

Möllevången

Testimonies from Möllan

Abstract

This paper and its accompanying film constitute a study on a Malmö neighborhood in the process of gentrification, examining perceptions of these changes among locals and visitors. The study was conducted through photography and semistructured interviews with 19 interviewees. It was found that while visitors and locals share certain perceptions of Möllevången and the ongoing gentrification of the area, visitors are much more likely to focus on positive aspects of this process whereas locals are much more likely to focus on negative aspects. While questions of spatial displacement are not addressed, it is clear that place displacement - I.E., displacement by change of commercial infrastructure and loss of community - is perceived by many.

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Introduction

Problem field

Hip, multicultural working-class neighborhoods across Europe are to varying degrees facing threats of gentrification. As Christina Hansen demonstrates, Möllevången in Malmö (from here on referred to in the local vernacular “Möllan”) seems to be caught in the very classic loop of gentrification that many neighborhoods across Europe find themselves in, where any and all positive activity is “welcomed and embraced by the city leadership and private property investors and owners, as these activities enhance the attractiveness of the neighborhood and thus raise real estate values in the area.” (Hansen, 2021). Processes like these make gentrification doubly contentious because positive change only seems to invite more gentrification and expulsion by way of rent increase. Additionally, fears of gentrification might sow division in neighborhoods, as new residents threaten the way of life of older residents, even while ostensibly making the neighborhood better by patronizing local shops and cafés or bringing in opportunities for work. Gentrification presents many points of contention, often context specific and open ended in their solutions. Similarly, these contentions might lionize locals into forging or reiterating neighborhood character and culture. Also in Christina Hansen's article, she refers to Lukas, a 29-year-old local activist, who said Möllan is “Both a concept and a physical place, an identity and a subculture.” (Ibid.). It is in this context that we want to explore perceptions of gentrification among both visitors and shop-owners/workers in Möllan.

Literature review

Gentrification as a process has been studied for half a century, ever since Ruth Glass initially coined the term in 1964 (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2010). Studies have been diverse and global, ranging from statistical analysis of ethnic makeups most conducive to gentrification (Hwang, 2016), over consumer habits of gentrifiers (Ilkucan & Sandikci, 2016) to gentrification before the modern age (Verlaan, 2022). Indeed, even gentrification in

Möllevången has been studied before, with particular influence on this study from Frykman (2015) and Hansen (2022).

In her paper '*Cosmopolitanism in situ: conjoining local and universal concerns in a Malmö neighbourhood*' (2016), Maja Povrzanović Frykman describes the idiosyncratic cosmopolitanism of Möllan as a neighborhood where ethnic and national differences matter far less than economic class, social attitude, and community participation. Additionally, she charts the local storytelling of Möllan with its activism, working-class history, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitan outlook. In contrast, she brings up the storytelling from the side of the municipality that has been ongoing concurrently with the urban restructuring that started in the 90s (Ibid. p. 38). Indeed, in our interviews with both local stakeholders and outside visitors, these two stories of Möllan were very much mirrored – one of activism and working-class struggles, and one of happy cosmopolitanism. Frykman also points to the irony of city authorities ignoring Möllan in their presented image of the city through the 60's, 70's and 80's only to gloss over its economic problems from the 90's and onwards. She points out that the official story of Möllan is often incongruous not only with the socio-economic facts, but often also with the local story of Möllan. Christina Hansen's work (2021; 2022) is highlighted in our work to point out both storytelling as a factor of perceptions on a neighborhood - regardless of whether the perceiving person's own everyday life in the neighborhood is contradictory to the story - but also specifically activists' dualist role of both resisting and assisting gentrification i.e. that the activist is both putting up resistance and simultaneously adding value for the investors leading the gentrification. Additionally, her work with activists provide valuable context for the local perceptions of Möllan.

In his article '*What makes gentrification "gentrification"?*' (2003), P. A. Redfern challenges the assumption that gentrification is merely an agent-less consequence of demand from the middle-class that results in the gentrification of neighborhoods and posits that it is instead a question of supply (of gentrifiable housing) shaped by gentrifiers with agency. However, Redfern also posits that both gentrifier and displacee (i.e. the residents displaced by the

