

Paper for the 9:th workshop on: “Social Capital and Development Trends in the Swedish and Japanese Countryside”, 24th – 25th May, 2012, Österlen, Sweden

Art and Time

Art Hall in a rural area inspired by creative ideas from the urban.

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INTRO

In April 2008 a new Art Hall opened its doors in Östersund. Contemporary art was introduced to the visitors on the premises of one of the former regiments – art never previously exhibited in the region. Some of it was labelled “relational aesthetics” entailing that viewers coproduce the art by their presence and participation. This art intends to create a social interaction as opposed to merely passive viewing. Video films of the Russian artist Kulik showed when he imitated dogs at an exhibition and physically attacked visitors. People in Östersund could consult the virtual oracle, Miltos Manetas and have their queries answered or be fascinated by carps swimming in a pond creating

patterns on the water surface. Another more challenging work was “Happy Easter”, a compilation of snapshots from brutal murder-scenes in horror movies. All this was art “teleported”, as the term was coined, from earlier exhibitions in a Stockholm art hall.

This new art hall in Östersund “Paint Factory North” (Sw: “Färgfabriken Norr”) was the result of a project financed jointly by public regional actors and EU Regional Funds. The real estate company as owners of the premises financed the renovation of the building and donated the rent for the three-year period the project lasted. The origin can be traced in the recent history of the town, and the possibilities created by these events in combination with EU-funding. At the background is a long lasting demand for a larger public art-gallery in the town that has never been filled, a vibrant art-environment with many small local private galleries and regional artists working to sustain their living.

This project is here discussed at the background of theories on Experience industry and Creative Economy in relation to the tension between rural and urban contexts. The attention attached to the Experience industry is commonly linked to urban areas – here urban expressions of art are located to a rural area. Can it have implications for both our view of cultural industry and the differences between the urban and rural?

REGIONAL CONTEXT

The abandonment of all military activities in Östersund 2004 created a major blow to employment in the region. The county has around 120.000 inhabitants, of which roughly half lives in the only city of the region: Östersund. In one strike, the national government erased 1400 jobs in the military sector, with indirect jobs among subcontractors the numbers counted about 3500 employees. If all concerned were taken in account, jobs as teachers and so on, estimates point to 7000 jobs. In a region where depopulation has been a trend since the 1950's, this was a serious situation. The private sector has never really grown strong in this rural region. No major industries have become established and the private service sector is not very strong. Tourism in winter is a force for

employment, but the main stronghold is the public sector. But even here problems have grown over the last twenty years, as many governmental jobs have closed of which the military employments was the most severe cut. The closure of regiments announced by the Minister of Defence at the streets of Östersund in 2004 was thus about to give birth to a sense of despair and negativism: what was to become of this? But several initiatives from the government and the regional authorities were taken to counter these feelings. A large rescue-package was announced with new jobs of compensation and funds for fresh initiatives, projects and financing of venture capital funds. The overarching idea was to turn the pessimistic mode into a sense of confidence in the future.

A number of slightly opposing ingredients were hereby at hand: closure of a major employer in a region with low employment, a sense of defeatism in need of hope and large public funds for different activities. There was money in search for initiatives, to put it bluntly. An old idea of a public art hall vibrated in the background. These were the conditions when the Art Hall “Paint Factory North” got established in the old drill building at the regiment. The EU-funding, the privately funded renovation, the money from local municipality and county council all together funded three years of art exhibition, amounting to 20 mill SEK (a little less than 2 million €). The intention was to have new funding after this period and establish the art hall as a permanent institution. Another stated ambition was to become not only a regional but a national stronghold for contemporary art. Where conscripted soldiers over many years had trained to perform their military duties, the most advanced modern art from all over the world was about to replace the drill, the repeated dismantling of weapons and the assembling of machine guns. To understand the situation, the events preceding the “Paint Factory North” need to be presented.

THE EVENTS UNFOLDING

The origins

When the most well known of regional artists, the former nativist Primus Mortimer Pettersson (1895 -1975) was on exhibition in Östersund at one of the small private galleries together with one of Sweden’s more prestigious contemporary artists, the idea

of a public art hall was given new energy. Some influential actors in the Stockholm art-life got involved, meetings were called in town and public politicians and civil servants began working on the idea again. The real estate firm having recently acquired the large plant where the newly closed infantry regiment had resided was a driving force. Their interest in an attraction coincided nicely with the old discussion of an art hall.

