

Article

The Mall Method: Applied in a Study of Inhabitants' Appreciation of Urban Cultural Heritage Areas

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Abstract

Criticism has been directed at traditional approaches to cultural heritage management, as reflected in legislation and policy, for ignoring elements integral to community perceptions of cultural heritage. Although discussions on the right to define are lively, there has been less focus directed towards the significance which personal affiliations and memory play in the processes of forming people's conceptions of important cultural heritage assets and valuable places. But how does one achieve insight into the subjective appreciations of heritage environments? The point of this article is to show how new subjective methodological approaches, tested by what is identified in this article as the Mall Method, can reveal subjective narratives and perspectives linked to inhabitants' everyday life in urban contexts, and to their memories of places. This article searches for subjective meanings of places and landscapes, realized by a stall in a town mall. The method is evaluated in the light of the importance of situated knowledge and subjectivity.

Key words: situated knowledge, cultural heritage, intangible heritage, subjective narratives, everyday life

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Introduction

The general demand for organisations to pay more attention to the views of the public has gradually worked its way into planning. The effects have also started to appear within the cultural heritage management sector. The concept ‘cultural heritage’ was primarily introduced and evolved by the cultural heritage management sector and, although it has gradually found a wider area of application, the concept is not used much in ordinary everyday vocabulary. This may present a problem for cultural heritage managers when assessing the degrees of attachment and appreciation that cultural heritage inspires.

A change of position is required; the primary consideration must shift from purely material issues towards the interaction that takes place between cultural heritage monuments/sites and people who visit them (Dakin, 2003; Turnpenny, 2004; Waterton, 2005). In this article we ask if the Mall Method which has been tested out in the study is a reliable approach to gaining insight into the subjective dimensions in heritage appreciations.

What we call the Mall Method is a kind of street interview, localized in roofed over shopping malls in three different towns in Norway. The aim of this method was to find inhabitants in public space in an everyday situation, and in a more easy way than by using surveys or more formal interviews. In this way we hoped to find people who could both tell us about and point at places and artefacts they appreciated in a perspective of traditions, heritage and memory. In the first hand we looked upon the method as a kind of rational methodological choice, finding people where people were gathered. On the way we discovered some interesting advantages by using this method, but also some problems. In this article we describe how the method was carried out.

The discussion presented is part of a larger interdisciplinary project, ‘Local heritage values and cultural heritage plans.’ The focus of this paper is primarily directed at the discourses found among inhabitants, and the methodology that captures these.

A broadened definition of cultural heritage

Cultural heritage can be understood as ‘all traces after human activities in our material surroundings,’ which is the way it is defined in the Norwegian Cultural Heritage Act (§ 2). In cultural heritage management, however, cultural heritage has most often been understood and referred to in the light of how the law is implemented and which assets are formally listed and protected. These views are gradually changing. Parallel to the professional discourses within the humanities over the last decade the definition of cultural heritage has been extended in official heritage policy to include a wider range of cultural historic assets, including female domains, rural and industrial proletariat, immigrants, etc. (Graham, Ashworth, & Turnbridge, 2000; Jensen, 2008; Jönsson & Svensson, 2005; Lowenthal, 1985). Heritage is in principle inclusive of everybody’s history.

Inclusions and exclusions constitute a politics of memory discourses (Radstone & Hodgkin, 2003), a perspective which can be extended to include the processes that influence the shared

meaning of cultural heritage. The renewed interest in memory has the potential to contest “regimes of history” and official narratives of what happened (Radstone & Hodgkin, 2003, p.11), or what Braudel rhetorically named “the History with a capital letter” (1992, p.29). In the main study we set out to discover the ‘regimes’ or order of cultural heritage discourses by investigating the elements in their everyday environment to which people attach special meaning (that is, what their dearest cultural memories are). These types of heritage discourses include information that is collected through interviews with municipal planners, members of local NGOs and residents. In this paper, however, focus is primarily directed at the discourses found among inhabitants.

The Mall Method is our doorway to this area of knowledge, and it draws more upon the everyday than many other studies in landscape – or architectural disciplines. It invites the inclusion of vernacular knowledge, a term which refers to “practices of those who speak a critical language grounded in local concerns, not the language spoken by academic knowledge-elites” (McLaughlin, 1996, p.5). Vernacular discourses can sometimes occur as special forms of resistance and be experienced as uncategorisable in current available terms (Cronin, 2006), or be seen and interpreted as parallel local modes of cognition in a shared and collective nature of knowledge making (Smith, 2004).

