

## BESIDES CONVIVIALITY:

### *Paradoxes in being 'at ease' with diversity in a Copenhagen district*

#### Abstract

This article critically discusses conviviality, a concept increasingly used to denote unproblematic encounters with diversity. It is examined how conviviality has travelled in the literature, at times acquiring utopian and normative dimensions. Inconsistencies are demonstrated in the literature with regard to whether conviviality is elaborated as fundamental or 'small'/local, overarching or counter-narrative, harmonious or (also) conflictual, unpredictable or designable, descriptive or normative and universal or particular. Conviviality is then applied analytically to interviews conducted in Copenhagen, using a resident-driven park as a case. The analysis demonstrates how a conviviality lens invites certain attentions whilst restricting others, such as re-production of majoritised norms, power and inequalities, proximity/distance and affective ambivalence. Finally, drawbacks and utility of conviviality as an analytical concept are evaluated.

#### Keywords

conviviality • diversity • inequality • mixing • racialisation

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## Introduction

Multiculturalism in Europe has been under critique from political leaders for over a decade (Berg & Sigona 2013; Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010). Two examples from leading political figures include the German chancellor Angela Merkel's 2010 announcement that 'multiculturalism in Germany has utterly failed' (Weaver, 2010) and the British Prime Minister David Cameron's attack on 'state multiculturalism' (Wright & Taylor, 2011).

Whilst multiculturalism as a national-level strategy has been declared dead by politicians, there has been an increasing focus on 'mixing' and social cohesion in policies and interventions implemented on urban, municipal and neighbourhood levels (Fortier 2010; Grünberg & Freiesleben 2016). These policy foci can be related to research investigating how 'countless residents successfully live with difference on a daily basis in cities marked by cultural diversity' through everyday encounters and practices (Fincher et al. 2014, p.2; Watson & Saha 2012). Thus an emphasis on conviviality, or mundane, everyday (or even 'successful') rubbing together and getting along, reflects political and politicised research agendas – on one hand, countering dominant narratives of segregated neighbourhoods, parallel societies, immigrant crime, failed integration and the like; and on the other hand, falling in line with interventions that aim to facilitate social cohesion and mixing. Consequently, occupation with (planning for) conviviality can be related to diversity management

discourses within urban planning and governance. In the Danish context, municipal policies designed to promote everyday encounters across social and cultural differences represent attempts to produce conviviality 'by design' (Fortier 2010), built on assumptions about positive effects of 'good' mixing.

This article examines what characterises mixing as it occurs in a resident-driven park in Copenhagen, exploring the analytical possibilities and modus operandi of conviviality by applying the concept to interviews. First of all, existing conceptualisations and developments of conviviality are sketched, identifying important discrepancies. Finally, the analytical value of conviviality is assessed, addressing remaining challenges.

## Conviviality – a travelling concept on the rise

Conviviality and related notions are gaining popularity in migration and diversity studies. A number of terms have been proposed to describe people in diverse settings getting together and intermingling, such as 'prosaic multicultural' (Amin 2002), 'throwntogetherness of place' (Massey 2005), 'everyday cosmopolitanism' (Noble 2009), 'commonplace diversity' (Wessendorf 2013), 'mundane multiculturalism' (Watson & Saha 2012), 'domestic cosmopolitanism'

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(Nava 2006) and 'everyday multiculturalism' (Wise & Velayutham 2009). Whilst there are differences between these conceptualisations, they can be seen as part of a 'convivial turn' in migration and diversity studies (Gidley 2013; Neal et al. 2013), focusing on 'the ways people live together successfully, how they create a modus co-vivendi and what strategies they create in order to practice it' (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014, p. 342).

Owing to space limitations, this article will not offer an exhaustive review of conviviality or the 'convivial turn' (see Gidley 2013; Nowicka & Vertovec 2014). Instead, it will sketch how central dimensions of conviviality have mutated as the concept has travelled across time, space and scholarly disciplines (Said 1983). Whilst this review is by no means comprehensive, it aims to illustrate central discrepancies and the elusive and contested nature of the concept.

Recent literature on conviviality tends to draw on Paul Gilroy's critique of multiculturalism in Britain (Gidley 2013; Nowicka & Vertovec 2014; Wise & Velayutham 2014). Gilroy defines conviviality as

a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity, but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not – as the logic of ethnic absolutism suggests they must – add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication (2006, p.40).

