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Public art debates as boundary struggles

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the symbolic boundaries that are at play in controversies over public art projects and the criteria different groups of actors, (e.g. artists, art experts, bureaucrats, and local communities), use when evaluating public art. This investigation shed light on how art, artistic autonomy, and public spaces are subject to “boundary struggles” in which the identities and worth of different social groups and the value of art in society are negotiated. Based on case studies of two public art projects that were rejected before their completion, – and by tracing the media coverage of the public debates these cases generated, – this analysis reveals that the ways art is understood vary considerably between representatives of the artistic field and those outside of it. It is argued that insights into such struggles can inform cultural policy in the narrow and wide sense. It is valuable to gain insight into how ‘ordinary people’ value and draw boundaries around art, as cultural policy research has primarily attended to the perspectives of public authorities and professional actors in the artistic field.

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Introduction

According to Blomgren (2012), cultural policy has been preoccupied with the autonomy of the arts and culture and less with the “voices of the people”. He argues that this represents a lopsided idea of democracy. A similar criticism could be directed toward scholarly work on cultural policy. Within cultural policy research, there has been a tendency to put the perspectives of public authorities and professional actors in the artistic field at the forefront of analysis. However, a democratic perspective calls for increased knowledge regarding how “ordinary people” understand and evaluate art and a determination of the extent to which and the specific ways in which these understandings and evaluations relate to those of professional actors in the artistic field. Such an approach would align with what Vestheim (2012) maintains is essential to cultural policy; he argues that cultural policy-making must pay attention to the citizen.

Previous research indicates that people outside of the artistic field certainly have their opinions about visual art (Bennett 2009; McClellan 2008; Zebracki 2013; Halle 1993). However, they rarely engage in public debates on concrete artworks or the role of art in society. While art is an activity that typically takes place within specialized institutions and buildings, public art means that art is installed in spaces that are primarily used for other purposes. This means that public art objects might lead more active lives engaging a larger cross-section of people, but also with greater risk of invisibility, disdain or vandalism (McClellan 2008, xiii; Mitchell 1992). From time to time, public art projects are perceived as so controversial and provocative that groups that seldom publicly voice

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their opinions on art also take part in the public discussions of these projects. Such controversies reveal different understandings of what art is and how it should be evaluated. Sometimes these controversies even lead to the rejection and termination of art projects (Mendelson-Shwartz and Mualam 2020). In this article, I argue that public debates of this kind represent unique opportunities to take the voices of non-experts of art seriously in cultural policy research. However, it is important to note that boundary struggles related to public art do not necessarily correspond to the boundaries drawn around art in other settings such as in museums.

The French sociologist Heinich (2000) argues that there is no better way to study the shifting boundaries that define what constitutes art than “via the negative reactions to works of art or proposals that breach the boundaries of common sense, shared references, and generally accepted categories”. Accordingly, cases of public art being rejected can be of special interest if we want to investigate the degree to which and the ways in which the public and professionals in the artistic field understand art and the societal role of art differently.

In the Norwegian context, there have been several rejections of public art projects in the last decade. This article investigates both the symbolic boundaries that are manifested, negotiated, and established in such controversies and the criteria different actors, such as artists, art experts, bureaucrats, and local communities, use when evaluating public art. In this way, this article will analyze the ways in which art, artistic autonomy, and public spaces are subject to “boundary struggles” (Midtbøen, Steen-Johnsen, and Thorbjørnsrud 2017). Such boundary struggles could be seen as a response to cultural policy both in a narrow and wide sense. On the one hand, public authorities are often heavily involved in public art projects, at least in the Norwegian context. On the other hand, art is a social arena where social differences and hierarchies are produced and reproduced (Bourdieu 1984; Bennett 2009; Halle 1993; van Den Haak 2014).

The article proceeds as follows: The first section describes the concept of public art before moving on in the second part to an introduction of the present work’s theoretical perspective, which centers around symbolic boundaries. The third section presents both the method and the two cases that are the focus of this study. Fourth, three aspects of the material are presented in three parts: how boundaries are drawn around art, the role of art in society, and public spaces by different groups. Finally, the article ends with a concluding discussion highlighting that boundaries drawn around public art are not just intellectual constructions, but that such boundaries produce real effects.

