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Places, distances, flows: Everyday organizing in an urban hybrid space
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Recent studies have emphasized the importance of commercial centres as social spaces that are constantly produced and enacted through everyday practices (Stillerman & Salcedo, 2012, Hagberg & Styhre, 2013). Hagberg and Styhre's (2013) empirical study on the shopping centre development practices show how different professionals such as architects, developers, politicians, and retail experts collaborate and balance their various interests aiming to produce a balanced combination of a commercial and public space in a community. Many other studies on shopping centres demonstrate too that shopping malls are not only commercial spaces but additionally, they are often developed and used as welcoming public spaces (e.g. Goss, 1993; Abaza, 2001). Routes to the shopping mall by public transport are here in an important role (Stillerman & Salcedo, 2012). Overall, as Hagberg and Styhre (2013) emphasize the production of social space in urban settings such as shopping malls is a continuous process where both material and social arrangements are closely entwined.

This study contributes to Hagberg and Styhre's (2013) call for more research on organization and management of urban spaces, both commercial and public. The aim here is to explore in which ways various local actors on site, in particular retailers and different maintenance workers such as security guards, cleaners, and facility managers participate in everyday organizing and thereby in the production and maintenance of social space in a hectic urban milieu. Our research site is Kamppi Centre and particularly Kamppi Commercial Centre in downtown Helsinki, Finland. Kamppi Centre consists of a complex of commercial centre, offices, housing buildings, and public transportation terminal (metro station, local and long-distance bus terminal). Moreover, there is a freight depot and underground parking facilities in the Centre. Kamppi Centre can then be considered as a hybrid urban space (Perry, 2012) serving multiple roles such as business establishment, dwelling, transport, and - due to its location in downtown Helsinki - also leisure and hang-out.

The Commercial Centre consists of six floors including the street level with the gross leasable area of roughly 44,000 m². It is owned by an international real estate investment company, but interestingly, inside the building there are public pedestrian roads that essentially cut through the Commercial Centre in three floors. Particularly in the street level, there is a constant people flow from local bus terminal along the pedestrian road leading to various directions inside and outside the building. In 2013, Kamppi Centre counted 36 million visits. Mainly due to the local bus terminal, the opening times of Kamppi Centre are long. From Mondays to Thursday the Centre is
closed only between 2:30 a.m. and 5 a.m. From Fridays to Sundays the Centre is closed only 40 minutes between 4:20 a.m. and 5 a.m. The opening time of the Commercial Centre follows the normal opening times of retail stores. The long opening times lead to the requirement of maintenance workers such as cleaners and security guards to be present 7/24.

The empirical research started in September 2014 and will continue until May 2015. In the study, we apply a variety of methods to generate data about everyday organizing in a complex urban hybrid space, including observation, photographing, ethnographic interviews of four security guards, and ten in-depth interviews of multiple local actors at the site such as the commercial centre site manager, retailers and entrepreneurs operating in different floors of the centre, and maintenance workers such as security guards, cleaners, and facilities management. Additionally, we have interviewed five architects, two Helsinki city officials, two representatives of the construction company, and one consultant involved in the design and construction of Kamppi Centre to gain understanding on the development phase of Kamppi Centre and thereby the planned functioning of the building. Also, we have conducted five in-depth interviews of key local actors in cultural and youth affairs - three museum representatives, a movie theater director, and a director of youth affairs of the City of Helsinki - in the close-by premises of Kamppi Centre to gain more knowledge on urban life in the whole Kamppi area. Finally, a director of retail concepts in a construction firm was interviewed to gain understanding on current trends in the design of future commercial centres. All interviews have so far produced approximately 27 hours of recorded material that has been transcribed verbatim.

The preliminary results identify critical locations or places where local actors are constantly confronting the need to negotiate the social space in the Commercial Centre. Physical distances as well as material and people flows in the Centre seem central to local actors’ practices and thereby to the ways how social space is maintained, and are therefore analyzed and reflected with the existing literature (e.g. Taylor and Spicer, 2007; Knox et al., 2008).

References:


