

# Invisible Lines Crossing the City: Ethnographic Strategies for Place-making

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## Abstract

Helsingborg, a coastal city in southern Sweden, initiated a long-term re-development project called H+ in 2009, aiming to convert industrial harbor space in the city's south into a new, livable urban neighborhood and city center. The project aims to create an open and 'tolerant city' in Helsingborg over the next twenty years. In 2010-2011, H+ used an open-source planning method as a strategy to incorporate multiple working methods and ideas into the planning process. As a cultural analyst, my role with the H+ project and the City of Helsingborg was to mediate social and cultural perspectives and development strategies between planners and citizens. Focusing the project's vision towards incorporating existing communities and their values, I applied an ethnographic method to culturally map Helsingborg's social cityscapes. Cultural mapping integrates social and physical places into one map. It is a useful methodological tool in accessing 'cultural' knowledge, translating ethnographic data into usable maps for city planners in the process of developing the H+ area. This article addresses how ethnographic methods and cultural mapping engages with and revitalizes city planning, essentially a process of place-making the H+ area. An applied cultural analytical approach provokes planning practices and questions how and if planning can be more open and inclusive through deeper understandings of unique places that emerge from the relationships between people and spaces. The 'invisible,' yet well-known, segregating line (a street called Trädgårdsgatan) in Helsingborg creates a particular condition that the city must contend with in order to achieve its vision of a 'tolerant city.'

**Keywords:** Applied cultural analysis, place-making, cultural mapping, sensory ethnography, urbanity, segregation, tolerance

## Introduction

Helsingborg's H+ project is, according to their website, "Sweden's most exciting city renewal project" (The H+ Project). The project's vision is to redevelop the industrial harbor and surrounding neighborhoods structurally as well as socially, based on a 'Tolerant City' model and brand that was developed from an architectural competition in 2009. The project expected to employ new, innovative, and creative methods throughout the planning process. An example of city renewal comparable to the H+ plan is the nearby city of Malmö's Västra Hamnen (the Western Harbor), a purportedly 'sustainable' urban redevelopment project of the 2000s, which changed the local landscape and perception of the formerly industrial harbor and city, but which also receives critique for creating further gentrification in the city. With the developments of Västra Hamnen in mind, can H+ develop a 'Tolerant City' project that lives up to its name? And how? This question is perhaps somewhat rhetorical.

My own involvement with Helsingborg's H+ project began in March 2010 as a cooperative endeavor between my studies at Lund University and H+. The H+ project was presented as a long-term urban renewal and regeneration project tackling social questions of tolerance together with infrastructural change. Expertise was needed to provide perspectives and insights into these kinds of social questions, particularly regarding several neighborhoods adjacent to the developing H+ area in the south of Helsingborg (Söder, Planteringen, and Närlunda) that would also be affected by the development. Establishing a plan for citizenry dialog (medborgarråd) was one of the projects that my colleague, Paul Sherfey, and I were tasked with, though our research proposed additional foundational work before the dialogues began. During the year and a half that followed, we worked collaboratively with the H+ planning team on three social research projects. I took inspiration from current trends in cultural planning methods and worked with the urban sociologist and consultant Lia Ghilardi's cultural mapping method to translate the knowledge I gathered 'on the ground' as an ethnographer into 'cultural' maps, tangible representations of social worlds existing in Helsingborg.

What I learned from these projects is that the complexity of perspectives, experiences, and actors involved in urban transformation need to be understood in their own right in order to enact any form of social sustainability. Dempsey et al. (2011) note that social sustainability has been broadly defined but also not yet theoretically problematized. In short, they argue that the social sustainability of a neighborhood, region, or built environment inquires into such things as inclusion, safety, equality, high qualities of life, sense of community, and attachment to place (Dempsey et al. 2011: 290, 294). Culture, including emotions, behaviors, and values 'construct' places and likewise have an impact on urban spaces. Places are of ontological concern, as a form of embodied experience, which is important to understanding the experiences of the built environment from the citizens' per-

spectives (Feld & Basso 1996). Shifting the planners' view to that of individual lives and experiences of citizens' aims to plan spaces that respond to current everyday life and needs in the city.

Notions like 'cities for people,' 'social sustainability,' and 'human dimensions' are cropping up in urban planning discourses, placing an increasing focus in planning on social and cultural issues. In this case, the social sciences and humanities should logically have a large role to play in these discourses. Likewise, concepts from the social sciences and humanities are at times borrowed into architecture and urban planning, such as in Jan Gehl's lifetime work of transforming modernist planning into "cities for people" (Gehl 2010). Yet cultural and social specialists (applied cultural analysts and academics) often take a back seat in the process as 'consultants with special knowledge' rather than active participants.

As a cultural analyst, I see myself as a 'cultural mediator.' By this, I refer to the translation of cultural and social information between citizens; city planners such as architects, communications officers, politicians; and those from the social sciences and humanities disciplines, both within and outside of the academic sphere proper. The social sciences are often understood as 'soft sciences,' but as applied sciences they can be considered cultural 'hardeners,' making abstract theories and qualitative ethnographic insights into concrete and actionable strategies.<sup>1</sup>

In a large renewal project like H+, which will be ongoing until 2035, accomplishing lofty goals like transforming Helsingborg into 'the Tolerant City' (where the city's current touristic brand is "The Pearl of the Sound") will be a difficult feat. There is always the risk that plans to create positive redevelopments have negative (unintended) consequences. An actor-network theory (ANT) approach might suggest that city transformation is a process of 'becoming' places, and that many realities are simultaneously performed. "From the standpoint of ANT, 'gentrification' is not an evident development, it is an assemblage that, like everything else, needs to be performed, enacted" (Forsemalm 2007: 23). Likewise, 'tolerance' can potentially be understood as assemblages to be performed through the construction of H+. I consider 'tolerance' to be a social and cultural concept with implications towards inclusion and diversity, presumably in opposition to gentrification of public life. In this view, it concerns more than a city re-branding strategy. The question becomes: in what capacity will tolerance be performed in Helsingborg, and how it will be enacted? Cultural analysis not only offers complex understandings of social and cultural phenomena, it also offers concrete strategies for thinking about tolerance and for planning the city. This can be a strengthening of more traditional city planning methods or a path towards new ones. My work left me with many questions, not least the question of whether social inequalities can be somehow 'solved' through adjusting or building infrastructure with the H+ project.