In a following step, contacts were established with one of the by then few private large art-halls in Stockholm: "Färgfabriken" ("The Paint Factory"). It was originally financed by a public donation in 1996 consisting of renovation and free use of a large building and further relied on private and public financing for their activities. Apart from being mainly privately financed, something unique by then in Stockholm, the art hall was also known for blending their exhibitions with laboratories for discussing planning issues in general and architectural aspects in particular. The Paint Factory in Stockholm constituted an unconventional combination of art hall, a contemporary laboratory and a consultancy firm.

Property owners in Östersund were impressed with the achievements of these cultural entrepreneurs in the capital and so agreed with "Paint Factory" on financing a feasibility study on the establishment of "Paint Factory North". This proved to be the first step, as the property owner to the old regiment property confirmed its interest in the establishment when they decided to renovate the old drill hall, and then donated the property rent free for three years. This was all in all valued at over 6 million SEK. At the same time the County Board of Jämtland granted contribution from the Conversion Funds, after some hesitation and pressure. These funds were intended for "growth initiatives" to meet the closure of the regiments and officials were unsure if Paint Factory Art Hall belonged to that category. Representatives of the municipality of Östersund were during this whole period of preparation very active and the municipality became in 2007 a co-financier of the venture. When the requirement was that the Paint Factory should be a county matter, and also include children and youth aspects, Jämtland County Council entered the scene with part of the financing. After all these decisions the outline of a large EU application emerged, granted in December 2007 of Structural Partnership Objective. Public funding accounted for 7 million SEK as EU grant came with that decision and all together, this was 14.2 million. Along with funding

for renovation of the premises (3 million) and the waiver of rental costs (3.3 million) the three-year project "Paint Factory North" North on over 20 million could start. The time had come to open the Art Hall.

The opening x 3

The opening was in actual three openings, all taking place in April 2008. The first was a conference on a "New World Bank", built on ideas as opposed to money. Next opening was the Teleport-exhibition with the challenging art works involving relational aesthetics. The third and last was a "Contemporary laboratory" where the planning challenges in Östersund were about to be tackled with the help of external consultants and experts. A large map about the size of a villa plot was the starting point for that exercise. These were all spectacular and expensive openings of the art hall, one opening in three.

The initiative "New World Bank" gathered people from all over the World, to discuss global matters such as inequality, pollution and bad housing. No concrete measures or initiatives were taken as the idea was to allow the flown in experts, consultants and artists to merge ideas with local people from authorities and companies. One of the more remarkable appearances was the now deceased Malcolm McLaren, more known as manager for Six Pistols. He advocated the idea of "Majestic failures", where the premise is that any major success to be accomplished requires a complete fiasco beforehand. Changes need failures, a suggestion some of the audience perceived as a blink to the event itself, others regarded as a mysterious thought. The symposium "The New World Bank" consisted also of Group Work intended to foster material for the alternative global bank to be started, and the day wound up with a dinner with local specialities.

The art hall with its works opened up day two of the seminar. The renovated drill building housed installations, video films, paintings and other works. Most of it had been shown previously in Stockholm, hereby the term "Teleport" which was the title of the exhibition. Some of them were however original art, as the sound from the depth of the local lake "Storsjön" claiming also to include the cry of the monster in the lake: "Storsjöödjuret". At the opening local business people, politicians, artists, civil servants mingled and tried to hide their wonder. They slowly sipped the wine served in this extravagance of light and sound and other effects accompanying modern art.

The third opening took place a couple of weeks later, and was less spectacular. This “Östersund at large” proved to be a remake of “Stockholm at large” where the planning problems of the capital were discussed. Here Östersund was literally the map to be scrutinised and discussed, at this first event by external architects, planners and an anthropologist. They held lectures, led and participated in workshops that developed plans for a future city. The result was a focus on communication within the city (as a skateboard bridge over the railway separating city centre from the lake) and rail links to Norway (Trondheim) and Sundsvall (the neighbour town westward). The ideas were artistically illustrated on the huge map covering the floor, and during the presentation after two days of workshop a smoke- and laser-show focused the attraction. With this event, new dimensions were to be introduced in the planning of the city, setting the place in a global setting and initiate debate. Following the three-day workshop were the schoolchildren from first Östersund and then from all over the region coming by bus to look at the map and discuss their future in the region. These discussions with the new generation of the county took several weeks and involved many pupils.

