in order to make the experiment truly transformative and to create a better city, the planner may be forced to use her agency to contravene the dogmas of the municipal system, or to challenge the norms in the city (Døssing 2018:11). Even the municipal visions and strategies call for the planners to produce “edgy” urban spaces like Containerby Linjen (Municipality of Copenhagen 2015a, 2017e), while ignoring that the municipality’s bureaucratic requirements make it virtually impossible to construct such alternative urban spaces.

Hence, a planner’s inclination to actively challenge and change the current governance paradigm or system seem to depend on her perception of her own role: Does she act on behalf of the municipality by following established requirements instead of taking unnecessary risks? Or is she an urban cowboy acting on behalf of the city and its local residents by challenging unjust structures regardless of their origin? Another important dimension to this, that we will not be able to discuss here, is the fact that while bureaucratic measures are implemented in the light of the existing political paradigm, bureaucracy is the key to welfare planning of any kind. It is therefore important also to consider in this discussion that the planner may have faith in the municipal bureaucracy to lead the way to urban justice (Døssing 2018:11).

The planner as producer of urban space: A mediator or an expert?

A pending question is how urban planners in fact position themselves in the production of the urban in their effort to create a better or more just city. My research reveals in this regard that planners of place experiments tend to balance between two planning roles: The facilitator and the expert. Some planners take a clear stance while others shuffle between the two roles.

Planners as mediators

Perhaps surprisingly, not all planners regard it as their right to prescribe and impose urban production. A planner may instead perceive her role as primarily facilitating and empowering. In that case she seeks to set a frame around the experiment, recruit local stakeholders and mediate dialogue about objectives and methods of the experiment. In this process, an important part of the spatial production is left to locals and other urban actors, and the planner is merely the one connecting the dots. Thiesen, for example, regards himself as a mediator supporting citizens in the production of urban spaces that suit local needs (Thiesen 2018:3), supporting their right to the city (Harvey 2013:xvi). To him, it is not the planners who should create urban alternatives. Instead, those who live in and from the city, and more specifically, those who live in a local neighborhood, are the ones who can create Lefebvre’s utopia:

“Well, we [the planners] could easily have made something resembling this [container village], but then it wouldn’t have been community, co-creation and a city with an edge. It would have been us mimicking that kind of city. And that wasn’t the point. The point was that we wanted something that we [the planners] didn’t dictate, but instead something that has potential because it comes from someone else.” (Thiesen 2018:4p).

The perspective that the urban cannot be fabricated but needs to be nourished is not unique to Thiesen but recurs among the planners in Stengadeparken (Boesen 2018:13) and the Karens Minde experiments (Nordlund 2018:2). Here too, the planners insist on the right for the local residents to define and produce their own space, and on their own role as planners to merely set the process in motion and make ends meet.

Planners as experts

While the notion that citizens are the real creators of the city persists among planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration, some planners also insist on their expertise to decide what leads to a good or just city. These planners may perceive it as their right to produce the space according to their professional skills which enable them to point to better solutions, and not just to act as facilitators. With this logic, spatial justice requires strategic planning, through which the planner ensures a more egalitarian spatial distribution. In Stengadeparken, Boesen stresses the importance of citizen participation, not to

“come up with the right solution for a space” (Boesen 2018:10),

but to give feedback and qualify urban solutions – essentially to function as test subjects and local experts (Boesen 2018:10). The planner’s role, on the other hand, is to create well-functioning and just urban spaces by prescribing what a good urban space should entail. In Leonardsen’s words:

“The more we define the use of the space, the better is the chance that we can make it work socially.” (Leonardsen 2018:3).

Hence, despite the abiding co-creational governance paradigm effectively outsourcing planning roles to other urban actors than the professional planner, some planners maintain that they, by virtue of their professional skills, have the responsibility to create just urban spaces. With this logic, planners employ their expert planning knowledge to create what *they* perceive as urban justice.

Summary and conclusion of Analysis C (discussion)

The place experiment's hermeneutic and transformative character is not perfectly compatible with a bureaucratic and standardized policy framework. This discrepancy forces the planner to balance between abiding to the rules or breaking them in order to follow her own judgment in the pursuit of a urban justice. The planner may perceive her role either to enable local residents to create the spaces they need, or to employ her own expertise and power to produce urban space on behalf of local citizens. In some cases, planners even switch back and forth between these roles (see for example Boesen 2018:10). Still, the question remains, which role urban planners should assume, and whether social justice can even be pursued from "inside the system" (Harvey 1973, 1985; Fainstein 2010).

