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## **Abstract**

This thesis measures relationships between story, identity, and the built environment. Since the late 20th century, scholars have given increasing attention to the idea of “place” and the process of storytelling as key mechanisms through which identity is embedded in and carved from built urban spaces. Many have started to draw connections between these strands, but investigations that explicitly address the making of place through the formal elements of story are lacking. To help close this gap, this research examines the tales of Blågård's Plads, a square in Copenhagen through which diverse histories, groups, and forces move. The square's narrativization, as presented by users in archived memories and semi-structured interviews, is analyzed through three essential elements of story – temporal sequences, explanatory logics, and standardized forms. From these dimensions, it becomes clear that people actively conceive of Blågård's Plads as a place through story, narrativizing the square as a spatial manifestation of time, a collection of dramatic plots, and a stage for heroic (and evil) characters. Research findings confirm the value in merging literary and urban studies: narrative devices and frames can serve to organize, compare, and question informal identity markers. The tools and ideas presented are relevant to those in urban planning, local history archiving, community activism, and other fields. Like Blågård's Plads, all urban areas can be studied as continuously (re)read and (re)written place-books.

## **Zusammenfassung**

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die Beziehungen zwischen Geschichte, Identität und der gebauten Umwelt. Seit dem Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts, befassen sich AkademikerInnen zunehmend mit den Schlüsselmechanismen der „Ortsverbundenheit“ und den Prozessen des Geschichtenerzählens, durch die Identität in urbanen Räumen integriert, aber auch hervorgebracht werden kann. Obwohl Verbindungen zwischen diesen Aspekten erforscht wurden, fehlt es an expliziten Studien, die sich mit der Gestaltung von Orten durch die formalen Eigenschaften von Erzählungen beschäftigen. Um diese Forschungslücke zu schließen, untersucht diese Arbeit die Märchen des Blågård's Plads, ein Platz in Kopenhagen, durch den sich verschiedene Geschichten, Gruppen und Kräfte bewegen. Die Narrativierung des Platzes, wird von Nutzern in Form von Erinnerungen und halbstrukturierten Interviews dargestellt und anhand von drei wesentlichen Geschichtelementen analysiert – temporalen Sequenzen, Erklärungslogiken und standardisierten Formen. Anhand dieser Aspekte wird deutlich, dass die Menschen den Blågård's Plads aktiv durch Geschichten als Ort begreifen und den Platz als räumliche Manifestation der Zeit, als Sammlung dramatischer Handlungen und als Bühne für heldenhafte (und böse) Figuren darstellen. Die Forschungsergebnisse bestätigen den Wert zwischen der Verknüpfung von Literatur- und Stadtforschung: narrative Mittel und Frames können dazu dienen, informelle Identitätsmerkmale zu organisieren, vergleichen und hinterfragen. Ebenso wie Blågård's Plads können alle städtischen Gebiete als kontinuierlich (wieder)gelesene und (wieder)geschriebene Orts-Bücher untersucht werden.

No man is an Iland,  
intire of itself;  
every man is a peece of the Continent,  
a part of the maine

John Donne  
*Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*



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All photographs, unless otherwise noted, were taken by the author in 2020.

“We’re nothing more than dust-jackets for books, of no significance otherwise. Some of us live in small towns. Chapter One of Thoreau’s *Walden* in Green River, Chapter Two in Willow Farm, Maine. Why, there’s one town in Maryland, only twenty-seven people, no bomb’ll ever touch that town, is the complete essays of a man named Bertrand Russell. Pick up that town, almost, and flip the pages, so many pages to a person.”

Ray Bradbury  
*Fahrenheit 451*

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## Chapter 1

### Doubles on the Square

In a standard doubles game of table tennis, players must alternate hits, moving behind and beside their partners in smooth choreography. This dance becomes more interesting when it is set at night, when the playing surface is covered in both graffiti and ice, and when three-fourths of the players are speaking Danish.

My thesis begins here, on a poorly lit ping pong table in a square called Blågårds Plads in the city of Copenhagen. It is January, cold.

My teammate, Maes, has an endearing habit of bouncing and twisting his body before each serve like a circus performer. He says less than our opponents, Christopher and Christian, apart from the occasional, “Come again!” a phrase that initially sounds like a scolding for my missed shots but is later explained as more of a “better luck next time.”

Christopher seems to be the leader of these three, or at least the tallest and most chatty. When I ask him what he thinks of this square, Blågårds Plads, he first references its centrality in the Copenhagen table tennis circuit.

“People come from all over the city to play here,” he says, “All over the world in the summer.”

“Why here?” I ask.

“No wind.”

After discussing the dimensions and durability of the square’s ping pong table – it has lasted, he claims, over ten years – Christopher tells me more about the square. People gather here for reasons other than table tennis, he explains, from May Day demonstrations to football tournaments to carnivals. He mentions Rasmus Paludan, a far-right politician who staged a Quran burning in 2019 on the square, which set off trash burning and window smashing throughout the immigrant-filled neighborhood.

The police also love to hang out on the square, Christopher says. A squad car will roll by twice as we play. Christopher takes puffs of a hash cigarette between matches. I ask if the police bother him for smoking joints.

“Not really. But they’ll give some of my more tanned friends trouble.”

At some point, two men who fit this description walk by with grocery carts to ask for recyclable empty beer cans in a language that sounds nothing like Danish.

As we play, the plastic ball spins across the icy green table and disappears momentarily amid white graffiti tags. The marks are of varying size, font, and legibility, but I can clearly make out two: “BGP,” a tag of the Blågårds Plads branch of the Loyal to Familia gang, and “ACAB,” the universal anti-cop slogan.

After the match, three men in their late-60s walk across the square towards us. A quick transaction ensues: men ask for hash; Christian asks for mobile pay; man wearing DSB hat consents; Christian puts green substance in small plastic bag; DSB man takes out phone; DSB man swipes finger; Christian hands over bag; laughter and Danish echo around the dark square.

I shiver in my ski jacket. Christopher is wearing a blue sweatshirt, totally unimpressed by the temperature. He sits on one of the square’s 22 sculptures. I have read they were designed by a sculptor named Kai Nielsen in the 1910s. I ask Christopher about the stone figures, muscular adults and crawling children that Nielsen designed to reflect the neighborhood’s then-working-class character.

“I think about them all the time,” he says. “I know they’ve been here since the beginning, but I don’t really know what they are.” He points out the sculpted man across the square playing an accordion.

“Ha!” Maes laughs, “I’ve never seen that one!”

My eyes drift behind the sculpture to Blågårds Apotek, an old headquarters for the local communist party that now serves craft beer and live music. Next to the bar is Vivatex, a soon-to-be-defunct mattress store that also sells organic coffee filters and “smartphone cushions.” I ask Christian about the red brick church beside it.

“It’s not really a church anymore,” he says. “I guess it’s a concert church. Mainly jazz. Really cool spot.”

I can confirm, having attended an experimental multimedia performance in the church a few nights before. The space contains a bar, a disco ball, a neon-lit palm tree. The crypt has been turned into a Greek wine shop. Christopher explains that a number of Copenhagen’s churches were put up for sale a decade ago. Some even have been made into housing for students.

I follow my teammates to a kiosk on the square’s corner. Maes and Christopher go inside to get beer from Rahim, the Iranian owner who a few days later will try to explain to me the pay-as-you-want system he tolerates among local young men (“Some end up in jail... but many come pay when they get out!”).

Christian and I wait outside next to a yoga studio. Nervous, though not sure why, I ask him how much he charged for the hash.

“200 kroner,” Christian says.

“How much hash did you give?”

“Not enough,” he chuckles. “We made fun of the oldest guy for not recognizing me. I’m good friends with his grandson.”

I smile and nod, internally debating whether I should ask if Blågårds Plads feels like a village or if the question sounds tacky.

“It’s crazy,” Christian says. “This place has so many layers. So much movement.”



I grunt, trying to buy time to say something that will push him to elaborate. But it is too cold to think clearly, and my mind wanders out into the dark, empty square.

This area is still called Den Sorte Firkant, “The Black Square.” People debate the nickname’s origins, but some claim it has to do with black pins police would use to mark child abuse cases. I turn to ask Christian what he thinks of this story, but he has been reacquainted with Maes, Christopher, and a six-pack of Tuborg.

It quickly becomes apparent that our night is over.

They offer goodbye fist-pumps, I thank them for the ping pong, and they begin walking down Blågårdsgade. I watch them go, wiggling my fingers in preparation for the difficult task of unlocking my bicycle. Lately the lock has been freezing shut.

The three figures start to fade.

“Come again!” I shout in their direction.

Either they don’t hear me, or they don’t care. They turn left for the lakes.



*Figure 1: A tale of ice and bash (and ping pong)*

### **What’s with the Story? This is a Thesis!**

Before its modern usage in academic settings, the word, “thesis,” was a convention of poetry. In the late Middle Ages, it was used to describe a speaker’s “lowering of the voice” on unaccented syllables (*MED Online*, 2007). The word itself comes from the Ancient Greek *thésis*, “arrangement, placement, setting,” and *tithēmi*, “to place, put, set” (*OED Online*, 2021). A thesis, then, has practical roots in performance and etymological origins in place. My thesis merges these two strands. Taking a square in Copenhagen as its point of analysis, it examines the ways in which people “make” place through story.

The above passage prefaces this work in two ways. First, it introduces my subject, Blågårds Plads (hereafter, “BP”). This square lies at the center of various movements, including socio-political currents, demographic shifts, and gentrification, all of which span many temporal and spatial scales. Christian sells drugs from a foreign country to their friend’s grandfather, who wears the hat of Scandinavia’s largest train operator; Christopher describes a global influx of ping pong players and local conflicts between right-wing politicians and Muslim residents; Maes laughs at a working-class statue from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that sits in front of a high-end “organic” mattress store.

From these angles, BP is representative of many contemporary urban spaces, which have come to be viewed as collections of flows, interdependencies, and relations (Massey, 1994). Cities and their subjects are increasingly confusing, fragmenting bangles of converging and diverging ideas, materials, beliefs, and capital (Jameson, 1991). The dynamic, complex nature of networks operating through urban areas makes the quest to coherently identify a place more difficult, but also more relevant. As David Harvey observes, “Place-identity, in this collage of superimposed spatial images that implode in upon us, becomes an important issue” (1989, p. 302). “If no one ‘knows their place’ in this shifting collage world,” he continues, “then how can a secure social order be fashioned or sustained?” (1989, p. 302).

BP is one such spatial and temporal “collage.” It has a working-class past of domestic immigrants and left-wing politics – barrel makers who beat their wives and anarchists who squat in decrepit flats. It has a motley present of immigrants from places like Turkey, Morocco, and Somalia, students from Denmark and abroad, bourgeois families, and drug dealers. As of 2014, at least 27 percent of Nørrebro’s inhabitants are of immigrant descent (Københavns Kommune). Given its surrounding social housing units, BP is home to many of these residents. At the same time, the square’s centrality in Copenhagen and position on an increasingly popular street, Blågårdsgade, have made it the object of capitalistic affection, bringing in yoga studios, wine boutiques, and high-priced dumplings.

The mixed composition of people, services, and buildings on BP makes for a shaky future. “Now it’s mainly immigrant lads who make trouble,” one journalist observes, “but they will probably be replaced by other types one day, for nothing is certain here. Not even the regular spots” (Stensgaard, 2005, p. 261). BP, Christian remarks in the above vignette, is layered. But these layers are moving, like urban tectonic plates. One does not need a seismograph, however, to measure the square’s layers, for they glide and crash into one another above the surface in plain sight. My research is an attempt to discover and make sense of these shifting plates. I intend to analyze how people can find and “know their place” in an area where “nothing is certain.”

The anecdote of ping pong on a cold night also introduces the material of my thesis, story. In itself, the tale is a mechanism for capturing the essence, or a few essences, of BP. The narrative forms employed – chronology, characters, a moralized, nostalgia-tinged sense of change – help organize and bring to life the square’s various components. In other words, the story performs the *work* of place. Stories people tell about places reveal their personal relationships to the built environment, their perspective on the other people incorporating the same space, and their sense of positionality across these settings and groups.

Furthermore, in the above short story readers can begin to understand how story is critical not only to my external endeavors to define place on BP – it is fundamental to the square itself. The square is an anthology of stories: statues

present the end of a working-class age; Rahim embodies the successes and obstacles of local foreigners; yoga studios indicate a new group of residents. Each human and non-human actor, from public speakers to graffiti tags to kiosk owners, captures and exudes narrative.

BP is littered with storytellers of stone and skin. In recounting and unpacking their tales, I aim to crystallize links between the crafting of story and the making of place. Drawing out this connection will show how people use narrative forms to process urban spaces, relate to other urban dwellers, and respond to urban change. Such an illustration has relevance for planners redesigning old neighborhoods, activists promoting new city policies, historians capturing local communities, and anyone else looking to harness the capacity of stories to unveil or enact place.

### **A Roadmap for the Stories**

This thesis contributes to a growing field within urban studies, namely the intersection between placemaking and storytelling. While both place and story have become prominent tools for studying the city over the past half-century, attempts to explicitly investigate place *through* the formal structures of story are lacking. My research addresses this gap by asking the following question:

#### **How do the formal elements of story facilitate and mediate the creation of “place” on Blågårds Plads?**

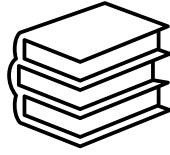
I will approach such a broad question through three more confined sub-questions:

1. In what ways does Blågårds Plads constitute a “place”?
2. What role does the built environment play in the making of this place?
3. How do the square’s users make sense of this place and its built environment through narrative?

To that end, in the second chapter of this thesis I will begin with a literature review that provides theoretical links between the study of cities, the making of place, and the telling of stories. Having illustrated the promise of story-based investigations of urban place, in chapter three I will introduce the parameters of my research, an inductive study that employs qualitative methods like document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Chapter four will present an overview of my case study, BP, a square in Nørrebro, Copenhagen. In chapter five I will then organize my findings along three of the four fundamental elements of story: temporal sequences, explanatory logics, and standardized forms. Finally, in chapter six I will apply the final element, generalizability, to these stories of BP in an attempt to draw wider conclusions about story’s role in urban placemaking.



*Figure 2: BP, day, September 2020*



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The first section of this literature review will address ideas of urban identity, demonstrating its fundamental connections to narratives and physical spaces. I will then discuss the ways in which the built environment shapes human activities, and vice versa, showing how the city has been studied as a mutually co-produced text. Then I will explain how scholars have conceptualized the ways people write and read this urban text through notions of “place” and “placemaking.” Finally, I will survey the growing literature on storytelling’s role in urban studies, which inspires a number of questions and points of departure for my research.

#### ***Identity***

Place and story are, fundamentally, expressions of identity. Identity itself is a relatively modern notion. Scholars trace the word’s contemporary usage in English through 20<sup>th</sup>-century waves of migration, war and the work of the German-American psychologist Erik Erikson (Weigert et al., 2007). Erikson differentiates between “personal identity,” how someone is viewed by other people, and “ego identity... the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods” (Weigert et al., 2007, p. 8). In other words, the ego identity gives people a sense of self-stability, even (and especially) in the face of external change. It is worth noting that while he defines these terms in the context of child psychology, “Erikson sees contemporary society as essentially similar to the changing, ambivalent, uncertain environment of the adolescent” (Weigert et al., 2007, p. 8). Modern societies, including their cities, are unstable, and the citizen’s formation of identity is partially a response to such instability. Given the shifting realities of BP, it will be important to consider and question this protective, reactive nature of urban identity.

Identity has spread well beyond the boundaries of psychology, of course. The philosopher Akeel Bilgrami divides the concept into two central components: “Your subjective identity is what you *conceive* yourself to be, whereas your objective identity is how you might be viewed *independently* of how you see yourself” (2006, p. 5). These two strands may align, or not. Like many concepts, identity is often defined in an oppositional frame. It is a people’s ability “to define or talk about themselves as a totality when confronted with the Other” (Bin, 2004, p. 81). Asking someone who they are sometimes means asking them who they are not. In mentioning his “more tanned friends,” Christopher exemplifies this process and suggests that identity creation on the square may often have links to various Others.

In the field of sociology, identity has come to serve as a measure of “interaction between the individual and society” (Gleason, 1983, p. 918). “Looked at sociologically,” notes Berger, “the self is no longer a solid, given entity... It is rather a process, continuously created and re-created in each social situation that one enters, held together by the slender thread of memory” (in Gleason, 1983, p. 918). Identity is fragile and iterative, an ongoing co-production between individual and society constructed through the stories that make up that “slender thread of memory.”

Thinkers from the school of symbolic interactionism have argued that this process is based in a joint creation of symbolic meaning between the self and other people. Identity, contends Mead, results from our “taking the attitude (or role) of the other” (in Rigney & Smith, 1991, p. 71). We imagine the perspectives of people around us, which then shape our sense and expressions of self. Identity is therefore a product of imagination and performance. Goffman develops this performative aspect, arguing that individuals try to control the impression they make on others by altering their disposition, appearance, and language (1956). In these performance scenarios, individuals are both actors and audience members – we present a particular self we would like others to interpret, and we watch how this show plays out and how others put on their own shows (Goffman, 1956). Urban spaces like BP, then, can be studied as stages for choreographed productions of identity.

### **The Built Environment**

At its core, my research is an investigation into the ways in which urban physical spaces – public squares, shops, and streets – influence human behavior. This is not a new idea. Indeed, it is foundational to urban studies. Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century sociologists from the Chicago School speculate about the effects of urban spaces, from the street block to the electric railway, on social contact, disposition, and interaction (Park, 1915). Humans may “produce” the city, Park writes, but they then fall under its weight, which “forms them, in turn, in accordance with the design and interests which it incorporates” (1915, p. 578). The built environment – BP’s cobblestones, bricks, and iron – is not merely aesthetic: it talks back, playing a significant, “forming” role in the lives of its users.

As it stages human activity, the built environment structures and binds it. “Particular places,” writes Kohn, “orchestrate social behavior by providing scripts for encounters and assembly” (2003, p. 3). Humans navigate the urban’s physical levels – stairs, walls, potholes – while simultaneously reading and reacting to its symbolic forms: “scripts” that range from a six-lane avenue to an outdoor

amphitheater. “The built environment shapes individuals’ actions and identities,” Kohn continues, “by reinforcing relatively stable cues about correct behavior” (2003, p. 3). Interpretations of these physical “cues” can vary: the six-lane avenue may signal onlookers to buy a car, while the amphitheater may signal a need for public performance. An investigation of the interactions between actions, spaces, and identities on BP must focus on its multi-faceted cues and scripts.

The theatrical language employed above echoes the work of Goffman and reflects the active nature of relationships between the urban and the urbanite. Cities are continuously, cooperatively remade. According to Lefebvre, “Every society produces a space, its own space” (1991, p. 31). Dahlkild’s collection, *Huse der har formet os* (*Houses that have shaped us*), analyzes Danish built spaces from this perspective. The articles collected draw links between Danish society and architecture, presenting, for example, a lagging interaction between hospital designs and modern medicine and a comparison between 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernist architecture and the creation of the welfare state (Dahlkild, 2015). Implicit to these findings is an appreciation of Lefebvrian spatial (re)production: social productions of space leave marks in the built environment, phenotypical evidence that reveals information about a particular society. While Dahlkild’s collection expressly sets out to treat “publicly accessible spaces” (“offentligt til-gængelige rum”), it overlooks a number of sites, like churches and government buildings (Møller, 2015). Nor does BP, a public space that reflects a particular snapshot of Danish socio-architectural history, make the cut. While it is not, strictly speaking, a house, I will examine the square’s ability to shape us, historically and in the present.

The square will be studied, in other words, as a text co-authored by people and buildings. A number of urban thinkers have taken this textual perspective. New York’s World Trade Center, de Certeau writes, has the ability “to construct the fiction that creates readers, makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text” (1984, p. 92). High above the city, viewers feel godlike in their ability to “read” it, but this “fiction of knowledge” deteriorates as quickly as the elevator brings them back to earth, the inevitable “Icarian fall” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 92). Although such heightened literacy may seem to disappear, the city’s textual form remains. The viewers’ “bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93). The reader again becomes one of many elements in the urban composition.

While de Certeau depicts the city walker as a type of blind author, it is clear that people often have the ability to understand, interpret, or rewrite urban texts. Barthes observes the Eiffel Tower in the context of such multiplicity. “This pure—virtually empty—sign,” he writes, “is ineluctable, *because it means everything*” (Barthes, 1997, p. 4). Depending on the visitor, the tower can serve as a collecting and reflecting point for romance, scientific progress, industrial might, or international travel. Through these associations, people can be said to write certain projects (of emotion, history, or identity) onto a landmark. In doing so, they circulate particular interpretations of the urban text in which that landmark is situated (Paris as a city of love, tourist trap, national treasure, etc.). The city as text is not a passive process of receiving instructions from concrete. As users encounter spaces like BP, they have the ability to actively read its symbolic outputs and fill it with new ones.

## *Place*

How can we study the city as discourse, as interplay between buildings and users, signs and identities? One practice involves a focus on “place” and “placemaking,” both of which approach the identities people etch into and out of space. As Rose observes, “Identity is connected to a particular place... by a feeling that you belong to that place. It is a place in which you feel comfortable, or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place” (1995, p. 89). Individuals project self-defining traits onto the built world, thereby “making” that place and themselves simultaneously. “When people make places as stable sites that materially embody the past,” notes Till, “they are attempting to give form to their search for a mythic self, a coherent, timeless identity” (2005, p. 14). A place like BP can be seen as a collection of “attempts” to “embody” the past, but it should also be studied for its potential ability to embed ideas about the present and desires about the future. Furthermore, it will be critical to analyze how aware users are of their identity formation – when these processes operate undetected and when they are consciously recognized and harnessed.

First, however, it is worth expanding on definitions of “place” and “placemaking.” Since Massey’s insistence that “place matters” in the 1980s (Merrifield, 1993), ideas about what “place” entails and how to study it have varied in type and scale. I take Agnew’s notion of a “sense of place” as my point of departure. A sense of place is “the subjective orientation that can be engendered by living in a place. This is the geosociological definition of self or identity produced by a place” (Agnew, 1987, p. 6). Studying an urban area like BP for its “geosociological” sense of place means digging into “the more nebulous meanings associated with a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 169).

What types of affective responses can place trigger? Some scholars argue that individuals embody an “environmental past,” a personal collection of, among other things, “memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behavior and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day-to-day existence of every human being” (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 59). These site-oriented thoughts and emotions, which address the past as much as the present, accumulate into a “place identity” – not the place’s collective identity, per se, but the identity, perspective, or worldview that users pull from that place and bring back to it or other spaces (Lim, 2010, p. 901). An analysis of BP’s myriad “place identities” will entail pulling apart congealed “environmental pasts” that users have acquired on and through the square.