The outcome:

These three opening events took place during a couple of very intensive weeks in 2008. The entire project “Paint Factory North” lasted 2008-2011, but the remaining part of the work proved to be less attractive to the audience and had not the same intensity and quality. Many of the exhibitions organised by Paint Factory North had inspiration from the Stockholm Art World. Apart from the opening exhibitions, an explosion of art from all over the world, the more modest followers had several artists from the capital. One exception was the exhibition created by two artists with a background from Trondheim Academy of Fine Art (Kunstakademien i Trondheim). The project as a whole was curated from the Swedish capital, and the questions raised were seldom focussing rural issues.

After three years of exhibitions, the “Paint Factory North” ceased to exist in the Drill Hall at the former regiment. No more funding was available, the public financiers lost their interest and no EU-money was at hand. Art is still on display in the building, but under another name and organisation. This initiative proved not to be viable after the project

period, and the reasons for this closure are manifold. The actors originally supporting the Art Hall represented wide layers of the public: politicians, civil servants, cultural workers and local artists along with private entrepreneurs. After these three years, few of them had any enthusiasm to offer the initiative, according to interviews we have conducted¹. Their initial support was based on prospects linked to the new term "Experience Economy".

THEORY

Long before the term "Experience Economy" came into vogue, "The Brothers Lindqvist" were the pride of rural Jämtland. They played dance music for mature youth, toured in Sweden and were a regular feature on TV. In the 70s they constituted a phenomenon, with a wide popularity. Today, they can serve to exemplify the "Experience Economy". What has happened since? Has it even happened anything? As usual, there are several versions available. One thing is however obvious: "Brothers Lindqvist" represented a rural phenomenon, with its base in dancehalls in sparsely populated areas. Now the experience economy has a more urban connotation.

The Swedish experience economy

Lofgren (2005) gives his version of the experience economy and its growth in Sweden. He believes it can be linked to the "Knowledge Foundation" and the 50 million SEK invested during the 1990s on the project "Meeting Places". Dominic Power, geographer at the University of Uppsala, presents an alternative version. He is inspired by Pratt (1997) and the perception that "cultural industries" should be seen as unified by a common production system, an interaction between companies, common labour market and joint technology. In a Nordic comparison, Power (2003) studied the cultural industry as such an industrial system. The purpose of his study was to identify the number of private companies and private employment in the sector and compare the

¹ Reported in Swedish only: Skoglund, Wilhelm & Westerdahl, Stig (2009). *Historien om Färgfabriken*

Nordic countries. It is important to note that the study does not include public employment in the cultural economy. The results show the sector (with tourism and hospitality industry included) account for 9-10% of total employment in all countries, and that it will grow much faster than other sectors. Small and medium-sized businesses dominate, mostly located in capital cities or urban centres. For the rural areas the sector is more seen as an important part of the hospitality industry. It can, still according to Power (ibid) provide development opportunities to increase the number of visitors. The Uppsala University researcher draws the conclusion that it is time to reassess the culture industry. It should not be seen as welfare dependency but regarded as a sector in its own right and as part of industrial strategies in a competitive market. Urban aspects are underlined.

Lofgren, linking the phenomenon to the Knowledge Foundation's efforts and Power, with the view that the phenomenon's potential is undervalued, represent different perspectives on the Swedish experience economy. The term itself can in English be equivalent both to "cultural industries", "creative industries" and "experience economy". O'Connor (2007), with Britain as prime study object, made a historical survey with a starting point in Adorno and Horkheimers (1947/1997) cultural pessimism. To them were creative industries an offshoot of the late capitalism they strongly criticized. According to O'Connor (2007) the cities and New Labour's focus on "cultural industries" constitutes a new starting point. It was in the 1980s the administration in Britain began discussing culture's potential role as an economic force in society. The trend began in the Greater London Council on the grounds that clusters of small businesses in the cultural sector could provide socio-economic revival. In the mid 90's it so became increasingly frequent in local strategies to appoint "cultural industries" as the engine of growth, employment and structural change. Cunningham (2004) cites researchers who claim the sector is a model for contemporary forms of production in the economy: "Just-In-Time" - production, outsourcing, global value chains, and more. The creative sector appears thus as a prerequisite for a knowledge based economy and becomes more central than the statistics indicate. Another example in the same spirit is Pine & Gilmore (1998) who defined the experience as a new, emerging dimension in economic value processing. Unlike commodities, products and services, experience is when a company

