Chapter 5
People and Place: The Interrelated Connections Between Interactions, Perceptions and Space

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Introduction

Geographical variations in health outcomes have been a research topic in public health for more than 150 years. Overall two explanations for these variations have dominated this research field. The composition explanation, which refers to the concentration of individuals with similar socio-economic status in specific residential locations, is used to explain why certain neighbourhoods are characterised by, for example, high mortality and morbidity. The context explanation, on the other hand, approaches geographical health variations as if it is *place* itself that affects health. For example, poor neighbourhoods comprised of worn-down buildings, a high crime rate, an insecure social environment, and lacking green outdoor spaces, children's playgrounds, public benches, etc. can have a negative effect on health. The context explanation is however a blurry conception that seeks to capture:

> those factors influencing human behaviours or health which remain once every imaginable individual characteristic is taken into account. It is indeed a black box, an unspecified "miasma" which somehow, but we don't know how, influences some aspects of health, health related behaviour or health risk in some population groups. (Macintyre et al. 2002, p. 129)

Exploring the contents of the "black box" has opened the way for introducing concepts originating in the social sciences. Social capital, defined by various theorists like Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1993), is, for example, commonly used as explaining differences in ill health (Carpiano 2006), although critics stress that the relationship between social capital and health is too difficult to determine due to the complex interaction between social status and health status (Ziersch et al. 2005; Kennelly et al. 2003; Hawe and Shiell 2000). Moreover, a high

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level of social capital does not necessary lead to good health. Portes (1998) draw our attention to the negative side effects of high levels of social capital, e.g. restricted individual freedom and increased social control and group closure. There is thus a need to further explore what is going on in "contexts", e.g. what are the ideals, norms and values being practised and how are these practices related to health.

The debate of whether it is either context or composition that causes ill health leads nowhere. A more fruitful approach may be to acknowledge that there is a reciprocal relationship between people and place that potentially co-determines health behaviour, risk behaviour and/or health status (Bernard et al. 2007; Cummins et al. 2007; Macintyre and Ellaway 2003; Macintyre et al. 2002).

This chapter attempts to shed light on the content and characteristics of this relationship by turning to sociological and anthropological disciplines, which have a long tradition in the study of the interaction between people and place. The body of literature concerning this relationship is huge (see, e.g. Morill et al. 2005; Lofland 1998; Williams 2007 for overviews). In this chapter, I will focus mainly on the research tradition embedded in the theoretical orientation of *symbolic interactionism*. In brief, social interactionism evolves from American pragmatism, a philosophic tradition focusing on the interactional nexus of social relationships (Kurtz 1984). It explores primarily how individuals and groups negotiate, (re)construct and engage in social interactions within a wider social and cultural context (Blumer 1969). The value of conceiving people and place from the perspective of social interactionism is threefold: (i) it allows us to explore how people use place, e.g. how residents practise everyday life activities in the neighbourhood and the meanings they attach to places; (ii) it turns our focus towards social relationships in specific places and finally (iii) it addresses how place structures social behaviour. Before addressing these three interconnected relationships, I will briefly introduce the historical background of how the relationship between people and place has evolved in the social sciences. The chapter draws on discussions and case illustrations first appearing in my Ph.D. thesis: *Community participation in health promotion: Perspectives of participation and everyday life in a multi-ethnic and socially deprived neighbourhood* (2010).

Background and Definitions

The Detachment of Social Relations from Geographical Space

The sociological classic writers such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies and Georg Simmel were concerned with how modern society changed social relationships. In their work, modern society increasingly transforms and characterises social relationships as being detached from geographical space. Durkheim (1893/1984) introduced the distinction between *mechanical* and *organic solidarity*, the former referring to the nature of social ties in small-scale societies and the latter

