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Liminal Life at Railway Stations

An ethnographic investigation of commuters' everyday rituals

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Abstract

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Building functional and effective railway station infrastructures has become a strategy to encourage sustainable mobility. Addressing on commuters, this thesis aims to investigate how station infrastructures frame commuters' commuting experience. Departing from the theory of rites of passage by Victor Turner, this thesis draws on autoethnography, interviews with six Øresund commuters and observational fieldwork at eight commuter train stations in the Øresund region. Focusing on the liminal character of commuting, this thesis comprehensively examines the interaction between commuters and train stations from the perspectives of space, time and place. The findings highlight the overlooked significance of station infrastructures in making meaning to commuters' everyday lives. It is argued that station infrastructures provide fundamental support in commuters' needs, assist commuters in orienting themselves for transformation, secure their identity and maintain the social norm.

Keywords: railway stations; commuter; rites of passage; liminality; infrastructure; cultural analysis; everyday rituals

摘要

建设具有功能性且有效的车站基础设施是倡导可持续交通的一项有效策略。本研究从通勤者角度出发，旨在调查车站基础设施对通勤者通勤体验的影响。本文基于英国人类学家维克多·特纳 (Victor Turner) 关于通过仪式的理论，采用了自传式民族志的调查方法，并对六位厄勒地区通勤者进行面对面访问以及在厄勒地区八个车站进行观察性田野调查。本研究专注于通勤行为的过渡性特征，从空间、时间和地方三个角度深度评估了车站对通勤者日常生活的影响。调查结果表明车站基础设施对通勤者日常生活具有影响。车站基础设施不仅满足通勤者的基本需求，协助通勤者在心理上做好日常身份转变的准备，而且起着文化认同和维护社会秩序的作用。

关键词：车站；通勤者；通过仪式；过渡性；基础设施；文化分析；生活仪式

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Lund, 17 May 2020

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

“The journey has its own lyrics
A duet of balanced motion
The rails and wheels in tune”
— Richard L. Ratliff

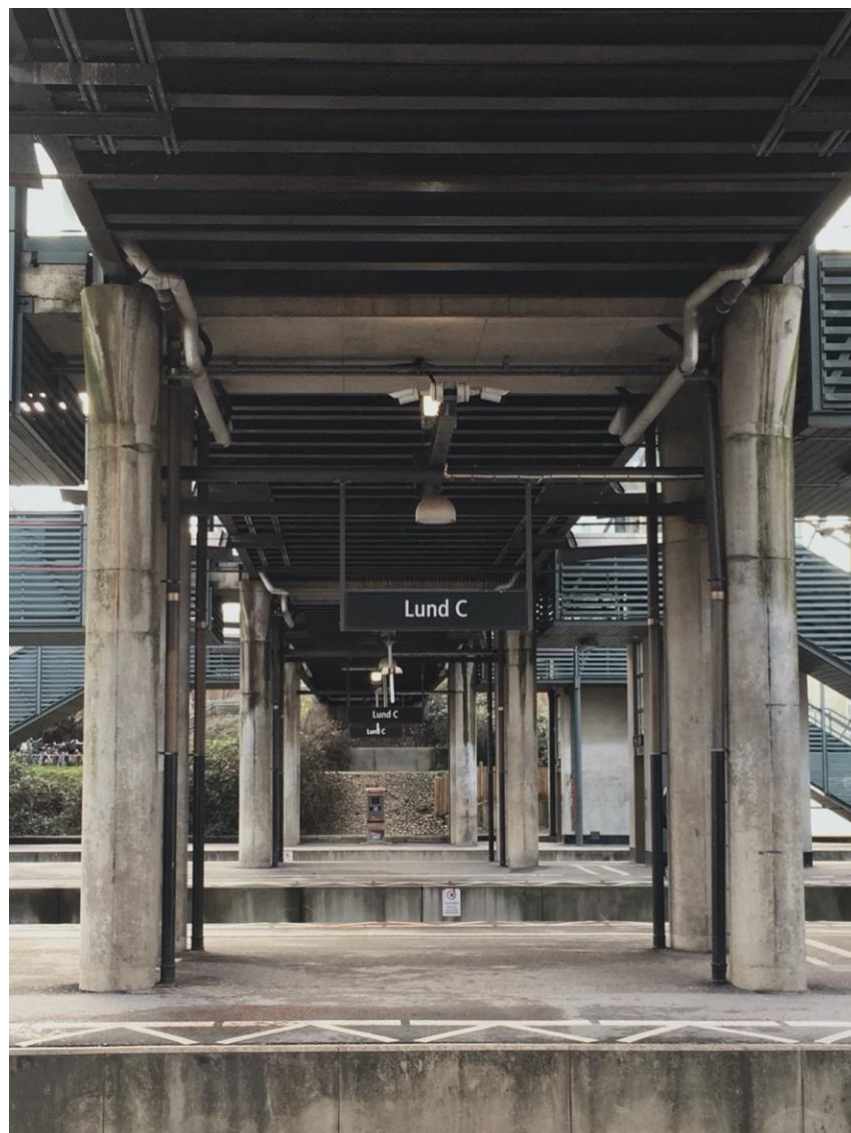


Figure 1. Lund Central Station

I am a railway buff. I love trains, train stations and train rides. Growing up next to a train station, I did not have many opportunities to travel by train. But I have witnessed numerous people at the train station, either alone or accompanied, either with a small bag or fully packed. They come to the station with plentiful emotions, joy, excitement, anxiety or confusion, and embark on an alluring journey from there. Like Richard L. Ratliff's (n.d.) poem, the rails seem to be the symphony that renders all my daydreams about the sophisticated glitter of the unknown world. This fascination is all about dreams: train stations incubate dream seed, and trains ride to the dream land.

People with a train complex are generally nostalgic. The two endlessly extending rails connect childhood memories at one end and desire for the unknown world at the other end. Train stations have been holding this nostalgic, poetic and remote impression on me until I moved to Sweden, where commuting by train is an ordinary everyday practice for many.

Seemingly old but practical Lund Central Station is the backdrop of my interest in studying the stations. Yes, old but practical. I say it old because it satisfies all my imagination of an old train station in Europe: European style architecture, open-air, few rail tracks, small, clocks. Yet it is practical: proximity to both major cities and small towns in the region, digital information board, automatic ticket machines, essential shops and cafés around, neat and orderly. I liked it at the very first sight, not only because it is a cute station, but also it marks the beginning of a new period of my life. This station seemed to be a threshold for me to start my new life as a student in Sweden.

Meanwhile, Swedish authorities are channelling more funding into the development of railway transportation and encourage sustainable mobility in the society. Since then, I have always been wondering if the train station functions as a threshold also for commuters who use it every day. How do commuters experience train stations? How is it different from other rail travellers? How do they evaluate the stations they use? What kind of roles do stations play in their everyday lives? What is the commuter culture here? How can the stations be improved to attract more people to commute by train?

When I myself for a period of four months last year was a commuter in the Øresund region, I carried these questions in mind. This daily commuting experience has triggered me into studying commuters and stations encounters. Consequently, it leads to my work on the

ritualistic role of stations for commuters in the Øresund region and how train stations create meaning to commuters.

In this research, I attempt to answer these questions and lay out commuters' everyday commute journey in a wider cultural dimension. I do this by exploring train stations' role in affecting this everyday practice for commuters.

1.2 Research Aim

This study addresses the commute practice that commuters in the Øresund region perform on a daily basis. Most of them commute five times a week and many do it for several years. The objective of this study is to understand how station infrastructures frame commuters' commuting experience. To this end, I examined the physical place of stations, space and time spent at the station and how these shape commuters' daily commute practices. Following by research questions as below:

- How do station infrastructures transform people's experience, activities and performances?
- How do commuters come to terms with waiting, interacting with fellow travellers and station infrastructures along with commuting?
- How do train stations make sense to commuters regarding place, space and time?

1.3 Disposition

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. Chapter one is the introduction of this research. To lay the groundwork for the forthcoming analysis, the succeeding chapter updates the previous research on the commuters and infrastructures within the anthropological discipline. Chapter three outlines the theoretical framework of the study and explains the reasons to review the two theories used in understanding the relations between stations and commuters. The focus of chapter four is the discussion of the chosen research sites, methodological approach, research materials as well as reflexivity of the position of the researcher and ethical concerns.

Following the methodology chapter, the empirical discussion and analysis begins from chapter five, where I bring together my observation and experience of commuting and emphasise the space in the station. In chapter six, I turn my attention to the time spent at the station. The last

analytical chapter, chapter seven deals with how commuters interact with stations and the place-making process of stations.

A concluding chapter enumerates the main points of this study and reflects on the research aim and questions in the first chapter. Finally, I end the discussion with recommendations for the study's future application in the field of public and traffic planning in chapter nine.

2. Previous Research

This chapter seeks to give an overview of the previous researches. This review of previous research addresses the investigation on commute as a social practice and infrastructure concerns in social science. In examining commute as an everyday social practice, this study is rooted in the discussion of how the station infrastructure shapes the everyday commute experience. This review identifies commute as a transitional activity, and mobility infrastructures play a vital role in altering the commute experience in daily practice.

2.1 Commute as a transitional activity

Commute refers to travel regularly by bus, train or car between work and home (Commute, n.d.). A large body of literature has identified commute as a transitional activity in social science (Lyons & Chatterjee, 2008; Nippert-Eng, 1996; O'Dell, 2009).

Christena E. Nippert-Eng (1996) provides a fruitful framework for understanding boundaries between work and home. Since boundaries are conceived of as socially constructed (Hacking, 1999), Nippert-Eng (1996) argues that these boundaries often indicate sociality and result in physical forms that strengthen and make visible the mental world. In other words, commute, as an explicit form of the boundary between work and home, assists commuters to create and modify the mental framework used to experience social life. As commuters cross these boundaries, either from home to work or vice versa, it consists of “a world of micro-calculations, each of which may seem meaningless at first glance, but which come to be highly meaningful when woven together in the pulse of daily life” (O'Dell, 2009, p.96). Simultaneously, Nippert-Eng (1996) calls it a “bridge” as it facilitates and encourages mental transitions between home and work, between two different ways of being. Ethnologist Tom O'Dell (2009) looks to the work of Nippert-Eng (1996) and further examines the transitional cultural process of commute. O'Dell (2009)'s work is especially important to understand commute as a phenomenon of mobility. This mobility practices generate rhythm, arrange everyday lives and drives the social practices that enable commuters to switch between different roles socially (Corvellec & O'Dell, 2012).

At the same times, much has also been written about how the time of commute is spent. In Lyons & Chatterjee's view, commuting time is considered as a gift time instead of a burden (2008). Moreover, in the research project *The Secret World of Doing Nothing* (2010), Billy Ehn

and Orvar Löfgren contextualises the phenomenon of “doing nothing”. They hold that instead of saying that these non-events are insignificant, they are worth investigating because these seemingly non-events bridge the private and collective world and make public life culturally organised. An interesting finding from their research is that fantasies as a secret pastime split individual but also unite them in common expressions. Other researchers draw attention to the space that commuters create. For example, this can be seen in O’Dell’s (2009) evaluation of commuter space, where he comments that commuters use their personal possessions, such as iPods, cell phones, books and coffee to distinguish public space and switch it to semi-private space. These divisions help to make sense of exploring the commuting experience from the perspectives of time and space.

Moreover, the quality of commute is bound up with health condition, psychological adjustment and work performance (McLennan & Bennetts, 2003). Holton & Finn (2017) evaluate the mobility performance among UK university students who commute and point out that everyday mobility practices have a positive influence on the production of knowledge, identity formation and feelings of belonging. At the same time, Jang & Ko (2019) observe that job-related characteristics, such as employment that offers the benefit of a flexible commute, have influential positive effects on commuter satisfaction. However, the importance of commute experience is thought to be largely overlooked by traffic planners. According to Lyons & Chatterjee (2008), even though the familiarity of the route reduces the “cognitive spend” of commuters which concerns the emotions aligned to uncertainty or worries, the stress of commute mainly comes from delays and unreliability of services. In addition, factors such as traffic congestion, crowding in transit vehicles, and the unpredictability of travel time will also have an influence on the commute experience. Hence, the need to further explore and identify the factors that frame commuters’ experience is advocated (Evans & Wener, 2006).