Public art

Public art is a phenomenon that is hard to define (Zebracki 2012; Hall 2007). Hein (1996) argues that the most obvious definition of public art – ‘art installed by public agencies in public spaces and at public expenses’ – was crudely pragmatic and narrow. The degree to which public agencies and public finances are involved differ, as does the degree to which the spaces in question are considered public in the sense of being open to everybody. More elaborate definitions of public art undoubtedly exist, but they differ considerably in their approach and content (Cartiere and Willis 2008; Zebracki 2012; Hall 2007).

Rather than starting with a clear-cut definition of public art, I suggest we recognize it as a phenomenon that is best understood in terms of its positions in the intersections between and among different fields and institutions. This understanding has much in common with the perspective on murals put forward by Mendelson-Shwartz and Mualam (2020). They believe that a set of tensions constitute of murals insofar as they are both public and private phenomena operating in the intersection between the artistic and public realms. While public art is certainly included in the field of art, its most salient feature is that it is outside of the most institutionalized parts of the field of art, such as the gallery, museum, studio, etc. (Zebracki 2011; McClellan 2008). Therefore, public art might activate social relations and dynamics that art, with its main trajectory in the most institutionalized circuits of the artistic field cannot. Because of this, public art is sometimes contested (Pollock and Paddison 2010; McClellan 2008). The public aspect of public art means that groups anchored in

institutions and practices other than the specialized artistic field are exposed to art without having freely chosen to be. On these grounds, it has been argued that there is a need to move the literature on public art from a focus on the aesthetic, cultural, and political intentions and processes that shape its production to how people respond to and engage with it (Lossau, Stevens, and Wagner 2015; Hall 2007; Hall and Smith 2005).

While research on the audience of public art is still scarce, several research contributions provide some interesting insights (Zebracki 2013; Senie 2003). Zebracki (2013) concludes that the distinct localities significantly affect and situate the publics' perceptions of public art and that publics perceive figurative and conventional works more positively than abstract works. Senie (2003) finds that audiences for public art for the most part are willing to engage with it. While the audience for public art is initially shy in entering a discussion about art, it does not hesitate to use works that exist in its spaces, for example as photo op, street furniture, playground or meeting place. In this way,

public art cannot be understood in isolation from the spaces where it is installed and from the groups that typically use or inhabit these spaces. Accordingly, public art is a phenomenon that needs to be analyzed in light of a socio-spatial dimension (Hall 2007). Using a geographical perspective, Zebracki (2012, 2) contends that: "Public art is peculiar in that it integrates space and place as part of the content, which makes the ontological nature of public art geographically complex and polemic."

To sum up, public art is a complex phenomenon in which the spatial dimension is crucial and, more importantly, in which social roles and dynamics are less institutionalized than in the normal activities of the artistic field. This opens public art up to potential controversies and conflicts when different perspectives of art and its role clash. I argue that such controversies and conflicts are of great analytical value if we want to better understand how art is defined, understood, and evaluated from different perspectives and by different actor groups in our society. Debates of this kind are the locus of struggles over what are conceived as legitimate and illegitimate positions/standpoints related to art.

Symbolic boundaries

The concept of symbolic boundaries deals with the types of lines individuals draw during they categorization. This concept has been widely used within cultural sociology over the last few decades (Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007; Lamont, Pendergrass, and Pachucki 2015; Lamont and Molnár 2002). Lamont (1992, 9) defines symbolic boundaries as the 'conceptual distinctions that we make to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space'. Based on this understanding, symbolic boundaries are at the core of processes in which the social world is given meaning (Lamont and Molnár 2002). The concept draws on insights from classical sociologists like Durkheim and Simmel and emphasizes that symbolic boundaries presuppose the inclusion of the desirable as well as the exclusion of the repulsive and impure. When boundaries are drawn as part of meaning-making processes, these processes simultaneously become acts of evaluation. When something is included, excluded, or categorized as indifferent, value is attached to the phenomenon in question. By studying how symbolic boundaries are drawn, we can identify the criteria used to include and exclude and consequently determine how different things are given value. It is crucial to underline that symbolic boundaries are 'real' in the sense that they shape individuals' propensity to act in certain ways in certain situations. This aspect of symbolic boundaries is palpable in cases when public art is rejected. Art that exists outside museums and galleries, and consequently also outside the defining power that such institutions hold, may be questioned in a manner it never is inside the institutions (McClellan 2008). Public debates on public art, where both experts and non-experts participate, represent a locus of boundary struggles.

