Mathilde Kirkegaard

Transformation of Cultural Environments

<u>Point of departure</u>
With a point of departure in the work by the research group 'Screening af Kulturmiljøer' (SAK), the Ph.D.-project will investigate a transformation strategy of cultural environments in Denmark. SAK is currently categorizing and mapping the Danish cultural environments. The research group is doing this together with the respective municipality and has currently described 2000+ cultural environments in Denmark. The group evaluates the cultural environments current status and the cultural environments intrinsic abilities - such as the ability to contain habitation, tourism, business or culture.

Cultural environments consist of an area, a built whole and its landscape, that conveys a historical narrative. The narrative of a former industry, an ancient work method, a social structure or a type of living. The buildings within the cultural environment can have an official degree of preservation value, but in many cases, the buildings can't be granted that status, and they are historical relevant in relation to the context of the cultural environment. It is the collective of buildings and its landscape that conveys a strong narrative, and that ultimately categorizes it as a cultural environment.

In Denmark, there is no official preservation law for cultural environments. The municipalities can make preservations plans for an area, but this is very costly, and the government can only grand the landscape or the individual building with an official preservation status. Often cultural environments are being left for decay, due to changes in society, or their potentials are being overlooked in planning. This is posing a threat regarding the preservation of cultural environments, but the intrinsic abilities of the cultural environments are likewise not being unfolded and used in planning. Examples show how some transformations of cultural environments generates a newfound local identity and sense of belonging.

Cultural environments cannot be preserved as museum artefacts. They need to be considered as part of a context of the surrounding buildings and a network of people living in and around it. The point of departure for the Ph.D.-project lies within the understanding that preservation of a cultural environment is its ability to retell its narrative with its intrinsic potentials of habitation, business, tourism or culture. In short, creating value for people today.

<u>Theoretical contextualization</u>
Cultural environments can be perceived as a living format that has witnessed important happenings, states of society, work methods, demographic compositions, etc. Marc Augé describes in 'Non-Places' from 1995 the importance of places not being "completely erased" (Augé 1995:79) and having a relational value, historic value and an identity (Augé 1995). This can also be described as the narrative of the physical environments. The narrative can be a strategic baseline for a development that can underline a unique strength and identity of the cultural environment. When dealing with the built environment the shapes, site and materials, and the sensing of these can be understood through phenomenology. The architectural theoretician Christian Norberg-Schulz describes in 'Genius Loci' from 1980 how a building must be understood in its physical, social and historical context.

"To respect the genius loci does not mean to copy old models. It means to determine the identity of the place and to interpret it in ever new ways. Only then we may talk about a living tradition which makes change meaningful by relating it to a set of locally founded parametres." (Norberg-Schulz 1980:182)

He states that the genius loci – the spirit of the place – must be respected, and by doing so the identity of a place can be enhanced or reinterpreted in a transformation that relates to the local context. Another part of Norberg-Schulz's *genius loci* is the notion that the identification with the built environment varies according to individuals. His theory leads to the importance of contextual and local understanding. Australian professor Laurajane Smith describes in 'Uses of Heritage', from 2006, how heritage is of great importance to its context and connected to the local community. The quote below expresses Smith's view of heritage that - like *genius loci* – has to be perceived as something beyond the physical object:

"Heritage is something vital and alive. It is a moment of action, not something frozen in material form. […] There is an interlinked relationship between the activities that occur at places and the places themselves" (Smith 2006:83)

She underlines a clash between the tangible heritage and the life evolve around and in it, and stresses challenges with the management of heritage and the western "physical" orientation. In the matter of architectural management, the architectural critic Jane Jacobs is one of the first to advocate a more democratic approach to the built environment (Jacobs 1992). These theoretical views outline the importance of local understanding and citizens involvement when dealing with the physical environment.

