Memorializing July 22: Private and Official Initiatives

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The public memorial process after the terror attacks on July 22 started immediately after the attacks, first online and then from July 23 and onward in streets and squares throughout the country where people gathered making spontaneous memorials. People’s engagement and extensive participation at this early stage proved that the tragedy affected the entire nation and was also emphasized as an important reason for making permanent places of memory.¹ Five months after the attacks the Norwegian government made public its decision to establish two national memorials in commemoration of the events. This may be seen as a transition to a new stage in the Norwegian memorial process, where the initial phase of spontaneous, non-official memorialization is followed by an official process of establishing permanent memorials. In my presentation I will bring attention to the dynamics between the private and official initiatives in the memorial process.

Early in the morning on July 23 the first people gathered outside Oslo Cathedral. The church employees wanted to establish a place to light candles outside the church, for those who did not want to go inside. This was also an advice from the police in order to prevent people from making memorials too close to the blocked off area where the bomb went off. The Church City Mission helped them establish this place and they provided candles and flowers to mark it. However, this was a windy day so they couldn’t light the candles. A man came passing by with a grave candle and asked if he could put it on the chosen spot.² This was the starting point of the biggest spontaneous memorial in Norway after the terror attacks and we see that it came to being as a result of a combination of official and private initiatives. On the morning of July 23 Major Fabian Stang, followed by his advisors and a photographer, walked through the almost empty city to the cathedral to light candles. This was a symbolic act where he was demonstrating a will to take the streets back after the attack, and at the same time he took part in the orchestration and the legitimization of the memorial. Sociologist Olaf Aagedal has pointed to the fact that central official actors played an important role in the creation of this memorial.³ The same day, the royal family visited the cathedral and lit candles.

³ Aagedal, Botvar & Høeg 2013 : 92
both inside and outside the church together with other mourners. In the days following July 23 spontaneous memorials were created at different locations in Oslo city center, on the landside facing Utøya, and on public squares all over the country. One of the biggest spontaneous memorials connected to Utøya was created adjacent to a farm called Lien, landside facing the island. This memorial was called “The Altar” by the locals in the area and was established in connection to a memory march which took place on July 25.

This march was one of many so called «rose marches» which were arranged all over the country on July 25 and the days that followed. These marches can be seen as an extension of the spontaneous memorials. The largest march, which was arranged on July 25 in Oslo, was initiated by private individuals thorough an unofficial group on Facebook. 200 000 people gathered in front of the City Hall and the streets were so full of people that it was impossible to arrange a march. Instead it became a ceremony were people stood still with flowers in their hands, singing and listening to speeches and music performances. The Crown Prince Haakon was one of the speakers and he said the iconic words: “Today the streets are filled with love. We have chosen to respond to cruelty with coming together. We have chosen to meet hate with unity.” Other speakers were the Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, the Major Fabian Stang and the leader of the Labour Youth Eskil Pedersen. This event exemplifies how both private individuals and officials participated in the realization of this initiative and had an impact on the content and development of the memory process.

Only a few days after the attacks e-mails and letters started to pour into the offices of the Oslo mayor and the Prime Minister, communicating people’s suggestions on how the temporary memorials could be turned into permanent markers. After the rose march in the streets of Oslo on July 25, one citizen wrote: “Dear Mayor, I and my family have just returned from the flower march in Oslo. (…) Let’s make a memorial park, a park of flowers/roses in commemoration of those who died at Utøya and in the government center. A park which helps us remember the power of the day when we countered hatred with openness, tolerance, love and democracy.” Another citizen was inspired by the direct broadcasting of the memorial event: “I have just seen the rose march on TV (…). I think we should dry the rose leaves and put them into a giant glass installation which can be placed on a public square”. July 22 turned into sites of memory – lieux de mémoire – in Pierre Nora’s wide acceptance of

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4 KUD 2011/3060-101
the term. So did the flower marches and memorial events in the days that followed. Most Norwegians still recall where they were in those days, and the memory of the events has crystallized into texts, symbols, ceremonies etc. It was above all the memory of the public response to the attacks, which people, in their letters to their elected representatives, expressed a need to hold on to and fixate in permanent, physical markers. On August 1 one citizen wrote: “Like so many others I have been to the Oslo Cathedral to have a look at the sea of flowers. I have given much thought to its symbolism and the unifying effect of this place. It will always be remembered, even when the flowers are gone and life has returned to normal. I have two suggestions on how the flowers’ symbolism of love and grief may be extended and enshrined (…)”. Another citizen wrote: “It is something about the spontaneity of this sea of flowers. Something which reflects people’s need to express, without specified frames or rules – and that something is worth remembering for a long time. Surely, this is what we should build upon!”