By the simple fact of their frequency and regularity, everyday routines will play a role in forming people's perceptions of places. Different approaches to the study of everyday life have been highlighted by social scientists like Lefebvre (1971) and de Certeau (1984), and the subject continues to attract attention (Haapala, 2005; Moran, 2004). The daily tasks that people perform are central to the affiliations to a place that they gradually develop (Geertz, 1983). In a historical perspective, practical doings like business, recreation and traffic are factors that gradually contribute to changes in the landscape and the place. The practical aspect of a place is incorporated in the concept ‘taskscape,’ where the active human and cultural dimension in the environment is underlined (Ingold, 2000), and in its parallel Norwegian concept *virksomhetssted* (Greve, 1998). Taskscape is not primarily something we see, it is not primarily something we build, but it is “a place we do” (Greve, 1998, p.192). Experiences and knowledge about the place are gathered through the activities each person performs there. In these landscapes there are traces of former times and former activities and to some visitors these function as “props of recall” (Feuchtwang, 2003, p.76), material or immaterial heritage that structures the thoughts and activates memories.

The visual is known to play an important role in how people relate to their surroundings, and we also know how sensual experiences such as smell, sound, touch or taste influence the memories that people have of places or material structures (see Bachelard, 1994; Benjamin, 1950; Casey, 1987; Tuan, 1979, 1990; Feld & Basso, 1996; Waskul, Vannini, & Wilson, 2009). The study of senses has become a thematic field of growing interest to historians, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers and literary scholars. The new rise of sensory studies began at the turn of the twenty-first century (Howes, 2006). We have found inspiration in an article by Edensor (2007) based on an encounter he had with an abandoned industrial landscape, and ask if some of his reflections about the sentiments this landscape evokes can be transferred to how people relate to heritage assets, and how they memorise the surroundings. He focuses on the multiple and contrasting sensual experiences that can be provoked by moving through an industrial ruin. The body is confronted with powerfully unpleasant but also pleasurable and surprising smells and sounds, and beholds sights which disrupt normative urban aesthetic conventions. The role the senses play in people's attachments to cultural heritage will be resumed later in the discussion of the narratives collected by the Mall Method.

Positioning ourselves: street dialogue, observation and mapping

In the social sciences Alfred Schütz (1943, 1964/1979) is referred to as the ‘father of phenomenology.’ An important element of phenomenology is present in this study. By searching out different aspects of a certain social context, we want to gain insight into inhabitants’ personal memories and their use of and appreciation of the built environment.

Schütz deals with different positions in being a social researcher, like *the man in the street*, *the cartographer*, or *the expert*, and *the stranger*. The man in the street is the person living in a community or group. He does not reflect much on his situation in his daily life, and his actions are not part of his thinking, as they are taken for granted. The cartographer, or the expert, is interested in certain parts of the life of others, and takes note of some chosen elements; by making a map or a system, he reflects *about* people in a community or a town. The stranger is the person coming in from outside, trying to understand the practices, the cultural codes and habits of the inhabitants. He does not share the inside habits and understandings of the inhabitants.

In our situation we can read Schütz’s three positions as different roles or attitudes in terms of the way we gather our data, concerning both researchers’ positions and values, but also more literally as a practical method. We use a combination of the positions when gathering information in our Mall Method: street dialogue, observation and mapping. We are strangers trying to attract the man in the street to our stall by inviting him to a dialogue and mapping individuals’ appreciated places and artefacts, thereby coming closer to an understanding of their place values. Our position is the stranger’s, but we are also cartographers, we map places and artefacts, and we sort personal narratives into different categories.

We have not seen the need to understand codes and cultures in the way that a phenomenological study often does, but we need to establish a dialogue with people, who can show us individual appreciations of heritage aspects, and to combine and contrast this with more factual organised elements, like the landscape mapping done by an archaeologist and an ecologist participating in the project group, and public registrations presented in the heritage plans. That being so, our study is based both philosophically and methodologically on phenomenology, with both Husserl (1950) and Schütz (1943, 1964/1979) as our supporters: we are interested in the phenomenon of cultural heritage in fringe areas in cities, and have to combine sets of information about this phenomenon, and we are in search of subjective meanings of places and landscapes, realised by a stall in a town mall.