This convivial culture is characterised and enabled by intermixture through everyday encounters – it is unpredictable and arises 'spontaneously and organically' (Gilroy 2005, p. 124). However, Gilroy's main focus remains on colonial genealogy and racial hierarchies inherent in multiculturalist policies, which are contrasted to convivial culture (Gilroy 2005). Thus conviviality unfolds parallel to and in spite of structural and political racist and racialising discourses. Although Gilroy (2005, 2006) expressed hope that conviviality will replace and outgrow 'multiculturalism' as well as contribute to decreased focus on static, race-bound and ethnicity-bound notions of identity and culture, he did not develop or apply conviviality analytically.<sup>1</sup>

After Gilroy, authors writing within the 'convivial turn' (Gidley 2013; Neal et al. 2013) have attempted to develop conviviality and related terms into analytical constructs. For example, Wessendorf (2013) proposed the notion of 'commonplace diversity' based on ethnographic research in the 'super-diverse' London borough of Hackney, referring to ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity being experienced as normal parts of social life in the area. It is described how residents of Hackney tend to adhere to an 'ethos of mixing' with regard to the interactions in the public sphere, whilst groups seen as refusing to mix can be perceived as problematic.

In contrast, a study by Watson and Saha (2013) is based on an interview research with three generations of Asian residents in London's previously predominantly white suburbs. The authors' primary focus is on mundane, subtle everyday multicultural practices and experiences. Whilst both studies emphasise complexities, ongoing negotiations and challenges in the diverse settings studied, the overarching themes of these analyses highlight 'routine and unpanicked' (Noble 2009) ways of living with difference. Thus, although the two studies do not adopt conviviality as the primary concept, they constitute examples of the growing 'convivial turn' (Gidley 2013; Neal et al. 2013; Neal & Vincent 2013).

More recently, a Special Issue of *European Journal of Cultural Studies* explicitly aims to develop conviviality as an analytical construct (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014). Contrary to Gilroy's work (2005, 2006), racialisation and racism do not play a central role in these analyses as parallel and dominant processes to conviviality. Instead, authors

tend to incorporate conflicts, violence, racism, closedness and/or exclusion under an overarching framework of convivial, or civil, togetherness (Freitag 2014; Heil 2014; Nowicka & Vertovec 2014; Vigneswaran 2014; Wessendorf 2014). For instance, in Heil's (2014) article, based on ethnographic research of neighbourliness practices of Casamançais in Senegal and Catalonia, it is argued that 'convivial practices apply to dealing with both harmonious relations and conflict' (Heil 2014, p. 456), referring to a fragile balance maintained across different types of interactions.

The study by Wise and Velayutham (2014) differs from other contributions to the Special Issue in this respect. On the basis of the ethnographic research conducted in Sydney and Singapore, the article examines conviviality as a component of everyday multiculturalism (Wise & Velayutham 2009). Rather than advocating conviviality as an overarching framework encompassing smooth and conflictual forms of co-existence, the authors draw on Gilroy (2005, 2006), using the term to refer to spontaneous and fleeting connections – atmospheric, embodied and simultaneously mediated by structural, spatial, cultural and national settings (Wise & Velayutham 2014, p. 408). It is emphasised that a focus on conviviality should not contribute to covering over racisms and tensions.

These authors' perspective on conviviality as low level and fleeting contrasts the fundamental concerns that conviviality is claimed to address in the editorial of the Special Issue (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014). The editorial attempts to tie the contributions together as pointing towards a concept of conviviality that 'conveys a deeper concern with the human condition and how we think about human modes of togetherness' (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014: 341). This conception might resemble Gilroy's (2006: 40) elaboration of convivial culture as a setting where people are not divided by essentialised notions of difference. However, in Gilroy's (2005) framework, convivial culture is positioned as a counternarrative to hegemonic racialised and racialising discourses. This counterbalance seems to be lost in the editorial, which claims that studies in the Special Issue demonstrate how fixed categories such as ethnicity, race or religion become increasingly silent (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014, p. 353).

In some articles, conviviality has attained a normative and prescriptive dimension as a concept holding promises for urban planners and policy-makers in designing convivial spaces and interventions (Fincher et al. 2014; Morawska 2014; Nowicka & Vertovec 2014). Conviviality is proposed as an almost utopian 'remedy to public and political discourse on multicultural societies and cosmopolitan world order' (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014, p. 350). Here conviviality increasingly becomes a descriptive *and* prescriptive term that is used to diagnose as well as prescribe desired social processes, which can be linked to policies promoting 'mixing' and social cohesion. However, others explicitly argue against conceiving convivial multiculturalism as a normative goal that can be designed or programmed (Wise & Velayutham 2014, p.425).