to modern societies. To Durkheim, premodern and "primitive" societies were based on *conscious collective* that captures the individual's consciousness and regulates social norms and behaviour so it matches the needs, norms and values of the community as an entity. Tönnies (1887–1973) introduced *Gemeinschaft* (community), representing social relationships in traditional societies, and *Gesellschaft* (association), characterising contractual relationships in modern societies of bureaucracy and commercial organisations. According to Weber, bureaucracy and capitalism is the driving force leading to loss of freedom and meaning for the individual (Weber 1970). In a disenchanted world *(die Entzauberung der Welt)* that modern society is, the individual is confronted with many different forms of values, which he/she must choose, but is not capable of. Individual agency is therefore predominantly motivated by utilisation values rather than inherent community-based and loyalty values (Ritzer 2008). Simmel (1998) presents the idea that urban modern life creates a psychological condition that insists on the development of the intellect, protecting the individual from hectic city life with its diversity of stimuli and superficial relationships. Moreover, social relations are unimportant per se and only gain importance if they are considered to have a utilisation value. These theorists shared the idea that premodern communities were geographically based, homogeneous and concerned with duties and values that served the community rather than the individual. This assumption led to concerns that modernity caused social chaos and disruption. These assumptions were challenged already in the 1920s by what later became known as the Chicago School. The Chicago School specialised in urban sociology and was particularly interested in working class neighbourhoods and how they were socially organised. These studies, most notable, Park's *The City* (1925) and *Human Communities* (1952), Wirth's *Urbanism as a way of life* (1938) and Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943), illustrated the social order of neighbourhoods, and social relationships also in modern society entail intimacy and place attachment rather than superficiality and geographical detachment. However, the concern that modernity causes social disruption is still valid today and to be found in current theoretical perspectives of local communities. For example, Zygmunt Bauman, Richard Sennett, Amitai Etzioni and Manuel Castells have been labelled "pessimists", due to their characterisation of late modern society as based on socio-geographical segregation, social disintegration and increasing inequity (Jørgensen 2008).

Place, Space and Neighbourhoods

Concepts of space and place have varied through history of human geography. Altman and Low (1992, p. 4) define place referring to space: "that has been giving meaning through personal, group or cultural processes". In this sense space is more abstract than place and deprived of any human thought or action (Tuan 1977). The concept of place, as Agnew (1987) notes, has been used within social science and has three main orientations: "locale" refers to settings where social relations are constituted; "locations" represent geographical areas, defined by social and economic

processes and encompassing the settings for social interaction; whereas "sense of place" refers to the subjective feelings associated with particular places. The phenomenological discipline has divided place into objective dimensions (the naturalistic qualities of place) and subjective dimensions (individualistic meanings attached to place) (Saar and Palang 2009). Criticising this binary opposition for distinguishing two inseparable spheres, a third space is introduced: the betweenness of places, where the subjective and the objective spaces meet and where objective reality and cultural meanings are fused (Entrikin 1991). Following Gustafson (2001), this chapter uses a definition of place that considers its meaningfulness:

> Meaningful places emerge in a social context and through social relations, they are geographically located and at the same time related to their social, economic, cultural etc. surroundings, and they give individuals a sense of place, a subjective territorial identity. (Gustafson 2001, p. 6)

This concept of place embraces the material circumstances, the social identities and subjective experiences, enabling an approach that considers three interconnected layers of place: that of societal structures, of local social interactions and of subjective emotions of attachment, or what can be termed as the *intersubjectivity of space* (Pranikoff and Low 2007).

As already noted, our era of modern society has developed with increasingly cultural de-territorialisation and been replaced by what Appadurai calls flows of ethno-, media-, techno-, finans- and ideoscapes (Appadurai 1996). In this sense it seems fair to ask if it is even possible to draw geographical boundaries and term them, for example, "neighbourhoods". A geographical territory consists, namely, of one or several centres, peripheries and borderlands. People who settle in sub-territories do not necessarily share cultural ideas as people in centres. When a geographical localisation does not reflect a cultural and social entity, how then do we conceptualise neighbourhood as a social place and something that people may identify with? The studies of the social structure and orders of neighbourhoods have been approached in various ways (see, e.g. Chaskin 1997; Day 2006). Cohen's work *The symbolic construction of community* (1985) may enable us to understand how a neighbourhood's identity is constructed. Cohen was inspired by the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth who presented the theory of ethnic boundaries (1969), whose major concern was to explore the demarcation between social boundaries rather than the cultural substance embedded within them. The theory views the cultural substance embedded within a particular community as being under a process of being reshaped by social interactions and negotiations. Moreover, the theory enhances that culture is unevenly distributed within communities, urging us to investigate the differences *within* communities. To Cohen, communities are distinct cultural entities applying simultaneously similarities and differences. Community is thus a relational idea opposed to other communities or cultural entities and is executed by the exigencies of social interaction, making use of particular frameworks such as kinship, religion, ethnicity or place (Cohen 1985).