The Mall Method in practice

Preparatory discussions

The Mall Method is a method which is voluntary, spontaneous and open – both spatially and in terms of conversation. When in the initial phase we were evaluating what kind of methods would be likely to give the most positive responses, we took into consideration the way people in contemporary society tend to get drowned in information, including advertisements and surveys, which can affect how open, cooperative and obliging people are when interviewed. The demanding, time-consuming and sometimes also rather unpredictable preparatory work involved in selecting suitable informants made the more established method of in-depth interviews, which is a more planned and framed conversation, less relevant. Asking ourselves where we would be most likely to meet people in passing on their daily routines between work and home, we ended up by choosing the shopping mall as a location suitable for inviting people to share their views with us. Two researchers were involved in the fieldwork.

The shopping mall can be described both as a functional and as a social arena, since people spend time there based on a range of motivations (Krange & Strandbu, 1996; Becker, Bjurström, Fornäs, & Ganetz, 2001). The mall's function as a meeting place is an essential aspect for a lot of its users. The mall is constructed for commerce, recreation and adventure, and its architecture is far from coincidental; it is well-planned to direct people through in a certain direction (Krange & Strandbu, 1996). For these reasons the question of the ultimate placing of the interviewers was essential.

In any interview situation the ethical dimension plays an important role. As confidentiality was not a problem in this case, since we never intended to ask for names and addresses, the ethical aspects primarily revolved around the decisions we made about "the roles to play in the field" (Neuman, 2006, p. 392). Since we were not selling or demonstrating products for sale, we were careful to produce necessary identification and information sheets about the project and the reason we were there. A more surprising aspect of the roles we had to undertake was the therapeutic function we experienced in a couple of cases (Weiss, 1994). A decision that has to be made in most interview situations is where to fix "the level of acceptable incompetence" you show as interviewer (Neuman, 2006, p.395). An acceptable incompetent is someone who is only partially competent in the setting but who is accepted as a non-threatening person who needs to be taught. It is important to communicate that the reason for being in the field is to learn, not to be an expert. As the presentation of the results show, we experienced a problem in one of the case studies in escaping the expert role we were ascribed. In a sense we appeared like 'the stranger' in Schütz' meaning; the person coming in from outside, trying to understand the practices, the cultural codes and habits of the inhabitants (Schütz'1964/1979).

The towns selected for case studies met specific criteria: they were regional towns consisting of the old town municipality and some more recent incorporated neighbouring rural municipalities; they had cultural heritage plans which had been developed with a certain degree of user participation; and they were situated in different counties.

Before we chose to meet people in the field, we did some preliminary mapping, including photography. We used photos as a way of starting a reflection on 'what does this mean for me?' or as examples for comment in conversation with the inhabitants. We also hoped our pictures would offer new ways of seeing the town's cultural heritage sites. Our photos were not obviously 'old heritage,' we also presented new buildings or artefacts, like a hotel from the sixties, advertising signs, telephone booths and public buildings from more recent decades.

Choosing a suitable mall and setting up a stall

After some introductory discussions, field observations and reflections, we began to employ the Mall Method, which simply involved choosing a place in a central shopping mall in each town. The plan required us to be on the ground floor, with our posters and our basket of fresh plums. Our intention was to make our presence visible through texts, maps and images, and by these means attract curious people in order to begin an open conversation with them on the topic. The local newspapers had accommodated our request to print a small item about our presence in the town beforehand.

We asked the director of each mall for permission to set up a stall and to guide us to a place that they deemed suitable that was also used by organisations and firms promoting their goods or services. In this article we describe some experiences derived from testing the method in three towns. We point to similarities and differences, and reflect on them in methodological terms.

In Town 1 the chosen shopping centre was located close to the main bus station in the very centre of town. We installed our equipment at the place assigned to us on the ground floor, near the staircase to the first floor, and close to a small café, a bookshop, a flower shop and a food shop, with corridors leading to more shops. The location turned out to be perfect, since the café and the bookshop were places for stopping, the staircase was a construction that gave room for change in speed and oversight, and the other nearby shops were well-visited.