Places and place-based identities, however, should not be taken for granted. The mere existence, or coherence, of these notions has been challenged. Massey describes how a few scholars, including Baudrillard, Jameson, and Robins, have postulated the fragmentation and disappearance of “placed identities” amid disorienting, postmodernist flows of people and images (1994, p. 162). Harvey argues that whatever identities people do find in places are trapped within global movements of capital (1993). Ideas about the end of place are not restricted to classrooms and ivory towers. They circulate around BP. As a local poet, Søren Thomsen, laments of Nørrebro, the square’s larger district, “Now there are only a few places left, for instance in Nørrebrogade between Assistens Kirkegård and the lakes between four and five o’clock when people are on their way home” (Stensgaard, 2005, p. 256). In his comment, Thomsen presents a few relevant



questions: Do users of BP also think the number of places is declining in the wider neighborhood? Is the square one of Nørrebro's few remaining places? What does that mean or look like?

Thomsen directly connects an understanding of place to the past. In his view, the lack of place corresponds with a “disappearance of the old Nørrebro” (Stensgaard, 2005, p. 256). This sentiment aligns with Harvey's belief that “the assertion of any place-bound identity has to rest at some point on the motivational power of tradition” (1989, p. 303). For Harvey, place and place identity are “bound” by nostalgia (in addition to capital). He goes further, arguing that these tradition-built concepts are only useful as a source of opposition and xenophobia (May, 1996). In this light, place is a “kind of refuge from the hubbub” of global flows, part of a “desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of all the movement and change” (Massey, 1991, p. 26). Here the space-time dimensions of place appear fixed. Stensgaard picks out this perspective in the words of Nørrebro's poet: “Thomsen,” she writes, “would like to have the world rebuilt as it was on 12 August 1972, when he came to Copenhagen” (2005, p. 256). With its rich history and diverse population, BP will serve as a meaningful testing ground for Harvey's “place-bound,” oppositional frame. What kind of identity “refuge” is the square?

Taking issue with Harvey's bounded frame, Massey applies feminist critiques to re-instill place with complexity and meaning. She argues that the exclusive binding of place with economic flows ignores the significant effects of culture, ethnicity, and gender (1994, p. 164). Humans are not homogeneous readers of the urban text – each comes with their own perspective. Massey directly ties the multifaceted nature of individual identity to that of place: “If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places” (1991, p. 28). Places, like people, are not simple, monolithic entities – they have multi-layered profiles.

Furthermore, rather than being caught within masculine, opposition- and Other-based boundaries, Massey states, place should be understood as relational (1994). These relations are spatial, temporal, and unbounded: Massey describes a Kentucky Fried Chicken in Paris to show how presentations of place reflect social flows to areas beyond the city's geographical limits and to distant, competing conceptions of the past (1995). Places do not have fixed meanings, in the present or the past – their current meanings, as well as the meanings of their history, are made daily. “They can be imagined,” Massey concludes, “as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings... They are processes” (1991, p. 29). Places like BP are not mounted, dusty paintings: they are live, ongoing self-portraits.

Indeed, this active construction is central to understandings of place. “Place,” Creswell concludes, “is constituted through reiterative social practice—place is made and remade on a daily basis” (2004, p. 39). If Lefebvrian space is constantly (re)produced by society, so too is place. Friedmann stresses the iterative and performative qualities of place, while adding three more: “place must be small, inhabited, and come to be cherished or valued by its resident population” (2010, p. 154). A place is cherished, he argues, if users seek to defend it. They will do so because it is familiar, but also because it is a site of “centering – of encounter and gathering” (2010, p. 156), where people can meet to observe significant events together, to confirm their own and each other's identities, and to seek out the sacred. This criterion of “cherishing” echoes the earlier work of Tuan, who writes elegantly, “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know

it better and endow it with value” (1977, p. 6). Place “becomes,” rather than is, through subjective experience, regular social performance, and contingent attachment. This thesis will reveal if and how, in addition to table tennis competitions, BP is cherished and what types of gathering it hosts as a place.

*Placemaking*, then, refers to the embedding of meaning and identity into a place, a type of labelling or insertion. But it also serves to describe the processes of wrestling personal and group identity out of that place, an uncovering or reception. Placemaking is a messy, open-ended production of visible and invisible flows, ties, and relations. It is a “chancy event” (Fincher et al., 2016), as much a product of change as stability.

While theoretical discourses about place and placemaking often have been measured along the Harvey-Massey, bound-relational spectrum (Bird et al., 1993), a few empirical investigations into these processes have forged new paths. May, for example, observes that middle-class residents of a London neighborhood draw a place’s “Englishness” in an image of diversity that is neither rigidly bound nor progressively relational (1996). “Rather,” he argues, groups with higher levels of social capital are able to “construct a markedly bounded, and thus reactionary, sense of place *through* a particular vision of those global connections understood as articulated in an ethnically diverse area” (May, 1996, p. 196). Place, and the identities it embodies or imbues, apparently can be both fixed and fluid, past-facing and forward-looking, reactionary and progressive.

In his work, May calls for additional empirical studies on the connections between identity and place. “The polarization of the current debate,” he writes, “may be blinding us to the complexity of contemporary place identities and fuelling the failure to outline either a more developed, or a more grounded, politics of place” (May, 1996, p. 195). Recent studies of urban placemaking have started to fill this gap. Observing an elderly community in Rotterdam, for example, Blokland finds that a place’s built environment is not simply an articulation of social relations among users, but a set of “vehicles that they use to create, renew and restructure such relationships” (2001, p. 271). Blokland expands on Massey: places become, rather than are, but so do the relational elements inscribed in place. Placemaking should not be taken for granted: it is active, ongoing, and complex.

My research contributes to this growing body of nuanced urban place studies. I aim to provide, as May writes, “a more grounded” sketch of one specific place by compiling the many specific places people make of it and deconstructing the ways in which this unfolds.

### **Story**

Just as the crafting of human identity is connected to constructions of place, so too is it intertwined with story. Identity formation is an act of telling stories, to oneself and others. Identifying as something or someone means drafting fictional ties to an idea, narrating oneself as a character into the wider drama of life. “Man,” writes MacIntyre, “is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal” (1981, p. 201). Story’s relevance to human activity has received increasing scholarly attention since the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bruner describes a “paradigm shift” in the 1980s during which scholars recognized “the possibility of narrative as a form not only of representing but of constituting reality” (1991, p. 5). The “life as led,” he writes, has been increasingly seen as “inseparable from a life as told... not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and

reinterpreted, told and retold” (in Finnegan, 1998, p. 4). Understanding life around BP can be done by examining how it is “told,” because, again, stories about life are not merely descriptive – they are life itself.

Turner models this phenomenon through his concept of the “literary mind.” Our cognitive functions, he argues, are based in the literary principles of “story” (“narrative imagining”), “projection” (using one story to understand another), and “parable” (combining story and projection) (1998, p. 5). These processes of organization and interpretation, Turner claims, allow people to make sense of new situations, find meaning in their realities, and connect to one another. I will investigate how aspects of the literary mind manifest through BP.

If story has been fundamental to human thought, it also has been elemental to human cities. The foundation of a city often gives rise to a corresponding “foundation myth.” Serres analyzes perhaps the most famous origin story, as told by Livy: “So Romulus kills Remus, and he founds Rome” (2015, p. 9). This tale, Serres observes, absorbs and echoes the story in which Heracles kills the fire-breathing giant Cacus, who had been attacking the Aventine Hill, “as though one foundation weren’t sufficient to truly begin. As though an origin required its origin” (2015, p. 9). The iterative quality of myth is directly tied to the iterative form of place described above: stories, like cities, contain repetitions, traces, layers. “For Serres,” writes Brown, “it is the substitution or overlaying of the stories... which proves integral to the establishing of Rome” (2000, p. 148). The city, as an idea in people’s minds – as a place – rests on a foundation of narratives. Rome was not built in one day, nor in one story. It takes many stories, stacked and blended, to construct places like Rome and BP.

Foundation stories also shape urban design. Rykwert analyzes the influence of myth and founding “*rituales*” over Roman towns (1988, p. 30). He shows how Romans conducted most aspects of urban planning, from site location to gate construction to plot surveying, through the context of stories about animals, heroes, and, more than anything, gods. Romans treated the city as a “total mnemonic symbol,” he writes, “in which the citizen, through a number of bodily exercises, such as processions, seasonal festivals, sacrifices, identifies himself with his town, with its past and its founders” (1988, p. 189). Finding identity and making place in the city, it seems, have always been about regular engagement, rituals. Thousands of years after the Romans built cities out of stories, it will be revealing to investigate how people around BP identify with and design the square through their own story-based rites. Who writes the square’s founding myths, and what value do they hold today in the traditions, festivals, processions, institutions, and buildings of BP? How is the square viewed as a “total mnemonic symbol”?

Stories have helped citizens relate to the urban past, but they also have allowed citizens to formulate projections of their present and future. As Soares notes, some of the first thinkers to confront modern social problems in the city were in the business of crafting stories. The author describes how late-19<sup>th</sup>-century “New Journalists” (Soares, 2017), among them Charles Dickens and W.T. Stead, laid a groundwork for the emerging field of urban sociology through their exposés of poor houses and crowded slums. In trying to read the city, people even create new forms of storytelling.

Denmark’s most famous storyteller produces similarly innovative work in his literary debut. H. C. Andersen’s first novel, *Fodreise fra Holmens Canal til Østpynten af Amager i Aarene 1828 og 1829* (*A Journey on Foot from Holmen’s Canal to the Eastern Point of Amager in the Years 1828 and 1829*), follows one poet protagonist on a two-hour stroll through Copenhagen over New Year’s Eve, 1828. As he physically

walks from urban city center to rural surroundings, the poet mentally approaches his desire to become an author. Whereas this genre of coming-of-age Bildungsroman typically frames the hero's growth over time, *Fodreise* suggests "that such development is primarily spatial and not temporal" (Kramer, 2013, p. 42). Andersen presents Copenhagen as not just the setting for the poet's walk – it is the mechanism through which the poet transforms. In this first "københavnroman" ("Copenhagenroman") (Kramer, 2013, p. 44), then, the city is both text and character, an anthology of stories and a prominent player in each plot.

### **Making Place through Story**

*Fodreise* progressively connects city, story, and place. Andersen's work, published in 1828, anticipates the work of Agnew, Creswell, and Massey by showing how urban space can be recast as meaning-filled place. In his encounters with Copenhagen streets, buildings, and characters, the poet protagonist "frames the project of becoming an author as a remaking of space, transforming it into place" (Kramer, 2013, p. 44). In telling this tale, Andersen simultaneously does the same, literally "becoming an author" in his first novel by molding the spaces of his city into places that can be related to and identified with.

"Such is the work of urban narratives," de Certeau explains:

They create another dimension, in turn fantastical and delinquent, fearful and legitimating... they render the city "believable," affect it with unknown depth to be inventoried, and open it up to journeys. They are the keys to the city; they give access to what it is: mythical... Through stories about places, they become inhabitable. Living is narrativizing. (de Certeau et al., 1998, p. 142)

The French theoretician expresses the paradigm shift described by Bruner above: "life as led" is "life as told" – "living is narrativizing." For Andersen, Bruner, and de Certeau, the story is not just some method for understanding place. It is *the* method, the primary point of entry into studying how people relate to urban spaces. Place, story, and urban life can be seen as one unity, creating each other instantaneously. When someone tells a story about a place like BP, they make that place as it makes their story, and this co-production fuels urban life. Storytelling, in this light, *is* placemaking.

To complete such placemaking, urban stories often employ Bakhtin's notion of the "chronotope," a literary device through which time and space connect (1981). In *Fodreise*, Andersen's chronotope is the road: as the poet walks, he crosses space and time, encountering animals, people, and ghosts, but also visions of the underworld and Copenhagen in the year 2129 (Andersen, 2003). "Time, as it were," writes Bakhtin, "fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road); this is the source of the rich metaphorical expansion on the image of the road as a course" (1981, p. 244). Through story, tellers are able to address the intersections of time and space in the built environment.

This is not simply a phenomenon of the page. Basso (1996), for example, has demonstrated the Western Apache's chronotopic use of placenames. Infused with stories about morality, conflict, or history, the words people ascribe to places give those places power. As Basso's Apache respondent concludes, "Wisdom sits in places" (1996, p. 127). A placename serves as a shorthand for the stories that reflect and solidify placed meanings. Any study of the stories about a place must therefore

investigate names used to describe it. Nearly two centuries after *Fodreise*, I will bring the chronotope back to Copenhagen, measuring its presence among the tales of Andersen's storytelling descendants: How, in its stories, does BP collect conjunctions of time and space? How do the users of BP access its meanings through names? What stories – what “wisdom” – do they embed in BP, “Blue Court Square,” and its alias, Den Sorte Firkant, “The Black Square”? If the road can be a chronotope, so can the square.

My thesis will therefore help bridge the gap between literary studies and social sciences. This intersection remains relatively unexplored (Soares, 2017; Gillespie, 2012). It will also contribute to a recently growing body of work that appreciates storytelling's relevance in urban investigations. In *Tales of the City*, Finnegan acknowledges this trend: “This view of the major role of narrative in organising our knowledge and our experience... has been gathering greater momentum in recent years through the current interests in ‘story’ within social, cultural, and literary theory” (1998, p. 1). Pojani writes of a “communicative turn” (2018, p. 713) in the 1990s after which urban planners started to incorporate the daily stories of citizens into participatory planning. And Sandercock (2003) provides a treatise on the effectiveness of systematically bringing narrative forms to the study, practice, and teaching of urban planning. “Planning,” she writes, “is *performed* through story” (2003, p. 12). Numerous researchers have followed Sandercock's lead, producing storytelling-focused urban planning investigations (Bulken et al., 2015; Pstross et al., 2014; Mager & Matthey, 2015; and Mace & Volgmann, 2017).

Within the field of urban design, calls also have been made to use stories that emanate from residents, visitors, and buildings themselves to inform creative processes (Childs, 2008). And scholars have started to reveal ways in which urban regimes wield storytelling to various ends: Greenberg (2003) details New York's symbolic narrative of death and rebirth through its World Trade Center, and Peck (2005) describes how governments seek to rebrand their cities by embracing stories about the hipster bar, the gay district, and other features of Florida's “creative city.” Researchers successfully organize investigations into urban planning, design, and economics around the story in its various forms, from town hall histories to apartment complex advertisements.

But the potential applications of formal narrative categorizations have yet to be fully explored within the overlapping field of urban placemaking. Filling this research gap will help us better understand “the ways everyday interaction with the landscape shapes identity and experience” (Steady, 2017). Finnegan's *Tales of the City* works to close this gap, directly and systematically applying the formal structures of story to the perspectives and anecdotes of urban theorists and urban dwellers (1998). In doing so, she outlines a comprehensive framework for my thesis (see Chapter 3). Still, Finnegan neglects to elaborate on the meanings and role of place within narrative systems (Bridgman, 2000). She leaves open a research path for examining how narrative forms can influence both a person's sense of place and a researcher's understanding of that placemaking's position in identity creation, neighborhood flows, and other social processes. Through BP, a space full of story, I will build on Finnegan's work, measuring narrative's status in the creation of identity and place.

This path is ripe for exploration. The connections between story, place, and the urban are clear. Indeed, if there is one common “genre” of urban academic storytelling, Finnegan concludes, it involves “providing a vehicle through which participants can and do formulate an understanding of the human condition” (1998, p. 23). Just as places can be seen as “vehicles” (Blokland, 2001, p. 271) for

determining social relations, so too can stories be seen as “vehicles” for determining the “human condition.” Urban place, like planning, is “*performed*” through story. Stories, therefore, can and should be used to understand the ways in which those places configure society. It is my goal to attempt such an undertaking, the results of which will further demonstrate the usefulness of narrative-placemaking analyses to various fields, including urban planning, local history archiving, and community activism.

### ***Some Questions and a Drawing***

Figure 3 visualizes the links between identity, the built environment, place, and story. These connections serve as a foundation for my research on BP (the four elements of story will be described in Chapter 3). It is my goal to investigate how processes of storytelling and placemaking interact through the urban square. In the process, I aim to address a number of questions inspired by above theory:

What are the various identities of users of BP, and how are these identities projected onto the square? Are these identities reactive and/or Other-based? In its design, symbols, and embedded memories, how does the square facilitate such identity formation, either as a more neutral “stage” or an active giver of “cues”? How self-aware are users about identity formation on the square? Do they treat BP as a “place,” as a site of regular social engagement, performance, and cherishment? If so, what type – in Harvey’s bounded, oppositional identity refuge image, Massey’s relational, “global sense of place” (1991), or some combination of both?

What do the square’s tales teach us about how people think about and relate to the built environment through narrative forms? What literary minds, foundation myths, placenames, and chronotopes can be found on BP? How does urban storytelling reflect or even foster contestation on the square? How do stories physically change the square itself? What are the limits of using story to make place and theorize placemaking?

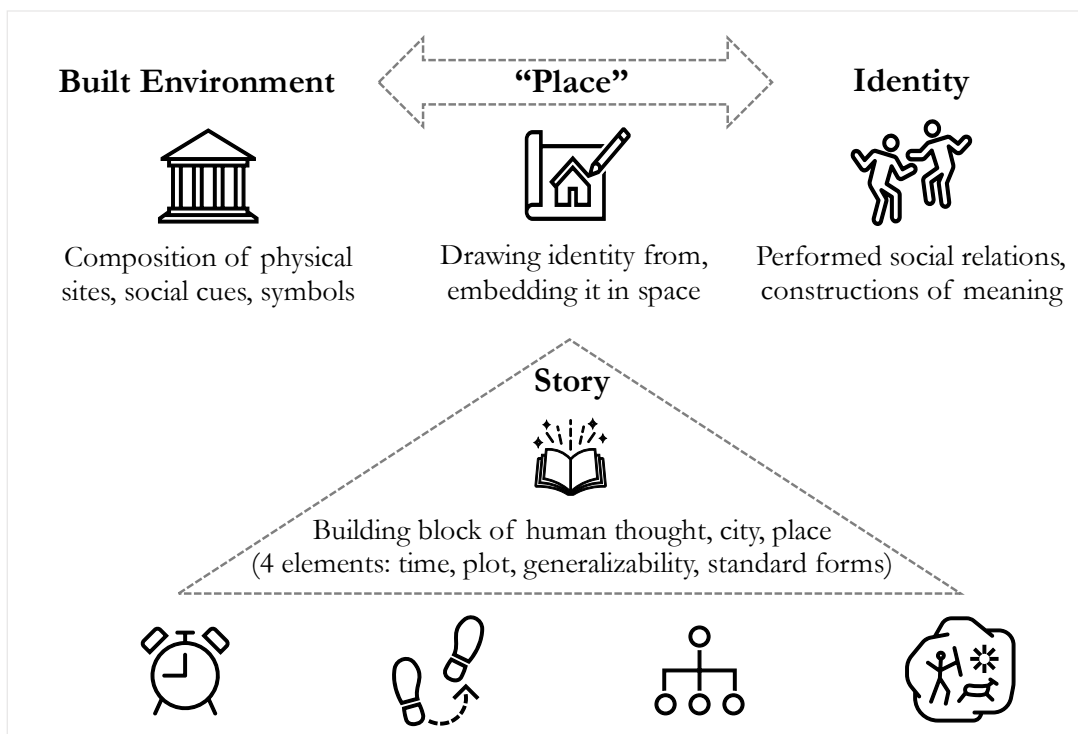
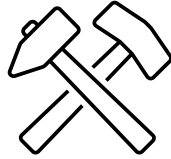


Figure 3: Research conceptualization, adapted from Gagnon-Boucher (2018)



### Chapter 3

## Finnegan's Wake: A Literary Framework for Place Studies

In *Tales of the City: A Study of Narrative and Urban Life*, Ruth Finnegan organizes an analysis of Milton Keynes, UK, around what she identifies as the four central components of story. I will now break down each and expand on their relevance to the study of urban placemaking. While synthesizing above-referenced ideas about place and story, this section will lend methodological credence to my borrowing of Finnegan's framework for place studies on Blågårds Plads. After describing the elements, I will detail the methods I followed to analyze tales emanating from the square in Copenhagen.

### *The Four Elements of Story*

The first quality of story, Finnegan writes, is “a temporal or sequential framework” (1998, p. 9). Stories are organizations of time, typically told through past tenses and a series of episodes. The order of episodes does not matter too much, but there should be order. There is normally some sort of “ticking clock” (Sandercock, 2003, p. 13). As described above, theoretical understandings of place are largely inscribed in time: Proshansky et al. depict a gradual accumulation (the “environmental past”) of place-inspired associations. The regularity by which social practices actively make place must operate through time. Blokland describes the centrality of historical narratives in New Haven residents' ability to symbolically enact limits on what or who constitutes “the community,” which manifests in uneven topographies of social access, prejudice, and control (2009). Places, like stories, are constructed over and with time, and the making of place should therefore be studied with this temporal dimension in mind.

According to Finnegan, the second quality of story is “some element of explanation or coherence” (1998, p. 9). This can take various forms, but it generally



refers to a sensible, recognizable sequence: “the patterns of the hero-tale, the rags-to-riches plot, the growth to maturity, the effects of villainy, or the fall from grace: the Golden Age lost” (Finnegan, 1998, p. 9). The explanatory nature of story is crucial to the study of place. Harvey’s notion that groups increasingly turn to place as a reaction to and against the Other, for example, embodies a “stranger comes to town” or “the effects of villainy” plot. Friedmann’s condition that places are cherished and defended connotes ideas of a hero-tale in which a community fights off external, alienating forces. Martin (2005) finds that residents of Notting Hill, UK, express place through stories about the loss of a Golden Age of traditional landscapes to gentrifying forces. He observes that such placemaking work varies across economic classes: working-class residents are less likely to express concern about gentrification than middle-class residents. The sticking power of urban explanatory plots, how often they are reproduced and the degree to which they are accepted, should therefore not be assumed, whether in Notting Hill or BP.

The third dimension, writes Finnegan, is the “potential for generalisability – something of the universal in the particular” (1998, p. 9). Related to the first two elements, this trait refers to the idea that stories entail specific examples of wider trends, of which storytellers and audiences have a shared understanding. Characters and readers pick up and interpret what Ginzburg calls “clues... details [that] provide the key to a deeper reality” (1980). This “semiotic approach” has gained increasing acceptance in the social sciences since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ginzburg, 1980). Indeed, analyzing the specific to understand the general is critical to urban theory, as scholars zoom in on specific sites (Barthes’ Eiffel Tower, Massey’s KFC) to point out something also seen elsewhere. In attempts to study place, scholars like Agnew and Tuan intrinsically make claims of universality. Researchers find that people cling to place by extracting broader connections from specificity, whether by knitting outside in Liverpool (Platt, 2019), claiming a Danish “public” in Copenhagen parks (Stanfield & Riemsdijk, 2019), or drinking in Amsterdam pubs (Ernst & Doucet, 2014). Through stories about place, researchers and subjects reach for the general from the particular.