This article addresses ethnographic strategies used in cultural planning practices for Helsingborg's H+ project and the incorporation of ethnography and qualita-

tive social research into city planning processes.<sup>2</sup> The case of H+ serves as a basis for discussing applied cultural analysis in practice. I use the notion of Helsingborg's 'invisible' line of segregation (which I locate along the street Trädgårdsgatan) to discuss ontological concerns of places and 'othering,' and develop a phenomenological approach to place identity for the development of cultural centered planning. First, the article describes Helsingborg as a transforming city and questions how H+ and a cultural analytical approach could help to transform Helsingborg towards a more 'tolerant city.' Second, I develop a phenomenological and sensory view to places, as experiences of places are fundamental to understanding human relationships to the built environment. Third, I introduce the street Trädgårdsgatan as corresponding to the 'invisible line' of segregation as an empirical case and analytical tool to understanding 'othering,' segregation, and embodied spaces. Fourth, I argue that ethnographic analysis used to uncover the uniqueness of a place and the values and needs of existing communities can be used in making ethnographic maps that translate cultural and social phenomena into city planning processes. Finally, I return to my own position as a mediator, and position Helsingborg as two "cities" in order to make an analytical point about top down planning and the need for cultural analysis to achieve social goals in the H+ 'Tolerant City' vision.

### **Background: Transforming Helsingborg through H+**

H + is not just a construction project. It will put Helsingborg on the map and change the city's identity. Through communication, you create a concrete picture of a reality that is not yet available.

(Sköldqvist, *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, 2011)

Cities, as complex spaces, layered with places, people, communities, rhythms, and routines, establish particular and constantly changing environments. While many post-industrial cities promote developments that attract outsiders for business and pleasure, their existing citizens also need appropriate spaces for their everyday lives and work. "The Tolerant City" has a lot to do with branding Helsingborg, but as a social notion it leads to philosophical contemplations about what tolerant places are, and how society envisions them to be. While Helsingborg's 'brand' concerns how it is perceived, or desires to be perceived, it is not necessarily a reflection of life in that city. Helsingborg has not been considered particularly 'tolerant,' indeed it has been considered quite the opposite. A report from 2010, based on a model from Richard Florida's work, shows Northwest Skåne, including the city of Helsingborg, as the most 'intolerant' area of the entire region of Skåne, suggesting unusually high segregation of ethnic and socio-economic groups to be the cause (Region Skåne, 2010). 'The Tolerant City' that H+ envisions for the future thus has an implicitly challenging social agenda. Cultural analytical per-

spectives are therefore incredibly important to this process of transforming the city as a physical and social place.

Re-development of places can have a huge impact on an individual's practices, rhythms, and experiences of their everyday lives. In this way, the H+ project is more than building new housing, public and business spaces, and infrastructure, it is also a social renewal process. In the initial planning stages, the 'tolerant city' vision of the project aimed to change Helsingborg socially while also redeveloping its physical infrastructure (Helsingborgs stad 2009). This redevelopment would be a production of spaces both physical and complexly social (Lefebvre 1991). In many ways, urban planners are tasked with the job of constantly (re-)constructing urban environments, and the resulting public life can be understood in relation to the possibilities that those spaces allow. Conversely, people also create places, bringing them into being, and these places can be understood as productions of social space (Heidegger 1971; Lefebvre 1991). The experience of places, and the relationship between people and places, is an important dynamic of urban everyday life.

Urban planning commonly focuses on physical details and concepts, producing maps and renders to convey the experiences of redevelopment. Though now commonly picturing 'potential users' in renderings and images of new buildings and spaces,<sup>3</sup> urban planning that incorporates explicitly social aims (like the H+ project) would benefit from a stronger focus on problematizing what these potential spaces actually mean for individuals (and who those individuals are) through research. How can physical infrastructural planning respond to ethnographic research conducted about communities and everyday lives in urban environments? I suggest that ethnographically derived knowledge about local cultures within cities, and about the city-planning processes itself, can be mediated for more culturally derived, 'people-centered' planning.

My research has been an exercise in re-thinking what public planning means, by opening up the process and understanding the city culturally, from the ground up rather than from the top down. How can cultural mapping engage with and revitalize city planning to enable the development of a 'tolerant city,' essentially a process of constructing, producing, and place-making the H+ area? As a cultural analyst and mediator, I aimed to focus the project's visions towards existing communities and their values, and to contribute to the H+ project's open source method of strategic public planning with an ethnographic approach. My own work employed double ethnography or 'double cultural analysis,' which encompassed an understanding of both the citizens and planners of Helsingborg. I used double cultural analysis to gather insights regarding the citizens' experiences and the culture of urban planning in the planning office in order to develop specific tools that would be most useful in building a 'tolerant city' model (Damnholt 2011). The overall aim of my investigations was to respond to the question: 'How can Helsingborg become a tolerant city?' From this, I developed tools for mediating the

information between actors, and used spatial maps of cultural resources as a manner of initiating a cultural strategy in the H+ planning process.

