

DYNAMICS OF MORAL GEOGRAPHIES

'old & ugly'

into

'old & nice'



Re-evaluations of old urban built environments have often been understood to be simply 'cultural' effects of economically driven urban restructuring within post-industrial societies (cf. 'gentrification', 'post-modern urbanism' or 'urban renaissance'). However, a close-up study of long-term re-evaluations of the urban area Haga in Göteborg, Sweden, shows that seemingly innocent practices of presentation – such as mediated popular narratives – actually include clearly normative social geographies that have framed the area in terms of its 'authentic' social and cultural contents and values. Thus, re-evaluations are fundamental instances of a continuous process

of socio-spatial and imaginary co-construction of the city as a moral landscape. Together, such popular geographies pave the way for constantly emerging new forms of cultural-and-economic exploitation. In the case of Haga, the last major re-evaluation meant shifts of three kinds: a shift from proposed complete renewal to extensive preservation combined with neo-vernacular adaptation of new buildings; a socioeconomic shift towards an increasingly middle-class population; a shift from small workshops and local shopping needs towards leisure-time life-style consumption serving a regional scale.

Four Imaginary Geographies

An important part of the analysis was to identify descriptive protocols in terms of dichotomous pairs active in the popular narratives. The four geographies described in the boxes below in a very condensed fashion refer to such narratological devices in texts analysed. The dynamics of urban re-evaluation were found to be articulated with complex discursive intertwining of 'new' and 'old', 'nice' and 'ugly', 'good' and 'bad', within different concurrent imaginary geographies. Within each geography, specific contradictions were discerned and found to be persistent key elements of the dynamics of re-evaluation.

| A Geography of Attraction (1860-1975) | A Geography of Commemoration (1860-1965) | A Geography of Sanitization (1860-1980) | A Geography of Maintenance (1920-1985) |
|---|---|--|---|
| <p>NICE: new</p> <p>UGLY: invisible</p> <p>HISTORY: nation-state bounded / founding era</p> <p>OLD BUILDINGS: Rare & nice, if peripheral & pre-industrial</p> <p>HAGA: confusions of name/space/time. <i>First:</i> absent in urban history</p> <p><i>Later:</i> included but no historicization</p> <p>Primarily outer part: buildings of philanthropic origin</p> <p>CONTRADICTION: Haga ambivalently visible / articulated</p> | <p>NICE: the vernacular</p> <p>UGLY: invisible</p> <p>HISTORY: regional character / pre-industrial era</p> <p>OLD BUILDINGS: nice if peripheral & pre-industrial</p> <p>HAGA: inner part: buildings of philanthropic origin</p> <p>CONTRADICTION: transgressions of the order of the rural vernacular</p> | <p>NICE: invisible</p> <p>UGLY: functionally mixed urban areas</p> <p>HISTORY: era of industrialization = bad/ugly</p> <p>OLD BUILDINGS: cause "psychological un-comfort"</p> <p>HAGA: object of research / symbol / abject eastern part</p> <p>CONTRADICTION: "what if..." (sociologist, journalist...)</p> | <p>NICE: wooden working-class housing</p> <p>UGLY: functionally adapted old buildings. Masonry construction of more than 3 storeys; industrial buildings</p> <p>HISTORY: era of industrialization</p> <p>OLD BUILDINGS: cause "psychological comfort"</p> <p>HAGA: object of research / symbol</p> <p><i>First:</i> historicization of whole area</p> <p><i>Later:</i> inner wooden low-rise part of the area</p> <p>CONTRADICTION: inhabitants' voices</p> |

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ON THE URBAN SURFACE. HISTORICIZATIONS OF HAGA

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