process of gentrification) share class-characteristics in both Marxist and Weberian understandings of class (Redfern 2003, p. 2359). "*Gentrifier, suburbanite and potential displacee all have to confront the same anxieties and therefore experience the same motivations.*" (Ibid.) In this sense, the differences between gentrifier and displacee become not the motivations, but the means by which to achieve these motivations. One motivation that Redfern brings up is identification and consumption. Since both of these are subject to fashion, the gentrifier may be understood as the one who can follow the whims of fashion, and the displacee understood as the one who cannot. In the context of our study, changes in the commercial infrastructure of Möllan are a great example of fashion determining which commercial options thrive, and which struggle. Livsmedel shops (i.e. small grocery shops) struggle greatly, while Möllan is increasingly more saturated with (sometimes) thriving restaurants, bars, and eateries. This also accounts for another aspect of gentrification as laid out by Redfern: that of opposition and tension (Ibid. p. 2361). According to Redfern, gentrification cannot be gentrification in the absence of resistance to the process. He uses an example of a child of a particular neighborhood coming into means and inheriting their grandparents' house vs. a person of similar economic status buying that house. The former would never be considered gentrification, but the latter usually would. Indeed, as Frykman points out, Möllan has a higher than city average of people with university degrees 38% for Möllan and 27% for the city respectively (Frykman, 2016 p. 39). We do not know the numbers for outside gentrifiers moving in and accounting for this high share of university educated residents, but since Möllan has been part of an urban restructuring project since the 90's it is not unthinkable that at least some children of Möllan residents are getting higher education but decide to stay in their childhood neighborhood. Understanding contentions and opposition to and resulting from processes of gentrification also requires an understanding of *who* is gentrifying and *how*.

What has undoubtedly been a part of the process of gentrification has been the eateries and bars that are popping up and competing with the ethnic shops (Asian markets, specific butchers, import shops) and the kiosks. With Möllan as a popular spot for eating out and

drinking, several of our interviewees tell us that rents reflect the economic viability of these. Since few shop fronts in Möllan are owned by the shop owners themselves, almost every shop owner we talked to had had significant rent increases in the last few years. As demonstrated recently in a study of a similar neighborhood in Cologne, Germany, gastronomy and gentrification are often correlated although causation and conclusive effects on the latter remain indeterminate (Lütke & Jäger, 2021).

Gentrifiers' consumption habits can constitute a subculture in and of itself, as demonstrated by Ilkucan and Sandikci (2005). However, as in their example of the neighborhood Cihangir in Istanbul, this subculture of consumption is not necessarily antithetical to the existing consumption culture of a neighborhood. As they noticed, cosmopolitanism has in recent years turned from a veneration of foreign, exclusive, or rare experiences, foods, and wares to an appreciation of locally anchored, often working-class options. Indeed, in our interviews with visitors to Möllan, an oft-lauded aspect of the neighborhood was the breadth of cheap but nevertheless global options when it comes to shopping. However, as our interviews suggest, these same shopping options are currently under threat from increasing rent and a customer base economically starved by rent, utilities, and inflation. The increased rent was related by several of our interviewees to the proliferation of bars and restaurants that could much more easily pay the increased rent.

Mark Davidson's "*Displacement, Space and Dwelling: Placing Gentrification Debate*" (2009) became a central point for us. Despite rent increase being a very real threat of spatial displacement among shop owners/workers in Möllan, the cultural aspects of *place* displacement rather than *spatial* displacement is a very relevant aspect of gentrification processes otherwise not as quantifiably highlighted academically as actual out-migration (i.e. spatial displacement) (ibid.). "*People can be displaced—unable to (re)construct place—without spatial dislocation, just as much as they can with spatial dislocation. Conversely, people can be spatially dislocated without losing place if they did not engage in these practices before.*" (Ibid., p. 228).

In the case of Möllan, multiple interviewees and in particular one with a record shop-employee highlighted the cultural changes (in context roughly meaning ‘an increase of regulatory stiffness’) the last years while simultaneously admitting that the previous tenants of the old days and ways actually still might be living there, albeit today being older and relatively wealthier.

Research area

While not realistically solving the issues of gentrification, the purpose of this study is to document how gentrification is felt at the ground level and how it affects the immaterial qualities of a neighborhood. Much has been said about displacement, class perspectives and economic policies leading to and resulting from gentrification, but an often-overlooked aspect is how this impacts everyday life. With gentrification happening in many cities across Europe and the world and with gentrification having been an ongoing fact of life in Möllan, understanding what is lost and how it affects the social and economic fabric of a neighborhood seems as important as ever. With that in mind, our research question is this:

How are the processes of gentrification felt and understood among outsiders and insiders in Möllan?