2.2 Infrastructure research in social science

Despite “infrastructures are ideally opaque and serve us unnoticed” (Jalas, Rinkinen & Silvast, 2016, p.20), it has been a subject close to many anthropological scholars’ heart, and it has become an increasing focus of many ethnographers’ work in the last decades. Different studies (Jalas, Rinkinen & Silvast, 2016; Starosielski, 2012; Willim, 2017) have been conducted to identify the function of infrastructures in organising everyday life and creating routines.

In envisioning infrastructure, people tend to associate it to a banal system of substrates, which usually hides in the background of everyday life but makes it possible to live in the society. However, as Susan Leigh Star (1999) put it, “infrastructure is both relational and ecological”. This understanding is twofold: Firstly, infrastructure has different meanings to different groups; secondly, any infrastructure is closely connected to the built environments, and it cannot be separated from them. In her study of *The Ethnography of Infrastructure* (Star, 1999), she enumerates that the rails are topic instead of infrastructure for a rail engineer. Therefore, there is a necessity to identify the end-users of the infrastructures and the place where the infrastructures belong to.

Meanwhile, Star (1999) has also characterised infrastructure as something that “becomes visible upon breakdown” (p.382). Infrastructure serves as an inherent process that enables society to function and makes our lives comfortable, but in reality, it is a highly complex system. Willim (2017) ingeniously uses the term “mudanisation” to capture how immeasurable and sophisticated arrangements of infrastructure and human organisation morph into the ordinary and the mundane of everyday life. Nevertheless, the difficult work is that infrastructure is always faded in the background (Starosielski, 2012) and is “ungraspable” (Willim, 2017) due to its complex structure. Since it is not noticed until infrastructure fails to keep the rhythm of everyday life, in order to understand how infrastructure supports our everyday life, we must “move beyond conceptualising it as naturally invisible, or only visible when it is built or disrupted” (Starosielski, 2012, p.54).

In recent years, there has been an increasing body of studies on the mobility infrastructures with a trend of expanding service range at stations and a growing focus on security (Rokicki & Foljanty, 2015). However, knowledge remains vague about how station infrastructures shape commuters experience. At this point, enhancing understanding of how station infrastructures are related to the place and affect commuters’ everyday life is required.

3. Theoretical framework

Two distinct bodies of literature serve as the theoretical point of departure for my research on the interaction between train stations and commuters: rite of passage and theories related to space, time and place. Combining these two strands of theories, I develop the idea that commute serves as a rite of passage for commuters and train stations play an important role in guaranteeing the process of the rite of passage. In this chapter, I review both strands of theories.

3.1 Rite of passage

Rite of passage is “a ceremony or an event that marks an important stage in somebody’s life” (Rite of passage, n.d.). Ethnographer Arnold van Gennep firstly discussed this concept in his book *Les rites de passage* (1960). He takes the cases of pregnancy, birth, initiation rites, marriages and death to demonstrate that in a certain society, every individual must process certain ritual conditions to pass from one social status to another. Because he believes “a man cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage” (van Gennep, 1960, p.1). van Gennep divides rite of passage into three stages: preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (transition rites) and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation). The first stage, rites of separation, “comprises symbolic behaviours signifying the detachment.....from an earlier fixed point in the social structure” (Turner, 1969, p.94). Liminal rites indicate that the individual or group is no longer in the previous positions but in the new positions. Postliminal rites, or rites of incorporation, happens when the society recognises the ritual entities in their new roles.

van Gennep’s work was not much noticed by the public until cultural anthropologist Victor Turner rediscovered his work and situated his own researches in the field of ritual amongst the Ndembu region in Zambia. Based on van Gennep’s threefold structure of rites of passages, Turner (1969) notably emphasises the importance of liminal rites and develops the theories on the liminal stage, the phrase when one is in the process of transformation. The term “liminal” comes from *limen*, the Latin expression for “threshold”. Liminality is an important anthropological concept, referring a state of institutionalisation. Turner (1969) describes the liminal body as “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (p.95). Also, Turner (1969, 1970) claims that rites of passage can be used to study when an individual pass through a border or stage to another to constitute a state transition. Rite of passage celebrates and helps an individual leave a group to enter another.

It helps the individual to be recognised as a new member of the group, leaving behind the other. As Turner (1970) notes, “*rites de passage* are not confined to culturally defined life-crises but may accompany any change from one state to another.....sociologically speaking, to movements between ascribed statuses” (p.94~95). This is of great value because it highlights the broad nature of contexts where the self is ritually transformed.

This insight directly influences Nippert-Eng (1996)’s analysis on the rituals of transformation between work and home. From her point of view, commuting can be seen as an everyday instance of rites of passage. Rite of passage conforms to the usual pattern of a commuter’s everyday life. When commuters commute every day from home to work or from work to home, they are involved in a transitional activity. The three phrases of the rite are not always equally important or equally elaborated. Natural boundaries are rare (van Gennep, 1960). In the case of commuting in the Øresund region, the rites of separation have been observed much less frequently. It may start from commuters waking up or leaving their house to separate themselves from the previous environment and position. However, liminality indeed happens when commuters are present in the station, and some may even continue during the whole train trip to work. For commuters, liminality signifies the transforming state wavering between home and work. Their status is ambiguous. And finally comes the rites of arriving at school or work to integrate them to the new position in everyday life.

Another important concept that Turner elaborates is “*communitas*”. *Communitas* is the Latin term for community. Turner (1969) favours the term “*communitas*” over “community” because it reveals the unstructured nature of the community. During the liminal stage, the whole community goes through a common experience of a breakdown from the previously established position, and everyone in the community is on an equal social level. It is a “society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals.....” (Turner, 1969, p.96). At this time, a sense of solidarity is generated, which embodies within the *communitas*. In a sense, that commuters experience the liminal stage and transform their social position may also reflect on a broader level of collectivity as “*communitas*”.

3.2 Space, place and time

In an important book, *The Production of Space*, philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991) believes space is a production. His metaphor of space as a product develops into a broader extent that space is the embodiment of social relations. According to Lefebvre (1991), space is simultaneously perceived, conceived and lived. Firstly, space is perceived whereas its manifestation of the materiality of daily routines and urban reality. Secondly, space is conceived – “social space ‘incorporates’ social actions” (p.33) – in order to represent certain social norms. And lastly, space is lived on the grounds that it represents the everyday experience – where its “inhabitants” and “users” experience it and “it overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (p.39). This is to elaborate on how physical, mental and social constituents associate together to produce space (Merrifield, 2000). For the purpose of appropriating Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial triad to understand the space in the station, it is then necessary to consider how the physical and social environment, in association with its users’ experience, cooperate to produce the space. In response to this, space should be regarded as a stage for the performance of different selves (Butler, 2006).

Lefebvre’s (1991) view on space is paired with ethnologist Mark Vacher’s (2015) vision on the temporal character of space. Vacher (2015) comments that “space can be lost as well as produced. Loss of space happens when the ability to install and handle difference is limited” (p.143). At a train station, space is only produced when various types of travellers are presented at the station. This requires the examination of train station space concerning its temporality. In accounting for temporality, philosopher Jacques Derrida (Derrida & Kamuf, 1992) indicates that the temporalisation of time commences the process of destruction of the object. This is to say that temporality entwines the subjective experience of time and these experiences shape everyday life. The subjective nature of temporality requires to examine how cultural expressions interpret everyday lives. Moreover, Derrida (Derrida & Kamuf, 1992) also emphasises the importance of the past in contouring the present experience. This means that it is important to engage with the past and seeking to understand how the past shape the present.

It ought to point out that while studying the abstract mental and social space, the examination of lived space, which manifests in the place should be highlighted. In comparison with the concept of space, place is physical, and more importantly, it is where everyday life happens. de Certeau (2011) illustrates place as “an instantaneous configuration of positions”, which entails stability (p.118). The ethnographic place-making process is a useful tool to investigate how human practices of everyday life are embroiled in the production of a phenomenological “sense

of place” (Pink, 2008). Hence, in order to anthropologically evaluate the station as a place that forms the liminal phrase of commute, it is essential to take account of its place-making process. A crucial clue to understanding the place-making process of commuter stations is place attachment. Place attachment is a term widely mentioned in environmental psychology, which refers to the emotional bond between individuals and places (Giuliani, 2003). Environmental scholar Schroeder (1991) also characterises the “meaning” of a place as “the set of thoughts, feelings, memories and interpretations evoked by a landscape” (p.232). The meaning of commuter stations emerges from a variety of experience and situations. Affects, feelings and emotions are believed to be causative of behaviours (Bowlby, 1983). Consequently, their choice of behaviours in the station represents who they are.

Scannell & Gifford (2010) proposed a three-dimensional framework of place attachment, consisting of person, psychological process, and place dimensions, and they further explained this multidimensional concept upon their research in the field:

The first dimension is the actor: who is attached? To what extent is the attachment based on individually and collectively held meanings? The second dimension is the psychological process: how are affect, cognition, and behaviour manifested in the attachment? The third dimension is the object of the attachment, including place characteristics: what is the attachment to, and what is the nature of, this place?
(p.2)

In terms of place attachment for commuters and train stations, the actor is the commuter, and the place is the train station. To this extent, in this study I shall focus on the second and the third dimension, the process of how commuters create an attachment to the stations and make meaning to it, as well as the nature of train stations.

4. Methodology

This is a qualitative study driven by a desire both to answer the research questions and uncover the blind spots at the field in order to shed light on a comprehensive understanding on the relationship between stations and commuters and how it affects commuters' experience and everyday life. The evidence presented in the following chapters emerges out of extensive observational fieldwork, semi-structured interviews and autoethnography. In this chapter, I introduce the field and materials, give an overview of the main methods used for this study, as well as discuss my position and ethical considerations in the research.

4.1 Situating the field

For cultural analysts, the selection of field sites is intimately associated with the topic (Davis, 2008). While trying to follow anthropologist George Marcus (1995)'s call for multi-sited ethnography, I have chosen to conduct fieldwork at eight train stations in the Øresund region and track different commuters' commute life. The Øresund region is a metropolitan region that spans eastern Denmark and the province of Skåne in southern Sweden. Since the opening of the Øresund bridge in 2000, the railway system in Denmark is connected to the southern Swedish region of Skåne. In this study, the eight stations I studied include Lund Central Station, Malmö Central Station, Malmö Triangeln Station, Oxie Station, Skurup Station, Copenhagen Airport Station, Copenhagen Ørestad Station and Copenhagen Nørreport Station.

As Copenhagen, Malmö and Lund are the three major cities in the Øresund region, I have picked Lund Central Station, Malmö Central Station and Copenhagen Nørreport Station as the main sites of my fieldwork. Lund Central Station is the third-largest station in Sweden and one of the busiest in terms of commuters. Situated in the centre of Sweden's third-largest city, Malmö Central Station serves regional, national and international transportation. Nørreport Station, as one of the busiest station in Denmark combines of metros, most S-train lines, regional trains, intercity trains and international trains to Malmö and Gothenburg in Sweden.