In the following days a public discussion on the matter unfolded in newspapers and online comment boxes. Government officials were concerned with the question of what to do with the spontaneous memorials, still growing and literally flooding the streets of Oslo, as well as with the bombed-out government building in Oslo. On July 27, representatives of Oslo Municipality informed that the flowers, objects and candles laid out in the streets would be preserved, so that it could be made use of later. At the same time, they asked citizens to engage and send in their proposals. Hundreds of proposals were put forward.

On July 27 the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) opened for debate on their web pages, asking people to comment on the question “What do you think should be done with all the flowers and objects?” People were sending in all kinds of proposals, many of them pointing at ways of making use of the material in permanent markers. People’s engagement and participation in the creation of spontaneous memorials and in making propositions for use of the material was interpreted and referred to as a demand for places to gather in grief and commemoration. On July 27 Professor in landscape architecture, Tone Lindheim, wrote in the newspaper Aftenposten: “the rituals during the last days have shown that we have a strong need to gather and express our grief together. Such a need will also exist in the future (…) I therefore suggest that we now create a beautiful memorial grove, a park

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which we all can visit for quiet reflection and commemoration of those who were so brutally taken away”. Do the many addresses from Norwegian citizens indicate a need for memorial sites or markers? Or do they rather indicate a wish to contribute and do something? Engaging in the process of planning for a memorial site might also be a way of processing the experience of the attack; something which provides a goal and brings purpose to life. By engaging in this type of questions one does something to reclaim what has been attacked and address the need to regain safety and normalcy.

The Government presented their resolution for two national memorials five months after the attacks, one to be placed in Oslo and one in Hole municipality, on the mainland facing Utøya. Given the extensive participation in the making of spontaneous memorials and the many questions and proposals from citizens from all layers of society concerning the establishment of permanent markers we might say that the decision of making national memorials did not originate in any government office. They were, in a manner of speaking, commissioned by the people. However, we should not underestimate the interaction between officials and private individuals in the early memorial process. As my examples have shown, representatives from official institutions participated in the spontaneous and non-official memorialization as fellow citizens. This does not imply that they led the process, but they took part in it and through the participation they legitimized it. This probably had an impact on the scale of the public participation.

Important questions connected to the dynamics between the private and official initiatives is: What happened to the public engagement after the announcement of the plans for the national memorials? Did the public engagement cool down? Was this the start of a new, officially driven stage of memory? We see that in parallel with the official process, several unofficial initiatives were made throughout the year of 2012 and up until today. One concrete and physical memorial proposal that is of current interest came from the blacksmiths Tobbe Malm and Tone M. Karlsrud who initiated the project “Iron Rose of Norway”. Inspired by the enormous “sea of roses” outside the Oslo Cathedral they came up with an idea to make a sculpture out of thousand iron roses. The first rose was forged on the blacksmith festival in Odda in August 2011. By now approximately 850 blacksmiths from 25 countries have contributed with iron roses. Relatives, survivors and others affected by the terror attacks have

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6 Tone Lindheim: Etablere en 22. juli-park. Aftenposten Morgen, 27. juli 2011: 5
7 NRK’s website: [http://www.nrk.no/hordaland/lager-jernroser-til-minne-om-terror-1.7750031](http://www.nrk.no/hordaland/lager-jernroser-til-minne-om-terror-1.7750031) Lastet ned 25.08.14
also been assisted in forging their own roses for the sculpture. Oslo municipality has confirmed that they support the project and it is planned to be placed in a park called Stensparken in Oslo next year. The initiators describe the project like this: "This is a monument and solidarity project that no one has commissioned, what lies behind is solely solidarity, love, and support for the relatives and survivors, from all over Norway and the world." By putting it this way they clearly mark a distance to the official memorial process. They link their project to the spontaneous memorials by highlighting the fact that it is not commissioned by anybody, indicating that the project has a more genuine and "authentic" origin, like an extension of the spontaneous memorials.