UNESCO has expanded their notion of cultural heritage with an immaterial list of 508 cultural heritage subjects of an intangible nature (UNESCO list 2019). The material list of UNESCO is comprised of 1121 subjects (UNESCO list 2019) and to these subjects there are clear guidelines for the preservation and development of the heritage. The immaterial list is in its nature of definition not connected to something tangible, but there are exceptions. One of the exceptions is the

Chinese traditional architectural craftsmanship for timber-framed structures, which in its essence is connected to the physical wooden structure, but since it is the craftsmanship that comprises the - UNESCO defined - heritage it is registered on the intangible list.

The example of the traditional Chinese architectural building method articulates one of the current imbalances when defining cultural heritage and thus an imbalance in the fundament for preservation or development. Cultural heritage is comprised of both the physical elements, but also to an intangible value of certain use, act or work, or the intangible value it generates for people today. In the Ph.D.-project cultural environments will be explored as a type of heritage that is in-between the immaterial list and material list, as something that also contains something intangible - a social layer.

Research questions

As mentioned above, the built environment can be understood to be something beyond the physical object and to contain a social layer. The theoretical orientation tries to broaden the understanding of, and approach to, cultural environments. The definition of cultural environments made by SAK, in short: 'a collection of buildings or/and landscape connected by the same historical narrative', will be a point of departure for the first research question. The question will investigate an extended understanding of cultural environments:

R.Q. I: With an extended focus on the social aspect, what is a cultural environment today?

The importance of historical references in the physical environment is partially due to its intrinsic accumulated knowledge and phenomenological quality, e.g.: site-specific identity, sense of place, historical introspect, etc., and this can advantageously be valued in planning. The value of the built environment is described above with Christian Norberg-Schulz and Marc Augé, as something within the built environment, and as something that can affect its context. This raises the question of the role of the cultural environment in its local context, today and in the future:

R.Q. II: Why are cultural environments relevant in the development of the respective local area and the municipality?

The development abilities of the cultural environment, described by SAK: culture, tourism, business and habitation, leads to the matter of unfolding the intrinsic abilities and potentials. Laurajane Smith and Jane Jacobs were mentioned as advocates for a democratic approach to the process of alterations and implementations in the built environment. They describe this as a possible asset and a vital part of developments. Citizen inclusion is a common method in relation to urban design and city planning, but it is a new phenomenon when dealing with cultural heritage. In Denmark, official and governmental organizations define what is worth preserving and how. When opening the definition of cultural environments to be more than the physical frames, the matter of how to deal with cultural environments becomes vital.

The Danish cultural ministry defines the Danish cultural heritage with it being "ours" and a "mutual" value, but the measures to which it is being treated is strictly "top-down" (Kulturministeriet 2019). Rules and regulations to preserve the buildings are often not inclusive of the life that is being lived in the cultural heritage or can be unfolded within it. A cultural environment can contain a few buildings having an official preservation status, but otherwise, it is without a collective preservation plan. This can both generate a possibility to be freer in the alteration of cultural environments, but it can also allow the cultural environments to be destroyed by development.

On UNESCO's material heritage list, there are different types of subjects and some of them can be described as whole areas and categorized as cultural environments. A few of the areas have been labelled "in danger", but almost all the sites have a description of elements that pose a threat against the preservation of the heritage. One of the sites that could be categorized as a cultural environment is Antigua Guatamala, which in 2017 had the following threats: "*Commercial development, housing, and impacts of tourism, visitor and recreation*" (UNESCO Antigua Guatamala 2018).

If historical buildings and areas are being recognized containing an individual value and recognized to be "ours", it should be treated more democratically and be allowed to generate a value for people today. Different case examples, both national and international, show how cultural heritage becomes a central part of their respective local communities. One example is, how the municipality of the Australian city Ballarat placed cultural heritage in the focal point of a large regeneration strategy. Another example is how the Danish city Ebeltoft experienced a transformation by local initiative of an abandon industrial building, into a community centre. Both cases express how the historic traces become a part of a new narrative for the local community and a central part in the development strategy. The means of how the two cases unfold this leads to the final research questions:

R.Q. III: How can Danish cultural environments be transformed today, complementing the development of the respective local area and municipality?