In Town 2 a lot of services, traders and commercial firms have moved out of the old town centre and are situated in a recently constructed largely car-based landscape with a mall and a large cluster of industrial buildings. We knew that most of the inhabitants strolling around would be found in the mall, rather than in the streets of the town centre, so the mall was chosen. The place assigned to us at the shopping centre, however, turned out to be in a rather quiet spot, some distance from the crowded agglomerations of shops and in a passage where people just hurried past in different directions. We immediately realised that this location was badly suited for the purpose, and chose another place on the second day.

In Town 3 we chose to place our stall in the mall, which was recently built on a former beach close to the town centre and now filled in to provide a huge space for new industrial buildings. Part of the town's activities have been moved out of the town centre and roofed over, and many people visit this mall every day. The location of the stall was very similar to the other two, and in accordance with what seems to be a standard design for Norwegian malls, that is, rather moderate in size compared with international standards, and usually constituting two floors.

How to start a conversation

In Town 1 we observed that people were curious about our installations at the foot of the staircase. These included our main poster, on which we had written in big letters: "What is your most beloved cultural heritage memory?" Many passers-by cast covert glances at our poster, our stall and us, and walked on, but during the time the two of us spent there, people also stopped, usually one at a time, sometimes two or three together.

People most often began by looking more closely at the documents placed on the table in front of the poster. One of the documents was an album with photos taken in the town and the surrounding landscapes with some documented cultural heritage traces, objects, buildings and places; another was a pile of detailed maps of the town and the surroundings. We made a point of keeping in the background till people showed a genuine interest and then we approached them. A few of them were just curious and left the stall after a short visit. People interested in talking were asked to mark on the map which heritage objects they appreciated. Some of them were quite confident about where to put their marks, whereas others reflected loudly on what this question could mean, both objectively and for them personally. We noted on the blank sheet attached to the map what they mentioned to us; sometimes we were given names of places, museums or other buildings, and sometimes we were told a longer story, which demanded our closer attention. We sometimes helped people with their reflections by providing possible examples (although careful not to steer their thoughts), and sometimes a short conversation with us was the beginning of a longer or shorter 'story of memory.'

The experiences we had in Town 2 were rather different. On the first day, just three people stopped for a chat. We decided to ask for permission to move to another place the next day, a place more similar to the one in Town 1. As many people were passing through the mall and came close to our stall, the next day started with a bit more optimism. But there was a problem in

Town 2: no one stopped, they just passed by our stall, somewhat shyly; we could not catch their eye, and we wondered why. Why did we experience such a difference compared with the other town? We made some hypotheses. Were they shy? Were they tired of people 'selling things'? Were they mostly farmers from the region rather than urban people? Had all the people interested in heritage topics gone on holiday? And so on.

We decided to share our experiences with somebody, and ask if they could provide an explanation. We confided our problem to a woman working in the hardware shop; she understood our questions immediately. She told us that people coming to demonstrate goods and services often had the same problem in this town and indeed the region. A woman who recently demonstrated a fruit press had told her that she had never experienced this problem before she came to this town. When she caught their eye, people turned away. "People living here are shy," the woman in the shop said. "They dare not make contact, and people living in this town are not really town people." She added, "You are looked upon as an authority with your posters and so on, and therefore they hesitate to talk to you."

In addition, there was another unfortunate fact: the autumn holidays for the schools in the region occurred in the same week. Many families with school-aged children were away from home this week, and it was obvious; the mall was rather empty.

Our experience in Town 3 was far more encouraging. We had been afraid that the good summer weather, which is not taken for granted in this northern region, could mean an empty mall, with just a few people visiting our stall, but we were wrong in our suppositions; many people visited our stall throughout the time we spent there. Most of the informants engaged with the topic, or had very distinct opinions on what they appreciated, or disliked, in the urban centre or fringe areas.

Total number of interviews

We attended our stall for two and a half days in Town 1 and 3, and two days in Town 2 from approximately 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. During these hours the mall was less crowded for short periods owing to daily routines such as lunch-time; people shopped in the morning and in the afternoon, and at lunch-time most of them were at home or elsewhere.

We gathered maps with examples and narratives from 37 persons in Town 1. Seen from a qualitative researcher's and a methodological perspective, the numbers are satisfactory. In Town 2 we ended up with just twelve conversations, and in Town 3 we had 41 conversations. There was a roughly equal gender representation among our informants: 43 women and 37 men.