Finally it should be mentioned that neighbourhoods do not exist as isolated islands but are part of wider society and that neighbourhoods are constructed on the basis of political and social histories of those societies. Poor neighbourhoods and

their residents have, for example, been associated with social stigma and moral degradation across time and space (Reidpath et al. 2005; Warr 2005). The process of stigmatisation happens over time, following unequal power distributions in society and where cultural, social and economic forces determine and maintain human differences, linking them to negative stereotyping (Goffman 1963). Stigma is thus a way of governance, of maintaining a specific social order and of justifying social, political and economic exclusion (Reidpath et al. 2005). The relationship of unequal power distribution and its consequences for poor neighbourhoods enable us to include in our neighbourhood approach its relation to wider society. However, if wider power structures in society are neglected in neighbourhood regeneration programmes, there is a risk that "outside agents" continually stigmatise poor neighbourhoods.

Place Attachment: Meanings of Place and the Creation of Home Territories

So far I have argued that place is space embodied with meaning. However, not all places are sites of place attachment. Rather, place attachment occurs as emotional bonding to a place when it cannot be substituted by other places from the perspective of the individual who experiences this attachment (Milligan 1998). Connections between people and "their places" may be conceptualised as *home territories*, a term first coined in a study by Cavan (1963) and represents *the relative freedom of behaviour and the sense of intimacy and control of the area* (Cavan 1963, p. 18). Home territories are created in public spaces by people who use these places regularly and together with other people with whom they have relationships, such as friends, family or neighbours. The process of place attachment is enabled by the creation of these home territories as will be demonstrated below.

Case Study: Sønderbro

Sønderbro, a public housing area in a Danish provincial town, is in an ongoing process of neighbourhood regeneration. As a consequence of the neighbourhood's high percentage of residents receiving welfare (78 %), combined with the high percentage of migrants (60 %), in addition to a poor reputation for crime and drug abuse, the area has for decades been characterised as "socially deprived" and undesirable to live in. To change this reputation, to improve neighbourhood security and to support health and well-being of all residents, a development initiative was launched in the mid-1990s. The aim of the development initiative was to organise and develop the neighbourhood in ways that considered the needs and resources of its residents. The physical appearance of Sønderbro had been improved, the buildings renovated and settings to encourage social interactions have been constructed.

Such settings include green areas, benches, children's playgrounds, the laundry house, the community house and the snack bar (Larsen 2010; Larsen and Stock 2011; Larsen and Manderson 2009). These settings can be defined as places; they are no longer abstract spaces deprived of human thought but constructed with the purpose of being grounds for human interactions.

It may not always be obvious which places can be characterised as "home" territories and which are merely grounds for social interactions nor is there necessary consensus among residents which territories belong to which group of residents. It does however become explicit as certain territories are contested:

> Bodil: "Usually we sit down here in the evenings drinking coffee and playing trivial pursuit, but now our bench has gone missing. It has been moved down to the fire place, I don't know who did it, but Jens [a community worker] does not care and will tell us to sort it out by ourselves.....You see the benches over there? I call them the gossip benches. Every night they [The Turkish women] sit there gossiping, sometimes scowling at us. Maybe they took it. Or their kids did" (17 July 2007).

The removal of "her bench" challenged her control of the area, and she clearly felt provoked by the fact that somebody had taken "her bench" as if somebody had entered her personal home. She also explained that she felt intimidated by a neighbour, who she felt observed her movements and who was not a person she desired to include in her home territory.

Likewise another resident, Ulla, a retired female, who frequently used a particular area also known in the neighbourhood as "the drunks' area", expressed her emotional bond to the place. She complained that drunken teenagers used their benches during night time, making loud noise and messing up the area with empty beer bottles, broken glass, cigarette buds and trash. The worst part in Ulla's point of view was that she herself and her own crowd were being blamed for both the noise and the rubbish scattered around. She herself described the area as her own garden and nursed the place by cleaning up after herself. Her sense of "ownership" of certain benches was strengthened by bringing in personal items such as ashtrays. That somebody else was using their bench and messing it up challenged her control of the bench, not that she didn't want somebody else using it but that she could not control "their" behaviour and that she might be blamed for misbehaviour she was not responsible for.