Research methods

The research approach will be centred in an experiment in a cultural environment. The overall method is the humanistic method Action Research which allows the researcher to access the project in two ways: as a researcher and as an active part of the design intervention (Brinkmann 2010). Action Research allows the researcher to be part of the experiment, which is often needed in the method Research by Design.

Design-based research is associated with a degree of involvement from the researcher, just as the designer cannot be separated from the design. The researcher's involvement in an experiment is recognized in humanistic research and it is an essential part of qualitative methods. The research in the cultural environment will explore a process that invites different local parties and the local community, which is expressed by both Jane Jacobs and Laurajane Smith, as an aspect needs to be a part of the processes in the built environment and the management of heritage.

Jacobs and Smith also touch upon the notion of identity, which is linked to the narrative of the cultural environment. By introducing the narrative, as part of the methods, the understanding of the cultural environment as a living thing becomes evident, both in terms of the history and future, but also in terms of the cultural environment being dependent on the life surrounding and defining it. This understanding of the cultural environment will be investigated through architectural methods and combined with a phenomenological approach inspired by the phenomenological architectural theory.

Design intervention
The investigations revolve around a physical design in 1:1 in a selected cultural environment: a design intervention. The design intervention has the purpose of activating the cultural environment both to inform and invite the local community to engage. Jesko Fezer describes in 'Urban Catalyst – The Power of Temporary Use' how small designs can act like acupuncture that, with a small needle, gives energy to an area beyond the small pin (Oswald et al 2013). When one is working with designs as a catalyst to activate an area, the main purposes is to explore the opportunities of the area and to change the perception of the area. As described, the group SAK points towards a set of potentials within the cultural environment: habitation, tourism, business or culture. This can be translated to potentials for "new life" in the cultural environment, which underlines the importance of integrating the local community and respective relevant parties in the design intervention.

The design intervention will visually communicate a process of alteration and it aims to unfold the narrative of the cultural environment. The design intervention will use the method Research by Design. The research will explore the effect of inserting design(s) to the cultural environment. Investigations will be made before, under and after the insertion of the design, and the investigations will be made with the ambition to understand the local community's perception of the area. In correlation to interviews and surveys, architectural investigations will likewise be made before, under and after the insertion of the design. It is not the specific design that is the "product" of the research, but rather the effect of the design which will be investigated before, during and after. This also allows the designer to step away from the design and shift between the role of a designer and a researcher, which characterizes the method of Action Research.

The design intervention is a mean that interacts with the physical frames of the cultural environment. The design intervention investigates whether the inherent narrative of the cultural environment can be highlighted through a design. As mentioned, the design can be informative, inclusive and/or inviting. Inform about change, be inclusive in the process or in its form invite a new kind of use. Whether the design intervention is informative, inclusive and/or inviting, the design intervention is of a temporary nature: an intervention for a period of time. Temporary design interventions can work as part of a process-oriented development. A temporary design intervention can act as a test, creating a visible and open development process. This approach is inspired by inclusive urban planning theories, as well as a democratic approach to cultural heritage development.
The design intervention strives to work with the social aspect - both according to co-creation, but also through a possible change in the perception or increase the use of the cultural environment.

Action Research and investigations
Action Research works as an umbrella for the smaller investigations in the cultural environment, which consist of a songline-investigation*, a design intervention and a quantitative questionnaire, as well as qualitative interviews with politicians and municipal employees. Various qualitative methods are included in the songline-investigation with the aim to track the perception of the informants: how they relate to the cultural environment and how they perceive it.