Earlier criticisms of the convivial turn have questioned whether a focus on harmonious encounters might contribute to the neglect of historical and material conditions and power (Valentine 2008). It has been highlighted that conviviality does not exclude racism and vice versa – for instance, by discussing inconsistencies between (including) values and (excluding) practices (Valentine 2008) as well as emphasising the co-existence of 'everyday cosmopolitanism' and 'everyday racism' (Noble 2009). Moreover, it has been broadly demonstrated that proximity and mutual knowledge do not necessarily lead to (meaningful) contact and ensuing positive attitudes or respect between groups (Amin 2002; Skey 2013; Valentine 2008; Wessendorf 2014). It has also been discussed how interventions aiming to

foster convivial encounters ('proximity by design') reinforce binary discourses where interactions with 'sameness' are seen as 'bad' and encounters with 'difference' as legitimate and 'good' (Fortier 2010).

These criticisms highlight fundamental discrepancies and tensions in how conviviality has been conceptualised and has travelled in the literature. Notably, there are inconsistencies as to whether conviviality is elaborated as fundamental or 'small'/local, overarching or counternarrative, harmonious or (also) conflictual, unpredictable or designable, descriptive or normative and universal or particular.

These inconsistencies and the 'slipperiness' of conviviality (Wise & Velayutham 2014, p. 425) underline the need for delineating the concept. This article draws on Gilroy's notion of conviviality as pertaining to social patterns in contested urban space where essentialised, reified differences do not 'add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication' (Gilroy 2006, p. 40). Instead, convivial encounters would be characterised by 'affectively at ease relations of co-existence and accommodation' (Wise & Velayutham 2014, p. 407). With respect to the dualities discussed earlier, conviviality is conceived as 'small' (local), counternarrative to dominant racialising discourses, spontaneously occurring and descriptive rather than normative. The analysis will aim to investigate what kind of interpretations are made (im-)possible by adopting conviviality as a central analytical concept.

## Methodology

The analyses of conviviality in this article are based on the interview material from Copenhagen's Nordvest district. The empirical material stems from a research project on minorisation and majorisation processes in Nordvest.

The project was commenced in February 2014. In the following months, the first stage of ethnographic fieldwork was conducted, comprising 30 interviews and a number of participant observations. Owing to an interest in how those with relative power and privilege (re-)produce ideas about the area, diversity, conviviality and minority-majority positions, most of the interviews in the first stage of fieldwork have been conducted with white, middle class majority Danish informants.

Although it only takes 20 minutes by bike or bus from Nordvest to Copenhagen's City Hall, Nordvest occupies a peripheral-stigmatised position in the popular imaginary. In a 2007 survey of Copenhagen districts, Nordvest came last as a desired area to live in (Christoffersen & Jensen 2010). The dominant narrative positions Nordvest as Copenhagen's most derided district, resting on historical periods of (white) working class haven ('light, air and cleanliness') in the 1930s, social and material decline in the 1960s and 1970s, leading to ambivalently told processes of mixing, social disadvantage and diversity after 2000 (Palm Larsen 2000; Post & Simonsen 2014; Sheikh 2014).

Counternarratives propagate the district's authenticity and/or see potentials for creative entrepreneurship and/or gentrification (Christoffersen & Jensen 2010; Post & Simonsen 2014; Sheikh 2014). These narratives correspond to conflicting and ambivalent accounts of Nordvest mapped through fieldwork, from its epithets as 'loser land' and 'municipal garbage bin' to its celebrated, convivial diversity, to its problematised lack of minority participation and to various threats and promises associated with gentrification. Consequently, the district can be understood as a contested terrain of competing definitions.

A resident-driven park in Nordvest constitutes a case for examining encounters through the lens of conviviality in the article. The park was started in 2009 on one of the decrepit privately owned construction sites in Nordvest, previously a car mechanic's workshop. According to informants' accounts, residents gathered one weekend and cleared the area of trash. In the following months, the group laid out turf, planted bulbs, built benches, designated an area for walking dogs, set up barbecues and constructed a fireplace and a wooden hut. The park was demolished by the landowner in 2010 and then rebuilt following an e-mail agreement that gave the community the right to use the area for three years (until 2014). Presently, plans to build apartments on the lot have been delayed after a signature petition was commenced in protest of the development.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst a small core group of residents has taken the initiative in establishing the park and campaigning for its continued existence, many people use it on an everyday basis. Thus, the park might represent a site of shared sociality involving residents with diverse backgrounds, constituting micropublics of everyday social contact (Amin 2002), possibly enabling more progressive forms of interacting and belonging (Clayton 2009).