Boundaries and the phenomena they encompass are not never definitively circumscribed. Rather, the boundaries of different categories are continuously redefined with regard to other categories. Cases in which art is rejected illustrate such ongoing processes. Art is a category that has been understood differently in different times and places and by different groups. In her study of the

impact of Vincent van Gogh, Heinrich (1996) argues that a fundamental break in the ways art is evaluated has been institutionalized – separating the specialists on the one hand from the uninitiated on the other. More specifically, this break is related to the notion of beauty. As a standard for evaluating the quality of artwork, beauty is discredited by specialists. Following Heinrich, this also means that the specialist approach to evaluating artwork is less of a function of the spectator's feelings and more of a function of what the artist was "trying to say" (Heinrich 1996, 144). Expression of the artist's personality, creative process, and experimentation are valued more than the "production of delightful objects for the consumer" (Heinrich 1996, 144). Other contributions also find a schism between how 'the initiated' and 'the uninitiated' appropriate art, with beauty, concrete referents, and emotions being important to the uninitiated whereas abstract forms, reflexivity and intellectual distance are valued by the initiated (Bennett 2009; Bourdieu 1984; Halle 1993; van Den Haak 2014).

Research strategy and method

This article investigates two of the most controversial public art projects in Norway over the last 10 years in which some of those involved rejected the artwork. In this way, the research strategy has been to follow up on Heinrich's claim that there is no better way to study the shifting boundaries that define art than in cases where art is rejected or meets negative reactions, as such cases are instances of boundary struggles. The two cases represent different types of public art projects: one is an art scheme for government buildings and the other an art scheme for outdoor public spaces.

In a study on public art controversies in the United States, Tepper (2000) found that abstract art pieces displayed in small cities were most likely to create conflicts. He also concludes that conflicts were more likely when there has been little or no involvement in the project by those who regularly "inhabit" the actual public space. To follow up on Tepper's findings, I chose two cases that differ in the character of the art and the size of the city. One is a figurative painting located in a government building in Oslo, and the other is a conceptual sculpture made out of well-known materials installed in a rural village. In both cases, a committee with art experts, representatives of relevant public authorities and local representatives chose the pieces. I argue that these cases are well suited for analyzing boundary struggles related to art, the societal role of art, and public space.

Vandalized art in the village – the Kvam case

The first case is from Kvam, a village located in one of the long valleys of southeastern Norway. The public art project in Kvam was part of a larger project called Vegskille (Crossroads) developed by Oppland county between 2014 and 2017. Vegskille was established as a response to the fact that the main road (E6) was gaining a brand-new route, which meant that several villages in the region would lose the traffic that had been vital to their local service industries. Vegskille was supposed to help revitalize villages losing their main road by using art in public spaces to stimulate interest in the villages (Fonkalsrud et al. 2018). In this way, the project is a typical example of using public art for regeneration (Hall and Robertson 2001).

A group of young architects and artists known as Fellesskapsprosjektet å Fortette Byen (FFB or the Community Project for Urban Densifying) was commissioned to create an artwork to be displayed in the village. They started to construct a sculpture in the village park in September 2017 in the spot where an unfinished fountain had been standing for years. An important element in the art FFB was creating was an old manure spreader. Before the work was finished, people in the local community began to protest on the grounds that this was turning out to be a project that had nothing to do with art. They also claimed that the artists were harassing the local community with their project. In October 2017, the work was vandalized with women's panties full of excrement. Notes with obscene

words were also hung up on the half-finished sculpture. The work was removed the day after with the explanation that the sculpture represented a security risk. After the removal, there were some negotiations regarding whether and how the project could be finished. The local community changed its mind, and in 2019, the work was completed and unveiled in the village (Figure 1).