The unofficial initiative with the largest impact on the Norwegian memorial landscape was the private and anonymous donation of sculptures made by the Norwegian artist Nico Widerberg to the 56 municipalities that lost one or more of their inhabitants in the terror attacks. The offer was made public on January 12 by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS). The municipalities had until February 10 to decide whether or not to accept the gift. 52 out of 56 municipalities chose to accept it. Both the National Support Group and the Labour Youth expressed their support and gratitude for this initiative. The initial plan, suggested by the anonymous donor, was that all the monuments were to be unveiled on July 22, 2012, one year after the terror attacks. Because this collided with the national memorial ceremonies that would be held this day, the monuments were unveiled on different dates throughout the year, with the first unveiling in the small city of Orkanger on June 30. The anonymity of the donor was the subject of a heated debate in the weeks after the gift was made public. The leader of The Association of Norwegian Sculptors was among those who saw the process as a form of coup. The fact that the donor is private in combination with the municipality’s role in “authorizing” the memorials places them in the intersection between unofficial and official. On many places the Widerberg monument is used for official ceremonies on the anniversaries of July 22, so in a sense they have become official places.

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8 The project “Iron Rose of Norway”’s website: [http://jernrosen.no/?page_id=149](http://jernrosen.no/?page_id=149) Downloaded 08.09.15
10 The project «Iron Rose of Norway”’s website: [http://jernrosen.no/](http://jernrosen.no/)
11 Dagbladet’s website: [http://www.dagbladet.no/2012/04/02/magasinet/nico_widerberg/22_juli/kunst/utstilling/20850285/](http://www.dagbladet.no/2012/04/02/magasinet/nico_widerberg/22_juli/kunst/utstilling/20850285/)
The unknown identity of the sender is problematic in a process where democratic decisions based on openness and transparency is the ideal. Nevertheless, they seem to have been well received and many of them have become important meeting places.

Spontaneous memorials are characterized by their ephemerality. However, the durability varies and two of the unofficial initiatives from the early phase prove that a quick disappearance is not always the case. One of them is “The Altar” in Hole which I mentioned in the beginning of my presentation. Here you have a view over to Utøya. This place was visited up until May 2014 when some of the neighbours decided to move it to a different location, due to what they claimed to be “disgraceful tourism” and traffic issues.12 The new place that they chose for the memorial is the place which they have suggested as an alternative location for the national memorial. Members of The National Support Group reacted with disbelief and one of the board members expressed that she was sad that this happened without a warning.13 Negative reactions were also evoked after a recent proposal by the Church Council in Oslo to remove a memorial by the Oslo Cathedral.14 This was created by the artist Espen Hilde and installed shortly after the terror attacks as a part of the spontaneous memorial. It is still visited and used as a place where people lay down objects and flowers. The strong reactions led to a postponing of the decision of at least one year.15

The interaction between private and official initiatives is a characteristic feature of the memorial process as a whole. Before the Government announced the decision to establish two national memorials they had received lots of proposals and questions from the public, showing the need for permanent markers. After the announcement people continued sending in their thoughts and wishes for permanent memorials and new, independent projects were carried out, like the Widerberg monument and the Iron Rose of Norway. The unofficial memory work has continued as a parallel process, and the unofficial and official initiatives have been in continuous negotiation with one another. The actions of official institutions are soon responded to by the public and officials respond to the private initiatives. Having this in mind, it might be more useful to focus on this interaction rather than on transitions between

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14 Dagbladet’s website: [http://www.dagbladet.no/2015/09/01/kultur/koro/kunst/skulptur/minnested/40881673/](http://www.dagbladet.no/2015/09/01/kultur/koro/kunst/skulptur/minnested/40881673/) Downloaded 11.09.15
15 Kirkelig Fellesråd’s website: [https://kirken.no/nb-NO/fellesrad/kirkeneioslo/forsideoppslag/hjertet-ved-domkirken/](https://kirken.no/nb-NO/fellesrad/kirkeneioslo/forsideoppslag/hjertet-ved-domkirken/) Downloaded 10.09.15
different stages in the memorial process. By examining how the negotiations affect the
decisions that are made concerning the memorials can be the best way to gain a deeper
understanding of the process and its current state.