Whilst the majority of interviews and observations have been informative for analytical processes involved in writing the article, six interviews are referred to directly. Most of the informants quoted are actively involved in the park. It can thus be argued that these residents speak from positions of relative power and privilege, from which their narratives carry a normative and constitutive weight with respect to the construction of the park as a social space.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Topics included informants' use of the area, sensory perceptions (smells, colours, sounds), everyday encounters, experienced conflicts, sense of belonging and changes observed and/or anticipated in Nordvest. The main strategy for selecting interview excerpts quoted in the article has been to look for narratives that might (be used to) illustrate patterns pertaining to conviviality but simultaneously call these patterns into question by revealing variations, ambiguities and contradictions (Alvesson & Kärreman 2011, p. 41). In other words, whilst these excerpts can be interpreted through a conviviality lens (people seem to be 'at ease' and getting along), they might also hint at other social dynamics.

There are limitations when using interview material to analyse encounters with difference as these unfold in everyday life. Earlier research has pointed to inconsistencies between verbalised attitudes/values and practices (Lyon & Back 2012; Valentine 2008). In addition, the interviewees have personal and political interests in portraying the subject in particular ways and/or might be engaged in impression management (Alvesson 2011).

However, this article is not primarily concerned with whether informant narratives are *representative of* and *consistent with* their behaviours. Rather, I claim that a focus on discursive practices pertaining to encounters with difference affords an analysis, central to conviviality, of *which differences (are narrated as if they) make a difference* and what *meanings* are attributed to these when relating encounters with others.

## Nordvest – an arena for convivial diversity?

Almost all informants describe Nordvest as a diverse district. For most informants, this diversity represents an opportunity for stimulation, reflection and knowledge, as opposed to the alleged homogeneity, orderliness and privilege of other Copenhagen districts. For example,

informants talk about how close proximity or 'throwtogetherness' (Massey 2005) of different people in Nordvest necessitates respect and the ability to compromise:

While I have a feeling that in other areas (of Copenhagen) it's more uniform how people live, here there are radically different people who live in all sorts of possible ways. In a way there is something provincial in it, but without us quite being it [provincial], because we still live close together, so many people, and because of that we have to come to terms with each other to some degree.  
Claus<sup>3</sup> (in his 30s)

In contrast, Sanne (60s) states that she was getting tired of all the privileged people in the high-end private housing estate in Nordvest where she and her husband lived previously. Instead, she values meeting people who 'come from another place', elaborated as everyday encounters with neighbours of Polish and Arab origin. In contrast, Liis (20s) narrates Nordvest in terms of sensory stimuli at 'greengrocers', followed by a transition to more normative perspectives on diversity (romanticised vs. unfortunate):

(...) the greengrocers define Nordvest a little for me. (...) Many people in a relatively small space. Some slightly odd people, various herbs. Loud chatting in different languages I don't really understand. (...) I think that's what I like about it- the different languages, different-looking people. Maybe it's also a romanticized idea of diversity, all sorts of different people meeting. Nordvest lives up to that image, I think- although (...) there are also some unfortunate things going on. (Liis elaborates by referring to biker gangs, low average life expectancy, homelessness, alcohol abuse, etc.)

These accounts represent different stories about diversity in Nordvest. Whilst Claus highlights the necessity of coming to terms with each other when heterogeneity and close proximity combine (the logic of civility), Sanne emphasizes personal advantages. Her account can be linked to conceptualisations of conviviality as gaining fun, wisdom and emotional enrichment from encounters with difference (Morawska 2014: 358). Yet, unlike Gilroy's convivial culture (2005, 2006), divisions in Sanne's account reproduce ethnic boundaries (Polish and Arab neighbours). Liis localises diversity to particular spaces, the greengrocers', relating it to sensory perceptions (colours, smells, sounds), romanticised diversity paralleled by troubling social phenomena. These different narratives of the area, from more general coming to terms with each other, to greeting or chatting with neighbours with different ethnic backgrounds, to greengrocer's as an arena with 'different people meeting', can be termed convivial, characterised by an emphasis on at ease co-existence and accommodation (Wise & Velayutham 2014).

Yet the analytical value of such a categorisation ('check, conviviality is at work') is not clear. Classifying these narratives as convivial can obscure their differences and inner discrepancies. For instance, in Sanne's case, celebrated diversity is personified in an essentialised way as originating in Poland or an unspecified Arab country; for Claus, accommodating difference seems to be a necessity rather than a spontaneous process; and Liis speaks of social disadvantage, rather than conflict, lurking on the sidelines of a romanticised idea of diversity.

Perhaps focusing on a specific setting can better illuminate the analytical value of conviviality. The following section will examine

conviviality with regard to interactions playing out in a resident-driven park. As described earlier, the park might hold the potential of a site of organised meaningful activity where people from different backgrounds might come to relate to each other in new ways (Amin 2002; Sandercock 2003).