Controversial art in the corridors of power – the Vanessa Baird case

The second case is from one of the government buildings in the city center of Oslo, Norway. The building in question comprises two restored buildings and a new building housing the Ministry of Health and Care Services and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The building was put into use in June 2012. Public Art Norway, the Norwegian government's professional body overseeing art in public spaces, was responsible for the art projects in the new government building. In March 2011, after an open competition, it was announced that the Norwegian artist Vanessa Baird would be commissioned to create three large wall paintings for the media room and the governmental sections of the two ministries. The artist began to work on the paintings in the basement of one of the government buildings close by. That same year, the horrible July 22nd attack by an extremist right-wing terrorist killed 77 individuals, with some of the damage occurring in Oslo's governmental quarter. The Ministry of Health and Care Services was among the ministries hit the hardest.

In December 2012, the first wall painting, *Light Disappears As Aoon As We Close Our Eyes*, was unveiled. The painting includes references to Norwegian buildings (also in the governmental quarter), landscapes, animals, birds, and characters from well-known folktales (KORO 2014). In February 2013, the two ministries sent a letter to Public Art Norway, expressing concerns over the acoustic consequences of the paintings. In June of the same year, it was made clear that the paintings provoked strong reactions among some employees in the ministries. Some employees in the building associated the first painting with the terrorist attacks of July 22, 2011. Based on the reactions from the employees, the Ministry of Health and Care Services rejected the third painting



Figure 1. Fellesskapsprosjektet å Fortette Byen: Odelsgut og fantefølge, 2019 © Fellesskapsprosjektet å Fortette Byen. Photographer: Sigrid Røyseng.

that was not yet finished at that time. Public Art Norway then decided to remove all the paintings because they were created as one coherent work. The plan was to find another public building where the paintings could be exhibited together, a task that turned out to be quite difficult. The first two paintings are currently still on exhibit in the government building housing the Ministry of Health and Care Services and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The third painting was installed in the reception area of Arts Council Norway (Figure 2).

Data sources and data analysis

In order to access the different boundaries and cultural resources at play in these cases, I looked at media documents covering the debates surrounding the two artworks. Media plays an important role in categorizing and forming general opinions of phenomena, especially when these phenomena are publicly questioned (Saguy 2000). However, it is important to consider that news media prioritize sensational and conflicting viewpoints (Harcup and O'Neill 2017). While qualitative interviews could have obtained broader insight into the boundaries different groups draw, it has been essential to study the public debates as they are the most prominent locus of struggles over what are conceived as legitimate and illegitimate positions and standpoints. There has also been a debate on the research ethics of conducting interviews with persons who experienced the July 22, 2011, terror attack (Enebakk, Ingjerd, and Refsdal 2016). While such ethical issues would have been possible to solve in the Vanessa Baird case, it was decided that interviews would not be included since the main focus was on public debates. However, it is important to point out that these findings should not be read as representative views of different groups but rather indications that individuals in different groups use certain cultural resources when drawing boundaries. A limitation of the utilized media documentation is that it does not cover all groups to the same degree. This especially applies to the employees in the Oslo government building in Oslo who were far less represented in the material compared to their leaders.

The data consists of newspaper articles collected through systematic searches in the Norwegian full-text database Atekst. First, I made an overview of the timelines in the two chosen cases to determine the periods in which to search for material. The rural case material spanned from 1 September 2017 to 30 April 2018, and the Oslo case material spanned from 1 March 2011 to 31 December 2014. Second, I chose search words that were broad enough not to exclude relevant



Figure 2. Vanessa Baird: Lyset forsvinner – bare vi lukker øynene, 2012 © Vanessa Baird/BONO, Oslo 2021. Photographer: Trond A. Isaksen.

material but specific enough to find relevant texts efficiently. In the rural case, the search was performed using the search string *Kvam AND kunst*, resulting in 115 hits. In the Oslo case, the search string used was *'Vanessa Baird' AND regjering**, resulting in 150 hits. I went through the hits manually to ensure that only relevant and non-duplicate texts were included in the final sample. After this operation, I was left with 96 documents, most of which were from the local media's coverage of the rural case, and 137 documents, most of which were from the national media's coverage of the government building in Oslo.