knowingly use the services and products to create a memorable occasion or event. The difference is the very memorable, something personal that only exists in the minds of individuals who participated in the event. According to this thinking, all kinds of companies benefit from thinking in terms of "experiences" and the contribution of Pine & Gilmore provides many examples of companies understanding this. Disney is working along these lines in their theme parks and manufacturing companies may think the same way – contemporary cellular industry not the least. Marketing involves now much more than merely “a telephone” and underscores the possibilities new smart-phones have.

Florida and the creative class

The suggestion the cultural industries constitute a force for the entire economy, makes the approach especially attractive to politicians and officials. The researcher who perhaps most of all is associated with these thoughts is the American Richard Florida (2006). His basic idea is that a new social layer grows and becomes increasingly important in the modern economy, the Creative Class. It is found in jobs in many different sectors of society that have creativity as primary asset such as the education sector, IT, finance and business world, and others. The class make up about a quarter of the professionals. Another pillar of Florida's theory is the importance of the place, according to him the most important contemporary social and economic unit. The creative professionals prefer living in the same large urban centres where they work together. Value patterns are deemed important, as the creative class wants individuality and tolerance, they embrace diversity and openness. Based on these and other characteristics Florida has developed a "creative index" that allows comparison of cities and other locations: sometimes referred to as the Bohemian index. Assuming creativity is the driving force in a modern economy, a region or city needs to be attractive to this new social class. An attractive location offers favourable conditions, with diversity and tolerance, interesting public places and a rich cultural life, among other things. Florida's books are bestsellers, and his ideas have attracted much attention both in academia and among politicians and officials. His main focus is how creativity requires an urban stage – the rural is merely seen as a backdrop. The creative industry is turned part and parcel of big cities.

But critical voices are also heard. Florida's ideas makes American phenomena universal and do not take into account the specific cultural and historical conditions, is one objection. The views of Florida is criticized also because it weaves together the industry with its own research on it, which makes it self-generated rather than critically reflective (Gibson & Kong, 2005). Florida is a researcher and author but also a well-paid lecturer touring the world.

A notable aspect of Florida's contentions is his discussion of another American scholar; Robert Putnam. Putnam has become known as a proponent of social capital as development force in society. In Putnam's (1996) book on Italian conditions, he explains the differences between the troubled south and the more successful north out of the differences in cohesion, reciprocity or social capital between the two parts of the country.

In a later book Putnam (2006) transfers his ideas to American conditions and warns that the social capital has eroded in the US. A common image is bowling, where many former players took part in various leagues or played together with friends. Today, bowling is something practiced in solitude with a monitor that instantly displays the results. The loss of Social Capital has implications for growth, is the rationale of Putnam's warnings. When the strong ties required for maintaining Social Capital are lost, it will make the society poorer. Florida questions this reasoning and argues that Putnam is looking back to a society that no longer generates growth. Today's successful economies are based on weak ties between people, not the strong ties built on family and kinship social capital stands for. Strong ties are those we have to people we know well and do things with over time. Weak ties are formed in environments where we do not establish deep and lasting relationships, and Florida's point is that creative environments require openness and mobility that favours weak ties. Florida also believes these weak ties are more attractive to the creative class, and thereby promotes economic growth. He thus questions the approach Putnam's emphasis on social capital represents. Both researchers ground their diverse claims on a variety of statistical data. Later researchers have followed in their footsteps, with different results. One example is Hoyman and Faricy (2009) who test the creative class theory and compare it with two other approaches in relation to growth: human capital theory and social capital. Their results show that the creative class is not related to growth, but that human capital predicts

economic growth. The study gives mixed results for social capital, but this is for sure not the last contribution in this debate.

Creativity is urban?