## (Convivial) Presences in a community park

Marta proposes to meet for an interview in the park on a chilly spring morning. During the interview, several passers-by greet Marta. As during previous and subsequent visits to the area, the usual sense of urban anonymity seems disrupted. Whilst it's not all-encompassing (everyone knowing everyone), there seems to be a more pronounced feeling of community than elsewhere in relatively central Copenhagen. Marta corroborates this perception:

Each time we arranged a big gardening day (in the park), incredibly many people showed up and contributed with their labour and their creativity. (...) I have a feeling that around this area people have a different attitude. It's also a community that we have created, and there are just as many people that don't have any idea that it exists, as people who are involved in it. (...) this feeling of having a community, of solidarity, is very strong here.

Marta (in her 40s)

Marta's narrative (re-)produces a particular idea of sociality around the park. She speaks of people contributing, a sense of solidarity, perhaps as a result of residents around the park having a 'different attitude'. Claus, who has also had a central role in establishing the park, similarly describes a sense of community, whilst giving a more detailed account of the park as an arena for encounters with difference:

(...) I think I speak to many people who vote for Danish People's Party (right-wing populist party of growing popularity, known for anti-immigrant rhetoric) (...) but one has to stop focusing so much on that. (...) I'm very sure that the people who use the park are very different. (...) there are people who are far from me in all sorts of ways. There are religious people, there are people from (a Muslim private school nearby). (...) It's these kinds of religious people I will never understand, but it's OK, I don't need to understand all people. So that way- yes, we are many different people who can easily agree on many different things, although we disagree radically on some very important issues.

Claus (in his 30s)

Claus' account of the park as a point of congregation for very different people echoes his narrative of Nordvest as a district where people live in all sorts of different ways, juxtaposed to more homogeneous (areas in) Copenhagen. The park is told as a particular space where residents meet and work together for a common purpose, establishing relationships across and despite of their differences, resembling Amin's (2002) conceptualisation of micropublics and local liveability and conviviality as affectively at ease coexistence and accommodation (Wise & Velayutham 2014) where essentialised differences do not lead to insurmountable communication problems (Gilroy 2006). Whilst religious and political beliefs are mentioned as important markers of difference and distance, they do not seem to delineate boundaries for inclusion or exclusion.

Yet Marta, unlike Claus, seems to draw boundaries for a community around the park. When asked if people with an ethnic minority background use the park,<sup>4</sup> Marta elaborates:

Some do. Some children use it after school. It's taken them, I think... (...) It can be difficult for some of them to exactly understand what the purpose is with such a common garden and where the limits are for what one can do. But I can imagine some of the boys think it's very cool to sit and hang out here. (...) I also know that the homeless people who visit (a nearby institution) use it a lot.

According to Marta, it seems that some resident groups have a more peripheral position with regard to the community around the park. This might be seen as contrasting Claus' narrative of the park as a site of encounters and collaboration across differences. However, although Marta hints at the existence of conflict(s) regarding someone's use of the park (uncharacteristically for the pace of the interview, she hesitates, and it is implied that the youths do not quite know (and/or respect) 'the limits' for what one can, or should, use the park for), her account can still be interpreted from a conviviality perspective. Ensuing disagreements between residents and youths with ethnic minority backgrounds might represent frictions that eventually lead to habituation and accommodation of difference (Wise & Velayutham 2014). This illustrates a challenge in using conviviality analytically, because 'being affectively at ease' is a matter of interpretation. Yet Marta's account suggests that children/boys with ethnic minority backgrounds, associated with the Muslim private school, are sometimes seen as not quite following (unwritten) codes of conduct in the park and perceived as more problematic than, for example, homeless people whose presence she narrates as unproblematic and natural.

'Muslim' background is also a position that sets some people apart more than others for David, although in a very different way:

(...) Last year it was even better. For the first time a Muslim family came (to the park)- father, mother, children, everyone. They had their own grill along, which I understand. We also have a grill here (in the apartment), because my son is vegan, he refuses to use a grill that has been used for meat, I understand it completely. They came several times in the course of the summer, that family. (...) It was completely... It is wonderful. (...) The people from homeless shelter come, too, plus the people from the ambulatory- I think it's a methadone distribution point. (...) They just sit and have it cozy. Of course, Greenlanders come, too. But they stay on the other side.

David (in his 60s)

David's account invites a reading from perspective of conviviality – as low-level diversity and 'throwtogetherness' working out (Massey 2005; Nowicka & Vertovec 2014) and the park being open to different groups. However, it can also be read as indicative of whose presences in the park are remarked rather than taken for granted (Ahmed 2000, 2012).

