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Abstract

This thesis explores ways in which the past participates in the social construction and imagery of a place. Particular attention is paid to the interdependency between imagery and forms of preservation and production of physical space. The empirical material analysed covers 150 years and consists of various forms of discursive representations of the controversial Haga area in Göteborg, Sweden. Up until renewal in the 1970s, Haga consisted of a dense mixed building stock predominately from the 19th century, but with origins in the 17th. In terms of valuation in public discourse, Haga's position in the Göteborg landscape was inverted in the 1970s from an "old, unhealthy and ugly Haga" to be sanitised, to a celebrated "old and nice Haga".

The thesis examines this inversion on the level of discourse along two lines, both concerned with present effects of imaginary geographies of the past. First, pushing beyond mainly socioeconomic concepts, e.g. 'gentrification' or 'urban renaissance', the thesis shows how re-evaluation takes place as a constitutive factor of the sociospatial construction of a city as a moral landscape. Studied sources show that 'new' and 'old' are continually intertwined with 'nice' and 'ugly', 'good' and 'bad', making ways for different spatializations of inclusion, exclusion, and economic exploitation. Second, moving beyond notions of place identity as dominant socioeconomic interests in a particular place, the thesis grapples with the long-term impact of certain imaginary geographies in the construction of identity. In analysing the sources, the thesis uncovers long-term discursive figures and constructions, their continuities and mutations. Importantly, the thesis thus not only avoids unjustified a-historical conclusions regarding the nature, timing, and causes of occasions of re-evaluation of 'Haga' and the related category of 'old urban vernacular buildings', but also points out the complex interdependency between shifts in the present and powers of the past in the discursive transformation into 'old and nice Haga'.

The theoretical framework engages Foucauldian notions related to the discursive appearance of the object, yet advocates a position that makes such notions effective in relation to actual built environments through an analytical focus on historicizations, i.e., on ways in which a discourse links contemporary physical spaces to past temporalities. In the analysis, this approach shows that re-evaluation is not a 'new' phenomenon, but that 'Haga' and 'old urban vernacular buildings' have multiple positive appearances as well as characterisations in terms of ambivalence and contradiction. In particular, the figure of 'old and nice Haga' appears first as a discursive homogenisation of a heterogeneous socio-spatial past under the heading "the oldest workers' district in Göteborg"; and, second, it appears through a re-localisation of the object, Haga, in the urban landscape, and a re-shuffling of Haga's constitutive elements in an aesthetic-moral geography. Closely studying the shift from "suburban-nice-stone-new" to "inner city-nice-wooden-old", the analysis reveals the particular ways in which historicizations unavoidably take part in sorting of places and people over time and space by contributing to the formation of the past as a particular history – on the urban surface.

KEYWORDS: *imaginary geographies, historicization, urban vernacular buildings, urban re-evaluation, social inclusion and exclusion, moral landscapes, preservation, history-and-geography*

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