Fourth, and finally, storytellers deliver these three narrative components – time, explanation, and generalizability – through standardized forms of “structure, style, protagonists, mode of distribution and content” (Finnegan, 1998, p. 11). Protagonists of academic urban stories can be “impersonal forces, (such as capitalism, globalization or the alienation of urban life)” writes Sandercock, “but there are also individuals who are seen as embodying these forces (such as wicked developers, alienated gang members, noble community activists)” (2003, p. 14). Authors like Lefebvre and Harvey center works around the “protagonists” of society, capitalism, and globalization. The characters of religion, secularization, gentrification, and the Other factor into studies of place in Sweden (Fridolfsson & Elander, 2012), Canada (Lynch, 2016), and France (Berg, 2019). Places are also portrayed and consumed through names (Basso’s chronotopes), events (Rykwert’s rituals), and advertisements (Peck’s creative city rebrands). On the whole, my research takes place itself as a form, a reflection of social relations and a “vehicle” through which they shift (Blokland, 2001).

These four fundamental elements of story – temporal frameworks, explanatory logics, generalizability, and standardized forms – constitute a comprehensive framework for the study of placemaking through narrative.



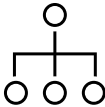

	Symbol	Definition	Manifestations	Place Implications
Temporal Framework		Sequence of episodes following some order; a “ticking clock”	Use of past tense, flashbacks; depiction of progress, change, development	Accumulation of “environmental pasts”; “bound” to or written from past
Explanatory Logic		Sensible, recognizable plot that follows a (moral) logic	Golden Age lost; rags-to-riches; hero’s tale; <i>Bildungsroman</i> ; parallel lives tragedy	Cherished center to be defended, exploited, changed; moralized binaries; “end” of place
Generalizability		Conveyance of the universal through the particular; vehicle of transferrable concepts	Symbols; signs; clues; familiar patterns; “life lessons”; epiphanies; induction	Site of individual and collective identity constructions; intersection of global-local flows
Standardized Forms		Typical and consumable devices, styles, structures, distribution modes	Protagonists, antagonists; 1 <sup>st</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> -person narrators; plot arcs; books, oral traditions, films	Battleground for local heroes, villains; place as “vehicle” for flows; chronotopic names; rituals as foundational

Figure 4: *The four elements of story, from Finnegan (1998) and Sandercock (2003)*

### **Not Just Fiction: Data Collection on the Square**

The notion that individual and collective stories contribute to the creation of identity-filled places implies a social constructionist research paradigm. This school, which encompasses Mead, Goffman, and other scholars cited above, takes reality, “truth,” as subjective – a production of individuals and groups (Berger & Luckman, 1966). There is no single objective reality but rather many realities that are each “constructed” through particular interactions and interpretations.

To study urban space through these various realities requires working from the ground up. I have therefore conducted empirical research on the level of the individual to follow the production of various complex realities through placemaking stories. Such a bottom-up perspective follows the lead of previous scholars who focus on the individual storyteller’s ability to shape symbolic reality constructions (Basso 1996; Blokland 2009; Pojani 2018). My approach is exploratory and inductive: I will explore the nature of placemaking narratives in one area, and the specific observations I make will accumulate and induce a few broader conclusions.

This work involves qualitative research methods. I have chosen qualitative methods given their effectiveness in producing “outcomes... most often composed of essential representations and presentations of salient findings from the analytic synthesis of data” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 4). Qualitative methods can help us understand processes, traditions, feelings, and experiences of public life (Martin, 2005). They facilitate the “chance to hear from disparate voices about the dynamics

and effects of being in public” (Rishbeth et al., 2018, p. 47). A qualitative approach provides the depth and flexibility needed to study complex ideas of urban identity and human meaning.

I have chosen to record the “disparate voices” emanating from BP, a public square in Copenhagen, Denmark. I have decided to approach processes of placemaking storytelling via a case study because of the form’s ability to uncover in-depth knowledge about bounded questions (Saldaña, 2011). “In general,” Yin notes, “case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (2003, p. 1). My focus is on how and why stories influence contemporary placemaking activities, over which I have no control.

I have chosen BP as my case for practical and conceptual reasons. I encountered the square shortly after moving to Copenhagen in August 2020. While first visiting the space on a Friday evening, I recognized its multilayered value as the square filled with diverse demographic groups. For the next two months, I performed external research into its history, relying mainly on Copenhagen’s municipal photograph and oral history archives. I supplemented these materials with modern records about BP in newspapers, journals, websites, and social media outlets. Whenever I encountered documents written in Danish, I was forced to rely on online translation software such as Google Translate and DeepL.

While developing contextual background, I began to perform visual investigations of the built environment in and around the square. This fieldwork consisted of taking photographs, embodying and moving through the space, and collecting personal observations of the physical space. I sat in, walked around, and biked through BP regularly, at different times of the day and different days of the week. This observation, conducted as a passive, peripheral, “complete observer” (Tracy, 2013, p. 113), became routine, helped in part by the square’s convenient location between my apartment in Frederiksberg and my university in Amager. Such grounded, bottom-up experiences allowed me to “follow the thicks and thins of [the] urban ‘text’” that is BP (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93). Despite de Certeau, I did my best to read it too.

My surveys of the square’s built forms began to merge with surveys of its social forms. I performed ethnographic research into what people did on the square. As I spent more time on BP, I began to have brief informal conversations with square users. In observing social activities on the square, I transitioned from “complete observer” to “play participant,” eager to “not only watch but follow around, eat, spectate, and play with participants (Gill, 2011)” (in Tracy, 2013, p. 109). Indeed, I started to eat food, socialize, attend concerts, and play ping pong on the square. I brought friends to the square; I made friends on the square.

As I accumulated written documents and ethnographic observations, I embarked on my third stage of research – semi-structured interviews. I began interviewing people around BP in September 2020, but the majority of my interviews took place in December 2020 and January 2021. In total, I completed 24 interviews, which lasted, on average, 70 minutes in length. Six interviews took place in person, face-to-face, one of which was a walking tour of the neighborhood given by a resident (Jann). The remaining 20 interviews took place over the phone and through online platforms. The digital nature of most interviews stemmed predominately from increasing COVID-19 restrictions on social gatherings that were heightened in Copenhagen during December 2020. Two interviews were group interviews. All participants consented to being interviewed and were made

aware of my research's context. I took written notes during each interview and made audio recordings of each with consent.

I interviewed people who lived around BP or worked at shops, restaurants, and other organizations on the square and its adjacent street, Blågårdsgade. These people responded to email requests and phone calls that I made blindly. Some suggested additional contacts to interview. I also found a few respondents in person, by walking into shops or engaging with people outside, but it should be noted that these spontaneous connections were made much more difficult by COVID-19 restrictions. Finally, I was able to interview a few former residents of BP, to whom I reached out digitally. Figure 5 provides more detailed information on each interview. The names of some respondents have been changed upon request.

While interviewing, I used an interview guide focusing on the respondent's usage of BP and their perception of the square's history, identity, and position in Nørrebro (see Appendix 1). All interviews were conducted in English, which is my first language but the second language of most of my respondents. Interviews took on a semi-structured format, in which I asked a few open-ended questions and adapted the discussion's direction based on responses.

It is important to briefly discuss my positionality. I am a young, educated, upper-middle-class white man from the United States. I have an academic background in history and professional experience in criminal justice, journalism, and youth development. Before this research endeavor, I had never been to Copenhagen, having lived primarily in Vienna, Brussels, New York City, New Haven, and Washington, DC, my hometown.

My positionality likely influenced the range of people who responded to my interview requests. My inability to speak Danish, Arabic, and other languages of the square's diverse residents limited my sample of respondents. Overall, my positionality may have influenced the fact that I ended up with predominately male respondents (16 of the 27 individuals interviewed). My background working in journalism and the criminal justice system likely drove my desire to speak with a reporter, a local police officer, and a crime novelist.

Within interviews, my positionality also might have shaped the answers I received. A few respondents expressed anxiety at the beginning of interviews about their English levels. In each interview, however, these anxieties were subsequently displaced by their ability to convey complex subject matters in clear, eloquent English. In many cases, respondents also provided original Danish words and expressions to supplement their English answers. Still, the power dynamics involved when a native speaker interviews a non-native speaker must be acknowledged. In general, respondents were quite open, excited to talk about the square with a newcomer.

Finally, as someone drawn almost innately to older built spaces and their ability to guide and embed human behavior, I am aware of a potential bias towards historical and architectural determinism. We all use (hi)stories to understand the world around us, but not everyone has the interest (or time) to talk about it. In interviewing people who were not writing a thesis about stories, then, I tried to maintain the perspective of a neutral observer, absorbing information that might relate to larger narratives rather than forcing narrative down my respondents' throats.

Name	Sex	Ethnic Background	Approx. Age	Occupation/BP Relation	Interview Length
Björn	M	Swedish	55	Local concert hall director, resident	1h24m
Sebastian	M	German	50	Computer scientist, resident	56m
Fei, Lorenzo, Kalle	F/M /M	Danish-Chinese; Italian; Danish	25	Musicians, square users	1h
Dorte	F	Danish	55	Local library coordinator	54m
Jonatan	M	Danish	30	Local shop owner, resident	40m
Jens	M	Danish	60	Resident	1h34m
Maria	F	Danish-Greek	40	Local shop owner, resident	2h5m
Randi	F	Danish	45	Musician, square user	1h16m
Mark	M	Danish	50	Musician, former resident	1h12m
Jann	M	Danish	60	Professor, resident	1h28m
Katrine	F	Danish	70	Journalist, former resident	54m
Kasper	M	Danish	30	Community police officer	1h56m
Alev	F	Danish-Turkish	25	Tourism worker, square user	53m
Pauline	F	Swedish	25	Musician, square user	1h3m
Madeleine	F	Danish	30	Local culture worker	1h16m
Jesper	M	Danish	55	Writer, former resident	57m
Felix	M	Mexican-Spanish	45	Local shop owner	59m
Pia	F	Danish	50	Social worker, resident	1h14m
Rahim	M	Iranian	65	Local shop owner	1h35m
Mudi	M	Danish-Jordanian	35	Local social worker, resident	1h13m
Alex	M	Danish	45	Local culture worker	50m
Naim, Kate	M/F	Danish-Palestinian-Jordanian; Danish-Indian	35; 50	Local shop owners, resident and former resident	1h1m
Åsmund	M	Danish	55	Local culture worker	24m
Lisbeth	F	Danish	50	Local social worker, resident	1h24m

Figure 5: Interviews conducted, in order of completion

### **The Real Literature Review: Data Analysis**

Upon completion of these interviews, I performed a transcription of each audio recording. While I used a transcription service, Otter, to obtain a basic, rough draft of each transcript, I went through each many times by hand for revisions and corrections. I also transcribed notes I had taken before, during, and after interviews. I then wrote summaries for each interview, which helped me isolate key themes and connections.

Following a grounded theory methodology, I began to code the 24 interviews. I enlisted the help of NVivo, a basic coding software. This software allowed me to organize material through various coding methods, which I borrowed from Saldaña's "First Cycle Coding" (2013): structural coding, descriptive coding, process coding, values coding, versus coding, narrative coding, and motif coding. As I coded, I wrote regular analytic memos to keep track of links, patterns, and difficulties.

After this first round of coding, I had accumulated 88 distinct codes (see Appendix 3). I reviewed these for possible eliminations, combinations, hierarchies, and other relationships. This resulted in a handful of key topics with corresponding subsections. Keeping in mind these central ideas, I reviewed the transcripts again for possible “pattern codes” and “theoretical codes” (Saldaña, 2013). I did not project personal assumptions onto the data, instead letting the transcripts and their codes guide me to wider themes. From this inductive method, the processes of placemaking and storytelling emerged as the most significant common denominators across all interviews. Such a result was neither intended nor expected – the original research goal had actually been to study spaces of music around the square. But my fieldwork on BP produced a rich collage of place-based narrativization.

Given the common denominator of story across my interviews on the square, I decided to organize my results along three of the four fundamental elements of story. Chapter 5 lays out these findings, analyzing tales of BP through temporal frameworks, explanatory logics, and standardized forms. Each narrative element allows me to inspect snapshots of the square through the filter of story. Then, in Chapter 6, I use story’s generalizability dimension as a tool for drawing wider conclusions from this research.

### *Circling the Square: Limitations*

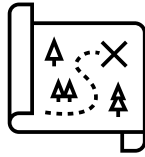
Before opening the book on BP, though, it is necessary to list a few limitations of this project. The first involves language. As mentioned above, my inability to read or speak Danish inherently restricts my ability to analyze stories largely about and told by Danish people. In my opinion as a native English speaker, I considered every one of my respondents to possess a near-fluent grasp of the English language. Still, as language is a central component of creating place through story, this limitation should be noted. Whether in my review of online materials, my spontaneous interactions with users on BP, or my interviews, I do my best not to lose much in translation, but undoubtedly a certain level of nuance slips through.

Second, a few groups are underrepresented in my sample of interviewees. The most obvious gap is Muslim women, who live in social housing units around the square but in my experiences were far less prominent in outdoor spaces. I was able to obtain a few contacts within these communities and hoped to break through, but I was unsuccessful. On the other hand, I also did not have success reaching a group that is highly visible on the square: the boys and young men of immigrant descent who hang out daily around BP. My respondents alluded to these youths frequently, but my attempts to make contact in person with them bore no fruit. Due to COVID restrictions, I was also limited in part by a potential respondent’s access to digital communication technologies. Finally, homeless or housing insecure individuals, as well as people with disabilities, do not make it into my sample.

To be sure, then, this thesis does not present all of BP’s stories or storytellers, places or identities. Nor will it cover all issues embedded in BP to as great a depth as many readers might hope. The central themes running through the square, particularly movements towards or away from neighborhood cohesion, leftist politics, and gentrification, could each invoke individual theses on their own. Rather than diving into one particular element, I have decided to weave many of them together through the structures of narrative.

Most of the academic literature cited above has been written by scholars living in or studying the so-called Global North, particularly Western Europe and North America. This geographic bias presents a theoretical limitation. There are, for example, rich traditions of crafting narratives from other parts of the world that contain alternative understandings of a story's "essence." These do not make it into my analysis. There is also a gender imbalance in my bibliography, with far more male authors cited.

Finally, like most other aspects of life, this project has been limited by the COVID-19 pandemic. Approaching strangers in a foreign country is never easy, but doing so from behind a mask and with distance restrictions presents a new degree of difficulty. Moreover, a number of social events – concerts, festivals, tournaments – were cancelled on BP during the course of my study. These events are typically filled with storytelling and placemaking, so I have done what I can to compensate by reviewing materials from their pre-COVID iterations.



## Chapter 4

### Blågårds Plads, Nørrebro, Copenhagen, Denmark

**B**lågårds Plads is a public square located in Nørrebro, one of Copenhagen's ten official districts. More specifically, the square falls in Indre ("Inner") Nørrebro between the Assistens Kirkegård cemetery and the Peblinge Sø lake. It is adjacent to a pedestrianized section of Blågårdsgade, which runs northeast to Nørrebrogade, the district's central thoroughfare. In ten to fifteen minutes, one can walk from the square, cross Dronning Louises bridge, and find Nørreport station before walking down to Strøget and Rådhuspladsen. BP is central.

Nørrebro has a population of just over 80,000 inhabitants, around 12 percent of the city's total population (København Kommune, 2020a). Encompassing about four square kilometers, the district is the densest area of Copenhagen.<sup>1</sup> If Nørrebro were a standalone city, it would be Denmark's fifth largest. In statistical terms, it is fair to say that Nørrebro is a territory of extremes. Compared to other districts, over the past fifteen years it has had the lowest population growth, the lowest average age (33 years), the lowest life expectancy (76.4 years), and the second-lowest average disposable income level (193,000 DKK) (København Kommune, 2020d). In the neighborhood conglomeration of Blågårdskvarteret, Assistens, and Rantzausgade (hereafter, "BAR," see Figure 7), 44 percent of residents are under 30 years old (København Kommune, 2020a). 66 percent are under 40 (København Kommune, 2020a).

Much of Nørrebro's building stock is more than a century old: over 42 percent of its buildings were commissioned before 1920; 66 percent are prewar (København Kommune, 2020b). Still, around 21 percent of structures come from the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when city officials cleared large sections

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<sup>1</sup> Nørrebro's ratio of 20,000 people per square kilometer is twice that of Østerbro, the next densest district in Copenhagen (København Kommune, 2020a).



of the neighborhood (København Kommune, 2020b).<sup>2</sup> Building stock statistics on the square roughly resemble those of wider Nørrebro. In BAR, 66 percent of buildings are prewar, while 28 percent are from the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (København Kommune, 2020b). Coincidentally, 28 percent is also the portion of Blågårdskvarteret units that are social housing, higher than the city-wide average of 20 percent (København Kommune, 2014, p. 32). These units, like those on the square itself, are typically made from cheap, prefab brick materials. Many contain small apartments and large families. Of the 345 total families with over three children living in Nørrebro, 104 live in BAR (København Kommune, 2020c).

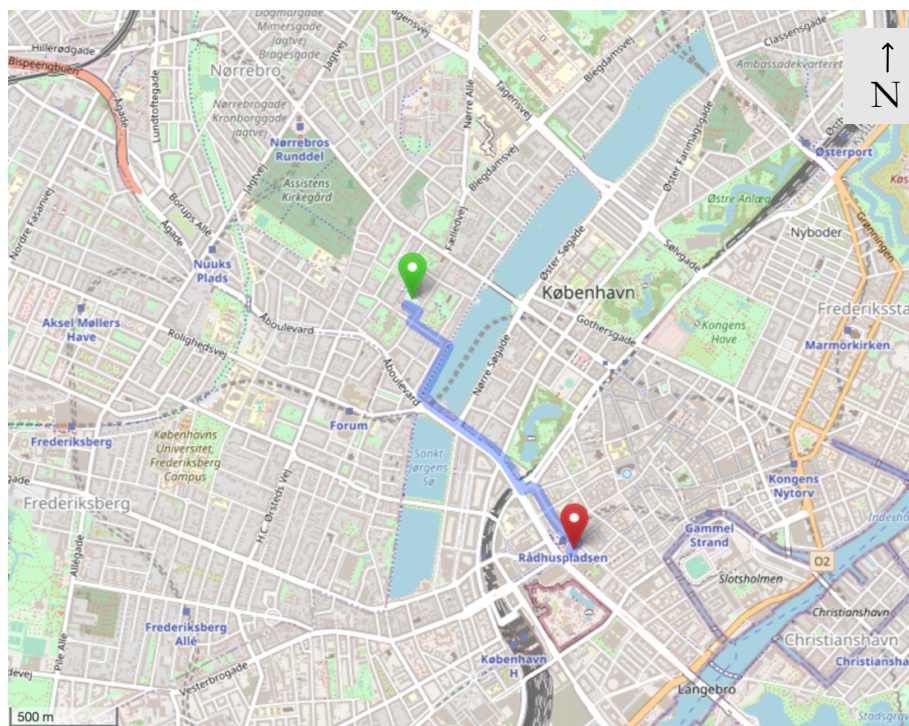


Figure 6: BP (green) to Rådhuspladsen (red), with added compass (OpenStreetMap, 2021)

Many of these families are of immigrant descent. If young people represent one prominent subgroup within Nørrebro and BP, immigrants represent another. Denmark is home to over 614,000 immigrants and 192,000 immigrant descendants (“*efterkommere*”), which together make up nearly 14 percent of the total population (Danmarks Statistik, 2020). The *efterkommere* slice is rising quickly, with over one in five children born in Denmark in 2020 having immigrant parents, a 15 percent increase from 1989 (Danmarks Statistik, 2020). These Danes often have non-Western roots, with heritage in countries like Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq (see Figure 8). One in four Copenhagen residents is an immigrant or immigrant

<sup>2</sup> Walking through Nørrebro, notes Stensgaard, it is relatively easy to distinguish between these two eras of construction: “The dividing line between the old and the new is roughly speaking Nørrebrogade. On the right as you come from town there is the old part. On the left you have the Green Square, where entire streets were demolished and replaced by prefabricated elements with a red ‘wall carpet’ and concrete bands as a contrast” (2005, p. 255).

descendant, and 15 percent of residents come from non-Western countries (Danmarks Statistik, 2020).<sup>3</sup>

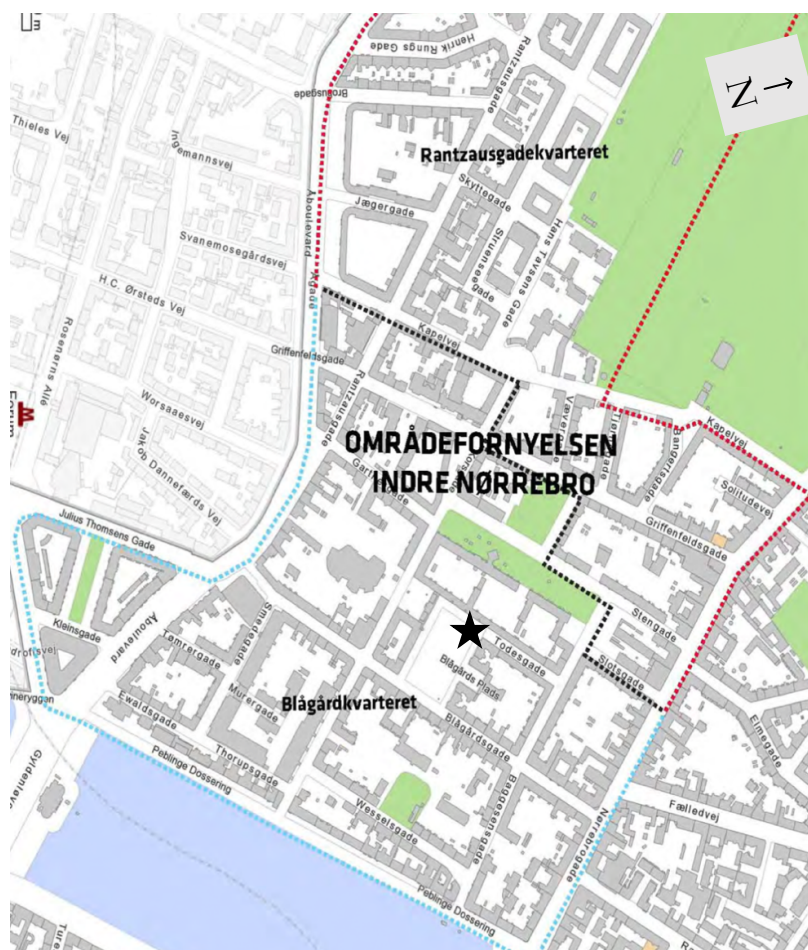


Figure 7: BAR with added compass and star on BP (Københavns Kommune, 2014, p. 7)

The graphs in Figure 8 reflect historical events and global flows that have brought foreigners to Denmark since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Such movement has come in waves. The first, not represented in Figure 8, involved workers from Turkey, Yugoslavia, Pakistan, and North Africa in the late 1960s (Open Society Foundations, 2011). A second wave in the 1980s consisted of “family reunification and the arrival of political asylum-seekers” from countries like Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Somalia (Open Society Foundations, 2011, p. 39). Most of these second-wave migrants had Muslim backgrounds. Whereas authorities largely welcomed the first wave of workers as an import of labor to fuel post-war economic expansion in Denmark, leaders in Copenhagen responded to this second wave with fear. In the late 1980s, officials tried to spread immigrants out geographically to avoid the creation of “ghettos,” and the newcomers became “scapegoats” for anxieties about a welfare crisis (Open Society Foundations, 2011, p. 39). In the 90s, national authorities appeased Copenhagen politicians by enacting

<sup>3</sup> “Non-Western,” in this case, refers to countries outside of the European Union, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Switzerland, Vatican City, United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

legislation that restricted immigrants from moving out of the municipalities to which they had been assigned (Open Society Foundations, 2011).

