

Chapter 8

Trends and Challenges in Nordic Gender Geography



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Introduction

Gender is a social category that in geography has been the subject of a variety of studies, with the aim of applying and developing theories of socio-spatial relations. But what does this really mean? In her article about a mining community in northern Norway, Halldis Valestrand (2018) tells the story about what happens when economic transformation alters traditional gender relations in one specific spatial context. The mine was closed in 1996, with major consequences for the inhabitants. Jobs that were traditionally labelled as male were lost and a more diversified labour market developed. Together with an increased strengthening of welfare measures such as kindergartens and maternity rights, this new situation was phrased a ‘feminization of the municipality’ (p. 1121). Several years later, the mine re-opened with a rapid inflow of migrating and commuting skilled male workers. Accordingly, the labour market went through a re-masculinisation process with a new understanding of what it was to be a man. With her detailed analysis, Valestrand gives an illustrative example of an analysis of the relation between gender and space. With its focus on locality, provision of welfare and labour market, this study also illustrates the socio-spatial contextual approach to gender geography in the Nordic countries. As shown in this example, such an approach means that places shape gender relations, but also that gender relations shape places.

Gender geography is both a sub-discipline in itself and a perspective in other geographical sub-disciplines. To analyse socio-spatial trends and challenges in Nordic gender geography, we conducted a review of the research carried out in this field,

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including dissertations, journal articles and reports from almost a hundred researchers in the Nordic countries. In the following, we will exemplify some of these, with a special focus on gender geography as a sub-discipline. We discuss gender geography as one strand of research where socio-spatial theorising has developed and where researchers have been dedicated to the task of adding new and gender related empirical knowledge and in-depth theoretical discussions to the discipline.

The Nordic Countries – A Gender Geography Community?

Feminist and gender geography had a rather late start in the Nordic countries. Buttimer and Mels (2006) explain this as a result of male-dominated institutional structures in the early 1980s. The first Nordic symposium on gender geography (or women's geography) was held in the spring of 1983 in Roskilde, Denmark, with over 40 participants from all Nordic countries. The prehistory of the meeting can be traced back to one of the Nordic symposia on critical human geography held in Røros, Norway, the year before. The female geographers found difficulties in getting a serious discussion about their research topics, and a frustration arose about the way they themselves and their papers were met by their male colleagues. This problem had already been addressed by Halldis Valestrand in an article in 1982, where she investigated the geography discipline's inability to acknowledge women's legitimate role in research design (Valestrand, 1982). Thus, the female geographers decided to organise conferences of their own to discuss the possibilities of establishing a women's perspective in the geographical research fields. This meeting in Roskilde was followed by meetings in Bergen, Uppsala and Tampere, where a broad range of topics were discussed, both empirical studies and more theoretical oriented themes on economic, social and political geography.

In the following, we discuss the ways in which Nordic gender geography has developed since these first meetings and scrutinise some of the challenges that this field of research encounters. We will present the topics developed and unpack similarities and dissimilarities in how Nordic gender geographers have tried to elaborate on the socio-spatial dimensions with their versatile empirical work, and we will illuminate the variety and depth of Nordic gender geography research. Common research topics have been related to scrutinising dichotomies such as public/private, production/reproduction, nature/culture and we/them. The underlying motivation was twofold: the first was to introduce gender aspects in human geography, and the second was to challenge the all-embracing gender theory by introducing space to the analysis. The gender-geographical discipline has developed along different strands, but the spatial contextualisation and the relation to the welfare state has been a common baseline in all the Nordic countries.

To the extent that a discipline develops within collective clusters of researchers with a common scholarly interest, the development of such clusters is of significance in analysing the various strands of gender geography that have developed in the Nordic countries. The development in Sweden can serve as an example of the

contextual character of such development. At the Department of Human Geography at Lund University, the strong tradition in time geography had implications for the department's first feminist-geographical studies of everyday life from a time geography perspective (Friberg, 1990; Åquist, 1992). Similarly, the economic-geographical orientation of the department at Uppsala University, resulted in gender-oriented studies on labour market and economic restructuring (Gonäs, 1989; Forsberg, 1989). In Stockholm, in a department which has a strong tradition of doing fieldwork on the African continent, the gender-geographical questions were raised in studies on female labour in Nigeria (Andrae, 1997). At Umeå University, many geographers were specialised in quantitative migration analysis, and it was in the field of migration that gender-geographical studies developed (Tollefsen Altamirano, 2000). Likewise, the tradition of regional development studies can be traced in gender-geographical studies on regional policy in Karlstad (Grip, 2010). Over the years, at each university department, gender geography has come to include a variety of themes and conceptual approaches. In her overview of Swedish feminist geography, Sircar (2019) argues that the last few decades have been marked by a stronger focus on intersectionality where issues of class, race and gender dominate.