The relationship between people and places, exemplified by *home territories,* is an important component in place attachment. According to theory of place attachment: "people develop attachment bonds with certain places, thereby entering into meaningful relationships with these places and ultimately incorporating them as part of their self-identity" (Leith 2006, p. 318). The creation of emotional links to places is constituted by meaningful interactions, having two related components: the *interactional past* and the *interactional potential* of a place (Milligan 1998). Past events, practices and routines associated with a specific place or memories of a place form the *interactional past*. When, for example, residents recall past events in their *home territories*, they construct and express a sense of belonging like Bodil's story of "my bench" illustrates. The *interactional potential* of a site is on the other hand what is imagined or expected to happen at the site. This is connected to routine

behaviour such as coming to the same bench every day or to planning future events, like arranging a picnic or community festival. The experiences of interactional past and potentials can be coined to *experiences of continuity*, meaning that residents experience coherence between the neighbourhood's past, present and future.

Social Interactions at Specific Places: Relationships in Neighbourhoods

Looking into the literature of social relationships in public places, such as street corners, parks and neighbourhoods, several typologies that capture the nature of these relationships have been constructed. Representing the interactionist perspective, Lofland distinguishes between *public*, *parochial* and *private realms* (Lofland 1989, 1998). Realm differs from place and can be described as a social territory in which a certain type of relational form dominates and thus captures the nature of social interactions in places. The *public realm* refers to the public domain such as street corners, parks, coffee shops and plazas. Relationships in these places are characterised by brief encounters and impersonal and superficial relationships, where people typically are unknown to each other or only known to each other by category by performing a specific role, such as a postman, a police officer or similar. These relationships are characterised as a *stranger relational form.* Similarly, the urban anthropologist Hannerz terms these kinds of brief encounters as *traffic relationships* (Hannerz 1980). The *private realm* belongs to the intimate domain such as private homes in which the relational form is long term or durable like family or close friends. The *parochial realm* refers to a communal relational form represented by places such as neighbourhoods or workplaces. The point is that each realm is tied to a set of norms and behaviours that only applies within that specific realm. Lofland argues that the benefits of this trichotomous distinction are an improved understanding of social territories, their boundaries, structures and inherent qualities formed by social interactions.

Kusenbach (2006) develops this distinction in her exploration of neighbouring patterns in the parochial realm. She distinguishes between four different practices that individuals engage in to treat each other as neighbours: *friendly recognition, parochial helpfulness, proactive intervention* and *embracing and contesting diversity*. Within each practice are distinct behavioural patterns. *Friendly recognition* ranges from a friendly nod when greeting to small talk of weather conditions, to cheerfulness and to flirting. *Parochial helpfulness* is represented by small services such as borrowing a cup of sugar, accepting package delivery or watering plants while one's neighbour is away on vacation. *Proactive intervention* goes beyond the parochial helpfulness since neighbours in this practice are taking action without having negotiated first. They are small favours initiated in situations to prevent one's neighbour getting into trouble. Finally in Kusenbach's terms, the last neighbouring practice is *embracing and contesting diversity*. These are acts of inclusion or exclusion of neighbours who differ from oneself and extend beyond other culturally

defined boundaries. She demonstrates how residents tolerate cultural diversities and even express that they prefer diversity above homogeneity. Other examples illustrate hostility towards residents who differ distinctively from oneself, and these acts are ranging from withholding friendly recognition to anonymously complaining to the housing authorities of what they consider as inappropriate neighbouring behaviour.

Kusenbach's distinction between types of neighbouring behaviour is useful in exploring how residents treat each other as neighbours or to explore which kinds of relationships are predominant in the parochial realm. This pattern of neighbouring behaviour was highly recognisable in the neighbourhood of Sønderbro, but I also found that residents were treating each other in other ways than being merely neighbours. Here a neighbour was sometimes described as "the anonymous" person living upstairs or next door, one you can hear move around, but never speak to other than muttering a "hello" when bumping into him/her in the stairways. A neighbour can thus be geographically close but socially distant. I call this a *geographical neighbour*. Attached to this category is a set of ideals of how to perform "good neighbouring behaviour". A positive feature associated with the *geographical neighbour* was described as "one who does not get into other people's businesses". It was highly valued that neighbours did not interfere, asking personal questions, gossiping or telling people what to do (Larsen and Manderson 2009).

A neighbour was also described as one you have a relationship to. I call this a *social neighbour*. In contradiction to the *geographical neighbour*, a *social neighbour* is one that cares and shows interest, helps out and interferes if problems occur or support is needed. Treating one as a *social neighbour* included exchanging favours and objects, much like Kusenbachs' categories of *parochial helpfulness* and *proactive intervention*.