Indvandrere fra de tolv lande med størst repræsentation i Danmark efter første indvandringsår. 2020

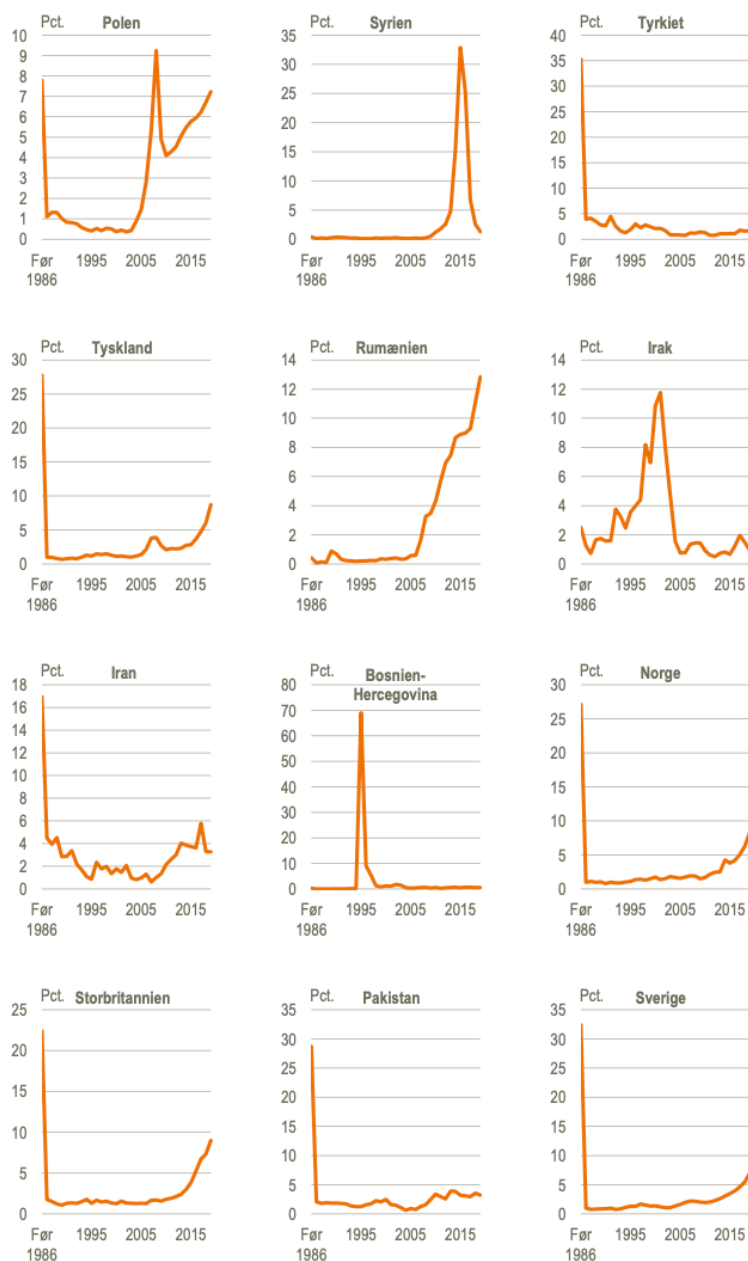


Figure 8: “Immigrants from the twelve countries with the largest representation in Denmark after the first year of immigration” (Danmarks Statistik, 2020, p. 17)

This policy has had spatial effects on the urban environment, contributing to the formation of multiethnic inner-city clusters like BP. Meanwhile, Social Democrat and Liberal-Conservative national regimes have restricted access to citizenship and immigration in general (Open Society Foundations, 2011). An anti-Muslim Danish People’s Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*) has grown steadily, often working in cooperation with the Liberal-Conservative coalition. Across the board, anti-

immigrant discrimination and prejudice in Danish laws and Danish minds have increased, especially since the September 11, 2001, terror attacks and ousting of Social Democrats in national elections one month later (Rytter & Pedersen, 2014). Many have identified integration obstacles faced by immigrants into Danish society, and the notion of *parallelsamfund* – “parallel societies” – has become a regular concern in political and public discourse (Markholst & Dahl, 2012). These discriminatory policies and roadblocks have affected predominately non-Western immigrants. Over the past ten years, immigration to Denmark has continued, but it has consisted primarily of international students and workers from Europe. The graphs in Figure 8 illustrate this trend, with recently rising numbers of immigrants from Sweden, Norway, Romania, and Poland.

Nørrebro’s population makeup has been shaped significantly by these trends. 21 percent of all current residents were born in a foreign country (København Kommune, 2020a). This figure does not include the growing numbers of immigrant descendants, which increase Nørrebro’s total percentage of residents of foreign descent to at least 27 percent (Københavns Kommune, 2014). More than half of these individuals come from countries with Muslim majorities or substantial minorities: some 19 percent of all Nørrebro inhabitants originate in non-Western countries (Københavns Kommune, 2014). One in four people living around Blågård’s Plads has non-Western roots (Markholst & Dahl, 2012).

For its part, BP is surrounded by similarly diverse demographics. 23 percent of BAR residents were born abroad (København Kommune, 2020a). The square acts as a physical manifestation of Denmark’s above-described immigration patterns. It is home to many non-Western immigrants and their children on the one hand and an increasing number of Western students and young professionals on the other. In analyzing population statistics, then, it is already clear how BP starts to embody Massey’s configuration of place as a series of “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” that extend well beyond Nørrebro and Denmark (1991, p. 29). The square’s “networks” are global.

### **Blågård’s History: Noble Estate, Working-Class Enclave, Social Battleground**

The land on which BP sits has hosted different groups and functions. It first enters the history books in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when it became a country residence of the statesman Christoffer Gabel. The land changed hands often, always to hands of nobility. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Prince Carl, brother of then-King Frederik IV, had a large estate built, called “Blågård,” or “blue court,” apparently because of the glazed blue tiles on its roof (Appendix 4.2). Through the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the area was home to a clothing factory, a teacher seminary, and a theater.

In a map drawn around 1797, a sparse landscape surrounds Blågård, then still very much a country manor. Following the 1852 removal of a demarcation line prohibiting buildings beyond the city’s artificial lakes, this semi-rural character began to change. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw intense movement into districts beyond Copenhagen’s original limits. Nørrebro was established as the “north bridge” neighborhood to take pressure off a cramped, disease-ridden city center (Schmidt, 2017). Maps from 1856 and 1858 illustrate the pace of urbanization around Blågård, as divisions and subdivisions multiplied soon after the demarcation line’s fall.

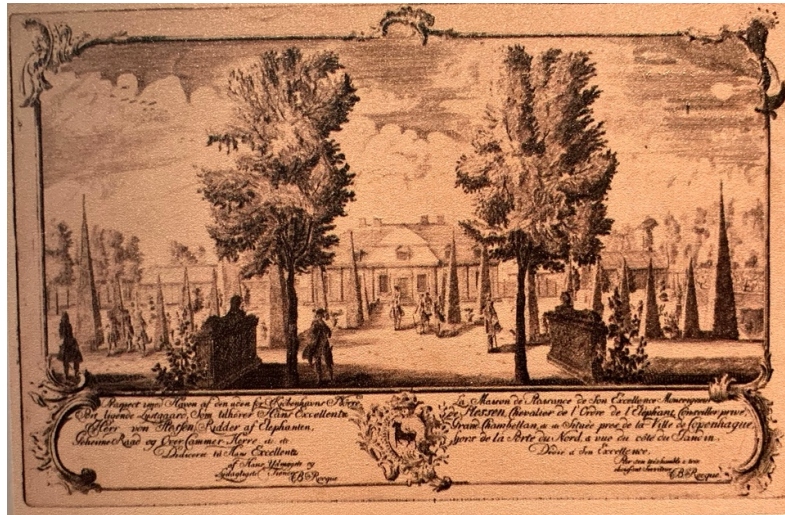


Figure 9: Barthélémy de la Roque, “Blågård Manor,” 1750 (in Københavns Museum, 2020)

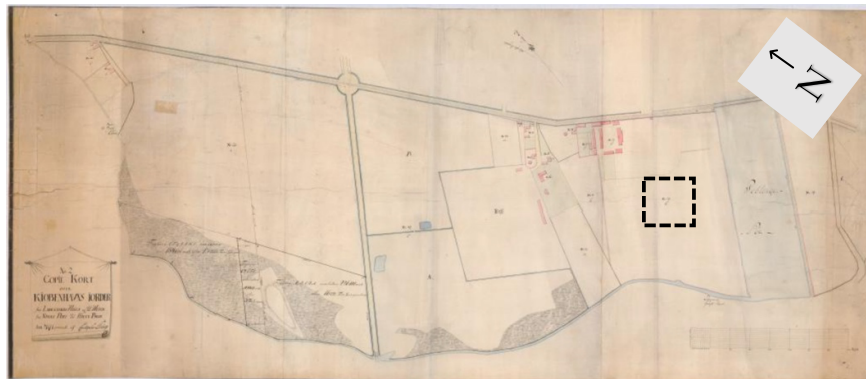


Figure 10: Semi-rural Blågård (square, compass added by author) (Lønborg, 1797)

The space that would become BP played a key role in Nørrebro’s urban growth. The estate had been turned into an iron foundry around 1830, which Anker Heegaard managed for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Heegaard needed workers, who moved to Nørrebro’s newly erected four-story buildings, squeezing into small flats often shared by eight people (Larsson & Thomassen, 1991). As was common in cities across Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, pollution from the iron factory was severe, causing health problems among workers and their families. Marie Biller, born in 1878, recalls growing up in the area: “We lived at Blågård’s Plads, where there was a dirty smithy that daily spilled soot and dirt all over the neighborhood” (Appendix 4.1).

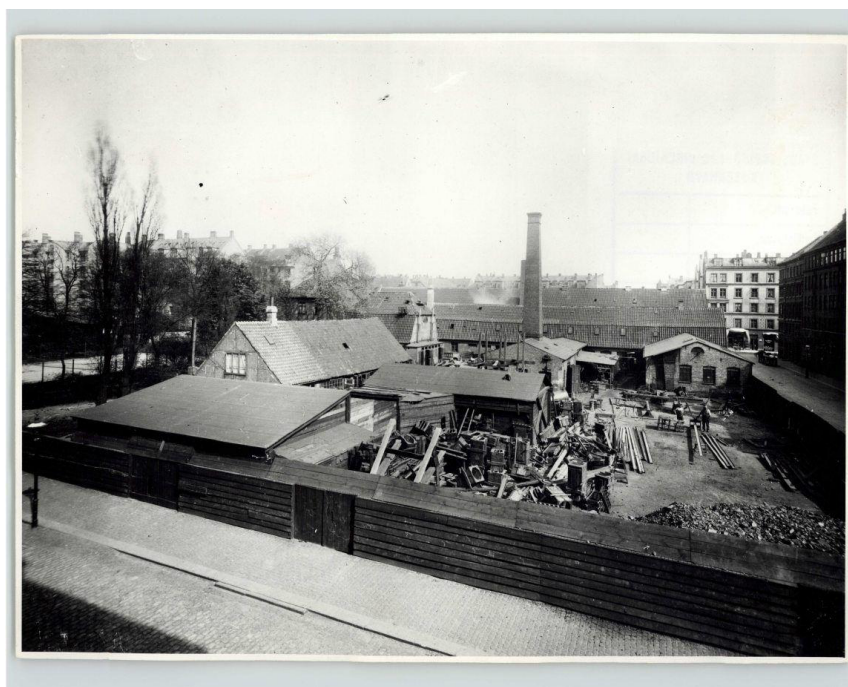
Biller’s memory is important for two reasons, both related to naming. First, it offers an early record of the complete transformation from country estate, “Blågård,” to urban square, “Blågård’s Plads.” Second, it provides a potential clue for the area’s nickname, Den Sorte Firkant. By 1900, Blågård was no longer a place for blue bloods living in blue houses. This was an industrial square, a dirty square – a Black Square.



Figure 11: Blågård, 1856 (square, compass added) (Orienteringsplan over Nørrebro Og Blågård)



Figure 12: Blågård, 1858 (square, compass added) (Plan Af Forstaden Nørrebro)



*Figure 13: Anker Heegaard's iron foundry, c. 1895 (Københavns Stadsarkiv)*

Although Heegaard's heirs sold the iron foundry land to the city in 1898, BP continued to act as a home and meeting point for workers throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. City officials cleared the area and enlisted an architect and a sculptor, Ivar Bentsen and Kai Nielsen, to design a public square on the site in 1913. Bentsen laid out a sunken square, 50 meters long and 30 meters wide, with a raised platform for speakers on its northern length. Nielsen carved 22 sculptures of workers – a bricklayer, a blacksmith, a stonemason – to adorn the square's stone edges, each chiseled adult twisting around playful stone children. With its powerful statues and inviting pulpit, the square's design embodied the neighborhood's working-class character. As the artist Harald Slott-Møller observed in 1914, BP was “a newspaper article made in stone” (Zerlang, in press, n.p.). Well before de Certeau, the square's first users were already reading it as a mediating text: BP presented a particular type of space, worker-oriented socialist space, for all to see and read. This Lefebvrian spatial (re)production was conscious, and its authors were satisfied. To Nielsen, this was the “first square in the world made especially for socialists and their kids” (Zerlang, in press, n.p.).

Indeed, over the next few decades socialists and their kids did use the square. In the Copenhagen Museum photo archive, prewar images of BP typically feature either political demonstrations or children at play. The square was used for, among other things, a Child Welfare Day in 1920, a political meeting and a sandbox playdate in 1926, and a student political gathering in 1935. But the socialists' enemies also used the square. Wilfred Petersen, who would lead Nazi terrorist groups against the Danish resistance, gave at least one speech on BP before the war. On September 29, 1935, the Conservative Youth (KU) party held a meeting in BP, hoping to build support for a fascism-inspired challenge to the Social Democratic government of Thorvald Stauning. The party, eager to incite a violent confrontation, chose the square specifically because of its working-class ties, and their wish came true in the form of an afternoon brawl between 500 KU demonstrators, 2000 counterdemonstrators, and some 225 police officers

(Krautwald, 2017). KU members had tried to paint Den Sorte Firkant fascist black, but the reds and blues came out in droves to protect their square. BP had become a battleground, a place to be defended.



*Figure 14: Political rally, possibly the violent KU meeting in 1935 (Lund-Hansen)*

After the war, the square continued to act as a charged center of social power struggles. Both working-class families and working-class industries moved out of Nørrebro during the 1960s and 70s. This exodus turned the neighborhood into “a devastated city with large empty spaces and deserted buildings” (Stensgaard, 2005, p. 249). Squatters started to occupy decrepit flats throughout Inner Nørrebro and around BP. City officials, in particular Mayor Egon Weidekamp, responded with what Kvorning has called “tabula rasa renewal” through which authorities “virtually replaced all the existing houses with a single type of building,” those brick and concrete prefab units (2001, p. 128).

The slum clearance was met with fierce local opposition. In the 1970s, for example, officials made proposals to clear, among other structures, a playground called Byggeren, “The Builder.” Residents resisted these plans by forming physical and human blockades on streets as large as Nørrebrogade. Violent clashes erupted between residents, police officers, police dogs, and construction machines. Located just two blocks away from Byggeren, BP served as a stage to organize and express neighborhood resistance. On May 5, 1980, tens of thousands gathered on the square before marching to Rådhuspladsen to protest the playground’s destruction (Jensen, 2011). Their efforts failed, and Byggeren was cleared in a week.





*Figure 15: Child Welfare Day, 1920 (Københavns Stadsarkiv)*



*Figure 16: Wilfred Petersen on BP around 1940 (Lund-Hansen)*

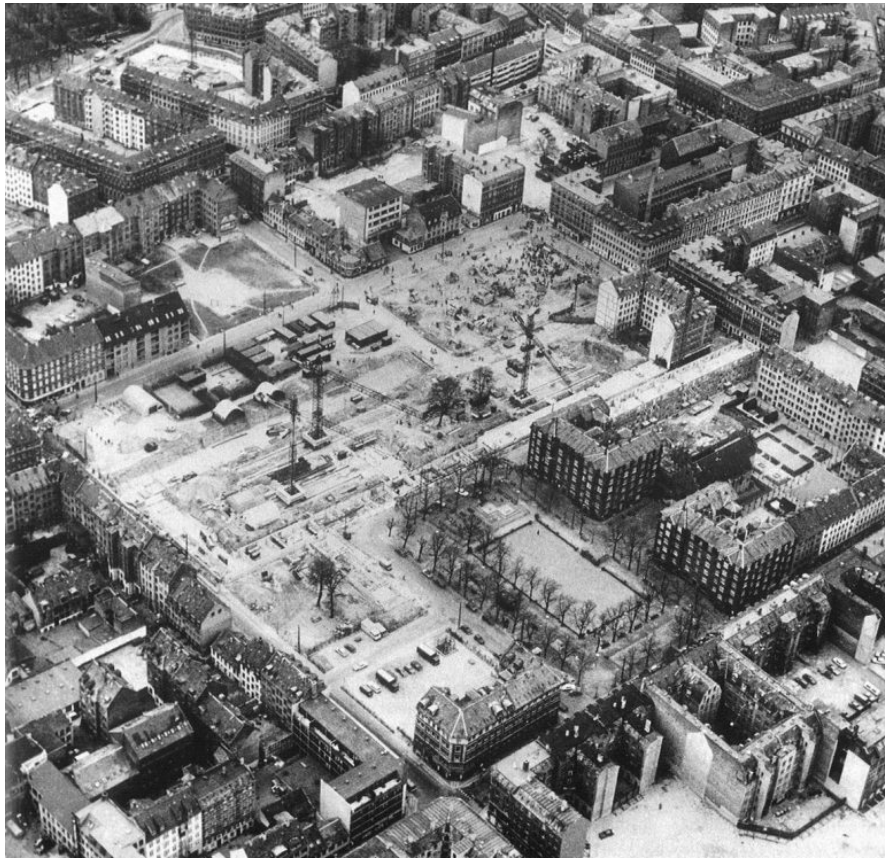


Figure 17: “Renewal” around BP, 1983 (courtesy of Jens)

13 years later, the square became a catalyst for one of Denmark’s most violent riots in history. A second referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, which called for an expanded European Union, barely passed in Denmark on May 18, 1993. Many were angry with this result, especially given that the referendum had failed to pass in 1992. That evening, at least 1500 people met on BP to listen to the rock band Chumbawumba before starting a chant that would take them out to Nørrebrogade and over to Skt Hans Torv, where they began throwing newly laid cobblestones at police (Nielsen, 2018). The police responded by firing some 113 shots into crowds of protestors, wounding 11 (Nørtoft, 2013). As in the 1930s and 1980s, then, in the 1990s BP spatially concentrated political movements, serving as a physical tipping point for wider social trends. Moreover, the square demonstrated how “the importance of a place... lies not just in what can happen there, but also in the things that begin or end there” (Olwig, 2006, p. 178).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two other forces have made their mark in and around BP. First, criminal gangs have started to occupy the square. During the 2000s, it even became the home base of a so-called BP gang, “BGP,” which would go on to become part of the larger Loyal to Familia (LTF) gang (Joumaa, 2009). A gang presence on the square has mainly consisted of nonviolent drug sales, but it has also included periods of violence. Three innocent bystanders were killed in a series of drive-by shootings in 2009 (Sullivan), and in 2017 a gang war set off almost weekly shootings in Nørrebro (Milne).

Alongside the rise of gangs, the neighborhood has also experienced an increase in rents and prices. Many identify this trend as the inevitable hand of gentrification:

When the sandwich shops, the Chinese takeaways and the dark brown pubs with their one-armed bandits and terylene curtains disappear, and second-hand Arne Jacobsen, hand-built bicycles and bagels with chorizos suddenly make their appearance... then it will have happened. (Stensgaard, 2005, p. 246)

Nevertheless, residents have organized to put up some sort of fight. They tried, for instance, to sabotage corporate coffee shops a few blocks from the square by filling them with random objects (Bloom, 2013). But such guerilla tactics have done little to slow the incoming tide of capital. Nørrebro has become known as one of the “coolest” neighborhoods in the world, ranked number 28 in Time Out magazine’s 2020 list (Manning, 2020). The area is now popular for its nightlife, “fancy cafes, bars and designer shops” (Schmidt, 2012, p. 607). As in Brooklyn or Berlin, in Nørrebro popularity and capital have followed one another. The district of extremes has seen the largest increase in price per square meter, 116 percent, since 2009 (København Kommune, 2020d).

Through this quick journey through the history of BP, I have started to break the stone surface of storytelling on the square. In doing so, I have illustrated this place’s political prominence, its diverse uses and users, its capacity for violence, and its current precarious position in the crosshairs of a few gangs selling drugs, and a few others selling expensive flats. “Gentrification,” writes Bloom, “is the erasure of the stories a neighborhood tells itself” (2013, p. 9). If that is true, and if gentrification is making its way onto the square, it has never been more important to ask, *What are the stories of BP?* Addressing this question may help to preserve tales at risk of being erased.



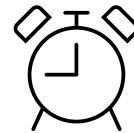
## Chapter 5

### Making Story of Blågårds Plads

In this chapter I will analyze Blågårds Plads along three essential elements of story: temporal frameworks, explanatory logics, and standardized forms. I will pull data from an online collection of “memories” in the Copenhagen City Archive and 24 semi-structured interviews I performed.<sup>4</sup> The memories and interviews, alongside personal observations made on the square, will shed light on how users of BP express identity through place, how the square’s physical form influences its literal and symbolic functions, and how narrative forces shape both processes.