The maps and notes we produced in cooperation with the informants are the most important data in this study. When analysing it, we found common themes in terms of what people appreciate most. They reveal important elements linked to reflections on heritage discourses as well as showing us how a broader invitation to reflect on cultural heritage can reveal new kinds of memory sites, including fringe areas in towns.

There is a marked overrepresentation of older people among those sharing their views with us, especially in Towns 1 and 2. There are several likely reasons. We tended to be present in the shopping malls on weekdays during normal working hours and lunch-times. This is the time of the day when retired people, part-time employees or the unemployed tend to visit the shopping mall. In Town 3, however, it was early summer, when people who had grown up in the town, but had left, came back for a visit, just before the tourist crowds. Some of them visited us for

particular reasons (we will return to this later), and most of them were in their late sixties.

Another reason could be that people's relationship with their neighbourhood, environments and places of memory become more important as they age, and this sharpens their interest in sharing their views with others. Other research has emphasised the importance of place in older people's sense of self, where a person's behaviour and life trajectory are embedded or situated in socially constructed, dynamic places (Wiles et al., 2009).

Subjective definitions of heritage

We will now return to the initial questions and discuss the role personal memories and sensual associations play in subjective attachment to place and heritage: what role do personal memories and sensual associations play in subjective definitions of heritage?

Generally, people we talked to were very conscious of the places they themselves appreciated. To some extent this appreciation revolved around places that people knew well and that played a role in their daily routines. Some people mentioned the main industrial building in Town 1, an old and beautiful administration building surrounded by a beautiful park, and the headquarters of the most important workplace for many people living in the town. Some mentioned the park in the centre of the town, or the small residential or industrial buildings in the old centre and market-place, whereas others pointed to an old church and the rock carvings just outside town, or the library building with its peaceful atmosphere, and a stamp mill near the town centre, *inter alia*.

The most remarkable stories were those of personal biography and memory, which in both subtle and overt ways could be linked to heritage objects, but also to childhood, belonging and loss. This was exemplified by an engineer who had left the town in his early twenties and was currently visiting for the purpose of selling his deceased parents' home. Emptying the house evoked a lot of feelings, which he shared with us. Our conversation led to a discussion about childhood memories and places of childhood experiences, which for him seemed the most important issue of our project. He was well aware of the fact that his view of the place was that of the homecomer as well as the visitor (Schütz, 1979); he saw places differently from people living there all the time (Simmel, 1971). Our visitor intimated that this was the reason why he was more of a hoarder than his brother and sister who still lived in the town: "They want to throw away most of it." We can thus interpret the feelings of this man as both those of the homecomer, who finds that everything has changed, and those of the stranger; the two roles were experienced simultaneously. He had both the distant perspective and the perspective of 'the man in the street,' having a body and a biography linked to the place. We saw some of the same tendencies in Town 3, where the homecomers were almost in uproar about the changes tourism had made to their home town and the fact that the seafront was full of fishing cottages (*rorbuer*) built in retro style. They shared this despair with people living in the town, and it was the issue most frequently presented to us. The most appreciated heritage object in the town was the decreasing fringe area between sea and land.

Another and very different example from Town 1 is the following. One of the many middle-aged and older women visiting the stall told us that the inhabitants of the town are very proud of their working-class history, which is linked to the town's paper industry. This contrasted to the situation in the neighbouring town, she said, where people were ashamed of their industrial history, and wanted to forget and hide it through heritage initiatives linked to architecture, culture and aesthetics. In her town the heritage work was to a great extent concerned with safeguarding the factory buildings and the working-class housing, a workers' garden, and other spaces linked to their industrial history.

Memories are strongly linked to sensual affiliations. During our conversations we were presented with stories strongly connected with smell (the smell from the factory reminding the storyteller of smoked ham, the smell of fish from the fishing industry), sound (childhood memory of the stone quarry where an interviewee grew up) and visual perception (the role that the old factory chimney played as a landmark, or the mountains dominating the skyline). We also noted that our stall attracted people with rather striking personal histories, two of whom returned twice to tell us more about their lives.

In some ways we felt we functioned like a 'social welfare office,' without direct relevance to the topic of cultural heritage. We think the word 'memory' on our poster encouraged some people to tell eventful personal histories, and in these cases as well as being professional, we had to show respect for personal tragedies and loss and some empathy (McLean & Leibing, 2007). We asked ourselves what might be the outcome of using different words and ideas when inviting people to talk about their town and the objects and places they considered worth safeguarding. We found that a mixture of associations and interests were evoked, depending on the way we used language. This led us to wonder how conscious we are of language use when we talk to people, or prepare interview guides, invitations and short summaries directed at people participating in studies.