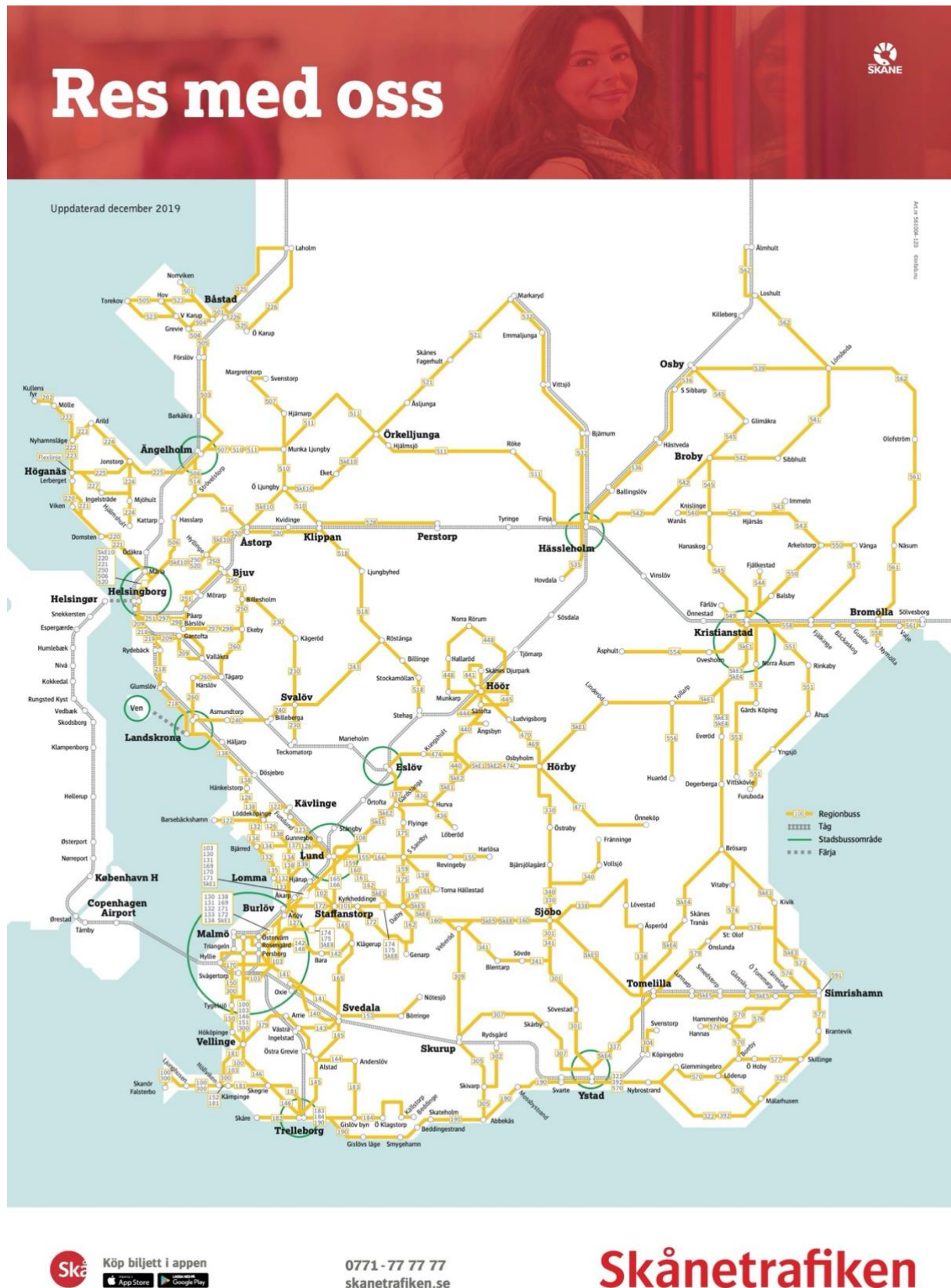


Figure 2. Traffic map of the Øresund region

4.2 Interviews and informants

Interviewing is a classic qualitative research method in the field of cultural studies, since its responses are open-ended, which releases informants from the preconceived notions of the ethnographer (Davis, 2008, p.105-106). This research is based on six semi-structured interviews with commuters in the Øresund region, mainly conducted in December 2019 and January 2020. As Löfgren (2008) mentions in his study of this transnational region, that the morning commute of Swedes and Danes living in Malmö to Copenhagen forms a mainly one-way flow of traffic. Therefore, in this study, I have primarily focused on studying people who commute within Skåne and people who commute from Sweden to Denmark.

Taking advantage of being in a Facebook group for the Øresund commuters called BroenLive, I have employed informants from the group who commonly live in Sweden and commute to work in different parts of Copenhagen. Davis (2008) argues that semi-structured interviews are “formally bracketed and set off in time and space as something different from usual social interaction between ethnographer and informant” (p.105-106). It relates to the development and alteration of understanding during the course of interview (Davis, 2008, p.113). This form of interview opens up the opportunity for me to obtain a basic knowledge of commute for the informants and reveal the hidden emotions that relate to their everyday commute practices. In addition, raising follow-up questions it allows me for more in-depth data collection and comprehensive understanding, which will help recognise wider cultural and social norms in terms of commute in the region. These interviews are instrumental in providing perspectives on how commuting life is in the Øresund region.

In total, I have conducted six semi-structured interviews in this study, each of which lasts for approximately an hour. I met most of the informants in local cafés or university buildings. In this thesis, all the informants are anonymised and given alias. Frederik is a fifty years old Scandinavian with over twenty-five years' experience of commute. He formerly commuted between Malmö and Lund, and now does it between Skurup and Lund. Caroline, in her late forties, has been commuting from her home in Malmö to her office in central Copenhagen in nearly fifteen years. Ebba, a master student at Lund University, lives in Malmö and commutes to Copenhagen for a part-time job on a weekly base. Coming from East Europe, Giulia has lived in Sweden (both Lund and Malmö) for over ten years, and she has been commuting from Sweden to Denmark for work for nearly seven years. The other two informants, Veronika and

Yuting, from the Middle East and East Asia respectively, are master students at Lund University and they both have at least four months commuting experience within the Øresund region for work and study purpose.

4.3 Autoethnographical approach

“Autoethnography is a qualitative method – it offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about *particular* lives, experiences, and relationships rather than *general* information about large groups of people”. (Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis, 2015, p.21)

Through the interviews with commuters, I can obtain insights into their experience towards commuting. However, in order to fully understand how space is produced in the station and how the station infrastructures affect commuters' experience, I have also adopted autoethnography as a tool to collect data. As Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis (2015) have noted, autoethnography enables researchers to immerse themselves in the “particular” lives, experience the context with personal experience and thus, it can offer an intimate perspective on the research objects. The analysis of this thesis mainly draws from my own four months commute experience between Lund and Copenhagen, namely commute between Lund Central Station and Nørreport Station. Phenomenology scholars have advocated for extra focus on aspects of human experience to scrutinise the hidden aspects in the research field (Kusenbach, 2003). Therefore, methodologically, I have utilised autoethnography as a bridge to gain a comprehensive understanding of the life of commuters. From August to November 2019, I commuted from Lund to Copenhagen while doing a work placement as part of my studies. For four months, I did this twice a day, four times a week, during both the morning and afternoon rush hours. This commute experience facilitates me access to the real experience and practice of commuting in the Øresund region. In this case, as a researcher, I am simultaneously the subject and the object of observation (Ehn, 2011). Kusenbach (2003) advocates ethnographers to study in the field *in situ* so they can access the experience and interpretations at the same time. Through commuting myself, I am thus immersed in the real situation of commuting in the Øresund region, connecting myself to various of emotions and thoughts while waiting at the stations, taking the train ride, encountering delays, train cancellation and other different of situations. Anthropologist Chang (2016) emphasises the “self” as ethnographer self in the auto-

ethnographical researches, while Adams, Holman Jones & Ellis (2015) argue that autoethnography offers insights into the sense-making process of certain cultural norms, experiences and practices. From querying my experience with waiting on the platform, interacting with fellow passengers, queueing, I am able to empathise with other commuters and understand the cultural phenomenon. This empathetic understanding is precisely what Chang (2016) has called for to truly understand “others”.

Besides, for the purpose to evaluate the place-making process, spatial experience and time spent at the stations for commuters, it is necessary to position myself as a commuter and experience commuting myself. Here it is also imperative for me to employ a multi-sensory approach. Ethnologist Sarah Pink (2008) argues that “by following their routes and attuning our bodies, rhythms, tastes, ways of seeing and more to theirs, begin to make places that are similar to theirs, and thus feel that we are similarly emplaced” (p.193). Commuting between different stations in the Øresund region gives me access to the intense awareness of how multiple senses, such as sound, light and smell shape my commute experience and capture the stream of thoughts and emotions under various circumstances.

This type of auto-ethnographical approach in the research offers the opportunity to capture the context of commuting in the Øresund region and make some of the invisible aspects of commuters’ life visible.

4.4 Observation and fieldnotes

Observational fieldwork furthers my work by learning about space, place and time through moving around in the stations, standing at the platforms, spending time watching others’ behaviours, taking pictures, writing down my thoughts. When investigating space and places, researchers always utilise observation as a tool to obtain insights into the intangible and tacit (O’Toole & Were, 2008). Anthropologist Charlotte Davies (2008) calls observation “the hallmark of anthropology” because it allows researchers to dig out the cultural meanings and social structures as an outsider. In my research, as I primarily focus on the sites of train stations, it is then advantageous for me to conduct observations at the sites, capturing behaviours and experiencing the place and space. Additionally, it offers a platform for researchers to assess the field through a sensory ethnographical approach, turning the invisible visible (Pink, 2008).

Observational fieldwork involves a lot of reflections and thoughts, and in this research, the fieldnotes I take during the fieldwork has played an indispensable role in the analysis process. These fieldnotes materials, on the one hand, help me pay attention to the details while conducting the observations, letting me carefully experience the stations and scrutinise the atmosphere there. On the other hand, it provides an opportunity for me to reflect after the fieldwork and also select certain phenomena that I presumably identify as impressive during the observations (Wolfinger, 2002). Through documenting the observations and reflections of the fieldworks, I am able to convey a more exhaustive depiction of the research sites and allow them to turn into more insightful knowledge (Wolfinger, 2002).

4.5 Ethical considerations and reflexivity

As Davis (2008) mentioned, with the increasing reflexivity in the conduct of social research, ethical awareness is required for the researcher. There are mainly two sets of difficulties that researchers face: the appropriate manner to present research to its participants and the effect on the research of any such closure (Davis, 2008). Thus, throughout the whole process of this research, I have been very cautious in regard to ethical considerations.

In recruiting the informants for this research, I have mainly utilised social media such as Facebook. After posting a notice for informants recruiting in the closed Facebook group BroenLive, I received several comments below my original posts and replied every commenter through private messages. This way of recruiting is not easy to control and may lead to biases. In my private conversation with the informants, I have indicated the purpose and anonymity of this study, as well as presenting a written information letter, in which I requested the permission to record the interview and explained that audio recordings would not leak to others and their names would be anonymised in my final thesis. Moreover, prior to every face-to-face interview, I once again stated the purpose of this study, asked informants' consent to record the interview and promised the anonymity right before the interviews.

To protect the personal information of my informants, I have given them aliases. Additionally, in order to avoid identification, I decide not to provide a detailed description of each informant. Instead, in section 4.2, I give a brief account of their backgrounds, their approximate age group, the time of their commuting experience and the stations they commute between.

On the other hand, this research is based on autoethnography, and a large body of data I use in this thesis derives from my personal fieldnotes. As Ellis (2007) puts it, “being researchers and participants meant that some ethical issues normally present in doing research on emotional topics were not as salient” (p.20), the position and subjectivity of the researcher needs to be addressed. First of all, throughout the whole research process, I bear in mind my dual roles as both researcher and commuter. This reminds me of not only observing the surroundings but also immerse myself into the world of commuting and experience how it makes meaning to my everyday life. Secondly, my motivation for this study inevitably reflects my subjectivity in the research. As I have stated in chapter one, choosing to study stations is out of personal interest. It is to answer all my frustrations about train stations and urban life. I am aware of my partiality. Thirdly, being a Chinese national living in the Øresund region for nearly two years, I am in the knowledge that I see many things here as a foreigner, more specifically from the perspective of a Chinese millennial. Still, at the same time, I am also familiar and used to the norms in the region. In this regard, the fieldnotes can be the representation of my tacit beliefs and background knowledge (Wolfinger, 2002). And subsequently, it affects my choice of material to present and analyse in this thesis.