The data analysis was carried out in an inductive manner looking for the ways in which art was understood and evaluated in the two cases. This process was performed via NVivo and led to the distillation of three main categories in which groups that participated in the debates drew different boundaries. The first category relates to the questions of what art is, what art is not, and how art should be evaluated. The second category deals with the question of artistic autonomy; in other words, the degree to which art in a public setting should be given full freedom or should adapt to different aspects of the context in which it is placed. The third category involves how public space is understood in relation to art.

In order to show how the boundary struggles in these public art debates played out, I structured my analysis around these three categories.

Evaluation of art

The public debates surrounding the *Kvam* and *Vanessa Baird* cases have striking similarities and important differences in answering the question of how art is understood, defined, and evaluated by different groups. These similarities are especially connected to the cultural resources employed by the different actors in the debates. The material clearly shows that while actors outside of the field of art highlight concrete referents in 'reality' when 'interpreting the different elements of art, actors within the art field interpret works of art with a more abstract art-history context. In line with these tendencies, we can see that the groups involved draw different boundaries when determining the appropriateness of the art.

In the *Vanessa Baird* case, the objection that received the most attention was that the painting contained elements that reminded some employees of the Ministry of Health and Care Services of the terrorist attack of July 22, 2011. Attention was especially directed toward a depiction of papers falling, which was interpreted as an allusion to the papers that flew around when one of the main government buildings was bombed on July 22, 2011. Additionally, the dead bodies and skeletons portrayed in the painting reminded viewers of the people who lost their lives during the terrorist attack.

However, different artists, art critics, and Public Art Norway maintained that the painting was not really about the terrorist attack. These groups repeated that it was not the intention of *Vanessa Baird* to portray anything connected to what happened the day of the terrorist attack. Rather, inspiration for the work came from other sources, such as fairytales and reflections on bureaucracy. One art critic, asserted that the response from the employees was not reasonable. 'We see the cabinet building that was hit and Oslo Public Library [that was also hit], but the terror itself is not portrayed'"(Røed 2013).

The actors in the artistic field held that *Vanessa Baird* was working with other themes, such as the relationship between the private and public and between humor and discomfort. They believed that the painting should be interpreted in this vein and, most importantly, as a critique of bureaucracy. Furthermore, they argued that the work's artistic value should be seen in light of the masters of the fresco tradition. The artist, *Ane Hjort Guttu*, one expert member of the committee that chose *Vanessa Baird's* project, asserted that: 'Traditionally, this has been a very representative artistic form that has fortified the ruling power more than asking critical questions from below. We wanted to develop the

critical potential of this tradition” (Horvei 2013). A final argument was that the painting would be seen in a different light and as having more value after some time had passed. The executive editor of a left-wing, culturally radical newspaper claimed that:

... with these magnificent, adventurous paintings Norway was about to have a decoration in a central public institution, which in many ways can be compared to Edvard Munch’s paintings in the University Aula and Picasso, Carl Nesjar and others’ decorations of the cabinet building in the governmental quarter. When the Ministry of Health and Care Services is refusing to receive such a work, which would have stood as a major part of Norwegian public art, it reveals a lack of understanding of the temporal horizon for such assignments (Braanen 2013).

This way of reasoning has much in common with one of the main findings in Heinich’s study of van Gogh (Heinich 1996). Heinich argues that after van Gogh, guilt was institutionalized as a phenomenon when great artists were not recognized in their own time.

Parallel to the Oslo case, much of the opposition to the Kvam sculpture centered around the concrete referents that people in the local community saw in the sculpture. While questions concerning whether the wall painting of Vanessa Baird was truly art never arose, people in Kvam strongly argued that the sculpture which was being constructed should not be considered art at all:

‘I get provoked that so much money is being spent on something like that. It cannot be called art when you put together an old manure spreader and a rock. No matter what you do with it, a manure spreader is just a manure spreader, and a rock only a rock’ (Nordrum, Vespestad, and Hong 2017).

‘It’s incredibly bad. It should not be allowed to call something like that art. It should be carried directly to the scrapyard. That’s where it belongs’ (Nordrum, Vespestad, and Hong 2017).

The mayor of the village also expressed that the park sculpture, which the municipality was partly financing, did not make sense to him:

‘I looked at the artwork when it was there and have to admit that I think it seemed very strange and incomprehensible, and I could not see the connection between the commission and the semi-finished product. I agree with many of the reactions that came’ (Brække 2017).