Whilst David highlights the presence of several non-majority groups, a particularly warm welcome is extended to the Muslim family. By welcoming the Muslim family, they are positioned as stranger to the park than, for instance, homeless people or people with Greenlandic background whose presence seems to be taken for granted, although on one side of the park only. Some bodies are told as (already, always) stranger than others (Ahmed 2000; Myong

2009). By warmly welcoming them, David is reinforcing his own insider position. Like offering tolerance, extending a welcome signals and re-produces positions of belonging and ownership, centre and periphery, majority and minority, insider and outsider (Ahmed 2004, 2012; Valentine 2008). David expresses positive affect ('It's wonderful') towards the presence of the Muslim family, as well as understanding of their bringing their own grill, drawing parallels to his vegan son. These utterances might be interpreted as ways of communicating proximity and distance.- Distance is negotiated by welcoming and thus setting apart; proximity and normalisation are indicated by likening the practice of bringing one's own grill to that of a family member's.

These dynamics of negotiating proximity and distance (or centre-periphery) are more difficult to notice when reading the interview from a conviviality perspective. However, it seems that although essentialised (ethnic, racialised, religious) differences are invoked differently, the park constitutes an arena where they are (re)produced rather than pass unremarked.

## Garbage bin, turf and other stories of conviviality

When I ask him to comment on different metaphors clinging to Nordvest, Morten explains why he sees 'garbage bin' as a positive metaphor:

(...) there is often most life in a garbage bin, because it provides a place to be for many people. If you have an area that is cheap to live in, and there are many slow payers and so on, and the opportunity to meet a lot of crazy people and be afraid and scared- really, all the things that a living city has.

Morten (in his30s)

Morten appropriates the garbage bin metaphor, elevating it to a norm for (good) urban life. A living city is told as a place of small conflicts, where one can have the opportunity of being confronted and scared. 'Crazy people' and 'slow payers' are articulated as sought-after figures. These presences make Nordvest more diverse and stimulating and keep it cheap. This raises the question of inequality, and a pattern of throwtogetherness emerges where some might benefit more than others. As illustrated earlier, Morten's account can lend itself to be interpreted as an example of convivial culture; yet, as in the case of David, by extending a welcome to particular others, conviviality does not invite an analysis of power and insider or outsider positions.

Inequalities and centre-periphery positions become even more pronounced when Morten speaks about the park:

(...) the park is clearly organized by white, middle class citizens, Danes who want to have a place to hang out together. (...) But after it has become more finished and available for use, it's all sorts of people who hang out there. The park is like other social projects- it has to be started by people who have a surplus of time and energy. Involving alcoholics or migrants, for example, is a bigger pedagogical task. So it has been open to all who wanted to be along... (...)

People who get involved are often people who resemble each other and who have (...) a drive to do something themselves and bring about tangible change. Many [people] would have started using the plot without having laid out turf, for example. I think

that it's like a Danish role, that it has to be co-zy ('hyg-ge-ligt', pronounced overstatedly clearly), you almost can't say that as a foreigner, 'hug-ge-lit' (mimicking an accent, laughing).

Morten states that the park is open for everyone and is being used by all sorts of people. Yet conviviality does not seem to be the most appropriate analytical term for interpreting his account.

Rather than constituting an example of micropublics, the park is told as a social project, started by those with a 'drive' (these seem to equal white, middle class, majority Danes). Minority groups ('migrants and alcoholics') are lumped together, and their involvement from the outset is told as a bigger pedagogical task. Whilst Morten evokes the 'pedagogy discourse' on deviant groups in a reflexive and ironic manner, it can be argued that it is exactly through the distancing produced by reflexivity and irony that he can appropriate and reproduce this discourse and simultaneously make fun of Danish 'hygge' and migrant accents. A duality of clusters of unequally positioned social categories (white/middle class/Danish/surplus of time and energy/a drive to do something/bring about change/cosiness/resemble each other vs. lack of resources/migrants/alcoholics/pedagogical cases/no drive/no resemblance) emerges and is expanded on in the narrative. Essentialised categories of difference are fused or 'lumped together' with seemingly more contextualised characteristics or behaviours.

With regard to the community around the park, there are ambivalent processes at play. On one hand, Morten frames the park as white, middle class Danish territory, made by Danes for Danes to hang out together, and emphasises the homogeneity of this group. Laying out turf and cosying oneself (hanging out in the park) are constructed as Danish practices, ironically underlined by the linguistic constraints of 'hygge' (foreigners can't even pronounce the word). At the same time, the park, once established, is described as open for everyone.