5. The space of stations and *communitas*

Train stations are seen as important public spaces as they offer public service and rights for its citizens to enter (Tonnelat, 2010). When commuters enter train stations, they are not only entering a piece of architecture, but also simultaneously coming into a public space with a certain state of mind. Turner (1969) builds on van Gennep and stresses the collective aspect of liminality. During the liminal stage of rites of passage, established social bonds collapse but at the same time, it is not disintegrated into a variety of structural ties. “These are the ties organised in terms either of caste, class, or rank hierarchies or of segmentary oppositions in the stateless societies” (Turner, 1969, p.96). Centred to his vision, the nature of liminality is twofold: firstly, the established social order will break down in the liminal stage, and it emerges as a transformational phase; secondly, hierarchies will be replaced by a community of equals characterised by a sense of solidarity. In this chapter, I develop the analysis of the space of stations on Lefebvre’s spatial triad (1991) and examine if there is the collective aspect of rites of passage, *communitas*, in terms of commuting, and if so, how the commuting practice brings about *communitas*.

5.1 Catching a mood

The first division of Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial triad is perceived space. It manifests in the organisation of daily routines and urban reality. A clue to explore perceived space is to capture the atmosphere. The idea of “atmosphere” is, according to Ehn, Löfgren & Wilk (2016), to catch a mood, which deals with the making or unmaking of the interplay between people on the move and the material infrastructure in a given place or social situation. This strategy has gained surging popularity in the ethnographical study in understanding the making of space. Then what is the mood in the stations?

Turner (1969) reminds us that liminality is a process of transformation, not a status. This indicates that commute is a dynamic movement, and therefore, it is directional. When commuters engage in such a transformational process, it “connects the realm specific mentalities and ways of being associated with either side of the trip” (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p.123), and their mental and physical activities also change according to the direction of the commute. From home to work, or from work to home, the difference of direction results in different activities and cognitive feelings, which consequently create different moods and atmospheres.

I feel I'm less observable in the morning than in the afternoon. I'm a person who always gets up from the wrong side. And it always takes me a long time to be ready for the new day. I have to have a shower and breakfast before I leave for work. When I arrive at the station, I'm always in the darkest ignorance of surroundings. But I think it's ok. There is not much going on anyways. People are all commuters and they are just quiet and live in their own world. However, in the afternoon is different. Actually, if you really pay attention to the surroundings, people are not actually talking to each other, but it seems noisier than in the morning. It is not a bad noise. It is the sound of lives. (Field note, autumn 2019)

It was not until I stopped my commute routine that I noticed that I rarely pay much attention to the surroundings in my morning commute journey. The reason why I tend to overlook the morning environment in the station is twofold: first of all, I am mentally stressed to make it on time to work, yet I have to conduct a series of tasks, or rituals, such as shower, breakfast, being in the station before I start working. Thus, my mind is occupied with conducting all these rituals and has no space to observe the others; and next, it has always been quiet at the station in the morning, and there seems nothing extraordinary to catch my attention. It is hard to be categorical about how people experience the space in the station, but it is clear that some of the informants also have a similar experience as me. For example, Veronika, who barely keeps her eyes on the surroundings in the station during morning rush hours, particularly points out that the station is immersed in a negative atmosphere in the morning:

It's quite busy. You see they are not students, they are not teenagers, they are adults, they have their notebook and briefcases, like working people, when you look at them, you know they are going to work, they are not going to have fun at eight am. I find it quite busy. And everyone looks so tired. Everyone looks so sleepy, tired, annoyed, no one wants to get up at 7 am to go to work I guess..... I always feel there is negative energy. When I look at people's face one by one, no one is smiling. I understand it's hard to get up in the morning, but it's such negativity..... in the morning it's always quiet, everyone has their headphones, no one wants to talk, everyone is still sleepy. Even people are together they don't talk, they just stand next to each other. (Interview with Veronika, Winter 2020)

Veronika's description has aroused my empathy. Getting up early in the morning and commuting long distance for work is an energy-consuming task. During the rush hour in the morning, everyone seems to quicken their pace and walk between the platforms. It certainly affects to the atmosphere. As I have experienced, the atmosphere at stations in the morning creates a sense of obligation for people to behave correspondently and manage their performance to fit in. In this way, the atmosphere is constituted and reproduced by the other commuters at the station. This results in everyone present at the station speeds up their pace to catch this nervous mood consciously or unconsciously. Furthermore, as they may still carry the mood of getting up early to work, a space of quiet, distance and somehow "negativity" is created.

In contrast to the quiet morning, the afternoon commuting trip seems to be a much-favoured one. Informant Veronika explains it like this:

Usually it's a lot of people but they are more talkative, I guess some of them work at the same place, they are colleagues, they usually talk or they speak on the phone, so it's not like everyone is drinking coffee, everyone is quiet. People are smiling, some people have their pets, dogs waiting for the train, it's more alive. And then I arrive to Lund C. It's busy. Compared to the morning it's more or less the same amount of people. But people are more alive, they talk, like fewer people looking at their phone, and fewer people listening to the music than in the morning. (Interview with Veronika, Winter 2020)

A notable point in this quote is that despite the station appears to be busy in a similar manner both in the morning and in the afternoon, the atmosphere it creates is very distinctive. Meanwhile, another informant, Ebba, makes this reflection:

You can see people who are used to take the train back and forth, sometimes you can see them carrying things from the stores in Denmark, like wine, beer, they brought something home, you can also see people who have been out from vacation, sunny, the skin. You can also see people who come from ski trip because they are carrying the equipment for skiing. (Interview with Ebba, Winter 2020)

People are behaving differently in the afternoon. There are several elements that decide the change of the atmosphere at the station. Initially, after a long day working, it is a mentally

relaxing moment for commuters to discharge the stress from work. In contrast to the mornings, commuters do not usually have the same commitment in their afternoon commute and this eases the general mood of the journey. Secondly, by comparing the station in the morning when most people are commuters, the constitution of people in the afternoon is more dynamic. During the early morning hours, stations appear to be more exclusive for the commuters. However, this exclusivity is crushed by the joining of various types of travellers. The diversity and inclusivity of travellers also devote to the production of a more dynamic space in the station. And finally, the presence of carrying items, such as alcoholic drinks and travel essentials, has a subtle contribution to creating a more positive space in the station. Influenced by this mood, people on the platform also tend to behave differently from in the morning.

In addition to the physical environment, as Nippert-Eng (1996) puts it, “arriving and departing activities and the realm-specific nature of drinks, food, and appearances play a particularly important and visible role in self-transformation” (p.123). As discussed earlier, coffee is the most observed beverage in the morning. The smell of coffee seems to be an alarm to alert all the morning commuters to prepare themselves for work, associating it with the need for caffeine to lower fatigue and drowsiness. However, this lavish coffee smell is gone in the afternoon. In a sense, it has a symbolic attribute in that commuters consume it in a ritual way, and it helps them switch the mentality that ought to change. Although in Nippert-Eng’s study (1996), alcohol has been taking the role as a transitional drink for many commuters from work to home in the United States, it is not much noticed that many commuters drink alcoholic beverages on their way back home in the Øresund region. However, an interesting observation is that many commuters, especially the ones who commute from Denmark to Sweden, carry alcoholic beverages on their way home at the end of the week. This is because it is generally cheaper to buy alcohol in Denmark than in Sweden. Here in the Øresund region, alcoholic beverages are not necessarily a representation for the mood change in these stations, but the switch of the atmosphere in the station is easily noted regardless. Absence of coffee smell, chat and laughs, a more vivid and lively space in the station unwinds commuters from intensive work mentality to a more relaxed one for home life.

It is worth noting that these two informants Ebba and Veronika are commuting to Ørestad station and Copenhagen Airport station, which are both outdoor stations. While other informants who commute from Nørreport station in Copenhagen and Triangeln station in Malmö, which are both undergrounded, does not mention the different atmosphere they

experience during the day. Atmosphere in the station is characterised by the infrastructures and results in different behaviours and feelings in the station. Even though different directions of the trip contribute to different pace and mood in the station, it is the free space between home and work for commuters to take a breath and arrange themselves for the change of status they are going to make, either a hectic workday or a calm home time.

5.2 Waste bin, queue and order

The second part of Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad is conceived space, or representations of space. Lefebvre (1991) views conceived space as the space constructed by professionals such as planners, engineers, developers, architects and other professionals (Merrifield, 2000). Conceived space is important in the human society because it is "tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.33). As for train stations, the conceived space could be the space designed by urban planner and city administrators. The structure of station space is constructed as public space.

Train stations drew the first image of the Øresund region to me when I first came here. Landing at Copenhagen Airport, I took Øresundståget (the Øresund train) to Lund Central Station. I was very impressed by the cleanliness and orderliness in both stations, compared to my previous experience in the train stations in China. This intrigued me greatly in investigating how people in the Øresund region maintain this cleanliness and orderliness in the public space no matter where they come from and no matter if they are new to the region or not.

An article about the psychology of Japanese train stations offers an angle to look at the orderliness at stations (Richarz, 2018). In this article, the author suggests the "nudge theory", as presented by behavioural economists Thaler & Sunstein (2008), for understanding how governors use gentle nudges that can subtly influence people in society's best interests. Thaler and Sunstein defined nudge as:

A nudge, as we will use the term, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the

intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not (2008, p.6).

Richarz (2018) takes the example of painting hand and footprints on each side of the “up” escalators as a nudge to encouraging riders to queue on both sides of station escalators as a means of increasing station capacity. Similarly, “nudge theory” is observed at work at the stations in the Øresund region.

This research starts from the observation at the field, the chosen train stations. On a casual observation, one can see the omnipresence of waste bins in the stations, especially the major stations on the Swedish side, such as Malmö Central Station, Malmö Triangeln Station and Lund Central Station. Operating on the theory that putting waste bins in sight can encourage people to throw rubbish in the bins, the stations in the Øresund region have installed waste bins almost every ten to twenty metres on the platforms. The installation of these waste bins keeps nudging people on the platform to walk a few steps forward to keep the cleanliness and tidiness of this space. Besides the waste bins, signs such as CCTV camera and “no smoking” can also be seen in the stations. The installation of these infrastructures keeps navigating people on the platform to mind their behaviours and keep the order that society expects them to maintain.



Figure 3. Lund Central Station



Figure 4. Lund Central Station

On the other hand, the orderliness of society seems to be taken as a given in the Øresund region—queueing for train can be an obvious case of a rule to follow in the region. Regarding this, I had a conversation with Frederik, one of the commuters with years of experience commuting in the Øresund region:

Most people behave themselves, most people follow written and unwritten rules (Tell me about these rules). When you get on the train for instance, you don't squeeze ahead, you stand in line, usually you wait until people get off the train and you get on, and you don't push other people. (Interview with Frederik, Winter 2020)

Here, Frederik takes the case of queueing as an unwritten rule in the Øresund region. He continues:

Yeah, I think they do (follow the rules). It does happen that people try to get on before people get off, but that's very unusual, and usually they got told by other

people. “Wait until people get off the train”, so it doesn’t happen a lot. (Interview with Frederik, Winter 2020)

Many interview respondents express their satisfaction of the orderliness in the Øresund stations as most of the rail travellers follow the unwritten rule of queueing. In all the fields of this study, stations have drawn a marked white line between the rail track and platform. It is noticed that most rail travellers wait and queue for the train after the white safety line. Queueing after the safety line creates a form of sociality that demonstrate the Øresund commuters’ shared values. Consequently, it becomes a phenomenon here and maintains the order in public space. Further, I discover more about how people in the Øresund region learn about these rules:

I suppose just by watching people. Common thing for people to do. If I’m insecure, if I’m not sure what to do in a certain situation, I watch and see what other people are doing. Then I do what they are doing. So, if I see the door is open, people stand not in front of the doors, by the sides, they let people get off first, ok, that’s what I’m going to do. It’s just following the pattern. (Interview with Frederik, Winter 2020)

The study of such supposedly trivial things such as queueing allows us to ascribe cultural expressions to the organisation of everyday life. Philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas maintains that the process of education requires constituting and sustaining particular kinds of communicative relationships within the society through cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation in order to guarantee a shared social life (Kemmis, 1998). Instead of delving into how people learn the rules of waiting and queueing in the Øresund region, I focus on the socialisation in the station space in relation to how society reproduces the given cultural practices. In the Øresund region, the experienced commuters obey the written and unwritten rules here. This is the manifestation of ingrained rituals of everyday life. And it indicates how private is intertwined with public life in the Øresund region, “so that widely accepted patterns can just as well be seen as emanating from the private sphere” (Frykman & Löfgren, 1996, p.7). These experienced commuters thus form a sort of nudge within the group.