## Experiencing Place

Place is the most fundamental form of embodied experience.

(Feld & Basso 1996: 9)

The world comes bedecked in places; it is a place-world to begin with.

(Casey 1996: 43)

What is a cultural understanding of place? Places are intrinsically connected to human lives and experiences. They play a large role in the ontological formation of identities, whether explicitly or implicitly. How people experience and think about places are important in understanding not only their own self-perceived identity, but also that of the place itself. A place-making process factors in existing communities and their perceptions of places to the designing and planning process of new spaces. Essential to my anthropological understanding of Helsingborg's cityscapes is an understanding of the relationship between people and places, which can be applied to place-making processes of city planning like the H+ project.

*Urban Identity: Learning from Place 2* gathers articles regarding urbanism and the uniqueness of places, aiming to discuss senses of local identities in places that are rapidly being replaced by homogenous city construction (Evans, McDonald & Rudlin 2011). In some regards, homogenous city construction can be seen as the creation of a type of large-scale non-place, whereby local urban flavors are replaced by more or less similar constructions of 'creative' or 'innovative' cities.<sup>4</sup> Through initiating H+, Helsingborg faces challenges that must be balanced in the formation of a new urban place, and must be wary of the different ways in which an urban renewal project can develop. The diverse needs and concerns of citizens as well as those of politicians, planners, and other stakeholders are important considerations at all phases of the H+ development. These needs can be economic and social, concern affordable housing, the availability of green spaces, new business growth, and education, for example. Careful mediation of all values must be structured in order to achieve a symbiosis and to work towards the vision of the project.

Place, urban or otherwise, is a central concept to being in the world, a sensory experience unique to each individual. In other words, bodies and spaces are intertwined to create places as embodied experiences (de Certeau 1984). Urban environments are layered with places, made unique by the individuals and communities sustaining them. "The living-moving body is essential to the process of emplacement: live bodies belong to places and help to constitute them" (Casey 1996:



24). Local expressions are invaluable to understanding the social layers of a city, underpinning the greater ‘city identity.’

It is the relationships between people and other actors to their environments that ‘produce,’ or ‘make,’ a place, and determine how it ‘becomes’ a place. In deconstructing power structures in practices of city conversion in Göteborg, Sweden Forsemalm points out that, “objects, human or non-human, go places, and do places” (2007: 163). But, city planning processes globally are slow to incorporate the cultural and social perspectives to the development process. Vergunst and Vermehren locate sociality in action, as a process rather than context or structure. Long and Moore note that their approach to sociality begins with “its conceptualization as a dynamic relational matrix within which subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are co-productive, and continually plastic and malleable” (2013: 4). Therefore, one can argue that while city planners attempt to ‘create’ spaces, social communities are concurrently producing places through interactions. A tension arises between these ongoing productions and planning processes that attempt to constrain them.

Perhaps we, as people in places, know implicitly this notion of spatial creation and constitution. Indeed, we are often immediately aware when atmospheres change from one place to another, and many times recognize our own presence and activities in transforming a place. But, to what extent do city planning processes understand and use this knowledge explicitly, and to what extent is research and planning of places and landscapes being conducted based on a city’s particular identities, narratives, communities, and cultures?



Figure 1.5 *Car boot sale*: “Car boot sale, every Sunday 11-15.” Söder is characterized by a sense of local community and events, as felt with this hand-made sign.



Figure 2. *Outdoor market in Gustav Adolfs Torg*: The outdoor fresh produce market in Gustav Adolfs Torg in Söder, Helsingborg is an important and characteristic local place, selling fresh produce and other goods at affordable prices year-round.

The ‘placeness’ of the H+ area will be consummated by the addition of people to the planning process and in their presence – being there – as a place exists as a relationship comprised of (everyday) practices, behaviors, and multi-sensory experiences. The identity and sociality of H+ will be the result of not only the built environment and place-branding, but through place-making: the dialectical relationship between people and place and their being in places and being of places as a complex and endless development (Casey 1996: 19).

Urban practitioners should begin to ‘see’ their own cities anthropologically, and respond to them through more integrated and collaborative planning practices. This kind of ethnographic understanding of cities will see communities and spaces as organic wholes, wherein ‘place’ becomes the foremost concern in understanding place-identities and experiences. My research found Trädgårdsgatan to be a pivotal street in central Helsingborg, as it demonstrates the issues of segregation in the city, and sheds light on how embodied spaces are important to an ethnographic understanding of cities for planning.



## The 'Invisible Line' and Embodied Spaces

This phenomenological fusion of personal identity and physical environment is, of course, not a product of contemplation but a byproduct of our everyday relationships – sensible, corporeal and imaginative – with and within the built environments we inhabit.

(Jackson 2005: 17)

A major consideration in the initial planning stages of the H+ area in 2010 – 2011 was how the project could strengthen the adjacent quarter known as Söder (literally 'the south'), building upon the values and potential of the area to serve local residents and not become a gentrification project singularly focused on potential new residents. Though bordering the old city center (Centrum), Söder has historically been segregated from its development as a working-class neighborhood, originally populated by labor migrants from rural Sweden and now notable for its largely immigrant population (Högdahl 2007). Söder is characterized by shops that are often owned and run 'by immigrants for immigrant' – primarily selling food and household products from their home countries – and is commonly perceived as being populated by lower income residents. In contrast, Centrum is characterized by several landmarks and historical buildings, a shopping street filled with chain stores and cafes, and beaches. It is perceived as being populated by an ethnically Swedish and economically wealthier majority. Despite the rich cultural diversity of Söder, its positive attributes have not always been emphasized, instead remaining separated and 'othered' in the city's south across an 'invisible line' of segregation corresponding to Trädgårdsgatan.