The aim of this study has been to document through interviews and photography the perceptions of the current conditions in Möllan, Malmö - which would include the square, Möllevångstorget and its surrounding neighborhood. This has then been edited in a free form video featuring interview excerpts and photographs, both evoking the feel of a neighborhood in transformation and showcasing the contrasts and commonalities between visitors’ and locals’ perceptions of this transformation. Due to difficulties of getting in contact with locals, emphasis has been placed on visitors who use the neighborhood to hang out, eat and drink, and shop-owners/workers in the neighborhood.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews

Semis-structured interviews have been conducted over two weeks with 10 visitors across 4 interviews and 9 shop-owners/workers across 9 interviews, with only 6 of them being recorded. In all, roughly 3½ hours of interview was conducted, with interview times ranging from 6-40 minutes. Visitors were mostly from Malmö with two coming from Stockholm, and evenly split with five men and five women. Ages ranged from early 20's to mid-30's. We did not ask shop-owners/workers where they live or their age, but several told us of their own volition that they either lived in or had lived in Möllan and the adjacent neighborhoods for much of their lives. Genders were eight men and one woman, and ages ranged from early 30's to late 60's.

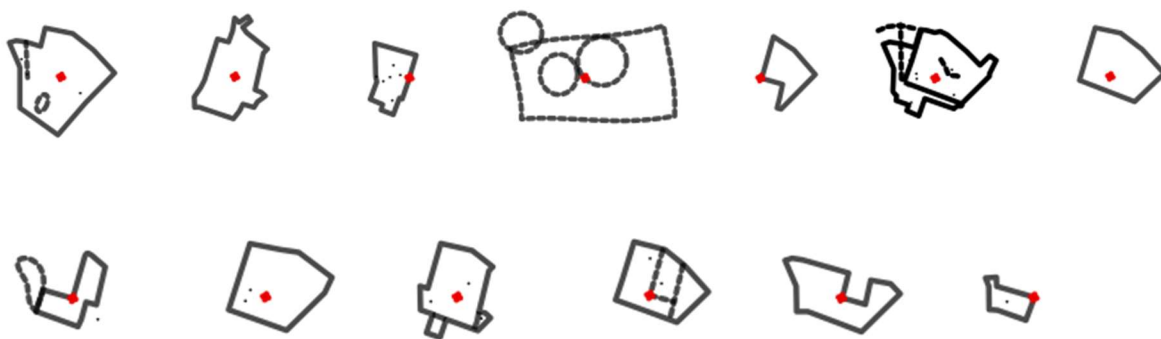
Two different interview guides were employed for the interviews with visitors and shop-owners/workers respectively. The first focused on usage of Möllan as a place to hang out, the role of Möllan in the context of the rest of the city, visible consequences of gentrification, and their thoughts on the future of Möllan. The second focused on the history of Möllan, how the neighborhood has changed during the interviewee's time in the area (a time frame that extended from five years to several decades), how rent increases and other economic factors had impacted their business and others', and how they saw the future of Möllan playing out. However, in both interview contexts the questions and subjects remained dynamic, as all interviewees generally brought up topics on their own.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their ability to facilitate dialogue and dynamically shift focus to topics or subjects brought up by the interviewee (Brinkmann, 2018). Additionally, a mental mapping exercise was devised to open up interviews with visitors, as described below.

Mental mapping

In order to probe our visitor interviewees and make them reflect on Möllan, we included a minor mapping exercise prompting respondents to draw the borders of Möllan on a map and including places of interest to them. This exercise took inspiration from co-design practices where probes work as both design tools and probes for reflection (Sanders & Stappers, 2014) and ethnographic practices of map-making (Ben-Ze'ev, 2012).

While not many put in a lot of places of interest, many included parts of either Sofielund or Rådmansvången which in turn let us discuss what made areas outside the borders of Möllan feel like Möllan - thus opening up discussions on the "feel" or atmosphere of Möllan. The maps have been redrawn digitally and centered around Folkets Park-rondellen (commonly referred to as "Knarkrondellen" or "the drug roundabout"), the roundabout roughly in the middle of Möllan to show the differences in perceived borders of the area. The roundabout has been highlighted in red, points of interest are represented as points, specific borders are represented as fully drawn lines, and unspecific borders as well as routes of interest are represented by dotted lines.



