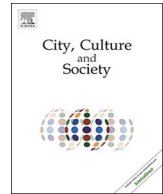




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Changing urban identities on a discursive map

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we look at changing urban place identities in four neighbourhoods in the Helsinki city area that are connected by the tram line number eight. The aim of our study is to present how place identity can be described as a cultural, discursive map that shows what kind of values, attitudes and ideologies are used when building urban place identities, and how people link different meanings to certain urban areas, based on their experiences and memories.

The theoretical framework of the study draws from cultural mapping theory and literature on place identity. The empirical part consists of citizen interviews and diaries left to be filled up at tram stops. The construction of place identity is elaborated through three themes depicted in the empirical materials: home, nature and community. Our methodology is based on discourse analysis, and the research is part of the field of human geography and urban studies.

We introduce a methodological tool: discursive mapping. It shows how different historical and societal layers are manifested in place identities. We also bring a new concept to the field: neighbourhooding, a process where neighbourhood identities are produced. The study sheds light to certain distinctive and unique neighbourhood identities and creates awareness of local histories. The research is a co-project with the City of Helsinki.

1. Introduction

This study observes the changing and diverse identities of the Helsinki neighbourhoods that can be found along the route of Tram Number Eight. Tram Eight runs from one of the city's westernmost neighbourhoods across its easternmost border to Arabia. It connects both old, established neighbourhoods and newly-built, developing areas as well as prestigious bourgeois quarters and working-class neighbourhoods.

The objective of the study is to determine *how place identities can be depicted as a cultural, discursive map*. The study proposes the discursive map as a method of describing the foundations of the locals' conceptions of their neighbourhoods, and how history and layers of different places are realised in various areas.

The theoretical framework of the study is built upon theories of cultural mapping and place studies. Cultural mapping is a multi-disciplinary method that often focuses on collecting and recording communal information. It has been used to map and understand cultural diversity and many times it has been successful in involving the local community in city planning (Evans & Foord, 2008; Mercer, 2002;

Stewart, 2007).

The empirical part of the study was carried out as interviews with citizens of different neighbourhoods and by collecting residents' thoughts in diaries left at tram stations. The study focuses on four Helsinki neighbourhoods through which tram Eight runs. These areas, Jätkäsaari, Töölö, Vallila and Arabianranta-Toukola, differ from each other substantially in their building stock, architecture, services and resident demographics.

From a European perspective, Helsinki is currently an interesting focal point of new and infill construction. Jätkäsaari is the biggest new construction area in Finland at the moment, and in Arabianranta-Toukola, the challenge is to embed a new neighbourhood (Arabianranta) beside a characteristic, post-war one (Toukola). The old city areas chosen for the study, Töölö and Vallila, are quite the opposite in their social and class characters: Töölö being prestigious and bourgeois, Vallila, an old working class neighbourhood which has now turned into a trendy hipster area.

The discursive way of reading empirical materials is based on the conventions of discourse analysis, also referred to as DA. In this research, we understand DA more as a theoretical and methodological

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perspective than as a rigid set of methods. Here it includes a deep reading of interviewees' and diary writers' meanings, memories and perceptions relating to their neighbourhoods. DA highlights perspectives, logics and values, on which neighbourhood identities are built. Those meanings are not only built verbally but also based on images and practices. In the background, there is an understanding of the social construction of reality. According to DA, there are always different ideologies engaged in everything that is said and done. DA helps to reveal these ideologies.

Discursive mapping can be used to locate discourses related to neighbourhoods and present them in cartographic form. Based on this first experiment, the method can be further elaborated. The collected research material enables the construction of shared experiences of local identities, thus creating awareness of the places' history. The study is rooted in culture studies, which has strong ties with humanistic geography and place identity studies.

2. Construction of urban place identities

Cultural mapping has been applied to various purposes, in several contexts and by using different methods (Evans & Foord, 2008; Stewart, 2007). It was first used in the 1970s to map and record the lives, culture and traditions of indigenous peoples. The framework has subsequently been used to research the cultural diversity and heritage of many other subjects in developed countries (Poole, 2003; Stewart, 2007; UNESCO, 2009). Cultural mapping and cultural planning are international methods for participatory data collection and planning (Hänninen, 2014). Most importantly, its active methods involve residents in the planning process.