The question of how marginalized communities can be supported – without being co-opted into dominant local culture(s) – through strategic city planning, should be inherent in the Tolerant City model. Barriers of gentrification, accessibility to services, infrastructural isolation, and cultural unfamiliarity (i.e. 'ethnic others' and 'economic others') that occur across the two neighborhoods influence the segregation of the city.

Public space thus confronts one as an enemy might – foreign, forbidding and minatory – and people complain, 'I don't feel comfortable going there. It's not our place. I don't feel I belong.' Moreover, the space of the other is like the gaze of someone who has greater power than oneself; it fills one with a diffuse sense of shame.

(Jackson 2005: 20)

The cultural analytical approach used by my colleague and I in our work with the H+ project addressed diverse spaces and notions such as 'comfort' in spaces to demonstrate barriers that exist in the city. An analysis using the concepts of 'othering' and comfort demonstrate that residents of Söder and Centrum (mis)understood the neighborhoods differently. Cultures and individual habitus made people feel uncomfortable in certain areas primarily because it was not familiar to them.

Yeah. I don't want to increase the feeling against the south but of course those in the areas feel a little more... but I think it depends upon yourself. It's just like, if you walk into a pub, and if you don't... It's important how you act maybe... but it's the same in the north side. It's not a big difference. It's more like that the people said 'I don't feel safe here' during nights when they walk home if they are a woman or a young man or old lady. They don't feel so safe. It's more where 'I heard [it's dangerous]' than 'I feel [it's dangerous]'.

(Interview with David)

David, who enjoyed Söder, pointed to the perception of difference over personal experiences that he noticed in fellow citizens. On a greater scale, this perception leads to 'othering' and segregation of the neighborhoods. Deconstructing the current social city can help to reconstruct a different one. Understanding these kinds of intangible knowledge in Helsingborg is an important first step in making new places that do not reconstruct the same issues. Through my research, I have found Helsingborg's 'invisible line' to be integral to understanding the atmosphere of segregation dividing the city.



Figure 3. *Trädgårdsgatan, the 'Invisible Line' of segregation*: The division between Centrum (the northern side) and Söder (the southern side) in Helsingborg lies along Trädgårdsgatan. Centrum's historical facades are visible to the right in the image. The city park (Stadsparken) lies to the left, the entry point to Söder.

In the approximately six months that I spent researching and analyzing Helsingborg's central neighborhoods, I found Trädgårdsgatan to be a defining place for the city and understanding the North/South divide that residents experience in more or less similar ways. This particular embodied space represents the city's history and present, while H+ represents a future Helsingborg that could potential-

ly change the experience of stark segregation currently associated with the divide along Trädgårdsgatan.

In addition to my participant observation work within the planning office, central neighborhoods, and other ethnographic material, I interviewed six residents of Helsingborg as part of my research. With more than half of these individuals, I chose to conduct a walking interview. When I walked with people in Helsingborg, I asked them to lead the way and show me parts of their everyday routes, places they enjoyed or did not enjoy, or places they commonly spent time in. This method of walking afforded access into embodied experiences of informants in places. Their experiences of places were made evident by being there together, perceiving and describing particularities in their own terms. By being there, and walking with them, I was able to access how particular place-bound identities in Helsingborg take place as embodied experiences “grounded in an inherently sociable engagement between self and environment” (Lee & Ingold 2006: 68). In a way, we were mapping routes and places in their lives together ‘on the ground,’ accessing the dialectic of perception and place which constitutes Helsingborg’s identity.

While each of my informants had different experiences and lived in different areas, they all indicated some level of awareness or perception of the segregation. My participants explained that there is a tangible and immediate feeling of difference when one crosses Trädgårdsgatan and the city park (Stadsparken), as if the atmosphere somehow ‘changes.’ They expressed this to me as we would walk from Centrum to Söder across the line and through the city park together (or vice versa), pointing out how they could ‘feel’ they were ‘somewhere else’ now. My informants’ experiences and uses of the two adjacent neighborhoods, Söder and Centrum, were different based not only on the available activities or economic possibilities of the spaces, but the kinds of relationships they formed through their individual interactions with these places. For instance, Mia<sup>6</sup> said that Helsingborg was ‘boring,’ because there were few events or ‘things going on,’ especially in Söder, while Navid considered Helsingborg to be a good place to live and he considered himself to be an ‘urban guy’ because he lived on Gustaf Adolfs Torg (central Söder) and spent his time in the center of the city (mainly in Centrum).

You walk past nice buildings everyday, but you don’t notice anything about them. Many times you are so stressed to go from A to B, so you don’t look around. So I’ve started to, when I’m walking in the city nowadays. I look at the whole building. And many buildings are very nice but you’ve never seen it because you are so bored of the, let’s say, bookshop at the first floor, because your eyes are always looking down. But you should look otherwise, then you will feel otherwise, and you appreciate it much, much more.

(Interview with Navid)

People inhabit places that reflect not only the kinds of activities they want in their lives, but also identities based from potential embodied relationships to places. The “multisensory experience of any physical and material environment ... is in-

extricable from the cultural knowledge and everyday practices through which place is constructed and experienced” (Pink 2008b: 96). Maria described part of Söder to be like entering another country, pointing towards particular streets which gave her this feeling most strongly, and David was similarly supportive of Söder and the developments there.

[Söder is] lively and foreign. But when I say foreign I mean it in a completely positive aspect. A totally positive aspect... Some people might read foreign as a negative thing [...] foreigners are better at meeting and standing out by the road and making the place more alive with people... I like that about this area.... There is just stuff going on.