#### I. TEMPORAL FRAMEWORKS

Every story is a sequence of episodes following some order. Audiences sense a clock ticking, time passing. Such a temporal framework underlies BP as well. Time can be operationalized along two themes: the square as a site of histories and the square as a container of cycles.



##### *The Square as a Site of Histories*

BP has played a central role in childhoods over the past century. According to archived histories of past users, the square has been a site of entertainment (Appendix 4.1), spectacle (Appendix 4.2), danger (Appendix 4.3), and mystery (Appendix 4.4). In these tales, the square serves as a geographical and temporal reference point, a grounded coordinate on each storyteller’s memory map around

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<sup>4</sup> Many quotations have been relegated to footnotes due to word count restrictions. Original Danish transcripts of the oral history “memories” can be found in Appendix 4.

which other memories – of somersaulting, roller-skating, or shootings – can unfold. BP and Blågårdsgade are sources of memorialized wonder.

Time flows through BP and the personal accounts of my modern respondents as well. For some, like Mudi, the idea of growing up in Nørrebro is synonymous with being on the square.<sup>5</sup> For others, like Kate, memories of youth extend to space around the square:

“When we were a kid and growing up, there was [sic.] many more, like, shops in a way... Before I had the restaurant, my mom actually had this shop... [Blågårdsgade] wasn't a walking street like now.”

One respondent, Maria, highlights a bar on a corner of the square as an important fixture in her adolescence:

“I had this Japanese boyfriend and some friends, and we would hang out there and drink so much beer.” (Maria)

As it was for children in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, BP remains a place of play for youngsters. It also continues to serve as a site of memories, facilitating the tracing of personal histories and family chronicles. Respondents explicitly describe the square as an object of time – it ages and changes, just like the people talking about it. Maria no longer has a Japanese boyfriend; Blågårdsgade no longer has cars.

BP collects memories on both individual and collective levels. Many respondents describe the square within the context of local and city history. When I ask Jens, for example, how old he was when he moved to Copenhagen in the 1980s, he proceeds to catalog the square's journey through time, from Nørrebro's origins to the construction of the square to the social movements resisting slum clearance in the 1970s and more recent spouts of violence. In order to tell his own history of BP, Jens needs to tell the shared history of the urban space around the square. To show his age, he must show the ages of his neighborhood.

Indeed, putting the square into words often means listing historic dates and figures, from the 1852 demarcation line fall to the 1993 EU riots to the 2019 Quran burning by Rasmus Paludan. The events – the times – that run through users' imaginings of the square often take place beyond the boundaries of its stone walls. They are not even limited to Denmark, as when Alma, born 1896, describes Lindbergh's transatlantic flight, “Syndicalists and Bolsheviks,” and nationally spreading “discontent... reflected in large riots at Blågårdsplads” (Appendix 4.6). BP brings together individual and collective narratives, personal and (inter)national histories. The square is an intersection point at which people, movements, and time collide. Simply put,

“Blågård Plads is a historical place.” (Dorte)

BP also changes physical shape through the passage of time. Sometimes, walking around the square, one notices graffiti marks on the backs of the statues lining BP. The example shown in Figure 18 contains a date, “1.12,” followed by a name. The statues, dating back to Kai Nielsen and the 1910s, embody collective temporal frames – a working-class beginning and 100 years of existence. Here, in

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<sup>5</sup> “For me it all started in Blågård Plads, because I'm born and raised there. It's there where I got my friends. It's there where we did all our good things and bad things.” (Mudi)

this graffiti tag, the statues also provide a canvas for the additional drawing of individual timelines, undoubtedly with some specific, personal meaning. Time is superimposed on top of itself in BP, silver spray paint cast on grey granite.



*Figure 18: BP, a palimpsest of time*

Further evidence of this fusing of personal and collective time comes in the form of placenames on the square. Another Jens, this one born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, begins his account of life around the square with Prince Charles' decision to build a country estate beyond Copenhagen's walls:

*The prince would [now] recognize the name "Blågård," which was called his pleasure garden, reportedly because the roof was blue. (Appendix 4.2)*

Here the square appears so intertwined with time and its movement backwards and forwards that it seeps out of the square's name. Merely speaking the name, "Blågård," is an engagement with the area's past residents.

One of my respondents, Maria, also draws meaning from this placename. She has set up a blue bench outside of her Greek wine shop, located in a small room beside the church building on the square. The bright blue is a way to attract customers to her store but also an homage to the area's history:

*"The idea started with this bench, that it's gonna be a blue bench, because I wanted this sign of blue to be a reference... Blue is 'blå,' is 'Blågårds Plads,' is 'Blågårdsgade.' This is part of the community. So, I want people, when they go here, I want them to see the blue because this is what unites us." (Maria)*

Maria's bench colorfully signals the square's historical roots. In its Greek connotations, the blue also signals a contemporary reality in which a woman of immigrant descent can run a boutique wine shop out of a former church crypt. With a small but deliberate decision, then, Maria transplants the passage of time onto physical space around the square. She marries her personal tale to the history

of this place. The blue also serves her wider agenda to “unite” a community around the square – to ground this place’s people physically, symbolically, and together in time.

People do not only recycle existing names to designate place through time – they also create new ones. Dorte, who works at the library on the square, connects the name of its cultural center, Støberiet, to the area’s industrial roots.<sup>6</sup> She also speculates about the origins of the square’s other name, Den Sorte Firkant, “The Black Square.” She says it may come from the dirty factory days but could also have something to do with squatters causing trouble for police in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Other respondents give even more explanations of the moniker. Jens (the younger) says the police pinheads were used to indicate high child mortality rates on a map of Nørrebro. Whatever the true reason, it is clear that even the square’s time-infused placenames have their own histories – someone told a rumor about the name to someone else, who told Dorte and Jens, who told me. The evolution of these names and built-in stories embodies yet another temporal aspect of the square.

### *The Square as a Container of Cycles*

If BP is a product of histories – a construction of memories – it is also a collection of temporal stages. These cycles can be seen on a superficial, visual level. First, there are the buildings. Though it lies “left” of Nørrebrogade, BP contains built elements of both “the old and the new” (Stensgaard, 2005, p. 255). The square is flanked on its two western sides by the red brick “wall carpet,” which form the façades of the library and social housing units, while its eastern sides contain prewar units that are one story higher and feature street-level storefronts.

It does not take an architect to date the square – often the clues are spelled out. On a walking tour of the neighborhood, for example, a resident of Blågårdsgade shows me the faint outline of lettering, “Øve,” atop one of the street’s storefronts.<sup>8</sup> This prewar building no longer houses a bakery, but the baker’s name endures, bringing one hundred years with it. The structures of BP reveal stages of growth.

Next, in front of the buildings, there are the trees. Leaves, or their absence, on the linden trees lining the square’s perimeter provide a reliable indication of the time of year. But local human events also follow the seasons. Due to COVID-19, my experience of these events is limited to stories. Sebastian talks excitedly about music events, including the Festival of Endless Gratitude, the Klang Festival, and the Jazz Festival. Music has a particularly active presence in festivals around the square, in part because the church building on its northern edge is now a “concert church.”

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<sup>6</sup> “I have to translate it myself... Yes, ‘the foundry.’ And that’s because there actually was a foundry at the square... And there were lots of other buildings, of course... and people running around, and I guess getting sick and getting lung cancer... The old manager from Støberiet, he came up with that name some 11, 12 years ago.” (Dorte)

<sup>7</sup> “Because of the foundry? Yes, yes, I think so. But I think there are other explanations as well. I heard—who told me that? Ah, I know... we have been working with history, during ‘beset,’ or, what’s it called? Squatters. I think it was in the 70s, partly, in the beginning of the 80s when the police put down pinheads on the map saying we have trouble here... then it made a black square.” (Dorte)

<sup>8</sup> “That’s an original inscription... That’s a Danish name, ‘Øve,’ first name. I don’t know what they had been selling here. It might have been a bakery or something.” (Jann)

Annual events that occupy the square typically occur during the summer: part of the city's summer jazz festival; an anti-fascist football tournament; a Sankt Hans bonfire; or a punk festival featuring Mad Max-style bicycle races (Figure 19). But the square also hosts community events in colder months, like the tented Winter Palace or the temporary ice-skating rink. Fall and spring also see life on the square: BP is a central location for First of May demonstrations. Through these and other regular events, the square provides an outlet for users to organize, signal, and recognize the cycle of a year. BP is a calendar onto which people write community traditions.



*Figure 19: Last bike standing (courtesy of Jens)*

The square also demarcates the cycle of a life. KoncertKirken, watching over BP on its northeastern edge, is no longer recognized as an official Danish church, but it still hosts funerals. According to Björn and Maria, a number of families of local community members, especially those who are not members of the Church of Denmark, ask to use the church for this occasion. The ceremony typically ends with the coffin being taken outside into a hearse that then slowly drives around the square two times. Such a tradition dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Björn explains, and it is “very local” – reserved for BP’s own.

The statues of BP, more than anything on the square, convey cyclical time. Kai Nielsen’s works appear in motion: each stone child circles around an adult, hugging, climbing, reaching; each stone adult works, twisting, carrying, or hammering. Even the accordion player is active, keeping his own time. These sculpted movements depict various components of a day: childcare, work, and leisure. At the same time, the figures present different periods of life: infancy and adulthood, babies crawling and mothers feeding. Moreover, the cycles embedded in BP’s guardians mirror those of its users. For a century and counting, children like Anne-Lise, born 1927, have climbed alongside Nielsen’s stone figures (Appendix 4.7).





Figure 20: Kai Nielsen's work, 1968 (*Piepgrass*) and 2020

Buildings, inscriptions, statues, and events provide evidence of BP's function as a container of cycles. But time's passage through the square can also be traced through the movement of people. In their descriptions of the square, almost every respondent identifies the presence of immigrants as one of its most central features. Some, like Jann, divide these groups along chronological lines, detailing different waves of immigration around and through BP ("Turks... Arabs in general and... Africans from Somali"). Kate accounts for a more recent cycle of immigration, people from "the old Eastern Bloc."<sup>9</sup> Her observations confirm the previous chapter's statistics, putting a face to the many European students and workers who have come to Denmark in the past decade. She and Jann demonstrate how users organize the urban spaces around them, and the people passing through, vis-à-vis temporal cycles.

Indeed, this is a square of eras. Respondents chronicle waves not only of immigrant movements, but of resistance movements – Jesper connects local groups fighting Nazis in the 1940s with groups fighting police in the 1970s; of gang movements – Lisbeth refers to the "Hells Angels War," the "War of 2009," the "War of 2014," and the "War of 2016"; and of shop movements – Katrine describes the cycles of storefronts around BP, beginning in the late 1980s.<sup>10</sup> Katrine lays out this urban progression like the biological cycle of forest fires: high density, destructive clearance, early growth.

<sup>9</sup> "I think, last 10 years, it's definitely been with the EU, with more, like, open borders for people from the old Eastern Bloc to come and study. And, you know, I think a lot of my staff have been from Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Germany, as well." (Kate)

<sup>10</sup> "When we moved there, the street was still very, very much in shock after the whole neighborhood had been leveled... All the shops that used to be there – you know, butcher shop, greengrocers, everything for daily consumption, lost their customers... And then that is what you see now with the specialty things and small designers making clothes... That's the way it is with small young designers and so on: they live for a while, and then they turn the key because they can't make ends meet, and then a new one opens." (Katrine)

But shops do not seem to grow for very long around BP. In recent years, according to many, rates of being forced to “turn the key” near the square have only increased. Shop owners speak of the difficulties of maintaining a business in the area. Jonatan, for example, says he had to transform his Blågårdsgade restaurant into a design boutique to stay afloat. Rahim believes his convenience kiosk on the square’s corner will only last a few more years.

Respondents often position these challenges and anxieties along some sort of neighborhood-wide, BP timeline. Alex laments the free market’s effect on rising rents:

“It changes the demographics... the whole infrastructure of a neighborhood changes... local small bars, you know, fucked up with the classic alcoholics and, what used to be, you know, working-class pubs – they are not there. Instead, you have fancy and super expensive cafes, where you buy a cafe latte [for] the same price as two shawarmas. So, in that sense, the whole of Nørrebro is changing, and the way I see it is, actually, it’s a bomb – it’s a bomb under the neighborhood.” (Alex)

Here, Alex describes a “ticking clock” of BP, one that is dangerous, explosive. Alex’s telling echoes Stensgaard’s premonition: the “dark brown pubs with their one-armed bandits” appear to be gone; “the bagels with chorizos” have arrived; “it” has happened on BP (2005, p. 246).

This storefront phase change has run parallel to a phase change of local residents, what respondents identify as a new segment of white, ethnic Danes of middle- and upper-class standing. Some even have a name for them – “spelt,” which is normally used to describe a type of whole-wheat grain.<sup>11</sup> They are “people who have all the right values, but a little bit boring,” explains Maria, thinking themselves “a little bit more advanced because they like to buy organic stuff.” She compares the word to “kommunefarvet,” which people used in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe the “standard Dane,” with their “typical Danish hair color.” Whereas Dorte and Maria use the nickname, “spelt,” in a slightly derogatory context, Jann thinks of it as a joke (he also thinks it better describes residents of Vesterbro – “much more posh”). Regardless, in spelt we have the birth of a new era of gentrifiers. As it did for the names of BP’s physical spaces, then, time runs through the names of the square’s people.

On the whole, BP is not only a “historical” place. It is a *generational* place. Generations of immigrants, workers, gangsters, gentrifiers, and their children. Respondents talk about the square by moving backwards in time, sometimes in a linear fashion, but often in jumps. They also orient the place in terms of its future, as when Kasper speaks of the square’s “next generation” turning away from crime. Telling stories through and about BP involves engaging with the past, present, and future.

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<sup>11</sup> “We call people who are the gentrifiers, we call them this grain word, because this grain was made very modern by these kinds of people... And they all came from Jutland!” (Dorte)

## II. EXPLANATORY LOGICS

Stories are not, however, mere timelines. “Some kind of explanatory framework or sense of intelligible causality,” Finnegan writes, “is part of what we normally assume when we call some account neither just a description nor a chronicle but a story” (1998, p. 9). In the following section I present a number of “explanatory frameworks” employed by people around BP as they try to understand and describe the square. Respondents conceive of this place in relation to three main plotlines – a Golden Age lost paradigm, a parallel lives saga, and a hero’s tale. While variations exist within each, these narrative tools perform a significant amount of work in the construction of place. Users connect to this place – they create this place – through socially reproduced explanations that often follow moral lines.



### *Blågårds’ Golden Age(s) Lost*

The first plotline employed by users to explain the area of BP is the narrative of a Golden Age lost, a bygone period of success. Some respondents frame the neighborhood as a former site of noble conflict between residents and the state. Jens, for example, gets excited telling a detailed story of the January 1983 eviction of Allotria, a building that was located one block from the square.<sup>12</sup> Jens’ account depicts a righteous, moral crusade against eviction. He recalls fond memories of throwing punches at police troopers and bricks at bank windows. Jens connects this nostalgic period of activism to local anti-fascist movements of the 1930s. The link is not just symbolic. He describes how local pensioners who had fought Nazis gave policemen coffee and pastries near squats to deter evictions in the 1980s. For Jens, this is a key overlap between two eras that constitute a Golden Age – leftwing, radical Nørrebro.

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<sup>12</sup> “And one morning, they came, and there was like 1000 policemen in the neighborhood. And they had, like, bulldozers, they had... several trucks with water that they sprayed on the house, in case that we threw molotovs. And then they had like the antiterror squad in a container... It was lifted up by a crane to the fourth floor, and there they drilled a hole in the wall, and they filled the house with teargas, and then they searched through the full house. They were wearing teargas masks, bulletproof vests, and machine guns... they could see some people in the house because we threw out a banner out of the window... it said, ‘We decide when to fight.’ And when they searched through the house, they didn’t find anybody. They were really surprised because we had dug a tunnel. We climbed through this tunnel into a shop on the other side of the street. And these guys, they were really surprised, because all of a sudden, there was these young kids, you know, breaking through... the floor, and it was like, ‘Hey, hey, hey, please be quiet. We’re not gonna hurt you, but please don’t tell the police we’re here’... Then we saw... what happened. They tore the house down. And they just let the facade stand as, you know, sort of like a symbol of their victory. It was very, very sad. We were really sad. We felt we won a moral victory. And the nation loved us. I mean, all of a sudden, yeah, we were the big heroes, because we found this peaceful solution, and we fooled the police, and everybody thought we were so brilliant. And they really loved us after that. At least, for some time.” (Jens)



*Figure 21: Escape from Allotria (courtesy of Jens)*



*Figure 22: Pensioners sweettalk the police (courtesy of Jens)*

BP plays a prominent role in this Golden Age. With its working-class ties and physical platform for social demonstrations, the square is quite successful in concentrating activist groups. As one respondent puts it,

“All revolutionaries in this world know about Blågårds Plads.”  
(Katrine)

The bar on its eastern corner, Blågårds Apotek, comes up frequently in conversations about politics on the square. Respondents describe it as a former headquarters for local communist parties. The bar, Jesper claims,

“Was housing the leftovers from the... pop cultural, political revolution from the 70s and 60s – you know, very leftwing people who had been social workers in [Central] America, in Nicaragua.”

Here, the bar and its square are situated within wider, international narratives – a Golden Age of counterculture, social progressivism, and revolution.

And, for some, this Golden Age of activism has been partially lost. The squatters, Jens explains, are older, and many no longer live in the area. Those that do sometimes meet for coffee around BP to reminisce about Allotria or the “Battle of Ryesgade.” Furthermore, to Jens at least, the area’s radical, political spirit seems to have dissipated slightly. When asked about social resistance to gentrification, he responds,

“We’re not really fighting against it.” (Jens)

As they draw this lost Golden Age of activism – of leftist, working-class politics – out of histories told around BP, people also draw it out of the square’s physical spaces. The cheap brick buildings that rose from the ashes of urban renewal in the 1980s serve as painful reminders of a lost time.<sup>13</sup> There is drama and emotion embedded in the loss of these structures. “Nørrebro,” says one resident, “is a martyrdom. One suffers and bears witness so that it will never happen again” (Stensgaard, 2005, p. 255). Here, BP is situated within one of humanity’s oldest plots – the space around it was “martyred,” sacrificed for some other purpose. The sacrifice takes built forms, the “red shit” eyesores of Nørrebro, and lived forms, the forced exodus of working-class residents.<sup>14</sup> Here is an age lost, a battle lost, friends displaced to the suburbs by physical force and unaffordable housing.

The old buildings that do remain around the square maintain that age’s ambience. Alongside Kai Nielsen’s 22 worker sculptures, the remaining prewar structures instill in respondents an imagined connection to the neighborhood’s past. It is something for which they yearn:

“It’s not a working-class area anymore, but that historic feeling is still here.” (Jann)

When I ask Jann if the aesthetic of these buildings inspire such a feeling, he is categorical:

“Yeah, it does, it does. I’m quite certain about that. We’re leftwing, all of us. Even though we are professors and priests. We are

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<sup>13</sup> “Støberiet, where the library is? All that red shit. It’s concrete, made of concrete with, with—I mean, it looks like it’s bricks, but it’s just wallpaper, you know. And today, they have been restored or repaired so many times. It was cheap, and it was lousy.” (Jens)

<sup>14</sup> “People who had to move out, everybody knew somebody who had to move, who were evicted. They knew. And, I mean, they lost, you know, friends and family because they were, they were forced to live out in the suburbs... I mean, we lost it all. It was so sad, and we were so angry.” (Jens)

leftwing. So, this working-class history atmosphere – it’s perfect for us.”

The “atmosphere” Jann speaks of is the manifestation of an imagined plotline – some nostalgic return to a bygone working-class era.

And if such a framework is “perfect” for leftwing professors and priests, it is also attractive to younger residents. Alev, around 30 years old, reveals that the Golden Age lost paradigm filters how users experience and enjoy architecture and built space in Nørrebro and Copenhagen.<sup>15</sup> People want to live in and look at the few remaining prewar buildings – to feel the cobblestones – before their erasure is complete. Around BP, as in the rest of the city, users interpret the built environment vis-à-vis a narrative of age and decay. The plotline influences groups young and old; it moves people physically to particular spaces; it moves people emotionally to point out faded names on storefronts they do not own; it sells to minds, hearts, and wallets.

Alev works in the city’s official tourism agency and considers BP an important target for the office’s so-called “localhood” strategy. She does not explain precisely what it means for something to be “local” around the square, but, on a superficial level, it has something to do with these older buildings and their representation of “the essence of Copenhagen.” Here we see a claim on the city’s identity, maintained by imagined narratives.

But localhood itself may represent another Golden Age under threat on BP. Some respondents describe the recent loss of a village-like, hyperlocal scene. For Pia, who has lived a block from the square for nearly 30 years, this decline can be measured in the absence of rundown drinking holes, which are run by people like Tony.<sup>16</sup> Again, these “one-arm bandit” joints have been replaced (Stensgaard, 2005, p. 246):

“All these fucking cafés have been going ‘ding, ding, ding, ding’ – huge café, with the brunch, and blah. So very hipster. And I don’t think that Blågård’s Plads is still, like, local.” (Pia)

Pia identifies a fading Golden Age of localhood through built forms: a bar where you can smoke rather than a café where you can brunch.

Other respondents measure this lost local nature in terms of decreasing familiarity. Up until the late 2000s, Mudi explains, he felt a sense of close togetherness on the square.<sup>17</sup> He blames gang violence, beginning around 2008, for

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<sup>15</sup> “I can also see on the, like, housing market that, I mean, I live in a classic Copenhagen building. And it’s, you know, it’s old and small toilet and everything and wooden floors... make noise. But that’s [sic.] the expensive apartments, which means that people want to live in them. And they probably also want to look at them – there’s some sort of nostalgia maybe connected to that. It is the essence of Copenhagen in what we associate with, you know, our city; and yeah, also in the city center, around the city hall. All cobblestone and old buildings. So, I think definitely that’s part of it and will start disappearing.” (Alev)

<sup>16</sup> “He’s been there for like 30 years... And you’re allowed to smoke cigarettes, and you can get a beer for like, 10, 20 kroner... And it, it has been changing within 10 years, because of the smoking laws changed. So, because you’re actually allowed to smoke in there, and they got billiard, and they got darts, and so on, then there’s a lot of young people, young, young people.” (Pia)

<sup>17</sup> “It was all about the area, it was all about being there for each other. It’s like a little community, you know, a little city. Everybody knows each other, everybody helps each other. It was all about the people from Blågård’s Plads are together, and if I had a problem, I could always find ones who could help me out solving this problem.” (Mudi)

the decline of this community focus. Dorte identifies the arrival of LTF, a gang of outsiders, as a key event. BP had gangs before, she says, but at least they were local.<sup>18</sup> The loss of localhood has weakened neighborhood trust. Residents do not come into the library for help as frequently. Meanwhile, Dorte claims she no longer gets sufficient resources to help because of a broader policy shift in the library system towards Copenhagen-wide, four-year strategic plans. The library on BP, it seems, has been institutionalized. Like its gangs, it has been partially delocalized. It has left behind a Golden Age:

“There’s not so much anarchy any longer.” (Dorte)

Dorte also associates this lost age of trust and localized service with the influx of new, wealthier residents (spelt) who consume a large portion of library resources.<sup>19</sup> Alex also laments the arrival of spelt-like families to the neighborhood. “This kind of new rich part of the local population,” he claims, clashes with the area’s noisier users:

“The police are getting a lot of complaints from the new citizens of Nørrebro, and a lot of them come from Jutland and other places of Denmark and find it to be... super hip. And that’s super fine. Problem is, they are changing Nørrebro from within. That is a serious matter, if you ask me.” (Alex)

For Alex and many other respondents, high noise levels are part of what it means to live in Nørrebro, of what this place is – or, what it used to be. Clearly, though, there is disagreement. Katrine, for instance, describes a conflict with her Blågårdsgade neighbors:

“Revolutionaries... in their big, Doc Martens boots on the floor, and had parties on Wednesdays at three o’clock in the night and... I went upstairs and asked them to please turn down the music because we had to get up and go to work and to school and the lady said, ‘Oh, you can’t come here with that. This is Nørrebro!’ And she has the most wonderful north, opulent suburbs dialect.”