Openness to (peripheral) participation by people positioned as minorities echoes Marta's and David's narratives. It could be argued that narrating the park as open and inclusive obscures and simultaneously enables the reinforcing of unequal subject positions and social boundaries. Describing the park as open for everybody can reinforce its being (more) closed to some bodies. In addition, Morten's narrative points back to Marta who spoke of how youths with ethnic minority backgrounds did not quite know what behaviours were appropriate in a community park, raising the question of whose (implicit) codes of conduct dominate.

Although many different interactions unfold in the park, informant accounts might be seen as indicative of underlying social structures and positionings. They highlight that convivial interactions are embedded in unequal power structures. The establishment of the park as a social space, laying out turf and making it cosy, seems to be built on (white middle class) majority Danish norms. Especially, in an explicitly normative conviviality framework, evoking 'successful' encounters with difference (Fincher et al. 2014; Nowicka & Vertovec 2014; Watson & Saha 2012), implementation of majority codes and norms might become defining for accomplishment of conviviality. This highlights the inherent risks of using conviviality as an alternative to integration, social cohesion and other normative terms, as Nowicka and Vertovec (2014) recommended. Following this line of reasoning, achievement of normative conviviality might require minority assimilation into a park 'made by (white, middle class majority) Danes for Danes' (Morten) who define 'the purpose of such a common garden' (Marta). Consequently, interpreting social interactions through a conviviality lens might obscure how majority norms and the outsider positions of others are reinforced.

## Evaluating conviviality as an analytical tool

The goal of the analysis has been to explore conviviality's modus operandi, investigating which perspectives this analytical process invited and, on the contrary, made less available. It has been discussed how, whilst the social processes related by informants could be interpreted as convivial, these were co-occurring with, and perhaps linked to, boundary setting, reproduction of inequalities and imageries where conviviality was associated with (white, middle class Danish) majority norms.

Before analysis, a review of selected literature on conviviality revealed important discrepancies. These disparities pertain to whether conviviality is conceived as descriptive and/or normative, fundamental or 'small'/local, overarching or counternarrative, harmonious or (also) conflictual and spontaneously occurring or designable. For the purpose of the article, conviviality was conceptualised as pertaining to social patterns in contested urban space where essentialised differences do not 'add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication' (Gilroy 2006, p. 40), instead denoting 'affectively at ease relations of coexistence and accommodation' (Wise & Velayutham 2014, p. 407).

Throughout the analysis, the presence or absence of conviviality has been difficult to establish. Reading interview accounts through a conviviality lens has been guided by my interpretation of the emotional loading of informants' narratives. Whilst conviviality has a significant affective component (Wise & Velayutham 2014), affect does not always lend itself to being straightforwardly communicated or observed. The affective loading of an informant's narrative might be local to the interview situation and/or misinterpreted by the researcher. Furthermore, it is likely that involved actors experience encounters ambivalently and differently – some might be 'at ease', whilst others are disturbed or feel excluded.

Another challenge pertains to the importance of essentialised differences for conviviality. According to Gilroy's (2006, p. 40) notion of conviviality, (1) ethnic and racial differences have been rendered unremarkably and (2) 'racial, linguistic and religious particularities' do not lead to impassable problems in communication or discontinuities of experience.

In informant accounts, essentialised categories of difference are frequently combined with particular characteristics and behaviours, as exemplified by Morten's narrative where positions of whiteness/middle class Danishness/resourcefulness/drive are merged and contrasted to a general category of migrants/alcoholics/lack of resources/pedagogical cases/no drive. This highlights the difficulty of maintaining a distinction between 'essentialised' (race, religion, etc.) and seemingly contextualised differences (based on behaviours such as (lack of) participation). Rather, essentialised minority categories are invested with characteristics and behaviours that legitimise and reinforce exclusion, for example, when Marta speaks about ethnic minority youngsters (boys), set apart by their brownness, gender and age, as not quite recognising the social norms in the park. From this perspective, it does seem that often visible (racialised) differences seem to make a difference for whose presence is taken for granted or set apart.

(Con-)Fused, essentialised ethnic, racialised and religious difference (often combined in the figure of 'Muslim' or 'immigrant') is remarked on by most informants and to a larger degree than other differences told as making a difference. However, such essentialised and reified differences also appear in empirical material in other studies that claim to document conviviality (Gidley 2013; Jensen, 2015; Wessendorf 2013, 2014; Wise & Velayutham 2009, 2014). It is not entirely clear whether conviviality

can include (re-)production of reified, essentialised categories of others, as long as they are not problematised (for instance, David's welcoming of Muslim family in the park).