(Interview with Maria)

I think that many cities with the same population (size) are very similar wherever you go. But there is a totally different life here depending where in the city you go.... That frightens a lot of people. People just want everybody to be the same. But I think it's really fun that it's so different. So, I enjoy that that you can buy almost anything from all over the world from the south side, from the immigrants. And that it's very Swedish if you go to the north side.

(Interview with David)

There is an expression of intangible difference (besides the very tangible and noticeable difference in building facades) occurring because of this dividing line between north and south and its accompanying perceptions and meanings. This atmosphere of difference concerns ‘place-boundedness’ in relation to individual experiences of a particular geographical place.

The built environment of a place is in direct interaction with one’s life-world, an understanding through one’s fully lived and bodily experiences whereby things become meaningful based on that which they have experienced (Frykman & Gilje 2003: 38). Understanding the different neighborhoods and residents of Helsingborg requires and understanding that one’s life-world is focused upon the everyday life and meanings that are created by the repetition of activity with that material environment, the life-world being primarily “something that you think with rather than think about” (Frykman & Gilje 2003: 36-37). Neighborhoods and specific places in Helsingborg must be understood through the multiple life-worlds that exist there, creating different meanings about the same objects, events, and spaces, together and apart from each other. It is evident that neighborhoods in Helsingborg are experienced very differently based upon those who constitute them through use.

It is precisely the understanding of places as experiences unique to each individual, and creating an ever-changing place-identity, which has been at the base of my work as a cultural analyst in Helsingborg. The mutual shaping of place constitutes its particular identity and the identity of those within it. As Casey puts it, “lived bodies belong to places and help to constitute them” (1996: 24). It is through an understanding of this emplacement that a picture of the distinct ‘urbanness’ of one’s lived experiences in Helsingborg is created. This approach is

the basis for locating unique identities of cities, and the culture, communities, and values therein, which in turn are useful for future planning possibilities such as those in H+.

Conducting a project in cultural mapping refers one to the question of how spaces are created. Urban identities are not singular, regardless of their cohabiting spatial relation (as all people living in and ‘using’ Helsingborg contribute to a ‘Helsingborg identity’ in some way), but rather realize the plethora of identities existing together in one space. The most important aspects emerging from my analysis on embodied spaces is the ‘othering’ perpetuated by the experiences connected to the invisible line of segregation, Trädgårdsgatan.

Ethnographic research accesses the cultural aspects of places, making the intangible ‘auras,’ dividing Helsingborg more tangible. What I call the ‘invisible line’ is a part of what Högdahl conceptualized as the mental landscape of Helsingborg.

Berättelsen om det ‘fina Norr’ och det ‘dåliga Söder’ som blivit ett problem – inte den fysiska ytan Trädgårdsgatan eller Stadsparken.

The story of the ‘nice North’ and the ‘bad South’ became a problem – not the physical space of Trädgårdsgatan or the City Park.

(Högdahl 2007: 97, author’s translation)

It is the resulting segregation that perpetuates the tensions between the north and south. Redevelopment of that space along with the H+ area could lead to new mental landscapes. Cultural maps are tools that offer a clear collection of this knowledge of cultural or mental landscapes, and they have the potential to show the social elements of the city and become a point of reference to initiate discussion around cultural aspects of urban life.

## Mapping Unique Place Identities

Cultural maps inform cultural planning processes as a first step towards understanding the urban environment socially and culturally. De Certeau, on walking in the city, explains that human behavior is central to urban environments and their presence adds important elements to space that are impossible to administer (1984: 95). Urban planning can benefit greatly by incorporating ethnographic perspectives throughout the process of planning cities for this reason. As city planning processes frequently use maps and other images to discuss the physical structuring of places, cultural mapping develops how a social layer can be incorporated into the process for a better understanding of place and communities for public planning. The ability to translate ethnographic information into current working methods is essential in doing applied cultural analysis. Cultural maps become the ethnographers’ tools, mediating information about human behavior and social resources in ways already understood by planners.



I am aware that there are elements of urban life that might not necessarily be ‘map-able.’ However, cultural maps – in the various forms they can be produced – do provide a basis for understanding and exploring social and cultural aspects of the city in ways that are accessible to those not trained in social sciences and humanities. At the very least, mapping begins the process of understanding the cultural city through an ongoing conversation that begins with culture. Pink (2008a) argues that for ethnographers to be reflexive, they must consider how they are emplaced in fieldwork and how they constitute places. She argues that we cannot know other’s experiences, but that “by following their routes and attuning our bodies, rhythms, tastes, ways of seeing and more to theirs, begin to make places that are similar to theirs, and thus feel that we are similarly emplaced” (ibid. 2008a: 193). I combined Lee and Ingold’s (2006) method of walking interviews and a phenomenological approach with Lia Ghilardi’s method of culturally mapping the city’s ‘cultural DNA’ to develop my own cultural mapping practice. Mapping has the potential to take on many forms and lend itself to many uses that would further the possibility to document particular experiences from a new perspective, as information provided on maps produce different ways of understanding the city, socially or otherwise. The maps produced by my colleague and I responded to the needs of the H+ working group at the time, which called for knowledge on the social resources of three neighborhoods.

Mapping is a form of place-making, where anthropologically constructed maps aid the process of understanding, and also constructing, places. Maps are more than physical representations of places; maps and people are mutually constitutive, involving social and cultural perceptions of places that have transformative power regarding both the landscape of people’s relationships to it (Idvall 2000). Cultural mapping is not only a process of visualizing, but understanding the embodied city, as a tool for incorporating people and their values into planning processes. Ethnographic knowledge is transmitted both through the maps and process of using them in planning, but also reflected in development strategies.<sup>7</sup> This opens up a different kind of understanding of places based from a human experience, which is not just about how spaces are produced but about how they are experienced and consummate identities.