At their core, these episodes reflect broader debates about what or who the area around BP should represent. Alex and Katrine present two of many sides waging a battle over what Golden Age the neighborhood should strive for: whether it should include dive bars, a focus on families, Doc Martens, organic food, loud music, or brunch. Residents who have been around for decades (or months) are eager to stand up and defend “their” turf, shouting, “This is Nørrebro!”

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<sup>18</sup> “That also changed something, because they’re not from Blågårds Plads, they come from everywhere. And maybe took away some kind of – I wouldn’t say innocence, because that would be a lie. But, you know, even though there were gangs before, and they were bad boys, it was like, ‘Alright, but I know you, Hamid, when you were six years old, you were standing in a corner and crying’... You know, it could be like 15 years ago, the children could come down to the library and ask for some kind of help... because their mother didn’t speak Danish. And, ‘Could you come and help?’ ... and they could translate things and all that kind of trust.”

<sup>19</sup> “They don’t need all that kind of services. The students who live in an expensive apartment all alone, they do not have to sit in the library and use the tables there for studying... Of course, libraries are for everybody, but I think somehow, in my opinion, I think people who have a more difficult life, they should have first priority.” (Dorte)

### *A Tragedy of Parallel Lives*

A second explanatory framework that respondents use to understand the square can be expressed through the sociological phenomenon known as “parallel lives.” This idea suggests that while various demographic groups may live near each other, they will rarely interact. The groups will run in parallel, mutually aware of one another’s existence but never able or willing to make meaningful contact – to have, as Valentine states, “intercultural dialogue and exchange” (2008, p. 325). Within this paradigm there exists an element of tragedy: the downfall of essentially good people thanks to a lack of communication and connection.

The square is a dense concentration of many different populations. A number of respondents identify this mix as unique.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, diversity is one of the main ideas through which respondents try to explain the area:

“When you go to Nørrebro, or even a little bit more inside Nørrebro, you will start seeing different color, different faces, that kind of things. And that really makes you [think] that, ‘Okay, now I’m in Berlin. Now I’m in London,’ you know?” (Fei)

“[BP] is the essence of Nørrebro. I like living here because it’s diverse... culturally diverse. My background is Turkish. So, I like it that, you know, people are different. They look different, and you can be yourself in this neighborhood.” (Alev)

Although these respondents paint compelling portraits of urban diversity around the square, many also recognize that superficial proximity does not necessarily lead to substantial intersection:

“I don’t think they mix very much... they keep to each other.” (Jesper)

“I don’t think they’re interacting very much with each other... they’re living side by side.” (Madeleine)

“If you’re just from outside, and you just drink a beer – it looks like it’s fantastic, looks like something that’s in front of Jehovah’s Witnesses magazine, the child and the lion, right? But it’s not as much as togetherness, as it is simultaneous activities. Because people don’t talk that much amongst the groups.” (Lisbeth)

BP is a space where different groups can live and perform various activities – but it seems like many of these are the type of “simultaneous activities” that run in

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<sup>20</sup> “The special thing... about Blågårds Plads is that it isn’t sort of a classical ghetto, because you have this kind of housing where you have in number 11, you have public housing, with immigrants with, you know, parabolic antennas on the outside turned to Arabic television; mothers and fathers that have lived in Denmark for 30 or 40 years and doesn’t [sic.] speak a word of Danish. And at the number 13, the next door, you have young media guys, couples with small kids living in apartments that cost like five, six or seven million Danish kroner.” (Jesper)



parallel. “You can be yourself,” as Alev says, but you will be on your own, or with others ethnically like you.

According to most respondents, the square does little as a physical space to bridge the divide between parallel groups. Even when people organize open events on BP, they struggle to unite separate planes:

“When we have great festivals in Blågårds Plads, when we have big tournaments, football tournaments, or a lot of stuff down here, the white kids always have other plans, which means, again, it is Mohammed and Hassan and all these names that are just gonna play each other... How are we gonna teach Mohammed to be around Christian and Frederik and so on?” (Mudi)

Christian and Mohammed live parallel lives, the story goes, their plans designed so they socialize with other children of their background.

They also attend separate schools. Most of my white ethnic Danish respondents who have raised children near BP sent them to private schools outside of the area. Many of these parents express a clear, sometimes remorseful, understanding of how such choices contribute to deepening divides between BP demographic groups. Some even have regrets.<sup>21</sup>

“I behaved like, you know, gentrifiers – I put my children in a school in a different city in a private school... Sometimes they were trying to go down and play with local children, but they were exclusively immigrant children and didn’t play the kind of games that my children wanted to play... We were kind of segregated... the upstairs neighbors were from Morocco... we lived in separate worlds.” (Katrine)

Respondents relate to their urban reality through a narrative of “separate worlds.” As it occupies political debates, *parallelsamfund* occupies the imaginations of BP users. They conceptualize the lives of their children, as well as spatial processes like gentrification, through a tragedy of parallel lives. This tale of BP is a tale of Hassan and Frederik, kids who simply do not play the same types of games.

The plotline of parallel lives is not just descriptive – it is used by parents to explain and even justify their decision to send kids elsewhere for school. Jann says he chose private schools because of a “difference in values,” what he imagines to be more “patriarchal” values spread by local children of immigrant descent. Pia says she chose not to send her daughter to the local public school because it was “80 percent of second [generation] immigrants... criminals... people [who] get paid but haven’t got a job.” The saga of parallel lives builds on itself, gathering momentum in people’s minds until it becomes a fact of nature:

“I used to visualize it as... a park or a forest where different kinds of birds are living and they’re singing, but they don’t hear other species. They only hear their own species singing. So, they have overlapping territories. So, they walk around between each other,

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<sup>21</sup> “I should, like, if I had put the responsibility and say, ‘Hey, I’m living here. So, she has to go to the local school.’ I should have, but no, it’s too hard. So, of course, it’s my only kid.” (Pia)

but they don't see each other. They, the other group, simply doesn't mean anything." (Katrine)

The metaphor of noncommunicative birds is a narrative device, employed at the behest of a parallel lives view of BP. It is a way for people like Katrine to read the city and make sense of this place. But it also reproduces and projects the divisions it describes – or, at least, it situates the social problem as something fixed, bound within spatial, natural laws. Residents like Katrine *can* communicate with immigrants, but they choose not to.

Moreover, the underside of this flowery language is ugly. Living a life in parallel with, rarely intersecting, that of white Danes can be difficult on BP. Both ethnic Danes and those of immigrant descent describe social marginalization of the latter group. It is harder, they say, for immigrants to be fully accepted into Danish society. Many, like Lisbeth, speak about how difficult it is for them to find employment. Jesper recounts interviewing a black professional footballer from the area who said the sport was his only track to economic stability, the only way to “get away.” Alex describes discriminatory policing of his immigrant colleagues and clients. Mudi details how a real estate organization made it almost impossible for him to rent a flat near the square, simply because his name did not “sound Danish.”

The boundaries that keep groups apart imprison both, and they make immigrant Danes feel unwelcome. Mudi speaks about his fellow nonwhite friends feeling like outcasts.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the plotline of parallel lives is not just circulated by white residents. Individuals of immigrant descent also recognize the “separate worlds” contained in BP. Mudi discusses the isolation experienced by nonwhite Danes in the area through geographic terms. The teenagers he works with rarely ever leave the square:

“In Denmark we used to say, ‘It’s like peeing in your own pants to get the warmth’... It’s like, ‘Ah, okay, my friends [are] here—why would I go other places?’”

Because they spend all their time around BP, Mudi explains, these youths have few opportunities to intersect with people and places in other parts of the city. They grow up ten minutes from the Round Tower but never see it, assuming it sits in Jutland because they have only ever heard of it. They become tourists in their own city.

The concept of parallel lives is not only a metaphor – it is a physical reality, with residents living in adjacent, but very different, spaces. Alternate universes run side-by-side. Not surprisingly, the spatial nature of this plotline contributes to spatial identity formation:

“If you ask them, ‘Are you a Dane?’ they will tell you, ‘No.’ If you ask them, ‘Okay, do you feel as a Copenhagener?’—‘Oh, yeah, a lot.’ ‘Do you feel as a Nørrebro?’—‘Oh, yeah, 100.’” (Mudi)

How these residents define themselves is strongly tied to the local environment, their territory, their square. For them, a place like BP does more to solidify individual and group identities than any ideas of nationality.

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<sup>22</sup> “It was difficult for them to adapt [to] the culture in Denmark, because they didn’t feel the Danes want them. They felt like, ‘Okay, the Danes are all racist, they don’t want the immigrant, they don’t want to be around Muslims.’” (Mudi)



*Figure 23: Hassan and Frederik, neighbors on the square*

From Mudi's perspective, the square might even do too much to bring together the young immigrant children he sees. Its popularity as a social gathering point may hinder those who gather:

"I love Blågård's Plads. I would never dream about leaving this place. But... this is also bad for the kids, as I see, because you're not going to learn that much if you only see the same ten, twenty people."

In other words, peeing in your pants may make you warm, but it will not make you grow. Whereas above respondents describe the square's inability to bridge divides between social groups, here Mudi reveals that BP may, in fact, play an active role in strengthening narratives of parallel lives. As a space on which to fasten one's identity, this place may reinforce existing social divisions. The square's tale of parallel lives is a tragedy: the love people pull from the square, it seems, may blind them from paths that run beyond.

### ***A Square of Heroes: Fighting Dragons on Blågård's Plads***

One of the most common literary tropes is the hero's tale: a valiant protagonist overcomes evil for the benefit of all, enduring adversity to slay beasts, tyranny, and corruption. The village is saved. This plot of battling evil is also central to how people relate to BP. Respondents conceive of the square as a place of heroic resistance to many of the forces described above – perceived evils like ethnic segregation, gang violence, and gentrification.

While the paradigm of parallel lives figures into how many view life on and around BP, respondents also present the idea of the square as a concentration of

efforts to bring down such barriers. The area is depicted as intensely social, a “village.”<sup>23</sup> Being social as a community, moreover, often also means being inclusive. A number of respondents value events that allow neighbors of various backgrounds to interact meaningfully. Jann identifies football tournaments on the square as an effective means for creating contact between white Danes and immigrant residents (contrasting Mudi’s statement about Hassan and Frederik). Madeleine speaks of organizing a music event, “Our Nørrebro,” in which young people from immigrant families had the opportunity to express themselves onstage to mixed audiences.

Although Dorte does not think the square facilitates social integration, she thinks the playground beside it does.<sup>24</sup> In my own observations, I also found the playground to be the busiest area of social interaction across ethnic groups. Here one finds a nonwhite mother pushing her son beside a white father pushing his daughter, the former parent wearing hijab and the latter taking photos with an iPad. Respondents observe that if these events and spaces do not automatically produce meaningful contact between ethnic groups, they at least provide an opportunity for it.

Of course, the square would never be able to create social cohesion on its own. Rather, residents take advantage of the space to bring ethnic groups together. Madeleine and Lisbeth run community-wide “fællesskab” dinners on and near the square, which provide young local boys an opportunity to work in a safe environment, removed from gangs, and interact with other residents. Björn organizes free concerts in the square’s church building and invites groups from local public schools. Some kids tell him these are their first concerts ever. Dorte and her coworkers at the library host workshops, produce brochures in Arabic, and send staff from door to door, all to unite the diverse groups living around BP. And local politicians continue to make use of the square’s open stage: in September 2020, politician Sikandar Siddique, who had a “schizophrenic upbringing” on BP, announced the creation of a new party, Frie Grønne, focused on climate change and anti-racism.

While these actors openly admit the challenges of such endeavors – Dorte’s team was unable to make brochures in Turkish, and their door-to-door tactics largely failed – they frame their work as expressions of a noble cause, a mission to celebrate BP’s diversity and increase social cohesion. Lisbeth recalls the personal satisfaction she feels when hearing, for instance, a Muslim girl and an ethnically Danish boy discuss identity issues.<sup>25</sup> Siddique positions BP’s social mix as a driving factor in his political career.<sup>26</sup>

This plotline of fighting for vibrant, civil interaction and cross-cultural exchange is nothing without appropriate spaces. Lisbeth’s satisfaction came in a cultural center near BP where it is possible for many groups to overlap with a shared purpose. Madeleine, Dorte, and Björn each shape and fill their respective spaces – the square, its library, and its church – at the behest of this social quest. Furthermore, respondents express admiration for these community leaders

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<sup>23</sup> “It is pretty much [like] living in a very small village... You know everyone, and you have to say, ‘Hi,’ to tons of people every day. So, in that way, you have to be [an] extrovert.” (Jonatan)

<sup>24</sup> “When people meet up with children, then there will be some coexistence, and then they are not so scared of each other, because they play together. And that’s quite beautiful.” (Dorte)

<sup>25</sup> “To watch these people have the conversations and listen to the conversations, it’s mind-blowing sometimes, because it’s some, some very diverse things happen. And both sides are being challenged.” (Dorte)

<sup>26</sup> “Here, all walks of life were gathered, and there is no doubt that I have taken that diversity with me.” (Mencke, 2021)

through an appreciation of the spaces they create: many praise KoncertKirken for its open, inclusive atmosphere and praise Björn for trying to welcome diverse groups into its stage and audience; Rahim commends Dorte's library for its unifying meetings, concerts, and parties; and residents speak of Lisbeth's community dinners as legendary and Lisbeth herself as a local legend, a master negotiator who can create dialogue between any groups, gangs included. Actors and spaces are linked together as heroic entities.



*Figure 24: Playground adjacent to Blågård's Plads*

Perhaps the most striking example of how this storied fight for social equality can come to define the spaces of BP involves the square's church and a group of refugees. In 1991, hundreds of Palestinians arrived in Copenhagen seeking asylum from persecution in Lebanon. When their requests were denied, nearly 100 of them took shelter in Blågård's Kirke (what is now KoncertKirken). Members of the community united to take care of the refugees in the church for five months. A number of my respondents visited them and participated in rallies supporting their asylum claims. Katrine recognizes the emotional power of this moment, both for the Palestinians and local residents.<sup>27</sup>

Katrine mentions that this asylum fight ended in a legal and political victory for the refugees and their leftwing supporters: Palæstinenserloven, "The Palestinian Law," passed in March 1992. BP's narrative-infused spaces and people had directly influenced the passage of national law, the right of hundreds to reside in Denmark.<sup>28</sup> This saga of collective resistance comes up regularly in my

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<sup>27</sup> "They really needed a break. They needed a new start. And I remember this guy who said he wanted to be a hairdresser. That was, like, his greatest wish, to become a hairdresser. And it was quite moving... And it actually succeeded, this attempt at political pressure, they succeeded. It [] created a specific law that gave these Palestinians the right of sojourn in Denmark. Yeah, so, we felt enormously powerful after it." (Katrine)

<sup>28</sup> The law's epilogue, unfortunately, has been less idyllic, with claims that many of the refugees are now involved in crime (Hejlskov & Birk, 2020).

respondents' attempts to describe and understand the square. It is a key reference that people can point to when they want to show how the desire for social cohesion is strong around BP.



*Figure 25: KoncertKirken, formerly Blågårds Kirke*

The second moral crusade through which residents define the square involves its gangs. A few respondents express sympathy for the young boys who join gangs that sell drugs or hang out around BP, noting various push and pull factors that bring boys into the groups: not enough safe communal spaces and productive activities; stressful, crowded domestic living circumstances; and easy access to the cars, money, and food of older gang members. Some consider the gangs as a response or form of resistance, albeit dangerous and ill-conceived, to general marginalization by society. Jann says the drug dealers can be quite friendly.

Jens tells a story of when some gang members were running away from police and came through his backyard during a barbeque:

“I was like, ‘Oh, that’s like us when we were young!’”

Jens draws a line between his squatter past and present gang activities. He thinks people in the neighborhood are “very tolerant” of the gangs in part because of such a connection to working-class histories and social movements. The line, though, is mostly superficial: when he once saw gang members hide weapons, for example, he pointed them out to police. Being tolerant does not mean being complicit. Unlike their pensioner predecessors, the former squatters are not handing out pastries to dissuade police from arresting the gangs.

Moreover, many residents actively work to get rid of the gangs. Following a series of shootings in 2017, Kate says, locals started to organize rallies and demonstrations against them.<sup>29</sup> BP, as always, was at the center of these events, a

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<sup>29</sup> “There was a lot of rallies where a lot of parents went, and then, you know, I think the most important thing was that it was a lot of parents of immigrant backgrounds that went out. And it

stage on which parents of all backgrounds could shout for increased police assistance and an end to violence. The shootings in 2017, Kate says, forced residents to step outside parallel lives and have difficult conversations about protecting young people from dangerous activities. Here is a “common problem,” a common enemy to fight together.

A few residents have made it their full-time jobs to take on this storied fight. For decades, Lisbeth has communicated with gang leaders and provided alternative activities for young people around BP. Mudi is a co-founder of FRAK, an organization that gives local youth part-time jobs around the city. FRAK participants also produce a bottled soda, “Ukrudt.” Made from weeds, the soda is both a literal means for giving young people economic independence and a symbolic tool to show them how something society considers disposable can be productive.

Overall, Lisbeth, Mudi, and other respondents recognize that the fight against BP’s gangs is spatial – it directly involves the built environment. At one point during a gang war, Lisbeth says, young boys were not allowed to be on BP unless they paid a fee to a gang and thereby automatically “enrolled” in it. She decided to open her backyard as a haven for young people, where they would be safe from gangs and shootings. Initially this safe space created conflict with the gangs, she says, “But now they just respect it.”

Another spatial project from FRAK has been the organization of youth-run tours of the area. The tours have given local teenagers the chance to tell “their own story of Blågårds Plads.”<sup>30</sup> FRAK tours allow young people to craft the place that is BP in their own way through storytelling. They provide a platform for authorship,

“An opportunity to show that Nørrebro and Blågårds Plads are other things than social troubles, gang members, and all this shit you can read in the news; there are also youngsters that want to make big changes, that want something in their life, and [we] tell these people, ‘Ok, why do we meet at Blågårds Plads? Why is this place important to us?’” (Mudi)

The tours are, in other words, a physical and narrative reclaiming of space from the gangs, from the attention gang violence produces in the media, and from the negative stereotypes people have of the area as a result. According to Mudi, they have been successful on both ends, giving young people purpose and pride in their neighborhood, and giving visitors an alternative, ground-up perspective on this part of Copenhagen. Every tour has sold out.

Just as gangs can battle one another over territory – “turf” – so too can residents battle the gangs for physical and symbolic control of space in and around the square. To that point, in Pia’s opinion the COVID-19 pandemic has given residents the upper hand in controlling the square. Forced to socialize outside, she says, non-gang members have taken back BP through peaceful occupation.

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wasn’t just, you know, like, oh, nice white people saying, ‘We don’t want this.’ It was like, you know, it was a common problem. And, usually, it’s quite hard to get them involved in things, but they got involved.” (Kate)

<sup>30</sup> “So, they chose what Blågårds Plads meant for them. And they had some hotspots in the area: it was the local school; it was Assistens Kirkegaard... the churchyard. So it was, let them tell the stories about their own neighborhood.” (Mudi)

The third dragon that people discuss battling takes a less animate, but equally spatial, form. Many respondents express sorrow and frustration regarding ever-increasing rents in Nørrebro.<sup>31</sup> Some residents identify global investment firms like BlackRock as the villains responsible for this “bomb” underneath the neighborhood:

“You have these guys, what are they called, Blackwater, Blackstone? ... They’re here to make money, not to make a nice society.” (Jens)

“We’ve got this Blackstone thing. They’ve gotten to be the Mordor of Denmark.” (Lisbeth)

Mordor, that evil realm of J. R. R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth, has extended to BP. Storytelling and place intersect explicitly on the square.

Although they acknowledge it is quite difficult to slow gentrification, respondents point to a few methods of resistance. Some believe public events on BP are important symbols of local resilience, a way to maintain community ties and prevent people from leaving the area and renting out their apartments. Others talk about the effectiveness of “andelsbolig,” equity-sharing cooperative housing, through which groups of residents can keep control over rents and property values.

A few also mention various fights to occupy particular spaces around BP. Almost everyone who has spent time in KoncertKirken praises Björn as a hero for “saving the church” from being developed into an office building or gym when it was put on the private market over ten years ago. Many respondents say they bought informal shares of KoncertKirken to support these efforts. Meanwhile, a few blocks away in her cultural center, Lisbeth’s battle is ongoing.<sup>32</sup>

Lisbeth even says that she sometimes prays for a gang war to help lower the rents around BP. While most respondents do not speak in such drastic terms, many do consider the current state of gentrification to be dire. Maria worries about the survival of her wine shop and sees increasing flows of external capital and residents as a threat to local businesses. She thinks of these shops – her boutique, a corner store, Kate’s restaurant – as a “last frontier... standing strong” against gentrifying forces. In such expressions, respondents channel pride and identity through their defense of the neighborhood from corporate greed. These residents know that BP may be exploding, its popularity and centrality making it economically challenging for them to remain, but they are not going anywhere – at least, not without a fight.