On the one hand, they are pushing themselves to behave in this particular way to maintain the identity of legitimate commuters. On the other hand, they are also setting examples for the rest to follow the pattern. “Waiting is something everyone has to learn, train and adjust to in

different situations” (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010, p.47). It is the commuters in the Øresund region who bear the responsibility to guide their fellow travellers to follow the local unwritten rules and to maintain the norm. Here, the unwritten rules spontaneously form a “team” of commuters that not only perform the norm but also “nudge” their fellow travellers. These unwritten rules function as the transitional experience that symbolises and categorises commuters and form *communitas*. At this moment, all the commuters already shift their identity and unconsciously take the duty to shift and maintain their upcoming new identity.



Figure 5. Lund Central Station

To summarise, the omnipresence of waste bins and people’s habit of queueing at the Øresund stations form a nudge to guide both commuters and other travellers’ behaviours on the platforms. Through this way, a conceived space is created, which signifies an important factor in both regulating the social order and maintaining the norms (Tonnelat, 2010).

5.3 Private bubbles

The last aspect of Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial triad is the lived space, or representational space. In the interviews of this study, I have primarily focused on the rites of passage, underlining the

transformation process of commuters during their daily commute journey. Station space, as a public space, is defined by sociologist Erving Goffman as the sphere of complex interactions between strangers (Tonnelat, 2010, p.5). In such a way, what kind of role does the station play in steering commuters' rites of passage? When I asked Caroline how she engages with the surroundings in the station space, she states as follow:

I actually don't pay attention (to the surroundings). And I'm away from the crowd. I'm going further up the platform or something, I move away from the people, I don't like standing in the group. I move aside, read my book, or have a phone call, and I move away. I like being in my own space. That's when the platform is crowded. But when it's not crowded, there is enough space. (Interview with Caroline, Winter 2020)

As she points out, instead of actively immersing into the public space, Caroline is always seeking her "own space" in the station. Here she mentions two methods she is always using to create her "own space": by simply moving away, or by reading a book or having a phone call. I categorise it as two ways because the first method is to create distance with the rest, and the second is to use certain tools to draw a boundary line between public and privacy, or to create what Adey (2010) calls a "bubble of privacy". The first one, is more obviously noticed by me and another informant, Yuting, who also comes from China. From our point of view, people in the Øresund region seem to maintain a relatively long distance with strangers in public space and keep it relatively quiet, which is the opposite case in China. This subtle habit is ritualised, and it takes new symbolic meaning to become a tradition that represents a culture (Frykman, & Löfgren, 1996). Simultaneously, this cultural habit creates the space that the Øresund commuters are more comfortable with, and this space helps them to perform the transformative rituals in liminality.

The second one, however, is much more interesting to investigate. Books and mobile phones are the essential items that Caroline carries every day on her journey to work. O'Dell (2009) calls items, such as iPods, laptops, cell phones, books and cups of coffee, "buffering tools of disengagement and symbolic fences demarcating the difference" of commuter space (p.93). During the unavoidable time spent at the station, from a few minutes to maybe a longer period, Caroline uses books or her mobile phones to isolate herself from the rest, creating her own comfortable space within the public sphere.



Figure 6. Malmö Central Station

On his commute over the years, Frederik has witnessed many changes to the station platforms. Frederik has been commuting within the province of Skåne since the 1990s, between Malmö and Lund and now between Skurup and Lund. He recalls in the 90s when the smartphone was not widely used in people's everyday life. Then people were mostly using their phones for making phone calls on the platform, while now they have turned to texting or listening to music quietly:

On an average day I would say there are about maybe 30 people, 25 to 30 waiting on the platform, very few are talking to each other. Some are looking at phones, some are listening to the music, and it's fairly quiet..... It is very quiet actually. Like I have said, I have been commuting since 1994, which means before everybody had a smartphone. And it's quieter now because everybody is in their own world. In the mid or late 90s, there were more people talking on their phones, so you would hear them. But now people are texting. Texting is quiet. Most of the time it was

pretty annoying when people are talking, I'm not interested in what this person is talking, I don't want to know, so this is better. (Interview with Frederik, Winter 2020)

The above discussion discloses that despite people's pastime choices have changed with the development of technology, they still tend to use books, cell phones and headphones as tools to create a personal space on the platform while they are waiting for their train. Waiting for the train is a passive activity, then how do commuters deal with it to orient themselves for the upcoming changes?

The answer is not hard to come by. Both Caroline and Frederik are experienced commuters in the Øresund region with more than ten years' experience of commuting. They decisively demonstrate that they are familiar with the time of their commuter trains and therefore, they seldom spend time waiting for the trains. Even though there are cases where they are forced to spend some time there, they barely engage with the surroundings. Unlike tourists, these experienced commuters are too familiar with the station space to spend any effort to notice the details of the station. They use their personal belonging to create their own space. Jensen (2010) has listed classic requisites, including books and newspapers, and new types of technologies, such as cell phones and iPods, as tools for commuters to found privacy in the public transit space. With the help of these ordinary equipment, "the invisible wall" divides the public space into many small personal spaces.

Nevertheless, they are not entirely private in terms of being in a public transportation spot, which distinguishes itself from the private space of being home. Many of these undisturbed spaces gather to maintain the order of public space. Concerning some may not work on their commute journey, and some may do, this is the shared period of liminality. The space adds meaning to make every commuter equal in the status of liminality – which is an important idea about "communitas" – "the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (Turner, 1969, p.97). At this time, commuters are equally going through the transitional phenomenon to welcome the new identity of the day.

Besides their personal belongings, they are also using the infrastructures to build the wall and create space. Infrastructures can play multiple roles in shaping the experience of space (Dourish & Bell, 2007). There are few illustrations of the employment of station infrastructures in

creating the “bubble of privacy” on the platforms. In the interviews, most of the informants proudly declare that they barely check the monitors on the platform because they are professional commuters and the train schedules are well-known to them. Nevertheless, through my observation, there are always commuters (evident from their look and travel time) looking at the monitor on the platforms. Combining this with my own experience, when I am looking at the information board on the platforms while waiting, my brain is not registering the information itself. On the contrary, by merely looking at the information board inactivates the “bubble of privacy” on the platform. This behaviour communicates with the surrounding space and creates the perception that “I am busy checking the information”. Besides, some people are observed to walk along the safety line between the track and platform. In these circumstances, infrastructures in the station are used as tools to create the “bubble of privacy” (Adey, 2010) in the station. These infrastructures are consumed more than their original roles, which monitors are to indicate information of trains and safety lines are to alert safety and guide visually impaired persons. Here, they are consumed culturally by the Øresund commuters to produce space. This is an imperative demand for them to perform their everyday rituals while sustaining the social norms.

In the ethnography of daydreaming, Ehn and Löfgren (2010) note that imagination develops within the special material setting. In another study, Löfgren (2008) examines rail travel historically and captures the train panorama of old memories and nostalgia of mass media images. Along with the smell and sound, this makes the train station a perfect space for daydreaming. The safety line, or even the wide platform opens the space for commuters to develop their daydream through walking. This contributes to the construction of their open private space in the public sphere and create *communitas*.

In summary, the Øresund commuters tend to use either personal belongings or the station infrastructures to create “bubbles of privacy” in the public sphere of train stations. These private bubbles are all the more meaningful given that commuters need to immerse in a comfortable space to conduct the rituals during the liminal phase of rites of passage.

6. Making time

Commuting time is considered as a transitional time for commuters (Lyons & Chatterjee, 2008; Nippert-Eng, 1996; O'Dell, 2009). In *Home and Work*, Christena Nippert-Eng (1996) has studied the intricacies and implications of how people draw the boundary between home and work. Central to her idea, commuters wield behaviour “tricks” and physical movement to substantiate the mental transitions. The liminal period is precisely when transitions are happening. Even though this time is temporary, its significance embodies in the transformation of commuters’ identity and orient their behaviours. To this extent, what are they doing during this time? This chapter attempts to make sense of the boundary transition process of commuters by examining how time is spent in the station and how it affects their transformation.

6.1 Waiting time

“In order to understand rites pertaining to the threshold, one should always remember that threshold is only a part of the door and that most of these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of waiting, and of departure --- that is, as rites of passage.” (van Gennep, 1960, p.25)

The station is not the destination for commuters; in contrast, it is a threshold. This means the station is not the place where commuters settle in. Commuters come to the station to catch the train. While waiting constitutes most of their time being at a train station, it is an abstract activity to study: one can do many things while waiting but can also do nothing. Therefore, how do Øresund commuters wait?

To wait is to wait for something. For train travellers, it is then to wait for the trains. Despite some are waiting for an upcoming journey, while others are waiting for the start of work, they are all commonly in a transitional stage to change their positions in daily life. While I spent time at the train platforms to observing the behaviours of passengers. I found it extremely boring. No one was doing anything spectacular while waiting for their trains. Indeed, waiting is not an easy phenomenon to examine. But how do people experience waiting?

(I usually wait for) No more than ten minutes. I usually look at my phone. Sometimes I look at the projection here in the Malmö Ci. I actually like it. I play this game, I guess everybody does. Trying to figure out where the image is from. They show the

images that are film from a boat, or a train of different places. I look at it for a while, but it does repeat.

(What about Nørreport?) I just look at my phone because there is nothing else to do there. Sometimes I talk on the phone. There is a good network coverage now. In the old days, there was part of the platform where you don't get network coverage, that's quite annoying. (Interview with Giulia, Winter 2020)

This description demonstrates how the commuter experience waiting at two different stations. This example is chosen to illustrate the experiencescape in the train stations. Some commuters choose to concentrate on their digital worlds, and some choose to immerse themselves in books. Intimacy with phones, books and headphones make the waiting time rather quiet in the Øresund stations. Commuters are introspective, keeping quietly to themselves. There is no norm that requires every person waiting at the station to use their cell phones and stay quiet. But why do they choose to use these devices during their time in the station?

In the previous chapter, mobile phones, headphones and books are demonstrated as tools for commuters to create their own “bubble” in the public space, to make themselves feel comfortable and secure in the public space. Here, commuters fulfil their time at the station tapping into the mobile technologies, to conduct their everyday rituals to mentally prepare for the transformation. I noticed that almost everybody was immersed in the world of cell phones and headphones. These subtle behaviours secretly put everyone in the same background: no one sense strangeness if everyone around them is in their own worlds. This time is so personal that commuters can do and think whatever they want to prepare themselves for the transition. Caroline declares as below:

It's spare time. It's like I make something I like doing. I use it to read, I like reading. So I get 40 minutes when I can read, I actually use it to something I like. A lot of people work during the time traveling, or talk on the phone, I think it's nice not need to pay attention, when you are driving you have to be alerted all the time, you have to think about the weather, if it's icy outside, raining hard or all these things, the train is like you don't need to think about all these, icy weather, anything, I can go in, take my book, and I can read.....Let me put it gently, I like sitting in the morning reading without being disturbed, changing to the metro and still reading,

when I get out, I have 10 mins to think now I'm going to work. So my journey on the train is "my time", good me time, I like that time. I don't get disturbed, sitting in my little bubble reading my books. (Interview with Caroline, Winter 2020)

Caroline repeatedly expresses her fondness of reading during her daily commute. A particularly noteworthy point in this quotation is that she calls this time as "spare time" and "my time". Commute is treated as a demanding task, as Lyons & Chatterjee (2008) put it, because commuters must suffer from the energy-consuming process of travel in order to reach their destination. However, this time is described as "my time". But what is "my time"? The "my time" is personal. It is a time when commuters can rely on the relative privacy and freedom of the commute to achieve their transformation goals (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 121). Turner (1970) has also noted that "liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence" (p.106). This way, time is granted with a bit colour of pleasure. Besides, Lyons & Chatterjee (2008) suggests that commuting time is regarded as a gift rather than a burden. Culturally we tend to label work as something more serious. Nevertheless, home time is not all easy when it comes to daily trivia. This perspective makes "my time" even more precious.