‘Cultural mapping’ examines knowledge gathered from ethnographic fieldwork, finds points of applicability, and translates cultural information into maps. These maps can be designed and used in specific ways to convey specific information, as our maps concentrated on cultural resources in three neighborhoods. Ghilardi’s model of cultural planning with Noema Research aims to gather anthropological information about the particular identity of a city – which she calls the city’s ‘cultural DNA’ or ‘social fabric,’ – as a first step in the process of developing creative and people-centered cities. “Each city, furthermore, has its own idiosyncratic way of working and its own ‘cultural DNA.’” (Ghilardi 2009: 3).

Cultural mapping is a tool for organizing relevant social information in context and aids the process of planning work.

This method is based on the assumption that a precondition for identifying and exploiting local potential is to conduct a wide-ranging exploration of the distinctive cultural assets of a place. How a place is shaped (history, landscape), what it feels like (the urban fabric and the interaction between different cultures and communities), how it projects itself (the images it conjures up) – these are all based on its local culture. Such broad mapping of the local cultural assets can be an effective way of responding to local needs while providing opportunities for local development.

(Noema.co.uk)

Working from within the city planning office was a method of understanding Helsingborg from the side of the planners of Helsingborg, who hold a certain power dynamic in redevelopment processes. This was important to my understanding of how ethnological work can strengthen public planning, and to understanding and developing my role as a mediator working within public planning.

My colleague and I created five cultural resource maps – later documented as one larger map (Helsingborgs stad 2011) – for the H+ planning team. These maps covered the Planteringen, Närlunda, and Söder, neighborhoods in the southern region of Helsingborg. The maps tangibly located and detailed what were determined as important social ‘hot-spots,’ pathways, community groups, schools, sports areas, religious centers, meeting points, and so forth. This mapping practice visualized the social (ethnographic) city for the planning team and demonstrated a number of barriers and the overall availability (or lack there of) of cultural, event, and community spaces in the southern neighborhoods. The maps are a physical representation of ‘what’s there’ in relation to existing social values. Söder is residential and commercial, effectively a ‘center’ of the city – primarily serving the southern neighborhoods of Helsingborg. We were asked to create maps by the planning team of these neighborhoods, as they provided preliminary social knowledge about neighborhoods that would be affected by the development of the H+ area. These maps serve as an example of how ethnographic data can be compiled into visual data, though their content is an initial exploration into the city.



