

# CHRISTIANIA – PERFORMING MULTIPLE AND NICHE TOURIST SPACES OF RESISTANCE THROUGH GUIDED TOURS

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## ABSTRACT

Christiania is a controversial place for alternative living and an important tourist place. As such, the place performs different types of images and ideologies. The purpose with this study is to use the guided tour as a tool for exploring the relation between the multiple voices performing the place of Christiania as a complex discursive and embodied place and niche branding processes.

**Key Words:** Christiania, guided tours, place branding, performing place, niche branding, urban multiplicity.

## INTRODUCTION

Christiania, Copenhagen, is a small city within a city, sharing most of the definitions that any city would perform, but due to the fact that its geographical scale is so small and artificially reduced, we may be able to grasp the multiple and contradictory features by focusing on the guided tour. The clash between the political establishment and people living in Christiania has very much shaped the images of the place in terms of a free, healthy and alternative space within a planned hectic big city. In sharp contrast to this image, Christiania has a reputation of hosting drugs like Cannabis which is openly sold at “Pusher Street”, attracting young people within a large hinterland including Southern Sweden. However, Christiania also hosts images of being a radical and alternative, even an innovative space of Copenhagen. Thus, Christiania is a contested place (Lund Hansen, 2010:219). From within, that is from the perspective of the citizens of Christiania; the city within the city is contested and is being promoted as an alternative place of living and being.

These two seemingly contradictory views on a place work simultaneously in terms of defining the place as both dynamic and attractive, or as destructive and threatening values of society. On the one hand, the use of place marketing approaches is used in order to view how to attract capital and gain attractive places (e.g. Bailey, 1989; Barke, 1999; Kavaratzis, 2004; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005:507; Ward, 1998). Although the effects of place marketing are questioned in terms of if capital, people and tourist are drawn to places that are promoted in such a way that place marketing resources are justified, place marketing is considered to be a way of understanding how places are being made attractive, involving a multi-disciplinary field of inquiry, involving disciplines such as psychology, political sciences (van Ham, 2008), geography, economy, history (Ward, 1988). Although such particular promotion can take paradoxical niche forms such as attracting dark oriented tourists through gazing at death, death icons, wars, disasters and atrocities (Stone & Sharpley, 2008), or drug and alcohol tourism (Dobkin, 1994;2005; Jayne, 2008), and even alternative tourism attracting radical tourists acting against a contemporary economic order (Higgins-Despiolles, 2008).

Although no centrally planned actions are taken in order to improve Christiania’s ranking in an interurban competition, involving the whole of Copenhagen, some micro-actions are taken in order to establish and determine some of the place’s characteristics. The competitive strength lay in the formation of grass-roots and alternative life-style niche of discursive production at the same time as Christiania have embraced a territorialization of economic activities connected to entrepreneurship and the experience economy (Jessop, 1998:79).

On the other hand, attractive tourist places often share the characteristics with cities, often defined as hosting the multiple, the contradictory and the abundance of activities. Massey defines cities by the help of a list most of us do when we think of them: “For many, it is the intangible qualities of *city life* that makes it distinctive, such as luxury and poverty, amenity and pollution, tradition and innovation, drudgery and novelty, order and disorder, thrills and spills, volatility and conflict, difference and indifference, public services and welfare provision, individual freedom and dependency on others. Clearly, some of these traits seem to be at odds with others: how can the city contain order and conflict, freedom and dependency? Perhaps what cities are about is the attempt to deal with (or make the best of) these tensions” (Massey, 1999:5-6). Yet another way of viewing the multiplicity and contradictory features within a city is to say that the city *perform* these seemingly contradictory characteristics as part of the idea that physical proximity produces them: “...a *body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity of affecting and being affected that also defines a body in*

*its individuality*” (Deleuze, 1998:123). Performance thus takes into account that tourists are not merely gazing and seeing (Larsen & Urry, 2011), they are also part of the production of a particular place (Jonasson & Scherle, 2012).

Whatever view is chosen, the niche or the multiple, physical proximity seems to be a common theme for attracting tourists. Physical proximity sharpens the awareness of human interaction, on symbolic as well as physical, emotional, social, economic and political levels. Hence, physical proximity also produces the desire to perform the differences as well as the similarities in order to sustain its multiple ordering.

Guided tours in Christiania are organized and the residents were early aware of the power of images representing Christiania. The guides themselves exploit the different kinds of images that are attached to Christiania by using descriptions such as “remarkable – exiting – terrifying – different – alternative” and by the state named as a social experiment.<sup>1</sup> Yet, being in constant threat of Denmark’s ambitious gentrification project (Larsen & Lund Hansen, 2008), its vulnerable state is also a component in performing of an attractive place that might not be there the next time you visit Copenhagen. Its attractiveness thus lies in its exclusiveness of being a place to visit today, but to be remembered tomorrow.