In contrast, the committee leader responsible for choosing art projects for the different villages on behalf of Vegskille believed that the artists had intentions that should be considered before the local community completely rejected the value of the project: ‘This is meant to be a poetic narrative about cultural exchange. And it will be about the challenges that the village of Kvam are facing. But the artists have been given room to interpret that quite freely” (Veskje 2017). Furthermore, he maintained that the choice of materials is part of a well-established artistic tradition:

... nobody has yet seen how these elements and more will be put together into a complex and distinctive work of art. In the world of art, such choices of materials are neither strange nor provocative, rather it constitutes an important heritage with reference to Arte Povera, which has characterized all modern art since the 1960s and 1970s (Veskje 2017).

The real-life referents in both cases have another aspect. The works of art seemed to function like mirrors in which the viewers saw themselves. While the employees in Oslo saw their experiences of the terrorist attack on July 22nd in Vanessa Baird’s paintings, members of the local community in Kvam interpreted the choice of material as an expression of how the artists saw the people of Kvam: ‘They [the artists] say they wanted inspiration from the village, but they only talked to people on the street ... they have been inspired to put up garbage, then they clearly see Kvam as that” (Tallaksrud and Hagen 2017). People from the village strongly felt that by choosing the materials they did, the artists looked at the community as garbage. This sentiment was also the background to claims by locals that they were harassed and humiliated by the artists.

In both cases, this comprehension of art was countered by arguments that immediate reactions and emotions should not be given too much weight in the debate over the fate of the artworks. In the Vanessa Baird case, several actors in the artistic field maintained that discomfort was something that cannot and should not be avoided. It is a part of life, especially with regard to a terrorist attack. Vanessa Baird said in an interview that she personally likes discomfort: 'Actually, it is the only thing I am interested in' (Horvei 2012). In this way, the debates were characterized by an opposition between what was categorized as immediate emotions on the one hand and distanced reflexivity and curiosity, on the other. This opposition echoes how Bourdieu (1984) describes the different ways art is appropriated due to different amounts of cultural capital.

Artistic autonomy

The concept of public art is quite new in the Norwegian context. Until 2007, the body responsible for public art projects, Public Art Norway, had another name: The Fund for Artistic Decoration. The change of names illustrates that public art has been understood as a way of bestowing an aesthetic dimension to public institutions more than as an end in itself. The change in vocabulary is also reflected in the debates analyzed in this article. In the Vanessa Baird case, one artist who argued that the paintings should not be rejected questioned whether this shift was meant as an invitation to a more autonomous art:

Is it the case that the concept of "decoration" has been changed to "public art" in order to show that public art is art and not décor ... ? For the artist, it is like balancing on a knife's edge. What is the most important: considerations concerning the user or what the artist want to express? What guidelines are given? Is it art that they want those who gets it? Or do they want decoration? (Lund 2013)

This artist acknowledges that public art was not only about the artist's freedom but that other considerations also had to be taken into account. However, she believed that the principle of art as an end in itself, rather than as decoration, should be given more weight when evaluating these kinds of artworks.

Decoration, however, is only one of many possible uses of public art for purposes other than an end in itself in public art projects. The Kvam case can be seen as an explicitly instrumental project from the beginning. As mentioned, it was initiated to regenerate villages that were no longer along the main route in the region. Furthermore, when the sculpture in Kvam had been dismantled, an interest in the artwork arose among some local businesses. Based on the observation that the sculpture had generated widespread attention both locally and in the national media, some corporations in the villages wanted to take over the project. They announced that they were willing to finance the project to make sure that the sculpture remained in the village:

Our requirement is that it is placed at Sinclair [the local inn] and is visible to as many as possible, so people get a good reason to use the turn signal and take the trip to Kvam. This is a marketing opportunity that we should not let go (Vollen 2017).

While waiting for an opportunity to reinstall the sculpture, a small sculpture model was created and placed in a box together with examples of the extensive media coverage. The box was then installed at the local inn to attract attention from people visiting the village. Even when the art was viewed as controversial and provocative, or rather because of this fact, it was also seen as an opportunity for other purposes. From the artistic side, it was believed that art should not be reduced to a marketing object.