Finally, the majority of residents were categorised as "non-neighbours". Acts that fall into this category are "indifference", not necessarily in negative terms, but rather as an expression of not having any needs or desire to engage. This form is characterised by "no social contact" other than the awareness of other people's physical presence and managing this presence, for example, the unwritten rules that apply when passing each other on the pavement or when a resident chooses to sit at another bench than the bench already occupied by a fellow resident. In these situations residents treat other residents as *strangers*, that is, patterned ways of interaction that structure and maintain a specific social order, in this case residents that share social space, but no social relation (see also Lofland 1973; Goffman 1963). Residents expressing this norm most often had their networks outside of the community and considered the neighbourhood as a place to live, rather than a place to have a life.

On the other hand, a very different type of "non-neighbour" was close relationships such as relatives or close friends. Several of the residents had relatives living in the neighbourhood or residents had formed close bonds. In this sense they no longer defined each other as neighbours but rather as friends or family members. Close relationships advantage the individual in that they feel emotionally, practically and even financially supported. But the bonds may also have side effects. One is that individuals might feel restricted in their individual freedom and even monitored.

Exclusion and restricted individual freedom are what Portes (1998) refers to as negative aspects of social capital; those strong, social bonds, although having embedded resources, carry the potential of controlling social behaviour that are not expedient for the individual's social and mental well-being.

Neighbouring interactions are therefore only one part of the social interaction pattern in neighbourhoods. The point is that the social realms, Lofland and Kusenbach distinguish between, which in each way inform social interactions, are multiplex in neighbourhoods. People are not just neighbours. They are also relatives, close friends, enemies, strangers and long-term acquaintances. In determining relationships in neighbourhoods, it may then be fruitful then to distinguish between *types* of neighbours and how residents categorise neighbours and non-neighbours.

Places and Social Behaviour

The final issue brought up here is the relationship between place and social behaviour and of how the physical surroundings of public life can be manipulated to enable or enforce certain social behaviours. The built environment does certainly not rigidly determine how people should socially behave, the kind of relationships they should have or how they should socially interact with each other. Rather, the built environment structures, enable and constrain interactional options between people and between people and place. Following Morill et al. (2005), it is fruitful to distinguish between *framing of a place* and *regulation of a place.* The framing of a place includes how space is defined concerning its use, accessibility and visibility and refers to the interpretive processes that occur when people interact with each other or with places. The interpretative process allows people to categorise, identify and perceive the meaning of a place and enable them to make sense of what a place is for, who it is for and how one should behave in it. In order to make sense of place, people draw on different frames that are embedded in historical and cultural circumstances. A place may be constructed for certain intentions, such as a public playground or an urban park. In this sense a place can be more or less *institutionalised* for specific interactions and relations. On the other hand, these intentions may be challenged by different groups of people. Urban parks, for example, may be used for recreation, picnic and family get-togethers or for more nefarious activities such as prostitution, drug trafficking or illegal camps for homeless people.

The regulation of place is closely related to the framing of a place but refers to the normative rules that regulate social behaviour, including processes of social control that are found in particular places. Public sociality, or to use Lofland's term: social interactions in the public realm, is characterised by brief encounters and is governed by norms that require individuals to maintain certain social distances from each other, although being physically close. Observing social behaviour in a London underground train, one finds that people rarely start conversations or look at co-passengers. These norms of behaviour may naturally be challenged by different groups of people. The *principles* of public sociality are described as "repertoires"

that individuals use when navigating in public places (Morill et al. 2005, p. 234). To see them as *principles* acknowledges that individuals have different skills and expectations as they interact in public places.

Furthermore, we may distinguish between open-placed frames and close-placed frames. The latter refers to places designed with specific intends, for example, places arranged with fixed seatings, tables or walls that restrict accessibility and purpose. Some benches situated in public parks have, for example, been designed in ways that don't allow people to lie down in order to prevent homeless people from "staying over". Close-placed frames thus define behaviour in a restricted manner. Open-placed frames are on the other hand designed to allow human creativity and freedom to decide how specific places should be used and thus refer to "permissive" behaviour. In this sense, city councils, governments or housing agencies construct and design physical surroundings to control social behaviour in a more or less restricted manner. Space then, how it is being used and by whom, is reflecting power relations in society and is the potential site for contesting societal hegemony (Altman and Low 1992). A further example from Sønderbro will be used to illustrate this argument.