The songline-investigation explores the individual perception and gives the researcher a view through the optics of the informant. The study explores the individual experiences of the cultural environment, which is linked to phenomenology, that describes the sensing between the individual and the object, but also the theory that advocates for more democratic management of cultural heritage since places are experienced and perceived individually.

A quantitative survey with 100+ responses, made before the design intervention, generates a notion of the general status the cultural environment has in the local community. The survey can be carried out again after the design intervention, and thus trace changes in the perception.

Process orientated design intervention

The diagram, presented together with the abstract, represents a "timeline" with two possible approaches and outcomes of the design intervention: A and B. The diagram tries to state that there will be made investigations before, during and after the design intervention, and that the level of cooperation can differ.
The integration of the local community and relevant parties can vary from e.g.: actual cooperation (see diagram, 1A) to casual interaction with the design (using it, watching it, touching it) (see diagram, example 1B). The effect of the implementation of the intervention will be documented before, during and after, and this is done through a field log with photographs and the investigations described above. The intervention will, as mentioned, strive to activate the cultural environment, open a dialogue and invite the local community and relevant parties to engage. The diagram shows a "next phase" (see diagram, 2A and 2B) which can consist of permanent new design or development plans for the site. The design interventions will work as catalysts and strive to activate the respective area, and it has the purpose of exploring the opportunities and to change the perception of the area.

The Ph.D.-project originates from the perspective; that cultural environments contains both physical and social understandings and should be developed in relation to its context of social network and its physical context. The initial research question examines a social aspect of cultural environments, concerning the social network, the use and the relational value. In the second research question the understanding of cultural environments, as being part of and influencing its context, is central. The third research question explores the method by which cultural environments can be developed.

The design intervention strives to motivate and allow a broad engagement. In symbiosis, the cultural environment will influence the local community, and the local community will help the development of the cultural environment. The physical interventions will communicate the narrative of the cultural environment and generate a common understanding. By the narrative of the cultural environment, there will be gained a common development direction. Likewise, the new discourse on cultural environments, as being a vibrant historic line of events that continues into the future, can allow the cultural environments to be contemporary and functional.

---

* The songline-investigation begins with a semi-structured interview in which the informant elaborates on his association with the cultural environment and views on the cultural environment. After the semi-structured interview, the informant is asked to draw two optional routes on a map of the cultural environment, examples: everyday and weekend or route in car and route on foot. The routes are discussed and one of them is selected. The selected route is then walked by the informant in the cultural environment while the informant is taking pictures. The informant is given a small note with topics to have in mind, for example: positively/negatively charged elements, characteristics of the harbour, practical elements or points of orientation. After this, the informant is subjected to another interview about the pictures (which is printed). The informant is free to describe the walk, often the informant places the pictures chronologically and then into themes. To gain an impression of the general attitude of the informant, some pictures of different cultural environments and public spaces are presented and discussed. The final question is about the future development of the cultural environment.

References:
Kulturministeriet, 11. marts 2019, https://kum.dk/kulturpolitik/Kulturarv/

Augé, Marc 1995, Non-Places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, translated by John Howe, published by: Verso, London, England and New York, USA.

Norberg-Schulz, Christian 1980, Genius Loci, Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture, originally published by Gruppo Editoriale Electa, Italy, 1979, this edition published by: Rizzoli International Publications, inc., New York, USA.

Smith, Laurajane, 2006, Uses of Heritage, published by: Routledge, Abingdon, England and New York, USA.

Jacobs, Jane 1992, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, originally published: New York: Random House, [1961], this edition published by: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, inc., New York, USA.

UNESCO list 19. August 2019:
Tangible: http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/ and Intangible: https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists

UNESCO Antigua Guatamala, 15. August 2018, http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&id_site=65

Brinkmann et al 2010, Svend Brinkmann & Lene Tanggaard, Kvalitative metoder - En grundbog. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Oswald et al 2013, Urban Catalyst – The Power of Temporary Use, p. 165: Fezer, Jesko, DOM Publishers, Berlin, Germany