There are clear unifying features of the researchers, Power, Pratt, Florida, Pine & Gilmore, and many more that point to the strength of the Creative Industry. It is a sector possible to identify and define, has many different names, but whichever is chosen it points to a sphere that grows with the different measures selected. Any type of Experience Economy is important not only for its own sake but also as it has positive influence on other parts of the economy. Some authors even claim that it is a model of the knowledge society. As a result, experience economy also has positive implications for a city, town or region.

Now we have moved further away from regional example of “Brothers Lindqvist “ and the 1970’s when their dance music was popular. Their big hit "Viggen" could not be downloaded over the net, but spread through sales of record and a few who recorded with the help of the tape recorder or cassette tape. The idea that culture would be a strong symbolic power and play a role in the regional economy was hardly applicable. “The Brothers Lindqvist” appeared in one of Sweden's two television channels in the 1970s. Today there are countless numbers of channels to watch, on TV, mobile or computer. Technology has changed the way we consume culture and entertainment as it is produced and distributed in completely different ways than our dance band could use. Another difference is this broad debate assuming culture and experiences must be a separate and important sector. In this approach resides the notion that experiences contribute to growth and more jobs. There is however also another shift in perspective here, where experiences and culture are mostly seen as urban phenomenon, and the theories on these businesses are inspired by urban contexts. This is the claim open for discussion in the final part of this paper.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusive part discusses firstly the reasons why the Art Hall got established in the first place. Two main reasons are outlined: the role of real estate and the hope for something new and fresh in light of the problems with jobs ahead. After that follows a third part where lessons learnt are outlined, in relation to the theories of Putnam and Florida introduced earlier: how to understand the closing down?

Real estate experience

The most confident and knowledgeable actors in the establishment in Östersund have been representatives of property owners, taking over the closed down regiment area. They have systematically sought knowledge and established relationships with the management of "Paint Factory" in Stockholm. They have discussed the on going cooperation projects and formalized relationships through a stake in the Paint Factory. Although they are not entirely convinced from calculations that they can recoup the investment with the renovation and free rent, the real estate actors strongly believe the area needs attractions. These include schools, a gym, parking lots, offices, homes, a Japanese restaurant and more, where a gallery is also present. The area must not become desolate, empty on weekends and evenings, and the Paint Factory can contribute to a vivid environment along with everything else. An active area needs, in short, both an art gallery and more conventional infrastructure such as bus lines. Here is the first answer why the Art Hall was located to Östersund. Real estate logics and experience industry joined forces with the interests of local planners, regional cultural representatives and property owners. These were some of the ingredients creating Paint Factory North.

Give us hope!

The second explanation highlights the need for unifying symbols in a difficult time. This brings us back to 2004, when the government announced the Ministry of Defence had decided to shut down all its operations in the city. As described, there were many excited voices in the population: what would happen now?

It is a diversity of voices reflected in the interviews conducted in our studies². Politicians hope an Art Hall will function as a tourist magnet, the cultural workers think it will contribute to better working conditions for them in the municipality. The private industry representatives strive for a stronger private influence in regional development and the Art Hall could be part of those ambitions. Others argue that is hardly realistic in an EU project with strong formal requirements controlled by the County Council. What unites the diverse votes is a curiosity for the new and to place hope in something untested, while the other motives appear to be as numerous as those interviewed.

Thoughts on “Paint Factory North” awakened at a time when discouragement had a breeding ground, but where optimism instead seemed to take root. At this stage there was a strong need for a symbol of the new and hopeful. An Art Gallery from the capital Stockholm was sufficiently vaguely subscribed to reflect these expectations. Knowledge about its activities, and the kind of art that was exhibited, was so superficial that its challenging art posed no problems. Nor did the blend of contemporary laboratory, art gallery and consultancy become an obstacle. The search for something new was stronger than any potential objections. With the help of links to the global art centres, the region's hope for a place beyond the rural insularity was materialised. At the grand opening ceremony this was concretized in discussions of the major world problems: hunger, environmental threats and lack of housing. These public discussions, combined with experimental art, were the focus and it went far beyond the region's hackneyed concern with declining population and unemployment. The people of Jämtland were perhaps the solution to global urban problems rather than rural problems themselves? This optimistic mood immersed with hope, formed another explanation for the start of the Art Hall. The reasons for the start have now been outlined, but the third question remains unanswered: how come the Art Hall did not survive?