In reaction to what actors in the artistic field saw as illegitimate instrumental arguments in the debates, the principle of freedom of expression in the public space was introduced in both cases. This argument was used to substantiate the importance of artistic autonomy. In the Kvam case, the artists maintained that one of the primary issues of concern was freedom of

expression, not only regarding specific work but also more generally. Their reaction to the vandalism of the work was based on this idea. The main artist behind the work expressed it in the following way:

We were accused of harassing Kvam. The work was also referred to as a mockery and a shame for Kvam. That someone thinks that the work is bad is okay. But I react to the strong words that have been used and that people have physically attacked and vandalized the sculpture. We do not think that is acceptable ... This type of reaction shows a fear of the stranger, which is interesting in itself as we work with freedom of expression in the public space (Prestegård 2017).

In this way, the artist sees the reactions from actors within the local community as restricting freedom of expression that they want to strengthen. Moreover, the artists saw the dismantling of the sculpture as censorship.

Similar views were expressed in the Vanessa Baird case. Public Art Norway emphasized that a common denominator of the artworks in the government building was a critique of power and authorities. It was also pointed out that art represents a free space in an increasingly vulnerable society. The papers in the first painting were seen as a critique of bureaucracy and increasing bureaucratization. When the last painting was rejected, it was seen as an abuse of power in which artistic freedom of expression was diminished. The well-known Norwegian artist, Håkon Bleken, argued that the reference to July 22nd was especially problematic: 'I do not think you should use one assault to commit a new assault'" (Larsen and Undheim 2013). When asked if it is illegitimate to listen to the employees who experienced the terror attack, he answers: 'You cannot take people's reactions into account in this case. There must be an absolute freedom of art, and it is totally reprehensible that they reject the art of Vanessa Baird'" (Larsen and Undheim 2013).

The Vanessa Baird case was seen as so vital by the actors of the artistic field that they encouraged the Minister of Culture to clarify her stance on the case and whether she was ready to defend artistic autonomy. An important backdrop to this demand was that the Minister had previously stated (independent of this particular case) that it is important for our society to encourage and tolerate provocative art that challenges us. When she finally commented on the Vanessa Baird case, she stated that there is an important distinction between 'art as provocation'" and 'art as psychological strain'" (Gravklev 2013). With this statement, she erected a new boundary to the category of artistic autonomy.

In this way, the debates revealed how boundaries were drawn differently according to whether individuals thought public art should be based on artistic autonomy or other considerations. The other considerations introduced during the debates differed in the two cases due to the different contexts in which the debates occurred. From an artistic perspective, art is seen as inextricably linked to the principle of autonomy and freedom of expression. From other perspectives, art is seen more in light of its different functions or as a restriction to other functions emphasized as more important in the public space. Thus, we need to look closer at the ideas of public space that were present in these debates.

Public space

When the principle of artistic freedom of expression was introduced to the debates, it was argued that the artistic freedom of artists in public art projects should be seen in an overarching democratic light. Public spaces were seen as arenas in which the democratic functions of our society were at stake. Public spaces were seen as similar to other democratic arenas – for instance, the media. Representatives of Public Art Norway underscored this in the Vanessa Baird case. They characterized the government building as a place where art should be given room to play a critical role:

... it has been a goal to realize topical and courageous art by artists who have the will and ability to take a place in a public, political space and challenge the thinking of power, democracy and history. It is a demanding goal in a context of state self-representation, which inevitably raises questions about how free art can be. An answer can

be found in the main focus of the art of R6 [the government building], "to strengthen the inherent value of art as an independent expression." The very test of democracy is precisely whether citizens can express themselves freely about the society they are a part of (Jahn and Wiersholm 2012).

This way of arguing defines the building not so much as a workplace in which employees carry out daily functions that should be considered but more as a space in which the fundamental democratic principles in a broader perspective should be safeguarded.