Figure 4. Cultural resource map of Söder



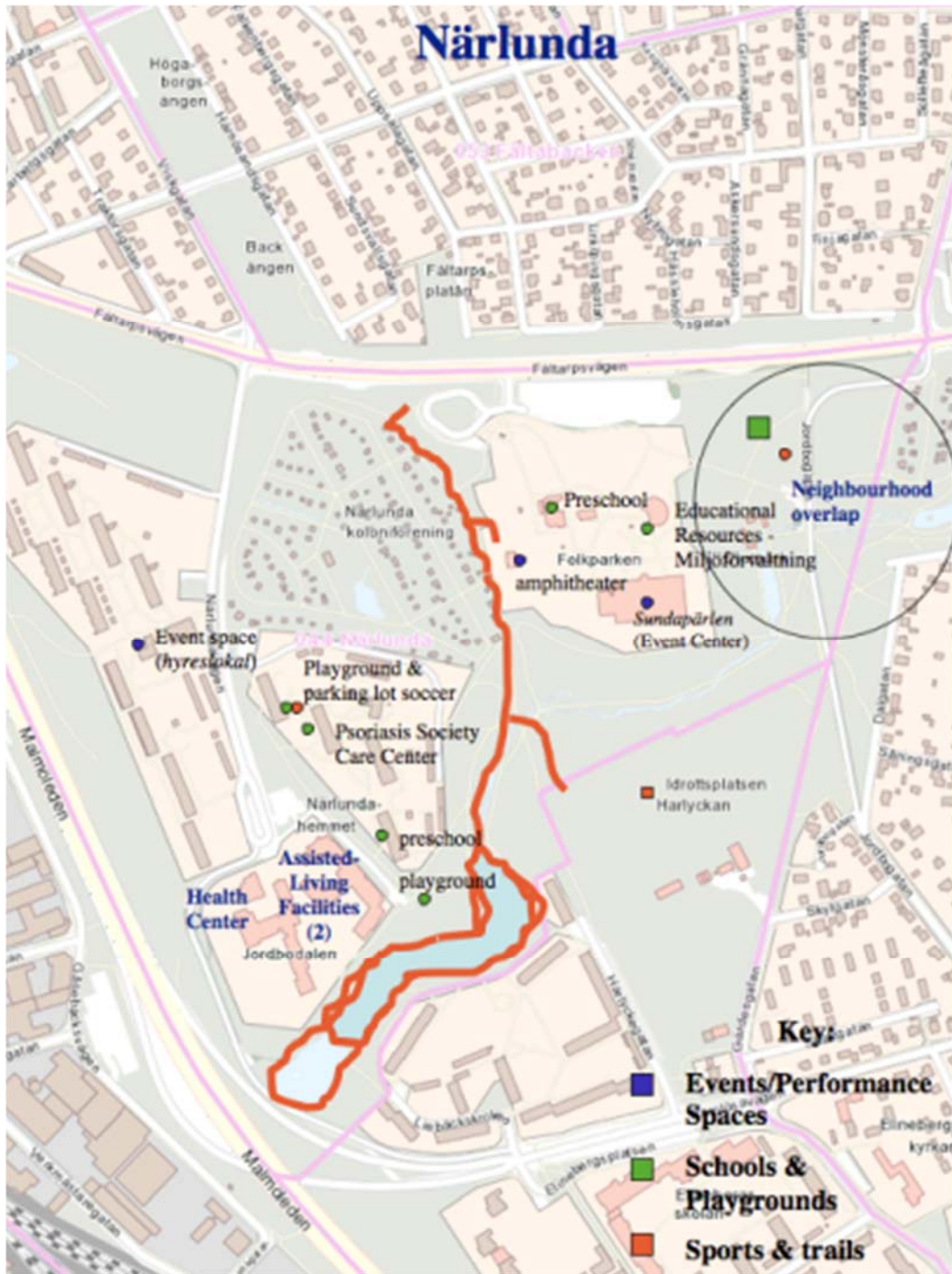


Figure 5. Cultural resource map of Närlunda

Examples of the cultural resource maps created by Samantha Hyler and Paul Sherfey, June 2010. Maps were compiled and reproduced under 'sociala konsekvenser' (social consequences) in: *Helsingborgs stad (2011) Utställningshandling fördjupning av översiktsplan för H+, inklusiv miljökonsekvensbeskrivning.*

The maps created for H+ were useful at the particular developmental stage of the H+ project in 2010-2011. The results of the cultural resource mapping found a lack of event spaces and gathering points in the southern neighborhoods (notably through the lack of venues typically found in arts and cultural institutions such as museums, or an indoor food market, or ‘Saluhallen,’ which is common in Swedish centers), as well as many barriers. Barriers were both between physical spaces and in the possibility for people to meet and connect in public spaces in a variety of settings. Both formal and informal groups become important in gathering a thick description (Geertz 1973) of Helsingborg’s various communities, and served as a model of the city from which to discuss physical and social interactions. Informal groups can also give important clues to the social identity of the city, such as the weekly brunch meeting arranged between several of my informants at a café in Centrum. These individuals traveled out of Söder (where many lived) and other areas of the city and into Centrum for these weekly brunches, finding their place at the same café every week where they knew the staff and enjoyed the food and atmosphere. A stronger café culture and meeting opportunities in Centrum over those in Söder facilitated the sociability and interaction they were seeking in their everyday lives but did not find in their own neighborhoods. This indicates the need to strengthen the opportunity for social meeting points in Söder in order to create an atmosphere of open interaction. However, this example should definitely not be taken to indicate that cafés are the solution, but rather one example of the lack of opportunities in Söder for actionable sociability, to interact with others through the process of actions and shared meaning (Vergunst & Vermehren 2013). This should also note the economic segregation inherent in the location of businesses – and which types of businesses – between Söder and Centrum. ‘Economic others’ are strongly visible and divided between the neighborhoods in this way.

The cultural resource mapping was used during the later stages of planning a cultural strategy for redevelopment actions, which were intended to be implemented in the H+ plans in 2011. The maps and research were later summarized under ‘sociala konsekvenser’ (the social consequences) in the city’s master planning document called, *Utställningshandling fördjupning av översiktsplan för H+, inklusiv miljökonsekvensbeskrivning* (Helsingborgs stad 2011). Further ways of documenting the social city could be developed from fieldwork and analysis, which could reflect for example, daily routes, experiences, auras, or nodes of activity by highlighting particular areas or adding pictures that reflect particular phenomena.

Cultural maps can be seen as a visual representation of social conditions, creating new kinds of maps that layer social information gathered through an ethnographic process over infrastructural maps used in city planning. However, maps must be understood as having ‘reconstructive power’ (Idvall 2000), where creating maps is in many ways a construction of social realities. For social researchers,



cultural mapping connects theoretical understandings of place and ethnographic field data to concrete problem solving in city planning. Cultural mapping is a product of my ethnographic practice and work within the City of Helsingborg, opening up urban planning practices and stimulating a more 'cultural,' people-focused vision. The practice of creating and using cultural maps became a mediation tool to connect our work with planners, and to involve ethnographic knowledge in planning processes.

### **Mediating Cityscapes**

My work with Helsingborg has been a process of bringing in knowledge directly from ethnographic investigations, and translating this knowledge through cultural maps and project reports for the planning process. As an initial project, this research covers the results of a project intended as a starting point to a much larger project that was not entirely realized. My role as a cultural analyst was to mediate cultural understandings between three primary 'cityscapes,' landscapes of experience that form the physical and imagined atmosphere of spaces as a result of everyday lives (O'Dell 2005: 16). These areas are the north and south of Helsingborg (as segregated areas from each other), and the 'cityscape' from the perspective of the city planners.

In order to understand my role in this work, I developed an understanding of mediation between 'two cities': 'the city' as citizens and users of the city (in both the north and south), and 'the City' as the planners and stakeholders (politicians, steering groups, and so forth). While there is a communicative space between these, they remain largely separate actors. This is not intended to dichotomize, but rather to locate my precise role among the recognizable multiplicity of 'Helsingborgs' and their various cityscapes. Experiences of multiple individuals and groups, habitus, and world-views contribute to an already multicultural space that desires collaborative planning. This is also a simple way of understanding top down methods of planning which still take place, where much of the planning decisions lie firmly with 'the City.' The metaphor immediately and unfairly segregates people and discourses of cities between planners and citizens, though I am not unaware of the overlap where citizens are at times, also planners, and the discourses are not always starkly separated. For these purposes, however, 'two cities' serves as a metaphor for understanding my role in analyzing, synthesizing, and translating knowledge between the various stakeholders (planners and politicians, but also citizens in this case) in the city for better cooperative and more cultural planning practices where 'the city,' in all of its multiplicities, are taken into account. Part of my research was to find out how the two 'cities' can work collaboratively towards common goals of re-development. The answer can be found by developing the role of an intermediary cultural analyst, who uses ethnographic methods and develops tools to synthesize information between these cityscapes,

ultimately helping to connect cultural phenomena, communities, and people's daily needs to infrastructure and planning and vice versa.