## METHOD

This study use participant observations combined with media articles, and Internet sites. The observation method has been used frequently when students guide their peers through Christiania as part of their city excursion and fieldwork (Jonasson, 2011). These observations will be supplemented by observations of a professional Christiania guide later this spring. Students have been assigned to do peer wise tour guides to Christiania within courses of human geography and teacher’s education every semester during the last six years. Most of the empirical material stems from these tour guides. Student groups have varied between 10-25 people and one group have been assigned the Christiania area on every occasion. However, the material will be complemented during the spring 2012 in order to sample professional and native guided tours.

## DESIGNING DISCURSIVE PLACES OF CONTRASTS

Christiania is district of Copenhagen, or more precisely, it is a city within a city. From the beginning the area was designated as a military base with barracks, but after 1971 people with different backgrounds took over the abandoned area. Many of those who then occupied the place would perhaps be defined as Hippies by contemporary viewers. The people of Christiania started early to create their own rules, and they believe that this was done very much independent of the Danish state. It is also said that the “Freetown” always has been known for its mix of different people. Earlier this probably referred to its tolerance towards the drug dealers selling of drugs openly on the so called Pusher Street. The clash between the political establishment and people living in Christiania has very much shaped the images of the place in terms of a free, healthy and alternative space within a planned hectic big city.

Christiania’s ideologies and political interest in environmental protection is represented in discourses and the practice of recycling materials. It is said that they can recycle about 90 % of all products, which they use. Since the zone is car free, it can easily be argued that its low transportation intensity and thus contribution to CO<sup>2</sup> is low. Christianians is said to give one voice through their homepage and comment their city: “Christiania is ecologically oriented town with low-growth economy and extensive self-government. We want to bring the town into country and country into the town – not mixed up in one big mash, but as alternating areas, lovely, spacious and full of pleasant surprises”. Yet another factor also shows the relative ideological proximity to the establishment, and that is that the area hosts many artists that could be defined as part of a creative class. The area shows an abundance of all different kinds of art, like sculptures, theatre and live music.<sup>2</sup> There is also the Green Hall, where many concerts are held. Even entrepreneurship is an important feature within a creative class, and Christiania also shows some examples of such encouraged activities, for instance the famous Christiania Bikes and the Female Blacksmith (Kvindesmedien).<sup>3</sup> Christiania could say to have a grass root embedded tactics

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<sup>1</sup> The Danish terms are ”mærkelige - spændende - skræmmende - anderledes – alternative” and by the state is named as The Social Experiment [Det Sociale Eksperiment – Christiania].

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z5Uvfxd8A0&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z5Uvfxd8A0&feature=player_embedded)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.christianiabikes.com/>, <http://www.kvindesmedien.dk/>

for territorialising economic activities connected to entrepreneurship and the experience economy as part of a community branding strategy (Jessop, 1998:79).

Grassroots is not, however a homogenous category. Today, informants tells me that “normal” people like teachers and nurses live in the zone, and even local county servicemen and people of the establishment actually lives in Christiania. They take their bikes to work in the mornings, as any other suburban commuter does. These servicemen clearly sees the importance of keeping the zone detached from the city, not only from a personal view, but also because of the fact that it is one of the most important visiting places in Copenhagen, attracting half a million visitors every year and making it more important than the Tivoli.<sup>4</sup> The sharp line between people living in the area today instead lies between the building capital and the people living in Christiania. The intent to integrate Christiania into the rest of the city is called the “normalization” process, which is a politically defined process relating to the area as “abnormal”. The threat to people in Christiania is not the state, it is said, but the construction companies standing ready to transform and gentrify the about 0,34 km<sup>2</sup> of highly attractive central city land in to normal housing, leaving the about 800 citizens of Christiania without a place to live. Christiania is situated in an attractive part of Copenhagen surrounded with green areas and it is a place with a different soundscape than the outside with its busy traffic noise. The transition from traffic noise and to birds song is so abrupt that it surprises a visitor being there for the first time. Christiania performs a sudden and violent transition zone between nature and culture, body and traffic, legal and illegal, sense and soul, freedom and socialization, democracy and direct democracy. For instance, citizens of Christiania have their own “parliaments” (the highest authority is called Common Meeting) and it is told that they use consensus democracy which means that they discuss until agreement is achieved.<sup>5</sup> Christiania is thus a highly political and emotional space if images of it from the Internet are to be taken seriously. A search on Google on “Christiania” and “business” gave 199.000 hits. When searching of images alone the result were 38.000 images. It is a fully developed and complex brand embedding and embodying different types of extremely different and similar ideological discourses and practices. The difference between Christiania and other places aspiring for attention is that the use of place marketing approaches is not primarily made in order to attract capital (e.g. Bailey, 1989; Barke, 1999; Kavaratzis, 2004; Ward, 1998). Instead, the main goal is to remain independent from gentrification and normalization. Thus, contradictions are part of Christiania’s space; public places can easily be defined as really messy, but people’s houses (usually) are said to be very beautiful and clean inside. Christiania is not either this or that, it is rather a complex hybrid of rural - nature, familiarity, community and tradition; and urban art, anonymity, dynamics, globalization, individualism, change and resistance. The performance of a guided tour presents one possible way of weaving together these contradictive characteristics in ways that are creative and persuasive.