Every day Art Hall life – not that glamorous experience

After the openings, everyday life reached the gallery on the old regiment area and the red building with contemporary art slowly became part of Östersund. It fulfilled its purpose as a symbol of a tough time but the most important prerequisite for the

² See chapter in Lindeborg, Lisbeth & Lindkvist, Lars (red.) (2010). *Kulturens kraft för regional utveckling*. Stockholm: SNS förlag by Skoglund and Westerdahl.

establishment had vanished: the elusive nature of a venue that could gather so many different types of expectations. The arduous task of establishing not only an Art Hall the relationship with an audience proved difficult.

The openings of the art hall attracted lots of attention and were immense in character, but the financial consequences proved severe. Much of the funding was consumed early in the process, and the efforts with establishing and sustaining contacts with a new public got affected. Another feature was the global rather than regional focus at the openings, with some exceptions. Few of the remaining exhibitions gained that much attention as the openings, and the numbers of visitors diminished. It proved also that the local actors who initially were very positive, over time turned more sceptical to the art hall. The prospects for new initiatives, links between art and commerce, a climate where new ideas could be aired – according to people interviewed these expectations were not met. Some of the people we talked to in our studies claimed the Art Hall was too modest in its marketing and did not try hard enough to attract the interest of local people. Much criticism is directed at the responsible in Stockholm, claiming the “Paint Factory” not had sufficient ambitions to make the regional connection strong enough. The undercurrent of the criticism is that this remained a project much along the lines of ideas and interests of the capital Stockholm, and less a regional initiative. This was manifested in the focus of the openings, the type of organisation the Paint Factory constituted and the problems with connecting to the local art scene.

Weak ties – short time.

A more coherent picture is emerging. An Art Hall was established in a rural area as a result of many external factors, as opposed to growing out of a strong regional root system. The money was provided by national and European sources, partly due to military jobs disappearing. The art is imported by an established Art Hall in Stockholm and inspired by its urban environment and global network. The exhibited objects represent international contemporary art – previously almost unknown or at least never exhibited in this local context. The whole project resembles the type of franchising in the Art World that Guggenheim represents in Bilbao or Venice, and Louvre is about to create

in Abu Dhabi³. The advantages are clear: linkages to the global art scene where the art deemed most important is available. These institutions are located in the big urban centres: New York, Tokyo or London. In a following step Richard Florida and his ideas are reached here, where a Creative Class united by weak ties form the social norm.

The disappointing result in Paint Factory North illustrates the weaknesses in this approach, at least as a universal cure. No doubt Bilbao is a success, and Louvre in the Arab world has the chance to become another. But moving the art scene to a more rural environment can prove more difficult. Attracting tourists with the help of contemporary art is no original idea as such, but here it never got tested. Three years is too short for that. The local art public is probable too small for a permanent institution like Paint Factory North and it takes time to reach that public. So for both a local market and incoming art tourists it boils down to a question of time. In three years you might create some weak ties, but the stronger ones require more time.

In an urban framework, three years can however be seen as a long time frame. Many new restaurants have opened and closed in the city centre, the fashion is profoundly new both when it comes to cellular and clothes. These urban centres are also where Florida collects his inspiration from the weak ties syndrome and its importance to the Creative Class.

The Social Capital mirrors another approach to time. To establish and maintain strong ties require a longer time span, where three years is more seen as a starting period. The rurally inspired does not necessarily entail slowness or conservatism, but more likely an expectation of endurance and persistence. The existence of Paint Factory North illustrates this, as most money was spent on three extravagant openings with international outlook and global problems at the fore. It contrasted sharply with the remaining exhibitions, in a more frugal atmosphere. This was also illustrated in the exhibition statistics as most people came to the openings and fewer visitors were attracted by the following events. When it came to the more day-to-day work in the project, it proved cumbersome and the final closure came as no big surprise. It proved

³ www.louvre.fr/en/louvre-abu-dhabi

not to be possible to establish the strong links between the audience and contemporary art. The Social Capital-theories might not give evidence for everything in this short-lived attempt to establish an Art Hall, but the differences between the time horizon typical of the Creative Class and the longer perspective inherent in the idea of Social Capital gives some indications of lessons to learn. The type of inspiration you look for, has also to be adjusted to the local conditions. The rural might not provide ideal conditions for an urban approach to creative industry – this might be the perhaps too obvious explanation for why the project failed.

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