Liminal time is temporal and short, and it is time with a lot of mental tasks. The liminal state is characterised by a loss of the previous status and in the process of gaining new sacredness and energy (Turner, 1969). Subsequently, it makes this time even more valuable for commuters. Clearly, commuters with years-long experience stick to the commute because they do not regard the commute time as a "waste", but instead, it is necessary for their life. As a result, the transitional time appears extremely important for commuters to take a breath between work and home, adjust themselves mentally.

Ethnologists Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren (2010) relate waiting as a form of "doing nothing", and it tells about how people make sense of their everyday lives. They have long taken an interest in exploring the "non-events" moment of everyday life and their research on "doing nothing" provides a lens through which to view the time that we normally ignore (2010). However, this "doing nothing" does not restrict us to enter the world of "daydreaming". Daydreaming allows minds to wander, switch around identities and fantasies, investigating secret worlds (Löfgren, 2008). Equipment such as cell phones, books and headphones make the time silent and peaceful and create the mood for commuters to daydreaming. Daydreaming is

commuters' everyday ritual and becomes a strategy to mentally support them in the preparation for transition during the liminal time. And because everyone is making this time private for themselves to daydreaming, no one around is interrupting their practice of rites of passage. This time becomes meaningful for them, even though they are doing "nothing".

6.2 Routines

"The word routine is actually the diminutive of route, a small path. This metaphor made us think about how routines are created in a similar way as paths, through a lot of repetitions, but also about how they become overgrown." (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010, p.81)

For many years, anthropologists have studied routines as "positioned, disclosed and evaluated within established ethical frameworks" (Shove, Trentmann & Wilk, 2009, p.8). Ethnographies of routines teach us much about how the repetition of certain activities create a mechanism for organising the flow of time and in this process creates temporal rhythms and patterns (Ehn & Löfgren, 2009). In this section, I attempt to look at how time is organised to create routines for commuters in the Øresund region.

To investigate routines culturally is to examine how their repetitious nature makes some critical changes invisible but eventually may affect everyday lives (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010). In this section, I select Frederik as an example to illustrate an everyday commute routine. The reason I choose Frederik is not only because he has more than twenty-five years of experience of commuting but also because he highlights that the smoothness of his routines matters for his work day.

Frederik starts his day very directly with breakfast and shower and leaves home at 8:10 am to catch the train that leaves Skurup at 8:17 am. The train ride takes him nearly fifty minutes to arrive at Lund Central Station, and then he walks for ten minutes to reach his office. This morning schedule may sound ordinary and even familiar to most people, yet it is routinized to Frederik's everyday lives.

I'm not an early bird, so I try to get up as late as possible. Shower, breakfast and get ready as short as possible. It is very basic and practical life. Haha, very very basic. I'm not thinking much at all. (Interview with Frederik, Winter 2020)

Frederik explains it in a relaxing way and believes this routine is so basic, ordinary and insignificant. However, this insignificance reveals that his familiarity with this daily practice. His routine is built on his knowledge of the train schedule so that he is able to organise his activities to match the timetable. The routine constitutes the pace of his life and in such a way, dwindles his affective efforts that involve emotions in accordance with uncertainty or worry (Lyons & Chatterjee, 2008). He further states that: *“Most of the time I'm not early, I'm just in time”*. (Interview with Frederik, Winter 2020)

I find similar statements with other informants as well. Experienced commuters are so familiar with the time schedule of their commuting trains that they always arrive at the platform at the very “right” time to avoid spending any extra minutes there. Even though the transitional time is valued as free time when an individual can wander around and be in a “between and betwixt” position (Turner, 1970), it is minimised by repetition. Generally, western scholarships have connected time to the ideas of investment and waste, where “productive time” is favoured at the expense of “idle time” (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010, p.27). In Frederik's eyes, to minimise unnecessary time waiting for the transportation is imperative, especially as he always works on the train. For him, entering the quiet compartment and find a seat draws the boundary line between home and work life. Besides, being familiar with the train timetable has allowed Frederik to calculate and organise his routine accurately. Commute has become a mundane for Frederik after twenty-six years repetition, and he has the train time table and departing platform in mind. These routines liberate Frederik from “demanding tasks” of everyday trifles and prepare him for more mindful activities (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p.113). Indeed, this transitional time is not necessarily long, but it is adequate for Frederik to “warm-up” mentally towards the changing mentality in the day between a home person and an office staff.

For many other commuters, listening to music or browsing through news or social media through mobile phones also makes it a routine for them. It indicates that they are repeating the same action every day while they are waiting for the train. They ritualise these actions as a vital part of their transition. In a sense, as they start to look at the phone when they enter the platform

and start waiting or turn on the headphones when they leave home or work, this is the logic manifestation of their transitional demand.

At last, a notable point that cannot be overlooked is the proximity of the stations, which in the Øresund region always are located in the city centre, as well as the frequency of the service within the region, have remarkably reduced the stress that could accompany the commute journey. In this way, the ritualistic time of commute appear less sacred and become more spontaneous.

6.3 Special events

In his ethnographic research of boredom, Bruce O'Neill (2017) encourages a methodological shift in capturing inactivity. He claims to take inactivity as the actual absence of activity and focus on a negative perspective – how a constant motion is interrupted, which seizes the undoing of ordinary life. The previous discussion about time in the station seems delightful. However, not all the time at the station is so enjoyable for commuters. In this part, I will discuss how time is experienced while disruptions happen.

On 20th October 2019, I cycled to Lund Central Station at 7:28 to catch the 7:30 train to Copenhagen as always. However, there was a large crowd gathering outside the station. I knew immediately some kind of accidents must have happened at the station. I tried not to be distracted by the crowd and find a way to the platform where I usually take the train. I have a habit of checking the information before I move to the platform. I did the same, but I noticed that there are only cross marks of all the Øresundståg. I saw a middle-aged lady in a green vest, and I assumed she was the staff of Skånetrafikiken, so I asked her what would happen with the Øresundståg. I was informed that due to the accidents on the railway between Lund and Malmö, all the trains to Malmö direction would be replaced by substituted buses. Looking at the people around me, I started panicking. I am very familiar with the flow of people in the region and the station, but I have never seen so many people here. If everyone was about to get the bus to Malmö, when would I get in? I was certain that I would be late for work, but the problem was: how late? (Field note, autumn 2019)

This experience remains fresh in my memory. It is not because I was late for work that day, but the anxiety I felt while not knowing when I would make it to work. Ehn & Löfgren state that “longing for something or worrying about the future creates different time experience” (2010, p.76). At the morning rush hours, most people are commuters, even though some are going to the airport to catch a flight. For the common goal of going to work, collective emotional suffering is created among them.



Figure 7. A cancellation of train service caused crowd at Copenhagen Central Station

At this point, I would like to explore how the infrastructures in the station interact with the collective emotions among commuters and evaluate how the station deal with the incident:

They are two people(staff) upstairs, but they don't know that much. The guy in the yellow vest, he tells me that he is here to help, but they don't necessarily have the latest information about what is going on. (Interview with Caroline, Winter 2020)

Another respondent Giulia explains:

It's been confusing and frustrating sometimes when the train is cancelled, and you have to go by bus instead, when there is substitute bus, that's always a problem. It's never well-organised, it never works the way it should. It's completely chaotic. The bus seems to arrive randomly, and nobody knows when the next bus will arrive and where it goes, if it goes to Malmö, will it go to all the stops in between or what would happen. That's very unclear, I think. (Interview with Giulia, Winter 2020)

The local station and traffic company, Skånetrafiken, take the responsibility to solve the problem of commuters. However, sometimes the communication does not seem to work and the commuters feel they do not get the help they expect.

Continuing the filednote I wrote at the beginning of this section, I document:

After a few minutes, a bus came to the spot. It did not have a sign to indicate the destination; however, all the people started to push and running to the bus. I was astonished by people's behaviour. Coming from a place where pushing in the stations happens a lot, I was not really upset by being pushed by people, but I was not expecting this would happen even in Sweden. Sweden always has an image of orderliness and politeness in my mind. However, it seems all of a sudden, all the boundaries and social orders disappear for all the Øresund commuters. (Field note, autumn 2019)

In this context, time is given a new meaning: when unexpected disruptions happen, it seems to be legitimate for people not to behave as they do when the train is on time. Instead, they can be aggressive and this is seen as acceptable. Disruption of social practices often reveals itself through the disappearance of orders.

If the disruption happens in the morning, because of the commitment to be at the offices on time, the transitional time becomes dysphoric. As a consequence, commuters do not do what they usually do anymore. From my observation that morning, it was clear that there were much fewer people staring at their mobile phones. Even though they are still doing nothing, the mood is different when everything goes smoothly. As Ehn & Löfgren (2010) describe: “a short wait may take all one’s attention, whereas longer waits make it possible to move in and out of the situation, doing other things, or letting the mind wander” (p.76).

Lund is good, the platform is long, there are plenty of space to stand, it’s also good that if the train is late, you can go into maybe buy a magazine in Pressbyrån, or you go to ICA to do some shopping. So, you can do something if the train is late. That’s good. It’s easy to get to the platform, there are two entrances and exits. (Interview with Frederik, Winter 2020)



Figure 8. Shops at Lund Central Station

Instead of describing the nervousness and tension when a delay happens in the morning commute, this statement sounds delightful. Time has characters (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010). It can be annoying or joyful. Frequency of train service, essential service departments around the station, and most importantly, the nature of travel ease the mood of the time.

In many of the interviews, the Øresund commuters speak highly of Lund Central Station and Malmö Central station for the easy access to a wide range of facilities. One commuter notably praises the presence of pharmacy and kiosk at the stations. However, when asked if they use these facilities on a frequent base, the answers are mostly negative. Nevertheless, the availability of such shops offers insurance and alternative in any case they are ever needed.

7. Attachment to a mundane place

Having reviewed the question of how the spatial arrangements are involved in the rites of passage for commuters and their activity and/or inactivity during the passage of time, it is now joined by the exploration of the place-making process of stations and the question of how a station as a place creates meaning as a ritualistic place for commuters.

While describing liminality as a state of “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1970, p.93), Turner (1969) does not ignore the important role of the place where rites of passage happen. As I have discussed earlier, station is a must-go place that connects home and office for commuters. To switch between the role of an ordinary citizen and a person who is ready to work, taking the train at the station is then an essential and unavoidable process for commuters in the liminal stage. But how do commuters experience the station as a place in this context? And how does the station, as a place, create meaning to the liminal phase of commute? In the third chapter, where I presented my theoretical inspiration, I discussed place attachment and how it relates to the understanding of the place-making process of stations. In this chapter, I will analyse the place-making process of stations based on this theoretical framework and explore how stations contribute meaning to commuters’ rites of passage.

7.1 Safety, security and the need for protection

The first question to answer is how commuters generate affect in train stations. According to psychologist Maria Vittoria Giuliani, “to have an attachment bond with someone does not simply and generically mean to feel affection for him or her. It entails drawing a feeling of wellbeing and security from the proximity with or availability of a person” (2003, p.143). Following this, we can conclude that attachment bond with a place stems from the relationship with the place that provides functional needs for the person, such as security and wellbeing.