## PART OF THE TOUR AND DRAWN INTO DISCOURSES

The guided tour thus allows for performing and signaling meaning that are being produced by manipulating temporalities through the expanding of movements in a path, in pauses, and in accelerations of time (Lefebvre, 2004:78). Although the guided tour with students often is prepared in advance, the group of people and the guide controls the rhythm by producing a: “rhythmic landscape” that presupposes participation and sympathy (Duffy, 1999). Rhythms in movements draw the observer and the driver in to an event in order to experience its movements and stops, choices and resistances. Its inclusions and exclusions are defined in terms of what is inside and what is outside Christiania. The guided tour produces a desire to *take* part and be included in the mobile tour context as opposed to being excluded and of being gazed at. These rhythms shape the very contour of the tour through Christiania in many ways. The group makes longer halts at the bicycle shop, symbolizing entrepreneurship and a space of economic progress. When passing Pusher Street, where drugs are being sold open, the group is getting quiet and is anxious to be speedy and beware of looking too closely at the drug dealers with their stands on both sides of the street. For many of the students, this street represents *the* image of Christiania and some of them tell me that they are afraid of being there (Jonasson, 2011).

Christiania is sharing most of the definitions that any city would perform, but due to the fact that its geographical scale is so small and organically reduced, we may be able to grasp the multiple and contradictory features by focusing on the guided tour. The focus of a guided tour often performs a mix between the ordinary and the spectacular, the everyday and the extraordinary, the material and the social, the emotional and the

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.sydsvenskan.se/varlden/article173862/Byggbolagen-star-klara-att-borja-riva-i-Christiania.html>

<sup>5</sup> [www.christiania.org](http://www.christiania.org)

political, the economic and the cultural. Performing a guided tour is, however not just a matter of piling up facts, it involves the translocating and trans-temporalizing of experiences by reconnecting and reuniting past and distant time-paces, and to create cosmo-topological hybrids (Jonasson & Scherle, 2012; Jonasson, 2011). As such, the guided tour offers an embodied affordance of new ways of being in the world (identity) – in other words, it is a way of cleaving spaces to shapeable elements as here, there, behind, close, beyond, foreground, background, at the same time as it also a reconfigure what is believed to be of significance. The internal dynamics of a guided tour embody a persuasive inter-corporeal and performative practice that shapes the very discursive terrain of what perspective the material landscape of Christiania should mean. Many of the students, both performing and participating in the guided tour, say that their image of Christiania has changed during after the tour (Jonasson, 2011). The guided tour gave them opportunities to see more and other dimensions of the place and witnessing of the economic and political forces around and behind that aims at closing down Christiania, at the same time as they say that they did not know that it was so many things going on in there.

A guided tour forming a crowd walking and talking is in fact a collective machinery of discursive formation, co-producing experiences and enabling us to think about representations and thinking in terms of connected when it was regarded as separated, and in terms of enabling when it was regarded as dividing (Wylie, 2002). The coordinated walking, which in turn coordinates the communication through a collective act in-between the symbolical, the visual, and the material: "...a socialized movement" (Cresswell, 1999:176; Merley-Ponty, 1962). The fact that the guided tour is made in a mobile group, with a group focus, makes it possible to enact and intersect different views simultaneously and in direct relation to the physical place, makes it possible to separate and reunite images of Christiania in ways that are creative and at the same time persistent.

## CONCLUSION

Christiania is a complex place and guided tours perform an effective way of shaping and configuring images of what the meaning of a place. Guided tours helps to develop a complex brand embedding and embodying different types of extremely different and similar ideological discourses and practices.

Guided tours helps in understanding how contradictory views on places can work simultaneously by taking different standpoints on political, cultural, legal, ethical and emotional issues. As such, guided tours underline discursive images of a place, in this example it uses classical place marketing approaches in order to view how to gain attractive places, especially niche forms such as dark oriented tourism. Together with these niche forms of place marketing strategies, guided tours reflect a view of Christiania as hosting the multiple, the contradictory and the abundance of things to do (Massey, 1995). Christiania is thus performing different layers discursive layers that sometimes contradict, and sometimes coincide.

A mapping of issues being brought up as key themes in a guided tour in Christiania represents a complex assemblage of characteristics that is co-composed as a new narrative every time it is performed. The guided tour makes it possible to merge or to detach from these different key themes by constructing proper arguments for either being against the place or for celebrating the place. Thus, Christiania is made a brand with the help of these key themes and sometimes multiple of these themes are temporarily formed to be part of marketing processes. The issue here, whether Christiania is a niche tourist place depends on the scale of geographical proximity. The guided tour tends to take into account more of complexity and the weaving together of deeper understanding of the multiplicity of voices producing a place, than distant and detached branding processes. Thus, the guided tour must take into account the many dimensions of the place, such as drugs, art, entrepreneurship, history, democracy, resistance, community, ecology, nature, culture, business, emotions, health and urban multiplicity, while the niche branding process or political agendas often foreground one or two of these dimensions as representing the place.

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