Cultural mapping has been seen as a vital part of cultural planning, one that includes the strategic utilisation of local cultural assets in city and area planning (Mercer, 2002). Drawn maps are the typical product of cultural mapping (Stewart, 2007). The maps produced in this study are discursive summary maps. The interviewees' verbalisations about their neighbourhoods include profound and detailed accounts of their memories and meanings associated with the places. Certain keywords associated with the neighbourhoods have been selected and written on the map (See Fig. 1).

Space and place are fundamental concepts in humanistic geography. In geography, space refers to a measurable, objective area in which activities appear. Place refers to parts of the Earth's surface that are constructed with meanings through subjective intentions, valuations and memory (Tuan, 1979; Luoto, 2001). Therefore, the concept of place is bound to change as cultures change (Castello 2010: xiv) and is the product of a person's individual experience (Tani, 1995, p. 14; ref.; Veijalainen, 2010).

In this study, we use the concept of place from Massey (2008, pp. 30–31): a place is dynamic, open for encounters in continuous process with its environment in space and time. Places do not have one, coherent identity but they are filled with past and future. Places become articulated in discourses and narratives that are repeated and renewed in social relationships. Discourses connected to neighbourhoods show what kind of strategies of including and excluding are used in defining them (Arlander, 2017; Wylie, 2007). Identity is bound to a place as a social construct, not to the identity of a community or the identities of its members.

A place identity is socially created from the personal meanings given by individuals to both physical space and its subjectively remembered history, so that the identity of a place is a creation of the human capacity to produce and consume meanings (Eräranta et al. 2015). Place awareness is related to experiences of belonging and participation, which emerge and gain strength through repetition

(Kymäläinen, 2006; Lehtinen, 2006), e.g. by walking familiar streets time after time. According to Yuval-Davis (2006), different forms of identification, performance, experience, and negotiation define places. Belonging to a place is a process, a negotiation of each interaction situation (Massey, 2005). The role of residence in general has been considered as essential for the development of place identity, although its importance has also been called into question (Forss, 2007, pp. 15–16). The concept of place identity comes near to topobiographic place, in which the subjective place experience is born biographically, from memories (Karjalainen, 2006).

This research project has identified place identities through the discourses verbalized by the interviewees. The way the environment is comprehended is always realised through language in some way (Karjalainen, 2004). According to Zimmerbauer (2008: 7), a place identity is an awareness of and a relation to a place and it is to a large extent formed in a linguistic process. Often, certain meanings and interpretations are repeated and thereby reinforced by stories that give place identities permanent and enduring elements. The interviewees cherish stories that they have heard about places that are meaningful to them. Subsequently, place identities that change from one situation to another may endure by being passed on in speech from one person to another.

This study regards place identities as being constructed through discourse, as a constant interaction between individuals and places. Identities are not permanent but in continuous change, and they unfold situationally. The majority of identity research within urban studies focuses on urban citizens' identities, i.e. personal identities, often based on memberships in various social groups. Place identity is always personal, too, of which the branch of feminist geography that studies the relationship between gender, identity and place stands as an example (McDowell, 1999). Our study observes identities of neighbourhoods. The starting point differs from a study focusing on the identities of people, but they both are known to place identity research (Zimmerbauer, 2008, p. 27).

Helsinki has always been a mix of different urban neighbourhood identities. In earlier times, cities were considered as symbols of a lack of space and an abundance of filth; the city phenomenon was, for a long time, feared. Helsinki still appears to be a melting pot for Finns, and people move there alone and young (Klinge & Kolbe, 2007, pp. 87–89).

Research has been conducted on the differentiation of neighbourhoods and significance of the area for resident identities (e.g. Vilkkama, 2011; Vilkkama, Vaattovaara, & Dhalmann, 2013). Also, the polarisation of elite neighbourhoods in the Finnish capital region has been studied (Kortteinen, Vaattovaara, & Alasutari, 2005). Extensive surveys have been carried out concerning wishes that the citizens of Helsinki have regarding residence and their relations to social classes (Kortteinen, Vaattovaara et al. 2005; Kortteinen, Tuominen, & Vaattovaara, 2005). Our study aims to gain more insight into the emergence of these discourses, and even more importantly, to develop a methodology for a deeper understanding of the residents. The respondents' thoughts do not form the results of this study but offer material for demonstrating the method this study contributes to the field: discursive mapping.

3. Research materials and methodology

3.1. Tram Eight as a source for the empirical study

The research material collecting was based on the route of Tram Eight, a route that provides a cross section of Helsinki in many ways. This line was selected at the request of the city of Helsinki, and they suggested we study the areas along this line. (see Fig. 1). The city is conducting several large construction projects along this tram route:

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