This relates to another challenge posed by the multiple intertwined connotations and affective dimensions attached to otherness in informants' narratives. For instance, Morten embraces minoritised presences in Nordvest, at the same time, regarding inclusion of 'migrants and alcoholics' in the park as a (too burdensome) pedagogical task. A predominant solution to similar ambivalences arising from empirical material has been to conclude that conviviality or everyday multiculturalism exists side by side with (everyday) racism, openness with closedness (Gidley 2013; Jensen, 2015; Noble 2009; Wessendorf 2014). However, these interpretations risk reproducing a dichotomy of 'bad' racism and 'good' conviviality, obscuring the ways the two might be intertwined, for instance, through commodifying and exotifying essentialised notions of (racialised) otherness (Ahmed 2000, 2012; Andreassen & Ahmed-Andresen 2013; bell hooks 1992).

With regard to Nordvest, it might be that narratives of 'mixing', heterogeneity and conviviality mutually enable and constrain narratives with polarised centre and periphery where white, middle class, majority Danishness is (con-)fused with resourcefulness and competence, whilst ethnicised/racialised otherness is equated with social disadvantage, lack of knowledge of codes of conduct and being a target for pedagogical interventions. Both strands of narrative emerge from the same landscape of meanings, as they both rely on the fabric of continuously re-produced differences, whether the bodies who bear these differences are embraced, tolerated or excluded by those in majority/insider positions. Perhaps, rather than taking 'difference' for granted, it might be more fruitful to examine how and which differences become mobilised as constitutive of social divisions, continuously negotiating proximity and distance to multiple figures of embodied others (Ahmed 2000; Fortier 2008, 2010), and how various categories of difference might be fused in order to legitimise these divisions. In this regard, focus on conviviality as 'living with difference' (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014) can contribute to neglecting how the very perception of difference must imply living apart and against, as well as with others. Conviviality conceptualised as (only or mostly) withness and togetherness risks reinforcing a discourse on diversity as harmonious empty pluralism (Mohanty 2003).

Valentine (2008, p. 333) has cautioned that celebratory discourses on encounters with difference might 'allow the knotty issue of inequalities to slip out of the debate'. On a similar note, Ahmed (2012) has argued for the need to ask what recedes when a particular positively loaded discourse on diversity comes into view. Consequently, the informants' tendency to relate the area in convivial terms raises the questions of to what effect this narrative is told, which and whose interests it promotes and what is relegated to the background.

An important and routinely ignored issue likely to recede in this case relates to racialisation and racism. It has been argued that there is a hegemonic discourse of colour blindness and silence on race/racialisation in the Nordic countries (Andreassen & Ahmed-Andresen 2013; Andreassen et al. 2008; Myong 2009; Svendsen 2013). Focusing on harmonious aspects of co-existence and pronouncing ethnic and racial differences banal and 'silent' (Nowicka & Vertovec 2014) can risk aggravating (neglect of) racialised politics of difference.

This highlights the fact that conviviality, as used in this article, does not seem well equipped to address the question of power and inequalities, namely, who is in a position of accommodating whom

or being 'affectively at ease' with whose difference. There remains a gap with regard to examining whom an ethos of conviviality serves (more than others), who claims and reaps benefits from it and whose perspectives (dis-) appear in, or behind, conviviality; and which subject positions and self-images become available to and reiterated by those who speak from a position of conviviality.

The analysis offered in the article is relevant when considering policies aiming to facilitate mixing and social cohesion. Inherent in such policies, like in much research through a conviviality lens, is a presumed dichotomy between 'good' conviviality and 'bad' segregation or racism, neglecting how both positively and negatively loaded narratives of difference can rest on the same essentialised social categories and dynamics of othering. Aiming to understand living with, apart and against continuously re-produced differences, negotiations of differences that make a difference and proximity and distance might be more fruitful analytical lenses than conviviality.

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## Notes

1. There is an alternative strand of literature, where conviviality is understood as living together peacefully; focusing on sociability, amity and affectivity (Overing & Passes 2000); and building on conviviality as the 'autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment' (Illich 1973, p.69). However, as most literature on 'the convivial turn' draws on Gilroy (2005, 2006), the present article primarily examines his conceptualisation and its subsequent travels.
2. The park was ultimately demolished in April 2015 whilst this article was in review. The plot is now a fenced-off construction site for apartment buildings.
3. All names of residents used in the article are pseudonyms, and sometimes biographical details have been altered in order to protect their anonymity.
4. This question can be criticised for evoking categorisation along the lines of ethnicised difference. The question was phrased this way because earlier on in the interview, Marta had vaguely and somewhat ambivalently referred to a development in a part of Nordvest: '*I think there is a greengrocer with every possible ethnicity (laughing). One can go down and shop in one's own language. I don't use that area so much anymore.*'

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