

## **Common Lands: The common as a city-development tool and a starting point for artistic research.**

This abstract is a presentation of an exhibition project entitled *Common Lands*, which is taking the city development of Bjørvika, Oslo as its starting point.

The development of waterfronts is a current trend in post-industrial cities where industrial harbor areas are being transformed into new urban spaces that emphasize mercantile, residential and recreational purposes. The curators of the exhibition project *Common Lands* uses the process of redevelopment around Bjørvika in Oslo to highlight a number of issues associated with urban development, democracy, access and the distribution of power. The project is in process following this specific development and relates it to other urban developments around the world.

Large parts of the Bjørvika area has been harbor, road and railway, and owned by the state. Thus the land can be regarded as common property. In conjunction with the redevelopment of Bjørvika, this land is sold and developed privately. In the project *Common Lands*, the curators want to look at questions around ownership, responsibility and management of state property. Further they want to look into visions and promises laid out in the master plan of the development, in regard to the commons being public spaces, open to use for a diversity of the population.

In the planning of Bjørvika there has been a strong emphasis on commons or common lands. This is an historical term and its Norwegian equivalent *allmenning* is rarely used in the context of contemporary Oslo. The term gives rise to associations to open spaces, available to all and an egalitarian mindset evocative of historical towns and villages.

***Common Lands* asks the question for whom is the new part of Oslo developed for? The title also points to art as a potential and political site for critical reflection concerning the public sphere both as concept and site.**

*Common Lands* is initiated by the Bjørvika Development Ltd, who represents the owners in the area. What were the desires of the commissioners, Bjørvika Development Ltd, when they included a program for art and to what degree could *Common Lands* create an independent space to maneuver within such a commission?

In addition to the question of the role of art, it has been natural to investigate Bjørvika as a context, which is created by many layers and structures where different, powerful interests were at play: from politics and finance to culture, urban history and architecture. It became impossible to look at art interventions in Bjørvika without considering the wider political and social perspective.

More than just a building site, Bjørvika contains several interrelated, but different spaces, economies and discourses, including political decisions, public debate, architects' and constructors' building plans and the cultural life taking place in the newly built opera and museums to come.