8. Final conclusions

This thesis is an examination of the use of place experiments in urban planning. My research has been guided by the question: *How do municipal planners seek to strategically employ place experiments in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and what challenges does this entail?* In order to conclude on this, I have conducted a qualitative study adhering to a realist ontology, methodologically inspired by grounded theory. Five interviews, each with a planner of a selected place experiment in Copenhagen, make up the empirical foundation on which I base the following conclusions.

With one leg in the Chicago School and the other in natural field sciences, experiments in and on the city have caught the interest of many academic fields before being adopted by and reconfigured by urban planners as the *place experiment*. Echoing its contemporary governance and planning paradigms, the place experiment encourages partnerships and co-creation, compelling its planners to redistribute power to other urban actors: Some who may have something at stake, and some who may not.

Inherently hermeneutic, co-creational and transformative, the geographically bounded place experiment allows the planner to (co-)produce urban spaces that challenge norms and test ideas in the city. Unlike traditional planning, experimental planners are able to embrace and build upon the errors and mistakes that the place experiments inevitably bring about. Among these planners, the discourse that “failures makes strong” is persistent, and along with a determination to put citizens at the center of urban production and to listen to local needs and demands, this makes the place experiment an interesting approach to local urban planning.

In disadvantaged neighborhoods in Copenhagen, municipal planners in the Neighborhood Regeneration have developed and internalized seven different but interrelated strategies for the employment and use of place experiments in their work. The place experiments are used strategically to I) incite local urban production, II) re-brand spaces III) develop local responsibility, IV) prepare locals for change, V) create local empowerment, VI) raise support and attention and VII) illustrate urban alternatives.

Despite many good intentions and an undeniable potential to redistribute power from haves to have-nots and to challenge status quo, place experiments in municipal urban planning also entail problematic as-

sumptions and risks to social justice. While the planners of the five place experiments are well aware of the importance of learning from their mistakes in the place experiments, they are less focused on how their practices may themselves be based on flawed logics and on arguments and actions contradicting their objectives. I demonstrate in my research, that strategic use of place experiments in disadvantaged neighborhoods by municipal planners may result in counterfeit democracy if power relations between the municipality, the planners and the citizens are not clear and fair, and in marginalization or stigmatization of existing place identities when planners declare a space to be “a non-place” and trump any use of the place that they consider unimportant, unproductive or unsafe. There is also a risk that place experiments implemented to induce public participation and local democracy into large municipal development projects in fact suppress critique instead of incorporating it, if the experiment’s co-creational dogmas are not passed on to the project’s entrepreneurs and advisory teams. Further, when place experiments redistribute power from local citizens and stakeholders to corporate or non-local actors, and when they (unpurposely) end up empowering “haves” rather than “have-nots”, their actual democratic power can be questioned. In particular, the place experiment often fails to challenge structural socio-economic inequalities, which in fact is the defining objective of the municipal Neighborhood Regeneration in Copenhagen.

None of these risks and challenges can be separated from the planning regimes in which the place experiment has come to exist. Despite a renewed focus on democracy and co-creation, the entrepreneurial governance paradigm also encourages depoliticization. While this paradigm is no less political than those before it, its language and its broad perception of stakeholders suggests that urban planning should be undertaken not only by local residents and democratic governance institutions, but equally by other interests. These perspectives are easily channeled to municipal planners whose professional jurisdictions are subject to municipal policies and discourses.

Based on these findings, I claim that that planners must critically review and reconfigure the place experiment’s underlying premises and logics in order to use it as a means to advance social justice. Despite an ambition to challenge existing procedures, the place experiment is constructed in the image of the entrepreneurial governance paradigm, and therefore fails to criticize more political issues such as socio-spatial inequalities, citizen instrumentalization and accumulation of capital and power.

However, the place experiment takes many forms, and one of its biggest strengths is that it gives municipal planners an opportunity to test, question and challenge “best practices” and established norms and ideas. If able to balance between a position of expert and mediator and between bureaucrat and experi-

mentalist, which is not as easy as it sounds, the municipal planner may employ place experiments as urban alternatives to the existing urban production. If planned and conducted with a critical ambition, the place experiment may after all be able to release its transformative potential. This becomes possible only if planners direct their agency to challenge unjust mechanisms, particularly in the system in which they are employed. By confronting and openly discussing the limitations and problems of place experiments, and not only their potentials and opportunities, the planners would be obliged to face the not always citizen friendly governance paradigm in which the place experiment has been born. If the real strength of the place experiment lies in its innate critique of the existing urban production, then planners need to consider how the place experiment can be used to propose alternatives, not only to planning practices, but also to planning policies.

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