However, in the controversies over the art projects, several other views of public space were expressed: arguments about the functionality of places in particular. In the Kvam case, it was argued that the sculpture represented a safety risk. In order to explain of the need to dismantle the sculpture, the mayor asked, 'What if the sculpture falls over children or others?'" (Brække 2017). In other words, the unfinished work made the public space into an unsafe space for people in the village. The mayor thus emphasized that public space should be seen more as a place where people can safely visit than as a space for people to express their views. In the Vanessa Baird case, it was held that the painting was not functional because it generated some acoustical challenges in the room. The Ministry of Health and Care Services preferred the installation of a different artwork – something made of textiles, for example. In addition, from the communication unit, it was argued that the paintings were problematic as the visual background of interviews with the Minister. They claimed that it would be better to have something more neutral in character.

Another argument against public art projects relates to the close connection between the space in question and those living or working there. It was argued that it was necessary to distinguish art in a gallery and art in a public space because art in public spaces represents something that people do not consciously visit but rather encounter without choosing to do so. This was especially important in the Vanessa Baird case, since the paintings were seen as a daily reminder of the terror certain employees had experienced. Leading bureaucrats in the Ministry of Health and Care argued that 'considerations for the employees'" were more important than the 'considerations for the artist'"(Nydal 2013). In the Kvam case, the park art was negatively related to the identity and pride of the villagers. In this way, the spaces were understood in relation to the wellbeing of those who carry out their daily lives in these spaces rather than as an arena defined by general democratic principles.

Finally, the actors of the artistic field argued that art created for a specific space could not be understood in isolation from that space. Therefore, they believed that the artwork should not and could not be moved. This perspective was especially indebted to the artistic tradition of site-specific art. It was argued in both cases that the works were created with their planned display locations in mind and therefore would lose value if they were placed elsewhere.

Concluding discussion

This work aimed to investigate the symbolic boundaries manifested, negotiated, and established in controversies regarding public art projects and how insights about these boundaries can inform cultural policy. It was important to search for the criteria different groups – artists, art experts, bureaucrats, and local communities – use to evaluate public art. The analysis of two cases in Norway revealed that the ways art is understood vary considerably between actors from the artistic field and the general public. This finding aligns with previous research, not least Heinich's analysis of the break between the specialists and the uninitiated (Heinich 1996). However, unlike Heinich, my findings are not strongly related to beauty as such but to juxtaposition between concrete interpretations of art based on referents in real life and abstract interpretations of art based on references to an art-history perspective. The way boundaries are drawn around the category of art therefore varies considerably between art experts and the public. Art is given meaning based on different cultural resources, which leads to struggles over the value and relevance of specific works of art. We have also seen that while

actors from the artistic field emphasize artistic freedom of expression as a fundamental principle, other groups underline cultural resources as more instrumental in nature. These include marketing possibilities for local businesses or communication strategies for leading politicians. Consequently, public spaces related to public art projects are understood differently. While actors from the artistic field see public spaces in this context as places that should be defined by fundamental democratic principles, other groups believe in the importance of the wellbeing of people whose daily lives are in the public spaces involved in public art projects. The different ways public spaces are understood reveal the importance of the socio-spatial dimension of public art. The social function and everyday experiences of people inhabiting the spaces are paramount to how public art is categorized and evaluated. This aspect seems to differ from the ways boundaries are drawn around art in a museum or gallery setting where the power of definition is differently distributed. A limitation to this study is that it is based solely on media depictions. In future research, it would be interesting to see if ethnographic methods (interviews and fieldwork) would broaden our understanding of the boundary struggles occurring in relation to public art.

On a general level, it can be argued that this analysis sheds light on the democratic problem of cultural policy that Blomgren (2012) has previously pointed out. The voices of the people (at least in instances when public art is rejected) are distinct from the voices in the artistic field. They build on different cultural resources, value art differently, and define the public spaces involved in public art projects differently.

By using the concept of symbolic boundaries to analyze the struggle over the boundaries of art, we are reminded that the categories that are constructed in public debates are not just intellectual constructions. They become real to the extent that they produce real effects on individuals and groups, in this case both on 'ordinary people' who are exposed to public art and on specialized actors in the artistic field (Enjolras 2017, 317). As such, these debates are also symbolic struggles over the moral order of society in which identities, worth, and recognition of different social groups, and the societal role of art are all at stake. In this vein, such debates also illustrate how social differences and power are mediated and negotiated through the symbolic boundaries drawn in relation to artistic projects.

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