How this and the other two battles will turn out is unclear. The drama of BP’s hero’s tale is still unfolding, and all three dragons – segregation, gangs, and gentrification – are still present: In 2019, Rasmus Paludan burned a Quran on the square, hoping to stir anti-Muslim hatred. While the Loyal to Familia (LTF) gang has been legally banned from BP, respondents claim its members have not left. Finally, COVID-19 has made it even harder for small businesses like Maria’s boutique to survive, and rents continue to rise. The village of BP has not yet been “saved.” What is clear through this and the two other plot types depicted above, however, is that explanatory logics run rampant through the square. Residents harness the second dimension of story to write place onto BP, using dramatic

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<sup>31</sup> “It’s super gentrified... If you have a wordbook or phrasebook with that word, you should have a picture of Blågård’s Plads.” (Dorte)

<sup>32</sup> “I’m trying so hard to keep this place in the municipality’s hands, because it’s a very attractive location, in order to, you know, just do my thing to stop the gentrification.” (Lisbeth)



plotlines to help them justify local decisions and make sense of the square's spaces, users, and changes.

### III. STANDARDIZED FORMS

Across the first two elements, I have referenced many traditional conventions that bind tales together. Stories on BP are delivered and consumed through a variety of forms. To wrap up this discussion of my findings, I will briefly survey a few of these forms – protagonists and antagonists, distribution methods, and spaces of story.



#### Protagonists and Antagonists

My respondents' narratives of the square reveal a motley array of characters. There are heroes: Jens the squatter; Lisbeth the negotiator; Björn the church savior; Rahim the "godfather." There are villains: gang leaders "Big A" and "Little A"; an incoming wine distributor with a Forbes profile but no local ties; spelt gentrifiers; BlackRock. Characters on BP are not fixed. They mean different things to different authors. While some have quite negative opinions about the police on the square, for example, a few consider these officers to be valiant protectors – "angels," says Katrine. And not everyone thinks of gentrification as an evil force corrupting the neighborhood. Jonatan, Rahim, Felix, and Kasper see positive consequences of the incoming capital in terms of increased business and safety.

Nor are these characters always flat. Respondents often portray the figures of BP as complex. They recognize, for instance, that of course not all young immigrant boys are part of a gang. Most of the square's youths want to work hard and live a productive, clean lifestyle. Furthermore, many believe that those who do end up in gangs are not simplistically evil villains, but rather they are intelligent, marginalized individuals who are capable of violence, yes, but also of civil conversations and potential compromises. According to Jesper, in his novel, *Unrest*, he portrays a local detective working with a gang member to solve a murder (at one point, they evade danger through BP's church).

Still, the use of characters in tales of BP often facilitates (or, at least, implies) rigid "us"-versus-"them" structures. The "us" can take different forms (revolutionaries, leftwing academics, 2<sup>nd</sup>-generation immigrants), as can the "them." Most of my white respondents portray immigrant groups, gang-related or not, as an Other about which they can speculate (regarding anything from social values to clothing choices to how much "protection money" gangs pay to Blågårdsgade storeowners).<sup>33</sup> But white, ethnic Danes can also represent a type of Other, especially if they are newcomers (spelt, in particular) or outsiders (anyone living beyond Nørrebro, and especially people from Jutland). Finally, the media is often seen as a character that callously stirs these Othered divisions from the sidelines, caricaturing BP into a warzone and making Maria's relatives scared to visit her wine shop.

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<sup>33</sup> A few respondents claimed that shop owners around the square have at some point had to pay "protection money" to appease local gangs. One even claimed that such fees contributed to the slowing of gentrification forces in the area. I was unable to find documentation supporting these claims. Many other respondents, including numerous shop owners and a police officer, denied them.

### *Distribution Methods*

These characters and the plotlines they follow come to life through many distribution methods. A tourist application called, “Know Your ‘Bro,” delivers BP as a story of a former industrial area that now serves as a “gathering place,” demonstration venue, and hotspot for the young. A series of wooden posts around the square provides an audio tour recorded by residents like Seena and Julius, a general expression of localhood and togetherness. Graffiti on BP’s ping pong table tells a story in which, for example, “All Cops Are Bastards.” A plaque in the Apotek bar commemorates Kai Nielsen and his socialist statues. The song, “Den Sorte Firkant,” released in the 1970s, is a ballad of tyrant employers exploiting the hero worker (Appendix 4.8). Finally, the local battle between activists and police over Byggeren in 1980 has inspired dozens of radio programs, many now available digitally (E. G. Jensen, 2014). These and other modes of distribution are written, spoken, crafted, and designed to make place out of story around BP.



*Figure 26: Commemorative plaque of Nielsen’s statues, Blågård Apotek*

### *Spaces of Story*

Finally, narratives of BP are conveyed through space. The square itself, clearly, serves as a site of play, debate, and confrontation. An ideal stage for plots, it is only natural that the headlining photograph for a newspaper article titled, “Nørrebro – multiculturalism or parallel societies?” should depict a man sitting on one of Nielsen’s statues (Markholst & Dahl, 2012). Respondents describe space around BP as a means of protection or exposure: the stairs of KoncertKirken provide enough cover for young boys to smoke weed; a room in the library exclusively for girls provides a safe study space; and the trees, alleyways, and sculptures prevent BP from becoming a “panopticon” in which one is always watched (Dorte, Lisbeth).

But respondents also express a need for new spaces around the square that would help change storylines. Dorte, Lisbeth, and Madeleine call for “gang-sensitive” architecture – additional non-commercial benches and porticos that would draw gangs out of private cafes and apartment corridors that they often occupy. Kasper suggests creating a space in which young people can legally smoke weed.

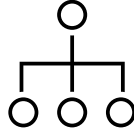
As they point to new potential spaces that could disrupt local narratives, respondents demonstrate the built environment's capacity to constrict or expand plotlines. In a sense, then, the notion of space as a standardized narrative form captures the core of this thesis. BP's users tell its stories through its spaces and the events taking place therein. The square is both a setting and character in these tales, its physical forms absorbing and shaping the unfolding drama.



Figure 27: Audio tour on BP



Figure 28: Ping pong table, BP



## Chapter 6

### The Place of Story

In my research on Blågårds Plads, I have tried to understand how three formal elements of story – time, plots, and forms – facilitate the creation of place. I will now weave together these findings by connecting them to theoretical aspects discussed in Chapter 2 and potential avenues for further exploration.

The materials I have gathered, from archived memories to personal observations to qualitative interviews, all depict BP as a distinct, multilayered place. The square is “cherished,” as Friedmann requires (2010, p. 154), by many – beloved as a space for meaningful “centering” events that take place annually (bicycle demolition derbies) or daily (ping pong matches). Indeed, it is a site of regular engagement: people “make” this collection of stones into a “value-endowed” place through constant performances (Tuan, 1977, p. 6), from a five-month asylum battle for Palestinian refugees to a five-minute search for a storefront’s old engraving. BP, concludes Dorte, is the “living room of Nørrebro,” a place where people can put on daily social performances in pursuit of meaning and identity (re)production.

As they project identities (of the revolutionary or community leader, the gentrifier or anti-gentrifier) onto the space, square users engage actively with the built environment. BP’s design, from its statues to its platforms, shapes the drama onstage – it gives “scripts” and “cues,” (Kohn, 2003, p. 3), nudging people towards “correct behaviors” of youthful play, political activism, historical appreciation, or working-class aesthetics. The case of BP confirms that this interplay is no monologue: as the built environment influences human activities, human users physically embed the square with meaning that references old patterns (Maria’s bench) or carves out something new (fællesskab dinners with squatters, immigrants, and spelt).

BP, on the whole, serves as a reference point on reality’s surface and in users’ imaginaries. Like identity, the square provides a sense of “selfsameness and continuity” (Weigert et al., 2007, p. 8) with which people can “know their place” (Harvey, 1989, p. 302) – they can use this sturdy site to gauge the passage of time

and change on individual and collective scales. BP acts as a magnet, attracting fragments of each respondent's "environmental pasts," those "memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values," and other components that define us (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 59). Respondents retrieve such fragments (the eviction of Allotria or a sense of localhood; a fear of outsiders or a dislike of Jutlanders) to convey and confront local change. For each user, the living room of BP contains photographs and smells, an aura to remember and call upon.

Through the square, people reveal place-based identity expressions that are both bounded in capital and nostalgia (Harvey, 1993) and free as "articulated moments in networks of social relations" (Massey, 1991, p. 29). Many respondents, like Alev, simultaneously position BP as a collection of diverse ethnic communities and a product of capitalist gentrification. Jens and Dorte can long nostalgically for past versions of Nørrebro and BP while also celebrating ongoing flows of people and ethnicities. Square identities are fixed, spatially (think of Mudi's observations on "peeing... to get warmth" or Maria's dislike for an incoming wine seller with no local ties) and temporally (Golden Ages lost; Jann's "perfect" working-class atmosphere). But local identities simultaneously transcend these boundaries: defending Palestinians and supporting future generations, for example, are definitional struggles around BP. This study therefore confirms May's finding that groups sometimes create a "reactionary... sense of place *through* a particular vision of [ ] global connections" (May, 1996, p. 196). In removing their children from immigrant-filled public schools or opening female-only library rooms for Muslim communities, BP users relate to the square *through* complex ideas about the immigrant Other and parallel lives.

Respondents do convey a notion of the "end of place," pointing to the loss of certain place-invoking spaces (an old drinking hole) and feelings (community familiarity). A few, like Maria, reveal anxieties about the place that is BP being washed away by rich newcomers. I never found the Nørrebro poet Søren Thomsen, but his nostalgic ideas clearly come through in the words of my respondents. At the same time, these people express a strong belief in BP as a robust, ongoing place. The square's endurance as place manifests in their passion for its events, traditions, and caretakers. Indeed, at their core, the above plotlines all present characters making claims about what (and who) the place of BP represents. The richness, variety, and contestation underlying these plots speak to the resilience of place on Den Sorte Firkant. Here my attempt to read a few tales of BP confirms May's additional call for more grounded, balanced studies of place (1996), studies that reconcile residents' contradictory ideas about the concept. Pia, for instance, denies BP's status as a "local place" in one breath, only to brag about the square's local, place-esque qualities in another.

Respondents actively make BP into place by harnessing multiple aspects of story. The square stands on literary devices. Myths abound, from its blue noble foundation to its black industrial period. There are even myths about myths – *who told Dorte that story about the origin of "Den Sorte Firkant"?* – and Romanesque "rituales" through which people reproduce place (the locals-only funeral procession, for example) (Rykwert, 1988, p. 30). Users thereby appreciate and make use of the "substitution or overlaying of the stories," about an old prince or a child abuse map, that are "integral to the establishing" of BP (Brown, 2000, p. 148). These iterative foundation myths seep into the area's placenames and circulate out into users' imaginations, festivals, and physical objects. With the words, "Blågårds Plads" and "Den Sorte Firkant," people travel across time to access various histories of the square. From its placenames to its timestamped statues to its

Blågård-blue bench, the square is a collection of chronotopes, narrativized intersections of time and space.

Reading the square as story – digging into this temporal framework and other narrative elements – has allowed me to organize and navigate a few of BP’s placed identity expressions. Turner’s “literary mind,” it seems, is not merely present on BP: square users directly relate to this place vis-à-vis literary principles. They conceive of it through “narrative imagining” (i.e., designating neighbors as characters), “projection” (using a tale about upstairs neighbors, or species of birds, to understand a story about their wider neighborhood), and “parable” (combining both into an explanation of local dynamics, parallel lives, demographic shifts, etc.) (Turner, 1998, p. 5). On Nørrebro’s Black Square, spaces are *storied*.

These tales are embedded in various standardized forms – built objects, romanticized personas, and, overall, what Blokland defines as “collective memory... shared memory – a tale of past events shared by members of a social group” (2001, p. 272). Respondents reproduce “shared” tales of the square, whether about placenames or gang wars, turning it into what Nora has called a “lieu de mémoire” (1989), a “site” of memory. It is a place made through the sum of personal histories. Taken together, my findings therefore suggest that urban places like BP can and should be studied as palimpsests, as texts layered with stories that have been imprinted onto the urban landscape to hold and demarcate individual and collective meanings. In its centering events and contested symbolic values, the square is a public “stage on which the drama of history... is performed” (Till, 2005, p. 8).

It is the platform for spatial *Bildungsromans*, coming-of-age identity formations of residents and communities. Indeed, the tales of BP bring into focus transitive connections linking place to story through identity. The temporal aspect of place, that accumulation of practiced engagements and “environmental pasts,” can be seen as a mirror to (and mechanism for) that of story. In its figures, anecdotes, and events, the living room of BP collects cycles of identity carving. Its grandfather clock ticks with every playground swing, violent protest, graffiti tag, and boutique opening. It chimes whenever someone uses it to make sense of their position in time and space, “to give form to their search for a mythic self, a coherent, timeless identity” (Till, 2005, p. 14).

Furthermore, respondents are aware of the effects these narratives have on the square and its users. Maria appreciates the meaning in her chronotopic bench, and Mudi understands the value in granting place authorship to young residents through local tours. Katrine expands on the imaginary, yet influential, nature of Nørrebro’s Golden Age lost and hero’s tale plots. “They’re playing at revolution,” she says of the people who have been drawn to BP by these tales, “they don’t know anything about real life.” Lisbeth identifies a “patriotic feeling about Nørrebro” that emanates from these explanatory logics and includes a drive to remove all fascists from the area. But the plot only runs so deep, she argues. “Have you kicked those fascists out?” she recalls asking “revolutionaries” about BP’s gangs. “No, but they’re brown,” they respond. “Yes, they’re brown,” she says, “but they’re fascist.” Users are selective, it seems, in how they choose to follow the area’s plots. They lean on certain logics for different ends – whereas Jann highlights BP football tournaments to support the hero’s tale of fighting segregation, Mudi uses the same example to retell the square’s tragedy of parallel lives. On the whole, then, respondents can be seen as consciously using narrative techniques as “tactics” (de Certeau, 1984), whether to combat subjugating forces, critique local movements, or decry social inequalities.

My research provides a point of departure for investigating the “authentic” within place studies. Respondents are cognizant of their identification with BP through stories, many of which are true, but many of which entail superficial appearances, imagined forces, and the stuff of myths. Jann lays it out plainly when talking about the square’s “working class atmosphere”: “It’s not real,” he muses, “It’s a history we have inside our heads—ideas.” Future research could apply narrative’s formal elements to dissect claims of (or against) so-called authenticity within spaces like BP. What does it mean for BP and Nørrebro to be considered “authentic” or “local” by the same people who recognize that the working-class roots of such feelings have been pulled out and thrown away? How “authentic” can a place really be?

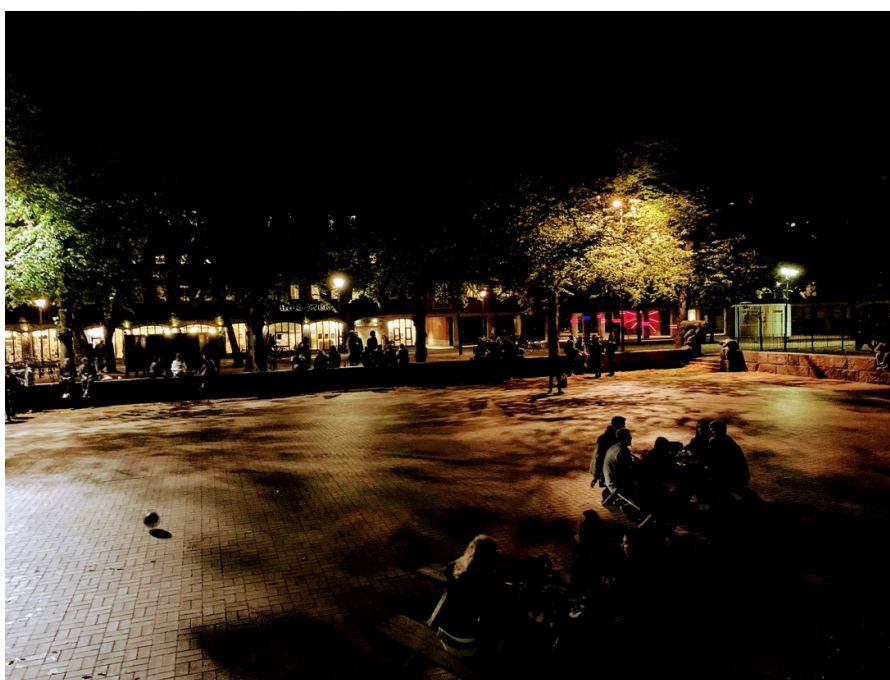
There are many more questions and prospective research directions provoked by my study of BP. Mudi and FRAK’s tours, which let young immigrant groups take control of placemaking stories, require closer inspection. How do such placemaking tales compare with the narratives of socially dominant groups and media channels? How are they received, absorbed, and circulated by listeners? Who is excluded from narrative placemaking around BP, and how else can their stories be heard? Such a comparison between institutional and subaltern placemaking tales would build on recent efforts to “address[ ] the consequences of the discursive dominance of certain narratives over others,” which “affect what defines ‘the community’ and what does not” and can lead to “place stratification” and “unequal access to resources” (Blokland, 2009, pp. 1593-1595). Indeed, I have only told a few of BP’s tales, and my sample was surely limited by these politics of narrative access. But what stories come from the square’s gang members? From its spelt? There are other timelines, plots, and characters bouncing across the square’s stone surface. More tales by more authors (more “kinds of birds”) need be told. As Katrine puts it, there should be a museum of these stories on BP.

Advancing such narrative placemaking research will continue to bridge gaps between literary studies and social sciences. My respondents demonstrate the ongoing truth observed by Bruner and de Certeau that “living is narrativizing” (1998, p. 142). But more can be done to formally analyze this narrativizing, to treat urban life as a proper literary text for critical inquiry. This perspective would allow us to consider, for instance, how the “spatial form” (Frank, 1945, p. 225) of modern plots (think of a walk through Dublin in *Ulysses* and Copenhagen in *Fodreise*) can direct solid, spatial creations of place in the real world or, on the other hand, how the “experimental” nature of modern and, especially, post-modern literature might contribute to a “fragmentation” of place (Brooks, 1992, p. 314). As I have shown in BP’s layered, time-jumping tales, the gathering and scattering of plot, identity, and place can be linked and surveyed comprehensively by applying the formal elements of story to particular spaces.

Approaching places through underlying tales of bygone Golden Ages, heroic activists, and villainous forces will help us move beyond mere description to deeper understandings of cities. In filtering BP through temporal frameworks, explanatory logics, and standardized forms, I have demonstrated the reproducibility of Finnegans’ urban narrative frame. This toolkit is necessary for digging into complex spaces like BP, which contain numerous place claims and just as many place narratives. The writing of place is ongoing and contested, but taking these literary structures to urban studies will help us measure such nuance and better grasp “the rich and messy domain of human interaction” (Bruner, in Finnegans, 1998, p. 180). Decoding urban space through story will allow us to question,

debate, and improve these “messy” places we create – to (re)write them, perhaps, with different plotlines and perspectives.

As it brings us closer to the city’s physical spaces and human relations within, an attempt to identify the urban place of story will bring us closer to ourselves. “These narrative resources,” Finnegan concludes, “are surely in the end the stories of us all, the creative artistry and resource through which we form our lives and the world around us” (1998, p. 180). For all its special events, professed locality, and idiosyncratic characters, then, Blågård’s Plads is a space of generalizability, that final element of narrative. Tales of this square in Copenhagen are tales of every square, their forms (if not their lessons) transferrable to new contexts, places, and people.



*Figure 29: BP, night, September 2020*



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## Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

### Personal:

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
2. Where are you from/have you lived?
3. What is your relationship with Blågårds Plads?
4. How, if at all, is your work related to area of BP?

### The Square:

1. Can you tell me about the square?
2. Do you hang out on the square? Doing what?
  - a. What brings people here?
  - b. What types of events happen on the square? Which do you attend?
3. What types of people live around it/use it?
4. Tell me about the square's physical design.
5. How has the area changed physically in the past 20 years?
6. The current reputation of square, could you talk about that?
  - a. How has this reputation evolved?
7. Why is BP such an active place?
8. What is it like growing up on the square?
  - a. What is it like raising family on the square?
9. Could you tell me about the history of the square?
  - a. How does this history still play a factor, if at all, today?
10. How would you describe the square's character?
11. What feelings arise inside you when you think of Blågårds Plads?
12. What kind of characters emanate from the square?
  - a. What role do the police play around the square?
13. What do you think of the appearances of buildings around the square?
  - a. What do you think about these statues on the square?
  - b. What do you think of its church being repurposed as a concert hall?
14. How, if at all, do you identify with the square?
15. What are three words that come to mind when I say, "Blågårds Plads"?

### The Neighborhood:

1. What is the relationship between Blågårds Plads and Nørrebro?
  - a. What role does the square play?
2. How has Nørrebro changed over the past 20 years?
3. How do these rising rents affect artists in the area?
4. What do you think when I say, "gentrification"? "Spelt"?
5. How is Nørrebro part of this narrative or resisting/pushing back?
6. What challenges do young people face in the neighborhood?
7. What is going to happen to the neighborhood going forward?
  - a. How will this affect BP?

### Business:

1. How long have you worked at this shop/has it been on Blågårdsgade?
  - a. What brought it/you here?
2. Would you say it's a "local" shop?

3. Who are your customers? Are they from the area? Are they ethnic Danes?
4. How much of your customer base is Spelt?
5. How would you describe the shopping scene around BP/Blågårdsgade?
6. What has shop turnover been like in the area in the past 10 years?
7. What are the biggest challenges you face as a shop owner around BP?

Immigrants:

1. Do you spend much time with immigrants around the square? / Do you spend much time with white ethnic Danes around the square?
2. What is your perception of immigrant communities around the square?
  - a. How do they use BP?
3. Do groups mix on the square? Where and in what ways?
4. How are immigrants integrated into the community?
  - a. Do they shop on Blågårdsgade?
    - i. Do they go to the same shops as white ethnic Danes?
    - b. Are there adequate services for immigrant groups?
5. Do people live separate/parallel lives around BP (“parallel-samfund”)?
  - a. What do you think of this?
  - b. What can be done about this?

Former Residents:

1. Why did you choose to leave Nørrebro?
2. By the time you left, how had the area changed/was starting to change?
3. Have you been back to the neighborhood often since you left?
  - a. What is your impression of the area now?
4. Could you live there again?
5. Do you feel like an outsider?