Personal associations versus management argumentations

How do personal associations relate to statements used in heritage management and local planning? In two of the towns, museums and local history play a role. We found that many of the women visiting our stall, and a few men, were especially interested in local museums and local history work, and that our stall in the mall made such people stop and show us what they were especially interested in. They said that we must learn to recognise the most important heritage spaces and traces, and they were concerned about the public plans, either positively or critically. Some of them were very interested in making the heritage list complete, adding buildings or places that were not mentioned. In short, we found that there were people and organisations outside the municipal system who were working with the topic, and waiting to be recognised for the role they play, rather than being seen as a group relying on a false premise in terms of local participation and collaboration and delivering reports that are quickly forgotten and hidden in the municipal archives without affecting practical politics in the field.

We also noticed that suggestions for new heritage objects that ought to be added to the municipal plan often concerned the old buildings in the town and the meeting places in the central area. The places of memory and events linked to childhood, youth and everyday life seem to play a crucial role in the suggestions of the people who live there. This is partly because they were prompted to think about the places, buildings and artefacts which they appreciated most both by the main question on the poster and by their conversations with us.

There is no doubt that the heritage discourses of official heritage management and the museums play an important role in forming the local comprehensions of what cultural heritage means. This is especially true of Towns 1 and 2. In Town 3 people did not know the heritage plan at all, and were less involved at municipal level, perhaps because it was developed by the regional administrative department and covered several towns and rural areas. The local newspapers also function as a channel for debate on these issues.

The implications of cultural contexts

An important factor in our study was the problem of a method which was well-suited to Towns 1 and 3, but turned out to be less well-suited to Town 2, where the crucial issue was one of spatial

openness and spontaneity in contact and conversation. In methodological terms we talk of the importance of being conscious of cultural contexts when applying different methods. In our case we saw that this really does matter and that there is much to gain by adhering to multi-method research (Carpiano, 2009). We have learnt that there are some differences in communication culture between the towns. Whereas our level of acceptable incompetence (Neuman, 2006) functioned well in Towns 1 and 3, it failed in Town 2. In the former there are traditions of collectivity, developed through a history of heavy industry and fisheries. All towns have a history of trade and transfer. This historical fact seems to mean less for the flow of spontaneous conversation today; where we see different forms of collectivity and social contact taking place at street level. We emphasize that there may be other explanations for the differences that are relevant here. For us, the consequences were that we had to find other ways of gathering data to catch 'the popular voice' in Town 2, and therefore used a focus group.

Discussion: The importance of situated knowledge

The main research question posed in the introduction was this one: Is the Mall Method a reliable way to gain insight into the subjective dimensions in heritage appreciation?

In the social sciences we speak about the importance of *situated knowledge* (Haraway, 1991), where both data gathering and theory development have to embrace close understanding of the particularities of the case, the community or the group studied. This is supported by the ideal of closeness to situations and cases in the research process.

Common dilemmas about *where* to conduct interviews are discussed by Elwood and Martin (2000). They argue that interview sites and situations are inscribed in social spaces and thus have an important role to play in qualitative research, although they are surprisingly seldom mentioned in methodological literature. Careful observations and analysis of the people, activities, and interactions that constitute these spaces can illustrate the social geographies of a place. Thereby they may offer new insight with respect to research questions, help researchers to understand and interpret interview materials, particularly issues of power and place. Elwood and Martin (2000) stress that the interview is not just an opportunity to gather information by asking questions and engaging in conversation, but that it is also an opportunity for participant observation. This corresponds with our experiences. From being total strangers, we succeeded to a certain extent in becoming the 'woman in the street,' being informed about places in new ways, and becoming more active listeners. We posed questions and make links between opinions and heritage objects in ways which made the conversation more 'full' or more informed. This was also a way of establishing trust between storyteller and listener, an important foundation for a deeper understanding of the issues in question.

