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Critical reflections on the production of urban mobilities

Urban mobilities are produced through different relations, interactions, and materialities. Different combinations of these factors produce different urban mobilities, which then can be more or less sustainable. Moreover, urban mobilities are influenced, shaped, and produced through the urban materialities that create power relations between mobilities and people and that reinforce certain unsustainable ways of moving in the urban space (Koglin and Rye 2014; Urry 2007). In areas that have been developed during the era of sustainable development, the production of mobilities should have been sustainable. However, this is not necessarily the case. In particular, peoples' movements and how they use the space have not been the focus in the development of areas such as the Western Harbour in Malmö, Sweden. While cycling through the Western Harbour, the experience is that obstacles are often in the way and that the network is not connected and is confusing. Moreover, the dominance of cars is very distinct. Parking garages and parking spaces are easily observed, but there is quite limited parking for cyclists. This could lead to unsustainable mobilities in an area that is being branded as very sustainable. The mobilities of the people in the Western Harbour are influenced and produced by the materialities that have been produced throughout the planning of the area.

In this paper, I argue that these materialities influence urban mobilities and that these can lead to the dominance of unsustainable forms of mobilities. By analysing urban mobilities in the Western Harbour of the city of Malmö, I show that urban planning, even though it might have sustainability as its foundation, can lead to materialities that produce mobilities in urban space that are unsustainable. This forces, either directly or indirectly, certain mobilities and patterns of travel that lead to different problems in urban space such as pollution or marginalisation of certain transport modes. The empirical data analysed in this study includes the travel survey for the city of Malmö (2008 and 2013), field observations from 2014 and 2015, and the planning and policy documents for the Western Harbour development. The analysis is done through the lens of critical theory (Marcuse 1999 [1941]; 2002 [1964]) and the production of space (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]). The critical theory and the production of space help to develop a critical understanding of the production of urban mobilities and their implications for sustainable mobilities.

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