## Appendix 2 – Observation Notes

I regularly visited Blågårds Plads between September 2020 and January 2021. Sometimes I took notes:

### **-- 11.9.20, Friday, 12:30pm --**

*street vendors... Many students / young... Benches surrounding not filled in center... Weed smell... Pissoir... Benches randomly scattered? ... Table tennis... Calm, peace*

*One kid on playground... 3 men of color in depressed area... Browns/dirts of floor, brick to match buildings... Uneven surface ... Now fourth man of color joins*

*Big water delivery truck ... Sculptures like chess pieces ... Main Street ... Woman cleaning rug out window... Trees tall, hide buildings ... Girl crossing square watching something ... Hard looking surface*

*Fair amount of trash, small things, wrappers, but only on perimeter ... Movement/life on Main Street side ... Black man crosses square ... Three elements of graffiti: toilet, bench, store*

*Kid running with large backpack ... Nice looking retail storefronts ... Woman in hijab with girl ... Fifth Man, why do I feel like a narc ... Old McDonald*

*Some money changing hands ... Arabic ... Church doors opening, closing ... Two more kids with that mom in hijab ... Always some movement around*

### **-- 14.9.20, Monday, 9:30am --**

*the demolition practices of the late 20th century pushed out many of the working class residents that had characterized the BP neighborhood ... in their place, the area seems to have been filled with two very different communities – immigrants and students*

*I was able to see both groups use the square over the course of last Friday. During the afternoon I saw many immigrant families taking advantage of the playground ... At night I saw groups of students taking advantage of the 80 kroner craft beers sold at the corner bar.*

*these groups aren't necessarily opposed by default, but their needs and desires often do not line up – and you can feel this tension while walking around the square ... there's a street yoga studio, a falafel stand, a boutique art gallery, and a small pottery shop where you can pay to make ceramic earthenware*

*very different from when people were paid to make pots and pans in the square during the 19th century...*

*the people, products, and services in and around BP have changed dramatically over the square's lifetime, but its basic functions (play and protest), for now, seem still intact.*

*physical and symbolic sandbox in which the user is both a creation and a creator ... As social creations, we follow stable cues about appropriate behavior, working for our families and playing nicely ... As social creators, we design new ideas and tear down old ones, sometimes with violence*

**-- 17.9.20, Thursday, 10:00am --**

*The sunken profile of BP's central rectangle is, I think, crucial. You step down into the center. The lowered space invites people in, in a way not so different from the feeling of walking down into a theater before a show*

*Once you are down in the center, you start to appreciate the closed nature of BP as a square ... The square has five or six story buildings on all four sides - there is no large avenue extending from the square, no vistas of things far away that might distract the square's users*

*The canopy of trees lining the square perimeter also contribute to the feeling of enclosure*

*By stepping down into the square you have entered a box. If you spend some more time walking around you recognize that this is a performance box -- there is a raised platform in the center of the northern side*

*This is a stage, a pulpit for speakers ... Again, the depressed, sunken nature of the square enhances the effect of this platform, which is raised up even higher*

*This square therefore seeks to concentrate in two senses -- it concentrates many people in one space, and it concentrates the minds of those people on one person or idea or goal*

**-- 21.9.20, Monday, 6:45pm --**

*Statues all look down, evoke struggle, contortion, strength; are they hiding, guardians of the square*

*Arabic music on a phone speaker ... Police stop car ... Table tennis graffiti ... Statue graffiti ... Headscarf woman crossing ... More on playground, father with air pods ... Construction sound and birds black and white robins ... Pedestal structure - clear leader position*

*Same police car making rounds ... Not the most inviting church: indented, car park, steps intimidate, no signs ... Young girls on phones ... Boutique pottery - still earthenware ... Cozy look in library*

*Vegan pizza ... Sound walk ... Many women in headscarves ... Sound cloud also - focus on common resident ... do you need blue courtyard space 'most beautiful views? come in and look out ... Coworking space? ... Danish Muslim Organization*

*Night! ... cameras actually have snowflakes ... Party central*

**-- 2.10.21, Friday, 1:30pm --**

*Two young boys walk meet mother with son , walk back, now back ... German tourists ... Rollerbladers ... Family five green van fotex bags*

*Talk to wine lady about parking green van they're not residence just visiting because buzzer ...  
Father son residents cleaning bike seats it's like new new bike for the kid, push star Price ...  
Spell test bell and fix tire*

*230 for 2 Volt guys eat their lunch ... Same recycle man on the bike circling the Square just  
like me ... Woman in her 30s having coffee with another woman is sitting on one of the statues*

*Recycle man pick some stuff from the middle of the square seems like a good place for business ...  
Green car is leaving 10 minutes after*

*Been here one hour cold ... Father with his daughter who pointed out statues is now playing in  
the playground ... Man who had brought back to sit on the bench is walking back to his place  
in a walker*

*I wonder what the ball league control at FSB office is for ... Move in with Roskilde festival back  
walks into apartment at 9C ... Basketball to people while they choose to eat here and how  
business is around here if they make a lot of deliveries around here with the people are like who  
they deliver to if they know the word spelt but it seems like they're actually 3 V people eating here*

*Forgot to lock my bike totally fine ... Ask them why they come there how are the prices are there  
and where they like to go sing music also ask them what is the reputation of the area, what they  
think of the statues / square ... Also BLUE TACO*

**-- 3.1.21, Sunday, 3:20pm --**

*Two families using playground ... Girl roller skating in square ... Old man white walking  
home with groceries to building next to Renees*

*30s women walking Holden for Home to same building ... 2 Volt drivers lunch ... Speak to  
kebab Man ... Family play soccer in square*

*Recycle bike Man didn't know ... Two white Danes beer - it's a church, still a church ... Three  
white Dane girls 20s backgammon - is it The church is it a church or is it at school I think it's  
a school*

*Two girls head scarf buzzing in next door ... Man at ranees 3:50 ... Police car 4 o'clock ...  
Used to be a church now it's more like a concert hall*

*Parking next to church for moving ... Ask if it's cool ... TOLS graffiti*

**-- 4.1.21, Monday, 4:50pm --**

*Couple with baby, Yankees hat ... Live a few blocks away ... (KoncertKirken) Don't know ,  
looks like a church ... Says Koncertkirken, some kind of church*

*Cold in CPH, any other tourist advice ... Sign next to it you could read*

*Two 20 years old girls, from the neighborhood, say KK, it's a school*

**-- 9.1.21, Saturday, 1:44pm --**

*Two families in playground ... Pissoir closed ... Couple looking at sculptures looking at phone ... From around, just read they are 16 motifs? Diff occupations - that one plays music Know your bro, also in English ... Hey in English, convo ... Couple - church, can't remember name, from further out ... Girl-father point to sculptures, run to diff ones*

*Four or five people on the bench talking towards each other ... 0° but still people gather outside to talk ... Drink a beer ... Arabic among three guys*

*I have falafel from Hassan ... Hassan who is from Palestine and asked me where I was from said there's too much Lebanon in the falafel in the states and said that he gets a lot of customers from the states ... business is slow with corona ... he won't be here every day but in the summer every day these have been in this spot for two months and lives in the area with family ... there are lots of Palestinians here just like they are in Sweden and United States and it's because they have here roots ... and he likes living here and he was born here and grew up here ... I got a falafel 430 krone*

*Man came prepared to sit on the bench has bag to see to sit on ... Family playing football in square two little kids and two parents look like parents are in their 30s*

*Man an orange jacket talking on phone has been walking around for a while ... Ask Hassan about graffiti on stand and about the permitting process for stand and about what he likes her doesn't like about the area*

*Also have to consider that people might be outside more even though it's cold because of corona and not being able to just chill in cafes*

**-- 11.1.21, Monday, 3:56pm --**

*Two families white in playground ... One in square ... Nearly dark, cold and windy*

*Memorial wreath on platform ... Cat looking down ... Police car 4:10*

**-- 12.1.21, Tuesday, 4:06pm --**

*Two guys ping pong, beer, mat for feet ... Also recording ... 6 guys, 2 pushing, Arabic yelling, separation 4:15 still light*

*Track suits, loitering at no 21 ... More fighting under awning ... Juice and standing guy... Two Indian girls in Audi show up to pick up ... Red hat yelling in front of one off ... Red pushing stroller and yelling ... Greeted by two guys in square ... Another into suw lion*

*Circus people playing ping pong ... Wind not a factor in bplads ... Talking to these people because of the square being so open, inviting*

*Rasmus Paladan, burning in square with police ... Lot of police around here ... Two police cars overall ... Weed we don't have problems with police but my friends tanned do*

*Four paddles ... Christopher on other diverse players ... Pia has paddles*

**-- 13.1.21, Wednesday, 3:14pm --**

*Men on table in playground even tho snowing ... Flowers for funeral - old tradition of going around square twice ... Looks like war memorial ... Very Blågårds with graffiti ... Woman stops to look at it. Walks up stairs*

*Bike stolen five times since 12 ... Three guys come in - follow on Instagram, saw sign, dry January ... Saw bjorn ... Kk discount*

*Kids playing ... Ranees folding napkins, talking ... Many strollers ... Woman parking in yard - ran homeless dinner*

*Another parked car in front of church - annoys Maria, who doesn't want to be bulldog*

**-- 15.1.21, Friday, 10:00am --**

*Man with two girls peeing next to pissoir ... Pong table made in Germany*

**-- 23.1.21, Saturday, 8:15pm --**

*Family young white couple with a baby call me on the window first floor room ... it's a six or seven man with a car parked before the barricade*

*I see two guys playing ping-pong not the people I know ... not as good ... square is lit up and I'm about to enter the kiosk to see if I can talk to Rabeem*

*More notes on Rabeem ... everyone would come in most people would buy cigarettes of an individual cigarettes ... I didn't know you could do*

*Rabim barely worked up as a customer take his time ... is very nonchalant ... not very concerned about what other people are paying enough for*

*payment coins ... is interesting else to see some people pay for individual cigarettes with credit card ... he took the receipts some people didn't pay*

*said he would keep track with list on the wall ... a bunch of receipts tacked on but he also used one of those receipts to write his thoughts on numerous times ... it was a government killing us off*

*hard to say that he actually kept track of debts ... he knew off the top of his head how much things would cost ... he got pretty relaxed with his service ... I think a lot of the customers they didn't care because they know him*



### Appendix 3 – Interview Codes

Name	Affected Interviews	Total References
alternative uses	16	51
anti-church	12	26
anti-gentrification	17	96
architecture	21	110
assumptions about immigrants	23	116
bad reputation	24	97
BPlads design	24	132
BPlads identity	24	205
BPlads language	20	64
built identity	13	36
built profile	13	33
church reuse	19	123
church symbols	16	56
city church	7	24
community	24	153
crime	24	111
culture clash	24	194
Danish Church	13	41
Danish culture	19	116
demographic changes	21	154
dialogue	24	163
disconnect	19	105
diversity	24	116
drugs	24	73
education	24	75
expensive cars	6	6
experimentation	24	182
“exposure”	18	38
feeling safe	24	121
finances	24	85
future	12	18
gangs	24	108

Name	Affected Interviews	Total References
generational	21	82
genre mix	10	35
gentrification	24	181
“ghetto”	12	42
grassroots	21	116
group identity	23	188
“hipster”	19	93
history	24	159
immigrants	24	178
inclusive space	24	101
interaction with space	24	224
international profile	18	53
life to the square	24	93
local	24	132
local activism	22	120
local boys	22	108
local business	24	163
local conflict	24	190
local connections	22	55
media	14	30
mixed users	24	155
movement	24	100
music scene	14	53
Muslim culture	17	60
“myth”	1	1
neighborhood change	24	189
neighbors	24	124
niche	10	19
noise	11	22
organizational structure	24	161
parallel lives	13	73

Name	Affected Interviews	Total References
permanence	14	35
play	13	27
police	22	96
positive impact	24	106
pride	14	63
proposals, ideas	23	119
public vs private	8	11
relations between spaces	17	71
rising prices	21	100
“sacred”	14	47
sculptures	3	7
services needed	24	193

Name	Affected Interviews	Total References
social inclusion	24	82
social mix	24	128
stabilization	14	23
students	19	52
support local	24	111
the Other	23	120
the State	21	107
tolerating	24	121
traditions	21	91
trouble explaining	21	95
unintended use	10	15
urban tactics	24	270
village	10	25

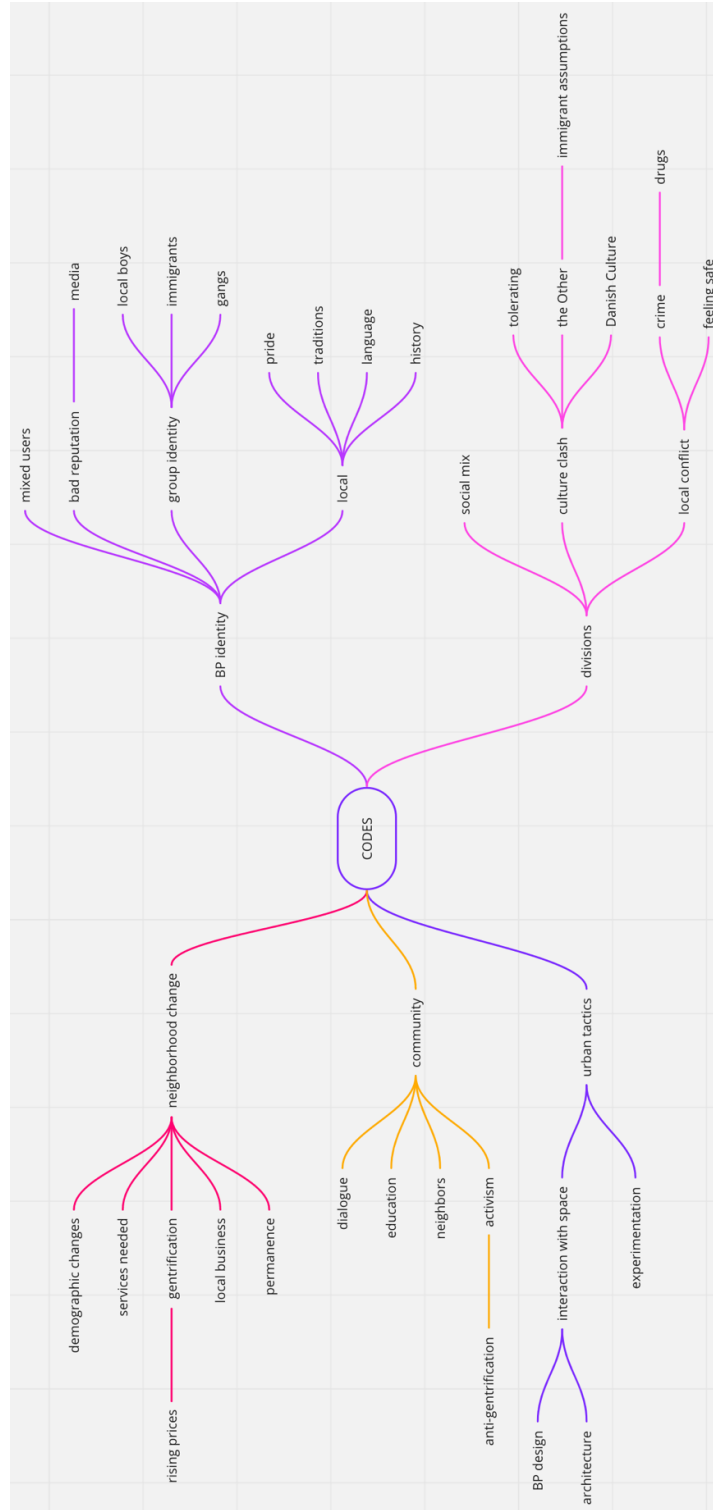


Figure 30: Coding mind map (made on Miro.com)

## Appendix 4 – Memory Translations

All memories were retrieved in September 2020 from Copenhagen City Archives, available at <https://kbharkiv.dk/udforsk/erindringer/>. Google Translate and DeepL platforms were used for English translations. Two verses from the 1971 track, “Den Sorte Firkant,” are also included. Available at <http://www.ponty.dk/slumstor.htm>.

### 4.1 – Marie Biller (born 1878)

*Vi boede på Blågårds Plads, hvor der lå  
en snavset smedje, der dagligt væltede sod  
og snavs ud over kvarteret. Ja, der er stor  
forskel fra dengang til i dag.*

*We lived at Blågårds Plads, where there  
was a dirty smithy that daily spilled soot  
and dirt all over the neighborhood. Yes,  
there is a big difference from then to today.*

Biller, M. (2018). *Erindring nr. 896*. Københavns Stadsarkiv.

### 4.2 – Jens Christian Raavig (born 1896)

*Blågårdsplads var et samlingssted for  
kvarterets drenge. Hvor kirken nu ligger,  
var der et ret højt plankebejn med et bræt  
øverst, hvor du bare kunne holde din  
balance. Her havde fremtidens  
“circusfolk” deres træningsplads. Det var  
hertesående at se drengene ramme salto  
fra den smalle platform og som regel lande  
sikkert på jorden.*

*Blågårdsplads was a gathering place for the  
neighborhood’s boys. Where the church now  
lies, there was a fairly high plank fence  
with a board at the top, where you could  
just keep your balance. Here the “circus  
people” of the future had their training  
ground. It was heartbreaking to see the  
boys hit somersaults from the narrow  
platform, and usually land safely on the  
ground.*

*Men det skete i det Herrens år 1791, at  
Prins Carl, broder til Kong Frederik 4.  
IV byggede sig et landsted ved Denne be-  
givenhed kan vist ikke være denne  
beretning uvedkommende, idet jeg er født  
indenfor området, hvor landstedet havde sin  
park, nemlig hjør-neejendommen  
Blågårds-gade - Baggensens-gade i  
Baggensens-gade nr 15. Prinsen ville ikke  
genkendende til navnet “Blågård”, det hed  
hans lyst- gård, efter sigende fordi taget var  
blåt. Senere fik eet, nogle siger to  
seminarier samme navn.*

*But it happened in the year of the Lord  
1791, that Prince Carl, brother of King  
Frederik IV, built himself a country  
house. This event can certainly not be  
irrelevant to this account, as I am born  
within the area where the country house  
had its park, the corner property  
Blågårds-gade-Baggensens-gade... The prince  
would [now] recognize the name  
“Blågård,” which was called his pleasure  
garden, reportedly because the roof was  
blue.*

Raavig, J. C. (1969). *Erindring nr. 1820*. Københavns Stadsarkiv.

#### 4.3 – Else Kaspersen (born 1915)

*På det tidspunkt optrådte Ping Club undertiden nede i muslingskallen på Blågårdsplads. De løb på rulleskøjter. Så gik alle vores børn ned til Blågårdsplads for at se alle de talentfulde børn. Jeg ville også prøve det, men nogle gange gik det galt, fordi mine ikke var så gode.*

*At that time, the Ping Club sometimes performed down in the mussel shell at Blågårdsplads. They ran on roller skates. Then all of us kids went down to Blågårdsplads to see all the talented children. I wanted to try that too, but sometimes it went wrong, because mine were not so good.*

Kaspersen, E. (1995). *Erindring nr. 1184*. Københavns Stadsarkiv.

#### 4.4 – Alice Blicher Nielsen (born 1931)

*I 1939 var der tit møder på Blågårds Plads, det var KU er og DKU er der holdt møder...*

*In 1939 there were often meetings at Blågårds Plads, it was KU and DKU that held meetings...*

*Efterhånden som tiden gik, blev der mere og mere uro i nabolaget. Pludselig en dag skulle der bygges bunkers på Blågårds Plads, og det passede jo ikke os børn...*

*As time went on, there was more and more unrest in the neighborhood. Suddenly one day bunkers were to be built at Blågårds Plads, and it did not suit us children...*

*En dag jeg skulle hjem, jeg kom fra Åboulevarden og skulle forbi Blågårds Plads for at komme hjem, var der et enormt skyderi på Pladsen.*

*One day I was going home, I came from Åboulevarden and was going past Blågårds Plads to get home, there was a huge shooting at the square.*

Nielsen, A. B. (1995). *Erindring nr. 548*. Københavns Stadsarkiv.

#### 4.5 – Lajla Dight (born 1940)

*Jeg har ofte undret mig over, hvorfor så mange af os af vore forældre havde fået forklaret visse steder, vi absolut ikke måtte gå. Blågårdsgade var "forbudt område".*

*I have often wondered why for so many of us our parents had explained certain places we absolutely should not go. Blågårdsgade was a "forbidden area".*

Dight, L. (2012). *Erindring nr. 11220*. Københavns Stadsarkiv.

#### 4.6 – Alma Jensen (born 1896)

*På samme tid skete store ting. Lindbergh fløj over Atlanterhavet, og radioen kom ind i vore hjem...*

*At the same time, great things happened. Lindbergh flew over the Atlantic, and the radio came into our homes...*

*Men det var intet imod den utilfredshed,  
som bredte sig i dele af befolkningen.  
Skulle man vurdere det, var det vel mest  
skuffelse over, at velstanden ikke kom  
hurtig nok. Det gav sig udslag i store  
rabaldermøder på Blågårdsplads,  
undertiden også ved Christiansborg. De  
blev kaldt Syndikalister og Bolsjevikker.*

*But it was nothing against the discontent  
that was spreading in parts of the  
population... It was probably most  
disappointing that prosperity did not come  
fast enough. This was reflected in large  
riots at Blågårdsplads, sometimes also at  
Christiansborg. They were called  
Syndicalists and Bolsheviks.*

Jensen, A. (1969). *Erindring nr. 1190*. Københavns Stadsarkiv

#### 4.7 – Anne-Lise Andersen (born 1927)

*Kunne vi finde på at gå over til Blågårds  
Plads, hvor vi rendte rundt og klatrede op  
på de stenfigurer, der omkransede pladsen.*

*We could decide to go over to Blågårds  
Plads, where we ran around and climbed  
up on the stone figures that encircled the  
square.*

Andersen, A. (1995). *Erindring nr. 4*. Københavns Stadsarkiv.

#### 4.8 – “Den Sorte Firkant” (released 1971)

*I hundred år fra far til son  
arbejder uge efter uge  
folket får en ussel løn  
så rigmanden penge kan puge  
den Sorte Firkant gir nogle guld  
mens andre kun får sølv i håret  
og for at glemme drikker man sig fuld  
mens chefen får pengene i foret*

*For a hundred years from father to son  
working week after week the  
people get a lousy salary  
so the rich man can pocket  
the Black Square gives some gold  
while others only get silver in their hair  
and to forget you get drunk  
while the boss gets the money in the lined*

*Sorte Firkant, dine gader er mørke  
men i dit sind er der lys  
Sorte Firkant, fra din stenørken  
skal direktøren snart få sig et gys.*

*Black Square, your streets are dark  
but in your mind there is light  
Black Square, from your stone desert  
the director should soon get a shiver.*

*Når direktøren så er blevet rig  
men vil ha endnu flere penge  
ja så køber han det hus du bor i  
og tjener på det, det er for ringe  
han sviner med landets gode muld  
hans slags folk er vandaler  
forureningen giver ham guld  
mens regeringen bare taler*

*When the director has become rich  
but wants even more money  
yes then he buys the house you live in  
and earns on it, it is too little  
he sucks with the good soil of the country  
his kind of people are vandals  
pollution gives him gold  
while the government just talks*

Slumstormerne. (1971). *Den Sorte Firkant. On Det Kan Blive Bedre Kammerat*.  
Copenhagen: Demos.