When the outdoor areas of Sønderbro were renovated, residential meetings were held in order to discuss and accommodate the residents' needs and wishes. At that time, there had been some complaints that alcoholics were occupying the benches at the main entrance of the neighbourhood and some residents felt insecure. But instead of desiring to exclude the alcoholics and ban them from the outdoor areas, the residents agreed that a shelter should be built for them in a less visible area, where alcohol consumption was allowed. The residents named this shelter *The Tea House*; however, the tea house was often empty. The alcoholics preferred to sit outside at nearby benches. Only in rainy weather they would enter the hut for shelter. Their choice of not using the hut for the intended purpose was related to how the alcoholics *framed* the place. To them it was not just a matter of having a place to drink alcohol; it was a hang-out, a place to be seen and observe the comings and goings of residents in the neighbourhood. The walls of the hut restricted these activities by blocking the view. Moreover, being in the hut was associated with being "locked up". In this sense the *non-use* of the tea house was both a way of maintaining their everyday routines and an act of resisting what other residents had decided for them.

So far I have illustrated how space restricts and permits specific social interactions to occur and how places are used. While this theoretical orientation is careful not to explicitly define a causal relation between certain places and behaviour, other theoretical orientations demonstrate that place indeed *does* something to people's behaviour and well-being. The *Broken Windows Theory* is a criminological theory that argues that disorder incites to more disorder (Wilson and Kelling 1982). For example, it is argued that if a building with broken windows is left unfixed, vandals will break a few more windows and eventually break into the building and perhaps even turn it into a shelter. The *Broken Windows Theory* has been integrated in urban and preventive crime policies in various Western countries for several decades now and has recently been empirically demonstrated in a study by Keizer et al. (2008).

Architectural design and the built environment surrounding our everyday life may control, stimulate or enforce certain types of behaviour, but it may also stimulate healing processes or promote health and well-being. Recent research trends in health geography have developed the concept of *therapeutic landscape*, which provides an analytical framework for exploring how the natural, built, social and symbolic landscapes contribute to human health. A therapeutic environment is one that has *positive person-environment interaction—where improvements in the physical setting are complemented by improvements in the social environment* (Pranikoff and Low 2007). The evolution of the concept is closely related to criticisms of the idea that rehabilitation is bound to institutionalised places of healing such as hospitals or recreation homes and instead suggests that practices of healing, health promotion or illness prevention can take place in everyday life settings such as neighbourhoods, workplaces or schools, reflecting a socioecological approach towards health (Williams 2007). The concept is however not restricted to everyday settings but is also applied in hospitals and long-term care settings. For example, spaces designed for delivering health services have been investigated in relation to interior, selection of colours and design of the furniture and of how these elements contribute to a therapeutic environment (Crooks and Evans 2007).

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed people and place interactions at three different but interrelated levels: the construction of meaningful places, the social relationships in places and the influence of places on social behaviour. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, I have explained the process of place attachment through the use of the concept of *home territories*. In this process it becomes evident that by people's frequent use of places, they develop a sense of ownership towards the place, which is overt as the territory is contested by other people. Moreover, I have demonstrated the various ways in which residents relate to each other in a neighbourhood. Relationships may vary broadly in intimacy, from treating each other as strangers to being as close as family as well as there are different ways of conceptualising what a good neighbour is and how he/she should behave. Finally I have discussed how space structures social behaviour and interactions. There are different perspectives of how rigidly spaces influence behaviour. Spaces may be designed to encouraging performing specific activities, to restricting certain actions and to determining a specific outcome like the broken windows theory suggests. By investigating this relationship, we further learn that spaces are arenas for contesting power. While authorities may design spaces for specific intentions, these intentions may be challenged by people's use of them and thus transform them into something else.

So how then are these perspectives relevant for investigating the relationship between neighbourhood and health? As I began this chapter I introduced the concerns over community loss. Some reactions to this concern have put forward a nostalgic view of community as a coherent unit, sharing needs, norms and values, a view

that is replicated in the health literature (Larsen and Stock 2011). It has been argued elsewhere that this romantic view is inherent in Scandinavian housing policies, particularly concerning socially deprived areas (Pløger 2002). This perception of neighbourhood implies that its residents are always interested in and connected with each other. As this chapter has shown, this is not always the case. This dominant perception may not always reflect neighbourhood relationships but is rather a normative prescription of how things *ought* to be. Acknowledging that residents in neighbourhoods have different relationships with each other, and use the places of neighbourhood in ways that may not always be intended, increases our understanding that neighbourhoods are complex and continuously changing in form, content and qualities. It underscores the point that there are no ready-made recipes of how to construct healthy neighbourhoods. Instead, working with human-made places requires that we begin with investigating who people are and what their relations are to the places they are attached to.

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