Street photography and video

Concurrently with conducting interviews with our participants, we've been taking photos of Möllan as a form of "glass geography" (Ward, 2014). These photos have then been edited and sequenced to work as visual aid alongside interview excerpts in a 15-minute video condensing and presenting the most salient points from our interviews in an artful way. Bridging art and science has many benefits (Leavy 2015), but we are particularly interested in the evocative and communicative benefits of this arts-based approach. Coupling interview excerpts with photos not only serve to visually ground the statements, but also to evoke the atmosphere and feel of Möllan at this time in history.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study stems from the fact that neither researcher speaks Arabic or other Middle Eastern languages, and only one researcher speaks fluent Swedish. As such, many of our interviewees were subconsciously chosen based on who we could get in contact with, and several shop workers declined interviews once they realized it would be in either Swedish or English. Additionally, no angle of approach was found that could facilitate interviews with local residents who did not work in shops. We'd hoped simply being in the neighborhood and approaching people in the street or at cafés would help, but we only managed to get in contact with visiting outsiders in this manner (albeit that many of the "outsiders" lived in the very much Möllan-related area of Sofielund just outside of the official Möllan border). This influenced us to shift focus to shop owners/workers, since these were at least static enough to easily get in contact with.

Ethical considerations

At least three interviewees from the professional group did not want to be recorded for the interview, and all but one interviewee from both the visitor and professional group did not want to be photographed. Note taking was done instead of audio recording for the three interviewees that did not want to be recorded, and anyone wishing to stay anonymous has

had their accompanying pictures chosen in a manner that obscures their place of work. Additionally, faces and registration numbers on cars have been blurred in places where it wasn't possible to ensure voluntary participation.

Findings

Through our interviews with visitors and local stakeholders in Möllan, several trends emerged. For one, every single interviewee could see at least some problems. While they varied to some degree, the vast majority tied back to questions of gentrification and specifically of displacement. Ideals of cosmopolitanism were present in every single interview with visitors, with many emphasizing both the ethnic diversity and the relaxed atmosphere - especially in contrast to more central areas of Malmö and popular bar spots like Lilla Torg. The same ideals came up in interviews with shop-owners/workers although less frequently and more likely to be tied directly to a working-class or alternative identity. Conversely, while issues of displacement came up in interviews with visitors, shop-owners/workers talked at length about issues of displacement as well as economic strain. This strain was not exclusively a product of rent increases (although all but one interviewee brought this up), but extended to inflation, dwindling customer base and economic strain on the local customer base as a consequence of inflation, fuel prices, utility prices, and rent. One interviewee working in a kiosk (who did not wish to be recorded for the video) told us he and his family might move out of Sweden entirely if the situation did not improve. These frustrations stood in stark contrast with the more generalized concerns of gentrification brought up by visitors. Among the local shops in Ystadsgatan all but one worker, in the famous 'Möllans Ost' ("Möllan's cheese shop"), feared imminent closure within the foreseeable future.

In the mental mapping exercise, participants (which were all from the visitor group) struggled with finding the actual borders of Möllan although two participants came close. However, all but one made clear distinctions on which areas, streets and parks were or

were not a part of Möllan. Especially Folkets Park was either a center point or excluded, but even Møllevångstorget was excluded in at least one map. Most maps did center around Møllevångstorget, and some were almost exclusive to that area. What was most interesting was the inclusion of southern ends of Södra Skolgatan and Södra Förstadsgatan. When asked, many people mentioned Vegan Bar, Ölkaféet and the general vibe. While both these streets are close to Möllan, they're separated from the neighborhood by Bergsgatan, the official western border. This suggested that while official areas of Möllan were not included in the minds of some visitors, areas outside of Möllan fit the image of Möllan well enough to be included.

Conclusion

Perceptions of Möllan and the changes the neighborhood is going through seem to be understood quite differently depending on who you ask. In the minds of visitors, Möllan seems to be less of a sharply defined geographical area, and more of a state of being that can include surrounding parts and exclude insufficiently fun parts of the neighborhood. The rosy view of Möllan as a cosmopolitan meeting place of the world where fashion worries and high street commercialism is ignored in favor of hip, cheap good times may hold true for the neighborhood's many visitors for now, and perhaps even more so now than 30 years ago. However, the continued commercial gentrification leading from local shops to eateries and bars threatens not just the owners and workers in these bars, but also the atmosphere they help create. The contrast between Möllan and Lilla Torg is diminishing with every new burger joint and hip café. In the minds of local shop owners/workers, this is not just a loss of character, but a loss of livelihood and local culture.

Whether or not a spatial displacement of the working-class is taking place, local shops are being marginalized and pushed into a precarious position. Looking beyond the justice perspective in spatial displacement, cultural place displacement has an even wider effect

on both locals and visitors. The things that make Möllan attractive and different from other neighborhoods in Malmö are being substituted by a commercial and cultural hegemony, thus eating itself and its unique qualities like an urban Ouroboros. According to our interviewees, this erodes the social and cultural cohesion of the neighborhood. In the minds of the locals, even a future Möllan where no spatial displacement takes place will certainly have lost some of its much-lauded character.

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