Thus, do stations in the Øresund region offer the functional needs for its commuters? In the interviews, a recurrent concern that informants have expressed is the issue of safety and security in the stations. Ebba expresses it as follows:

*Yeah, I do (feel safe) ... I never feel unsafe. I don't have the feeling of being scared.
Perhaps there is always people around, especially at Nørreport, speaking of a*

station that is dark and not nice-looking, I feel if I'm at the platform and I'm completely alone, I think I will feel scared...But there are always people... There are lots of drunk people hanging around the Seven-Eleven shop, but they usually have their group, they usually talk to each other, sometimes they are arguing, I'm curious what's happening, but it never involves someone around them. It's very rare I experience people who are drunk and yelling at other people. (Interview with Ebba, Winter 2020)

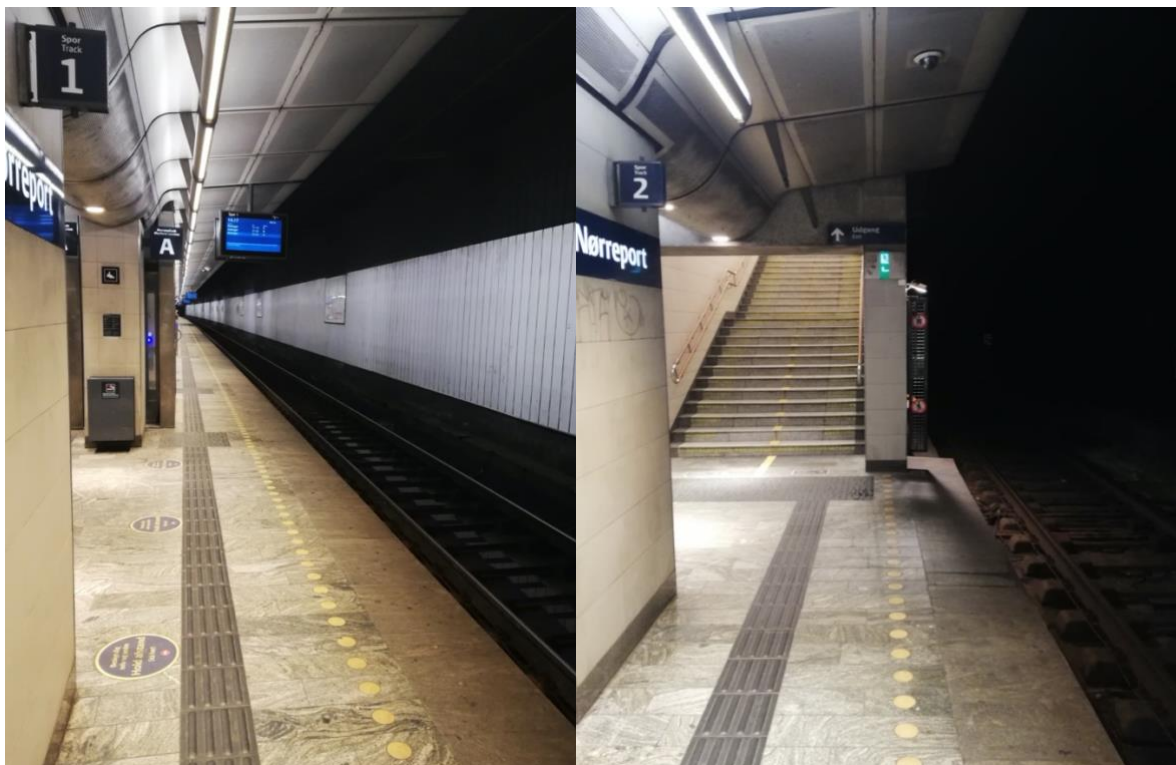


Figure 9 & 10. Copenhagen Nørreport stationii

Despite its dark and shabby environment, Nørreport station is still considered as a safe place for Ebba due to its high presence of people. Instead of getting scared of drunk or grumpy people at the station, Ebba is yet curious about listening to their stories. It is apparent that Ebba finds the environment safe, and therefore a sense of trust is created. In spite of the trust in Nørreport Station, she also assumes it as an unpleasant place to be, which I will expand later in this section.

Meanwhile, a similar story could be told of another respondent, Caroline, who has commuted between Malmö Central Station and Copenhagen Airport Station:

At the stations I use I feel safe. In Copenhagen Airport, it's because there are always people around, you are not alone. In the airport, there are people around, and security people are overlooking things. You see them at Malmö as well, walking around. And also the light. If it's lit up, it's not a dark station, where you can see everything, that also helps. If you come down to the platform and it's dark, it's not nice to be there (Interview with Caroline, Winter 2020)

From these quotes, we can conclude the two critical elements that make people feel safe: the first one is having fellow travellers around and security personnel in view, and the second is lightness. In the ritual studies, most ritual ceremonies are associated with a dim environment which is regarded as sacred and mysterious. Stations, as a ritual place for commuters, instead, generally are illuminated brightly. This is very much a result of being a public place. The light in the public place not only illuminate the place but also create and bolster a sense of trust.

Among the stations I have included in my research, some of them are located on the ground level (Lund Central Station, Oxie Station, Skurup Station, Ørestad Station, for instance) while others are underground (such as Triangeln Station and Nørreport Station). Triangeln station, for example, has its platform underground and it is totally enclosed. I enter the entrance and take the escalator down to the platform. The escalator descends slowly, and its platform is located very deep underground. I have paid extra attention to the light when I enter the station. At the entrance, it is illuminated brightly, even though it is located on the ground. I conduct the fieldwork at Triangeln Station at dinner time on a weekday in winter, when it becomes dark outside early. On the slow descending process on the escalator, the light becomes dimmer. I suppose this is due to the energy-saving reason as the escalator is always moving and people are not staying here. Yet, when the escalator touches the ground again at the platform, it is as bright as the entrance. Entering an underground platform as Triangeln Station from the ground, feels like entering a different world, but the illumination down there erases the fear of unknown and generates a sense of ease, and trust.

Ebba is a commuter who uses Triangeln Station all the time, but she does not enjoy commuting through Triangeln, and she describes her ideal station to be above the ground. She explains further:

I think it's the feeling that you are not trapped. And Triangeln doesn't give me the feeling that I'm strapped..... I like Lund C. it's very like the station in my hometown, that's cosier in a sense. I think it's nice, there is more light and fresher air, natural light. (Interview with Ebba, Winter 2020)

Anthropologists Bille & Sørensen (2007) argue that light steers social wellness. Here, in Ebba's case, the light has the ability to shape her experience and alter her perception to the stations. Unlike some old train stations in the Øresund region that are mostly on the ground, some of the new ones in the city are underground. Light has played a crucial role in balancing travellers' preference to the platform on the ground. Triangeln station can be a good example that provides "good" light so that its users do not necessarily feel "strapped". However, in some cases, it does not satisfy its users in terms of light. Infrastructures like light usually fade into the background since we always take it for granted as part of our normal day life, and it only appears upon breakdown (Starosielski, 2012). In this study, Nørreport station is repeatedly specified as a "bad" example of a station, especially in terms of luminance:

In Nørreport I'm very aware of it, this dark, dark tunnel, and as I said it is smelly, dirty, and more people, it kind of not so pleasant experience. I don't like the station, I have to go there for work, but if I wouldn't go, I will try to avoid it. (Interview with Ebba, Winter 2020)

As Ebba indicates, the sense is never experienced alone. When the light does not function to meet its users' expectation, the complaint is associated with other aspects of the place. According to Sorrell (2005), "light reveals, and delineates space: the better the light, the better our sense and appreciation of a space" (p.58). When the light does not serve to illuminate the place, its users are not able to oversee the place in a glance and fulfil their appreciation to the place. This may result in the loss of trust in the place. This is important as this type of experience alters the perception of stations to commuters and biases their application of the rite of passage.

The stations have more responsibilities, besides illuminating commuters and making them feel safe. In the interviews with the Øresund commuters, many of them have demonstrated their expectation that station facilities offer them shelter to rough weathers. Frederik makes this comment:

Well, I think I like a train station to be built in a way that I can wait for the train without suffering too much. If it's raining, I don't want to get wet. If it's very windy, I don't want to feel that If you are in the train station in Lund for instance, if it's really windy, you notice it. So you have to try to find protection wherever you can. In a perfect station, you don't suffer from the weather condition. (Interview with Frederik, Winter 2020)

As mentioned earlier, some stations in the Øresund region are outdoor and provides little cover to its travellers. Meanwhile, stations are supposed to be the place that protects its travellers from the weather conditions. This again is very crucial for commuters, because this place should provide them with safety, protection, and trust. As a result, the fundamental environment is created for their everyday rituals, such as drinking coffee, daydreaming and all the preparations for transferring into work mode. The meaning of train station, as a place, is made.

This does not directly lead to attachment to the place. However, the basic needs and demand for protection make the place “safe” in the commuters’ eyes and generates attachment to it. This brings about the trustiness of the place and builds up the bond between the place and its users. Consequently, it forms the exact environment that is needed for commuters to conduct their everyday rituals, so that it provides a sense of control and orient their daily transformation.

7.2 “Favourite spot” and place identity

The second element that plays an important role in forming a person-place bond is the cognitive aspect. People create meaning for places according to their beliefs, past experience and knowledge (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Fullilove (1996) entails familiarity as a central element in place attachment, or in other words, to be attached to a place is to be familiar with the environment and details of the place.

When commute integrates into people’s everyday life, the stations can often become mundane and invisible for them. Such familiarity appears particularly important in as it can build the cultural character of commuters. Familiarity embodies in routines. In this study, all the informants are recognised as veteran commuters in the Øresund region. This leads me to expect that they have a commute routine and are familiar with the stations that they use. Interestingly,

the majority of them told me they have a “favourite spot” in the station. Some of them has indicated that they usually wait for their train at either end of the platform:

(I wait at) very close to the end of the train. Because when I get to Nørreport, that's the closest to the exit. That's the most time-saving. On the platform you can see the tourists usually go to the front, commuters are... or go to the end of the platform like me. (Interview with Ebba, Winter 2020)

From this citation, it can be noticed that commuters find their “favourite” location to wait for the train, as this may be “a place schema of place-related knowledge and beliefs, which ultimately represents the special character of the place and one’s personal connections to it” (Scannell & Gifford, 2010, p.3). Proshansky (1978) forged the term “place identity”, referring “the socialisation of physical places”. At the beginning of my own commuting experience of last autumn, I placed myself randomly on the platform. Later I came to realise that standing by the end side of the platform can save me time when I arrive at the destination and leave the station. I then started to recognise familiar faces at the same spot and same time every morning. Similar descriptions are made by several of the informants. This again demonstrates that the points where a commuter chooses to stand on the platform create a place identity for him or her. In the case of this study, the Øresund commuters tend to wait for their train at either end of the platform while other travellers spend their time waiting in the middle of the platforms. Twigger-Ross & Uzzell (1996) defined this process as “place-related distinctiveness”. This place-related distinctiveness originates and develops from the knowledge of the station and its daily operation.

7.3 The experience of stations

Finally, the upcoming discussion of behaviours in the station is related to the changing modes. Tony Hiss (1991), the author of *The Experience of Place*, portrayed his experience of walking through the vast main concourse of Grand Central Terminal in New York and pointed out that his perception and behaviours vary continuously in accordance with the changing surroundings: “I could see how other people were changing their pace as I got closer to them, and simultaneously I could feel in my legs and body and arm the moment-to-moment adjustment in motion I was myself making in response to their approach” (p.20). He elaborated the idea of “cooperation” in a place, which simultaneous perception and modes shape our experience of

surroundings and guide our reactions to it. Hence, it is of great importance to make conscious use of a multisensory approach when experiencing a place.