Unlike the traditional street interview, often used by firms to advertise their goods or services and also used by social researchers, we did not stop people but rather invited them to stop. This implies an interesting paradox; the roofed-over mall situation made the contact between the researcher and the researched more open than would a stopping intervention in an open street. The degree of control was low, and therefore we assert that the value of the information is quite high. There is, however, a question of selection underlying this openness; we must assume that people who stopped were individuals with special interests in our topic. We believe, however, that this is no drawback. In many studies in social research both key informants and focus groups are used; this is a legitimate procedure and produces good material for analysis, especially in case studies.

In our position as researchers we were not blind to the social control of a situation. The most

extreme example of social control in research takes place when the researcher makes a radical intervention in a social situation, like changing its organisation. This gives a high degree of asymmetric control. Research with the highest degree of social control traditionally has the highest rank in research communities, the lowest being studies with the most informal and unstructured methods (Enderud, 1979). Therefore the Mall Method can be classified as one of low scientific value. The control regime in research, however, as Michel Foucault (1972) discusses frequently, has lost its position in recent social science discourses. The perspective of situated knowledge invites us to come closer to people involved in a research project, both by dropping the expert role of the researcher in a well-informed society, and by facilitating closeness to the socio-material reality, like the social encounters in streets and places of everyday practice. This also leads to a change of ideas; in our case the people we talked with are informants rather than respondents and the stall made another conversation possible. An everyday location like a mall invites all kinds of people and perspectives to contribute to the discussion on heritage values.

We see some important methodological points linked to our research topic, which may influence any topic of relevance. The processes that influence the shared meaning of cultural heritage are complex, and take place on many levels. There is a need for critical discussion of the dominant discourses we find in the field of heritage politics (Foucault, 1972), but also a need to be aware of *different* discursive practices (Fairclough, 1992). The notion of ‘memory’ in our poster had a double function: it raised questions of both personal and collective memories linked to the town in question. Sometimes we could see that one was woven into the other. The memory space was extended by the subjective contributions, as was the communication space. We have seen that this open space method means ‘open’ in different senses, as regards topics, themes and stories. This was not easy to handle in every case, but at the same time it shows that people are very interested in their histories, both the personal and the collective ones. For many, these histories are one and the same; they are woven together to constitute identity at both personal and place level. This has consequences for the question of which methods and criteria should be used in cultural heritage politics and in research on this topic, as well as in any topic in cultural studies. In this case, we see subjective reflections as important aspects of collective memories in places, both tangible and intangible.

Concluding remarks

We have found the Mall Method to be an approach that can present new arguments and perspectives, and lead to new practices in the field of heritage politics. The strength of the method described here lies in the fact that it is developed through dialogue and leaves openings for subjective reflections based on personal memories and sensual affiliations to places. The Mall Method allows for a more inclusive process than some in-depth interviews by allowing the respondent to be a participant in the interview rather than a subject who is being interviewed, something it shares with other more recent established interview techniques, like for instance “the go-along” method (Carpiano, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003; Lynch, 1970).

At the mall we could allow ourselves to be engaged at equal level in the conversations – we commented, asked and inquired. However, the people involved in the conversations felt free to interrupt and had the opportunity to leave at any time – a situation which can appear considerably more restricted if the interview takes place in one’s own home. The fact that we as researchers decided not to enter the informant’s personal space made the process less involved in both formal and practical details, which otherwise would have had to be clarified in due time in advance.

We should, however, draw attention to the fact that the method also has some weaknesses. This might, however, be a result of the method being practised for the first time rather than it being a

consequence of the essence of the method. We found that when somebody first got involved in a conversation, it was more likely that other people's interests would be aroused. This sometimes created a conflict between recording the storytelling correct and at the same time keeping an eye out for other people when they approached. On later reflection we realised that the initial decision not to use a tape recorder was too hasty. The nuances and level of details in the stories would have been far better recorded if we had combined the use of map, field notes, and tape recording. When, at the end of each day, we tried to reconstruct what had passed at the stall, the impressions were too entangled to be recapitulated in detail. Therefore this is definitely a method which requires at least two interviewers. The involvement of two researchers was also experienced as positive from a professional point of view since, during the calm periods at the mall, we could summarise our results and reflect on the knowledge we had been given.

A primary conclusion we reached was that the method is particularly suitable in the early stages of a study. It provides an opportunity to make acquaintance with potential informants for further in-depth interviews. The Mall Method could also potentially represent a good basis for interdisciplinary research, where it can represent one of several methods used to provide new knowledge.

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