

## **Migration, Place and Identity**

*Knut Hidle*  
*Department of Geography*  
*Breiviksveien 40*  
*5045 Bergen*  
*Norway*  
*Tlf: (+47) 55 95 97 65*  
*Telefax: (+47) 55 95 93 93*  
*E-mail: Knut.Hidle@nhh.no*

### ***Introduction***

This project investigates relations between identity and place in a context of migration. The development of what has been called the multicultural society has introduced new perspectives on how we can describe and analyse space and its relation to identity. Places can not be described in one form only, but have to include several forms. The project period is from July 1998 to July 2002.

The project derives from a perspective where people with immigrant backgrounds, migrants, non migrants and people from different generations are viewed as cultural and social agents. The empirical ground for the study is Kristiansand, a town in the south of Norway with approximately 70.000 inhabitants. The empirical basis for the study is interviews with individuals, most of them with different ethnic backgrounds, about social practices, biographical life histories and educational background.

Through this, the project aims at contributing to a greater theoretical insight into and discussion of the relationship between place and identity. It also aims at giving greater insight into different constructions of place and how space in different ways is a part of everyday life, and especially in the perspective of a multicultural society. The meaning of place and its location in different meaning-contexts is seen in relation to identity and identity projects and identity works. The main questions in the project are therefore how different meanings of Kristiansand as a place are constituted and how this meaning is related to identity.

In the following I will discuss the ontological basis and the three main concepts in this project, namely meaning, identity and place.

### *Constitution of meaning*

Meaning might be understood as an order we try to build and create in our everyday life. In this perspective meaning is tied to the subject and to every individual's attempt to create a meaningful life for themselves. We might say that this is a "Cartesian intellectualism, with its understanding of being as a belief system implicit in the minds of individual subjects" (Thrift 1996: 9). This implies that we also have as many different meanings as we have different people. But it is also possible to see meaning as social, as tied to social practices, to the material and to individuals, without Cartesian individualism.

This is what Mead (1934) does when he says that meaning is a result of social communicative processes. For Mead, meaning is not ideas and notions that is given or fixed, but is rather produced, reproduced and changed in a social communicative process. Meaning is then seen as cultural constructions and discourse. Like Wittgenstein (1953), Mead also views language as always connected to the entire non-linguistic field of social behaviour and social interaction. Words and gestures, then, largely derive their meaning from their connection to social meanings, and the meaning is independent of the intentions of individuals considered as singular entities (Burkitt 1991). Meaning provides therefore meaningful action and experience, or in Schutz' (1967) term a "stock of knowledge". Here Schutz (ibid.) distinguishes between "common stock of knowledge" that is intersubjective and "biographical stock of knowledge".

This concept of meaning is understood in connection with experience, practice, discourse and interpreting behaviour. The next question is how this concept of meaning might be connected to place and space in order to understand how Kristiansand is constituted in different ways.

### *Place and the spatial*

Hetherington (1997) shows that space has become one of the central issues for contemporary social theorists. From the debate in the new cultural geography he shows that space and place are not treated as sets of relations outside of society and human lives, but are implied in production of

the social relations and the human lives. Second, he shows that space and place are seen to be situated in relations of power, and third, space and place are seen to be multiple and contested. According to the outline of the concept of meaning in this project, the meaning of place and space is therefore part of social processes where it is produced, reproduced and are changing through the social discourse and through social practices (Entrikin 1991, Shields 1991, Sack 1992, Massey 1994, Simonsen 1995).

From this we see that the spatial has a social dimension. Ontologically, according to Werlen (1993), human action has a social, a subjective and a physical or material dimension. All these three "worlds" are interrelated to each other. For Werlen (ibid.) this means that if we want to investigate space and place, we have to investigate human action, because human action is spatially situated in social, material and subjective worlds.

Another dimension I find important in this project where I investigate how meaning of place is constituted and contested in contexts of migration, is the symbolic dimension of place. Here the communicative and interpersonal concept of meaning from Mead (1934) will be helpful, and Charles Peirce's concept of semiotic processes between different actors' interpretations and communication, their use of signs and their relations with the material and social worlds by use of signs and practice (see for example Singer 1984).

Massey and Jess (1995) use the word "activity space", to indicate how social and material practices are part of the constituting processes of space. Practices with symbolic meaning constitute space with symbolic meaning. In these processes might some activities be excluded from others. Or seen in another way, like Shields (1991) shows, how certain places attain a particular mythological and symbolic meaning of marginality as a product of social practices and discourses. This social construction of the spatial is at the level of the social imaginary as well as it is spatial practices.