To expound the experience of changing mode, I returned to Lund Central Station for an autoethnographic observation after I had stopped commuting.

On a recent morning at around 7:25 am, I came to Lund Central station. I tried to replicate my old commuting routine to take the train at the platform for both track 2 and 3. Assuming that I would take the Øresundståg at 7:30, I took the escalator to reach the platform. Knowing that I still had time since the train had not arrived yet, I was just standing at the right side of the escalator. It was not very busy, and no one was standing in front of me. Suddenly, someone passed by me. And then another man in the business wear walked pass me. I felt obligatorily hurried, so I followed to walk up to the bridge.

Instead of taking another escalator down, I chose to walk down the bridge to the right side of the platform as I used to do. It was not busy. It was never too busy. There were only very few people at this side of the platform. A lady was standing at the shelter, where one can keep out of the wind; a 20s young man was just standing quietly, with his big headphones on; another man holding his leather bag was walking along the yellow line between the track and the platform; another lady just came down from the stairs, holding a cup of coffee, you can see the mist(maybe it's from the coffee or just her breathe), she looked up to the indication board on the platform and then looked to the direction where the train would come. I tried not to look at them directly to be polite and looked at the same direction. But I was not looking for the train. I was just looking at everything and looking at nothing.

It was just a very short period of two to three minutes. When the train arrived, people got off and got on. The station became alive for the two minutes when the train was there and then quiet again. This circle repeated. (Field note, winter 2020)

Typically, we tend to believe that we are independent in deciding how we move and what we think while being in a place, because we seem to be separate from everything and everyone in our surroundings. However, the surroundings, accompanied by our senses, alter our experience

and reaction. Drawing from the notes of my recent observation, I come to realise that I was altering my behaviours according to the surroundings: like the others, I was also hurrying up and walked up to the bridge; I was also looking at the direction of the train. It is more obvious to notice at this specific side of the station because people waiting there are all commuters. In the environment of a train station, they all seem ordinary, doing just the usual stuff: walking around, listening to music, or just simply standing. Despite these behaviours all seem ordinary, they are “magical”, in the sense that it manifests in our everyday rituals. Turner (1969;1970) has highlighted the interstructural character of liminality. It can be understood that liminal activities are carried out rigidly. Through these seemingly ordinary actions, commuters are able to release anxiety and mentally prepare for the upcoming transformation in their everyday lives.

Generally, train stations in the Øresund region are described as quiet. The experienced commuters keep it this way, and whenever newcomers are joining the journey, they follow and mimic their fellow commuters’ behaviours at the platform: being quiet, doing something or doing nothing but keeping it quiet to match the environment. Why are they so quiet? According to Baron & af Segerstad (2010), being quiet is considered as appropriate behaviour in public spaces and Swedes seem to adhere to this. However, this is the constructed cultural background of the quietness in these stations. Another explanation can be that under the morning setting at a train station, coffee steam and smell floating in the air, drowsy commuters are seemingly doing nothing, but secretly performing their everyday rituals to orient their day. Being at the platform and waiting for the train, they are no longer the person who stayed in their cosy bed no matter if they had a good sleep or not, because technically they cannot stay in bed; meanwhile, they are not the person who are ready to start a new day working in the office either. During the liminal stage, it is of great importance for them to renew the energy for the next stage. The quietness blends with the surrounding and creates the environment that reminds the commuters to conduct their everyday ritual to pass to the new stage of their day.

In drawing attention to the important function of a place that serves the ritual, Mauss (2001) stress that “magic is not performed just anywhere, but in specially qualified places. Magic, as well as religion, has genuine sanctuaries” (p.57). The trust in the place is the precondition for the ritual. And the trust is built on familiarity, physical and sensual elements that direct to the sense of safety in the place. In this section, we can see that commuters afford a form of attachment to the station, where they invest trust and emotion, identify themselves, and add new meaning to the place. This attachment created to the station has led the station to function

as the sanctuary for the magic to be performed. It is then a ritual place. The station empowers commuters to conduct their rite of passage.

8. Conclusion

I study train stations because I am always interested in infrastructures and people's everyday life – in questioning how to engage infrastructures with the quality of people's life. This empirically supported analysis initially acknowledges the previously established knowledge of commute serving as a ritual transformation between work and home, and also highlights the previously overlooked function of station infrastructures in creating conditions for transformation to happen. The theory of rites of passage proves fruitful in examining how transformation makes meaning in commuters' everyday lives. Focusing on the transitional nature of commute, I have developed the analysis from the perspectives of space, place and time. The analysis describes how commuters experience the stations while commuting and suggests that stations play a crucial role in assisting commuters to conduct a mental transformation and orientate themselves towards a new status in their everyday life.

For my analysis, I start with Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad to assess the space in the train stations. The findings are thresholds: firstly, the atmosphere in the station is characterised by the infrastructures as well as different directions of the trip; however, it is perceived as a space of freedom between home and work for commuters to take a breath and prepare themselves for the changing of status they are going to experience, either a hectic workday or a calm home time. Secondly, the omnipresence of waste bins and people's habit of queueing at the Øresund stations form a nudge to guide both commuters and other travellers' behaviours on the platforms. Through this way, a conceived space is created, which signifies in an essential factor in both regulating the social order and maintaining the norm (Tonnelat, 2010). It is worth noting that *communitas* is created in the station space at this time. And finally, it is noted that the Øresund commuters tend to use either personal belongings or the station infrastructures to create "bubbles of privacy" in the public sphere of train stations. These private bubbles are all the more meaningful given that commuters need to immerse in a comfortable space, which one of the informants described as "my own space", to conduct the rituals during the liminal phase of rites of passage.

In the next chapter, the focus is on the perspective of time and I initiated the analysis through the lens of "doing nothing". I note that despite time at stations may seem non-eventful, commuters highly value this time since it functions as a gap between two roles of their everyday lives so that they can use it to prepare themselves for the new status of their day mentally.

Moreover, seemingly insignificant mundane creates routines for commuters. Along with the proximity to the stations and frequency of service within the region, these routines constitute the pace of commuting experience, notably reducing the stress that accompanied with the commute journey. However, adequate and efficient supporting service is regarded as an important part of train station infrastructures and is highly demanded when disruptions, such as delay or cancellation happens.

Lastly, in studying the place-making process of stations and how commuters experience a station as a place, I used the idea of “place attachment” to think about how station as a place link to commuters’ experience. In the course of commuting in the Øresund region, commuters view the Øresund stations as safe places. Through the qualitative interviews, multiple factors are identified as decisive in making these stations safe. But chief among them is the station infrastructure, especially the lighting on the platforms and station service such as security personnel on duty. However, in commuters’ point of view, stations bear the extra responsibility to protect its travellers from the weather conditions. Thus, relevant infrastructures that offer shelter during severe weather conditions are required. Moreover, with respect to cognitive attachment to stations, it is argued that commuters are familiar with the organisation of the stations where they take trains every day. This familiarity develops into a habit to wait for the train at a “favourite spot” for commuters, and it creates a place identity for them. In the end, the experience of the station is evaluated, and it turns out to be in association with the surrounding environment and infrastructures. It makes meaning in terms of creating a precondition for commuters to conduct the rites during liminality.

To conclude, this study contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how train station infrastructures make meaning to commuters’ transformation between home and work. The findings highlight the overlooked significance of station infrastructures in making a difference in commuters’ everyday lives in the liminal phase. Indeed, station infrastructures in the Øresund region have been assessed as efficient and sufficient, and it plays an important role in incubating commuters’ rites of passage and maintaining the social norm.

To deepen the understanding on this topic, this analysis can be extended to further investigation on how commuters experience the station at different timing of the day. Looking back on my fieldwork for this research, I focus on observing how commuters interact with stations during the rush hours (6:40 to 9:00 in the morning and 16:00 to 18:30). It is argued that it may generate

different feelings at the station at different timing, and it is worth investigating since the working hours are becoming increasingly flexible. Furthermore, it is argued that the gender of commuters and income level also matter in term of commuting experience (Ralph, 2015). Therefore, a continuation of this study with the gender and income level aspects could be valuable.

9. Applicability

Applied cultural analysis moves the concept of culture from one field of knowledge to the practice of knowledge and then further to a more dynamic engagement with the market (O'Dell, 2009). When I began this research, I wanted to explore how stations could be designed to better meet the needs and expectations of commuters and to encourage more people to commute by train. Through this research, I could underscore how the built environment and infrastructures connect to commuters' lived experience and make a meaningful influence on their everyday lives. For cultural analysts, one of the most essential tasks is to transform the research results to the implementation of the business of stakeholders (Ehn & Löfgren, 2009). In this chapter, I will give concrete suggestions for how to improve commuter stations, which could be used by mayors, city administrators, city planners, and other public and private organisations.

In general, the stations I have investigated in this study have been proven satisfying for commuters. Some stations such as Malmö Central Station, Lund Central Station and Copenhagen Airport Station have stood out as the "ideal stations" no matter in terms of facility availability or built protection in against extreme weather or other situations. However, some other stations may need to consider how to expand the infrastructures in order to meet commuters' needs. Here I list a few directions in which station infrastructures can be improved.

Reinforce station service efficiency

The services that stations provide are seen as a necessary but overlooked aspect of station infrastructures. These services include prompt and accurate traffic information, guidance on the platforms, security inspection, as well as access to various facilities. Here, Malmö Central Station sets an exceptional example for offering efficient and effective station service. However, the problem of inefficient and inaccurate traffic information and guidance when delay or cancellation happens are exposed at most stations in the Øresund region. Hence, more effective and efficient communication between train controllers, station staffs, and commuters is required.

Add more waste bins

Cleanliness turns out to be an essential factor that determines commuters' satisfactory towards a station. A lesson that can be learned from Lund Central Station and Malmö Central Station is to install more waste bins on the platform. These waste bins can play an especially important role to nudge people to walk a few steps to throw the trash into the bins.

Maintain the service frequency during rush hours

The service frequency of trains has been assessed as sufficient in the Øresund region. This is due to the effective collaboration between local transport company Skånetrafikiken in Sweden and DSB in Denmark. The frequency of train service reduces the travel pressure for commuters and support the pace of their everyday lives. This is an aspect that cannot be overlooked. The excellent collaboration by both sides in maintaining the service frequency during rush hours needs to continue.

Bridge infrastructure gap

The Øresund region is famous for its long and rainy winter days. Some of the interviewees emphasise the responsibility of stations to offer shelter for its travellers in lousy weather conditions. A practical way to support this is the investment in the protective infrastructures, such as glass shield (see Figure 11).



Figure 11. Glass shields at Lund Central Station

Ensure the luminance on the platforms

Lighting turns out to be not only functional but also essential in creating a sense of safety and security in the stations. Lighting in the Øresund stations is mostly evaluated as sufficient.

Station operators should make sure the lighting on the platforms, especially at stations that are underground.

Consider footprints or lines on the platform

It is not difficult to spot queues at Øresund stations. But in order to increase the capacity and maintain the order on the platforms, particularly for those major stations during rush hours, it can be beneficial to paint footprints or lines on the platforms as a nudge to encourage passengers to queue.

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Interviews and fieldnotes

All interviews and fieldnotes in the author's possession.

- a. Caroline (January 2020) Personal interview
- b. Ebba (January 2020) Personal interview
- c. Frederik (February 2020) Personal interview
- d. Giulia (January 2020) Personal interview
- e. Veronika (February 2020) Personal interview
- f. Yuting (January 2020) Personal interview
- g. Fieldnotes (August 2019 – February 2020)

Notes

i A permanent video art installation *Elsewhere* by Chilean artist Tania Ruiz at Malmö Central Station in order to improve the experience of public transport users.

ii I would like to acknowledge the visual material support from Kristoffer Gravgaard Pedersen. This thesis is written during the Covid-19 pandemic while Denmark temporarily closed down the border with Sweden. Due to this special situation, I was not able to travel back to the stations in Copenhagen to take pictures to present in this thesis.