Ethnographic knowledge informs a strong understanding of the social city (as opposed to the physical, economic, or political city, although they are also connected), including demographics, social behaviors, and seeks to understand rhythms, flows, networks, and everyday aspects of living in a city. In deconstructing embodied places through cultural analysis, cultural insights are reconstructed through visual maps for the purposes of city planning. My work has emphasized a method of city planning that uses cultural analytical approaches for collaborative culture-centered planning in the H+ project. In this way, the process aims to become more open by breaking down barriers that exist between the cityscapes in all forms, between city planners and citizens, and the cityscapes of the north and south in Helsingborg. Thus, my role as a cultural analyst and cultural planner has been to work as an intermediary between various 'cities' and cityscapes.

My role required me to understand whom I am researching for, and to develop the tools and materials that would be most effective for the tasks at hand. Applied ethnographic work derives knowledge from academic sources and is research intensive, but its results are used for different goals and audiences (often with normative positions like developing 'better' spaces and cities). Here, academic knowledge is being connecting outside of universities by using ethnographic methods to enable social change.

## Conclusions

Whether a city square, plaza or piazza, or a public monument, building or landmark, or simply the landscape in which one makes one's livelihood, this is where we consummate our identity as something more than a random aggregate of individuals; this is where we objectify ourselves as a community, a civilization, a nation.

(Jackson 2005: 19)

Practitioners within applied cultural analysis often describe the use of theories, methods, and literature as 'tools' in the process of understanding and deconstructing culture and developing cultural understandings for businesses, organizations, public policy, and so forth.<sup>8</sup> Cultural mapping is one of these tools, an instrument I have learned but also used in my own way to translate ethnographic knowledge into visual materials that follow the City of Helsingborg's own internal working models. Working within the structures already followed by the city planners has been an important venue for me to convey ethnographic information and perspectives, facilitating both discussions and further collaborative work with a cultural and social focus.

This article understands culture and places not of in terms of arts, museums and 'cultural events,' but rather anthropologically and sociologically; in terms of the everyday, and that which is distinctive, unique, and characteristic about it

(Bianchini & Ghilardi 1997). Simone Abram argues that city planners are also producing culture, and in order to bring culture into focus in planning, it is necessary to problematize the structures and categories surrounding it (2011). Likewise, my research has been about the planning process as much as it has been about everyday life in the city.

In a normative sense, urban planning benefits from a basic starting point of building upon existing identities and values in the city. Seeking to understand communities anthropologically provides certain information about the social particularities of place, experiences and perceptions, and everyday rhythms of life that can become the basis for developing projects around notions of openness, tolerance, and even facilitating social sustainability. As an applied cultural researcher, the aim of my work has been to encourage the incorporation of cultural perspectives into city redevelopment processes. One aim of this work was to bypass the creation of large-scale ‘non-place’ type urban development (Augé 1995, see Guwallius 2012 for discussion on similarities in waterfront developments) and to allow places to exist and transform in their own unique ways.

As public and private sectors turn increasingly towards social and cultural questions, applied cultural analysts respond by turning research and theoretical perspectives into actionable results as public intellectuals. O’Dell and Willim explore what it is to practice ethnography inside and outside academia, and put into question the use of ethnography as an “elusive buzzword, or be treated as a magical ingredient that might be added to all sorts of methodological potions, providing any research project (or almost any) with some form of ‘added value’” (2011: 6-7). In the end, this turn in ethnographic practice is a response to a growing need in various kinds of work (ibid. 2011:12).

The aim of this article has been twofold: to first develop phenomenological and sensory approaches to urban space, places, and communities in order to make the unique place identities and experiences formed from the relationship of people and spaces visible; and second to develop ways of translating this anthropological knowledge through cultural maps into strategic city planning processes as a mediation between city planners and citizens. This research has begun developing cultural approaches to the ongoing question: How can Helsingborg become a ‘Tolerant City’ through the strategic use of ethnographic perspectives? However, this research is just the beginning of a long process, and the effects are yet unknown and the question becomes a rhetorical one.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Notion of 'cultural hardener' derived from a discussion between Robert Willim and Joakim Forsemalm at a conference panel debate, ACSIS June, 2011.
- <sup>2</sup> This article is based on the author's master's thesis *Mediating Cityscapes: Cultural Analysis and the Development of Urban Places* (Hyler 2011).
- <sup>3</sup> See images created for the H+ area by Schønherr Landscape / ADEPT Architects, for example. <http://www.adeptarchitects.com/> and <http://hplus.helsingborg.se/>. These types of images are increasingly common among architectural renders and aim to envision how a space could be used.
- <sup>4</sup> See Relph (1976) and Augé (1995) for deeper discussions regarding place, placelessness and non-place.
- <sup>5</sup> All photos by the author.
- <sup>6</sup> All names changed for anonymity.
- <sup>7</sup> See *Utställningshandling fördjupning av översiktsplan för H+, inklusiv miljökonsekvensbeskrivning* (2011), for the resulting incorporation of the cultural mapping project by Samantha Hyler and Paul Sherfey.
- <sup>8</sup> Fredriksson & Jönsson (2008) *ETN: JOB* and O'Dell & Willim (2011) provides useful perspectives to practicing cultural analysis.

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