From this, Kristiansand is not one place with one given content of meaning. Instead we might say that Kristiansand is part of different meaning-systems and is located in different meaning-

contexts by social groups and individuals. These meaning-contexts, the constitution of them and the relation between them are the subjects to be analysed in this project. This constitution of place is here seen in relation to identity-projects. The next question is how we can understand identity and relations between place and identity.

### *Place and identity*

The project aims to show how space is a part of identity in different ways, and how this is important in the investigation of contexts of migration. In the process of constitution of meaning, Mead (1934) says that the same process also constitute a consciousness about the self. Mead makes a distinction between an inner dialog within the self and an outer dialog with significant others. In this reflexive process, identity is formed. The question is which role space and place play in these dialogues. Identity is by this not a fixed and resistant product, but is in change over time, and is best understood as projects and works. This concept of identity also overcome simplistic approaches, especially towards immigrant youths, as “placed between two cultures” (Ålund1991). Instead, new meaning arise, and in this process the self is reflexively.

In these communicative processes between inner and outer dialogues different actions are relevant in the investigation of relations between identity and place. According to Werlen (1993), action has a spatial dimension. The self, through its body and through action, has a spatial dimension, and this spatial dimension is an essential part in identity projects (see Hetherington 1998). We have to ask how this spatial dimension plays a part in identity work in multicultural contexts. More specifically we might relate this dimension to housing, to life-planning and life styles (Giddens 1991), to what people do in their spare time, their work and so on.

One final perspective on identity is from Giddens (1991). Giddens sees self-identity connected to biography. “It is the self as reflexively understood by the persons in terms of her or his biography” (ibid.: 53). If we see this in connection to Schutz’ (1967) concept of “stock of knowledge”, we might say that contemporary spatially situated practices have background in previous practices in the lifespan and might be related to other practices that is spatially situated another place. In a context of migration we might ask how migrants use their stock of knowledge

in a new spatial context. Or more specifically we might ask what kind of role does place play in the production of biography in the multicultural context of migration in Kristiansand.

### *Methodology and methods*

To investigate the main questions in this project I will use the concepts outlined above together with layactors concepts of their own world in what Giddens (1976) called a "double hermeneutics". Through interviewes I will focus on lay actors categories and practices in their everyday life. I will also study local discourses about for example conflicts about landuse and use of public space in the city. Who participate, what are the arguments, which symbols are in use and so one are set of questions I might ask. Here I will use the semiotic approach from Charles Peirce to investigate how actors use and interpret signs pragmatic in communication in their everyday life.

To reach young people I will use school essays and then have some interviewes with these youths about what they have written. Biographical interviewes are used to investigate what kind of role place does play in the production of biography, and especially in context of migration.

### **References**

- Thrift, Nigel (1996) *Spatial Formations*. SAGE Publications, London.
- Mead, Georg Herbert (1934) *Mind, Self and Society*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1953) *Philosophical investigations*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
- Burkitt, Ian (1993) *Social Selves. Theories of the Social Formation of Personality*. SAGE Publications, London [1991].
- Schutz, Alfred (1967) *Collected Papers I. The problem of social reality*. Martinus Nijhoff/the Hague.
- Hetherington, Kevin (1997) *The Badlands of Modernity. Heterotopia and social ordering*. Routledge, London/New York.
- Hetherington, Kevin (1998) *Expressions of Identity. Space, Performance, Politics*. SAGE Publications, London.
- Entrikin, J. Nicholas (1991) *The Betweenness of Place. Towards a Geography of Modernity*. Macmillan, London.
- Shields, Rob (1991) *Places on the Margin. Alternative geographies of modernity*. Routledge, London/New York.
- Sack, Robert David (1992) *Place, Modernity and the Consumers World. A Relational Framework for Geographical Analysis*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore/London.
- Massey, Doreen (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Simonsen, Kirsten (1995) *Sted, køn og social praksis - om en "kønnet" forståelse af stedsbegrebet, i Nordisk Samhølsgeografisk Tidsskrift, nr. 21, Uppsala*.
- Werlen, Benno (1993) *Society, Action and Space. An Alternative Human Geography*. Routledge, London/New York.
- Singer, Milton (1984) *Man's Glassy Essence. Explorations in Semiotic Anthropology*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Massey, Doreen and Jess, Pat (1995) *Places and cultures in an uneven world, in Massey, Doreen and Jess, Pat (ed.) A Place in the World*. The Open University, Oxford.

- Ålund, Aleksandra (1991) Wrestling with ghosts. Transcultural bricolage and new communities, i Schierup, Carl-Ulrik og Ålund, Aleksandra (red.) Paradoxes of Multiculturalism. Essays on Swedish society. Avebury, Aldershot.
- Giddens, Anthony (1991) Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Giddens, Anthony (1976) New Rules of Sociological Method: A positive critique of interpretative sociologies. Basic Books, New York.