The situation in the other Nordic countries has partly developed in other ways. Although the first conference was held in Roskilde, Denmark, the establishment of gender research has taken on quite different expressions there. In their article, *The challenge of feminist geography*, Simonsen and Vedel (1989) explain the situation in the late 1980s. Their conclusion is that the subject developed in Denmark in a cross-disciplinary way, with a special focus on power relations. This situation has prevailed, resulting in relatively few disciplinary gender geography contributions, and instead continued along cross-disciplinary approaches. A similar situation can be found in Finland, with important exceptions, such as Sireni's (2008) studies on rural female identities in relation to the welfare state, Koskela's (1997) studies on urban geographies of fear, and Hottola's (1999) analysis of embodied intercultural adaptation in tourism. In Iceland, the gender perspective in geography is developed in collaborations between anthropologists and geographers (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013). In Norway, gender geography is most explicitly practised in Tromsø and Trondheim (Gerrard, 2013; Valestrand, 2018; Gunnerud Berg, 2004), but examples are also found in Bergen (Overå, 2007; Grimsrud, 2011) and at the University of South-Eastern Norway (Birkeland, 2002). Generally, studies on Norwegian feminist geography have focused on gender constructions and practices, in relation to migration, rurality and landscape.

The Meaning of a Scientific and Political Context

As shown in the overview above, the importance of a supporting scientific milieu should not be underestimated. It can be found in the formal structure, but informal milieus can be just as important. There must be some safe spaces where gender

geography is not only allowed and tolerated but also respected. However, this is not always the case (See Webster & Angela Caretta, 2019). Works that can add knowledge to the way scientific theorising develops in relation to researchers' personal lives and their scientific communities are biographies and autobiographies. Such documentations, written by and about Nordic female geographers (even if they are comparatively few), contribute to the development of the discipline in the Nordic countries, thus enriching and nuancing the writing of the history of geography (see, for example, Simonsen, 1999; Forsberg, 2010, 2021; Friberg, 2010; Jones, 2014). We would appreciate more of such writings, since it would shed further light on the different histories of gender geography in the Nordic countries.

Gender research is not an easy assignment. From the early start, it has been disputed and challenged (Niskanen & Florin, 2010). The scientific credibility and justification were initially questioned, and the studies' results were met with suspicion due to an assumed connection and proximity to feminist political movements. This was partly also true; the pioneers were women who were engaged in feminist politics. The feminist movement developed along various strands in the Nordic countries (Dahlerup, 2001), but regardless of the differences, the aim of gender geography was emancipatory. In all countries, the focus was on situations where women were especially affected and vulnerable. In many ways, this situation has prevailed. With a normative approach, quite a few researchers are looking for restoration. Some of the studies even have an explicit or implicit character of action research.

The development of Nordic geographical gender research can be traced back to an interest in the welfare state, the labour market structure and female participation in the labour force, initially in close connection with the political (left-wing) feminist movement. This led to a further interest in gender inequalities in work and everyday life, as well as in formal institutions and power structures. Theoretically, one of the first important influences was the American sociologist Joan Acker (1990), who in the late 1980s formulated her own theory of how patriarchal power structures constitute the backbone in organisational constructions. The political focus on gender equality and shared responsibilities has led research to embrace themes that explain and critically investigate material and discursive realities.

Structure and Agency – A Starting and Prevailing Point of Departure

The structure and agency approach constitutes a relevant framing for our presentation. Gender specific practices occur at an individual level – between and among men and women – as well as on a structural level, where it is possible to discern general patterns and conditions. Gender researchers had an early interest in how spatial inequalities were created within the capitalist and globalised economy. They emphasised the local level, including social and political contexts, which gradually gave rise to a shift from studies focusing on big firms, structural transformations and consequences for employees, to a growing interest in the conditions for female

self-employed entrepreneurs in small firms, where the interaction of structure and action became especially evident. As an alternative to more aggregated analysis, the orientation was on women as social agents, rather than the gender-neutral human concept traditionally used in economic geography. A major source of inspiration was the 1984 paper 'A women's place' by Doreen Massey and Linda McDowell (1984), which became one of the cornerstones for Nordic feminist geography. Their work showed the importance of taking the relation between gender and space seriously and how the two concepts made a successful relational pair for analytical and empirical analysis. It challenged human geography's traditional universal claim and provided the discipline with new narratives.

In the following, we will discuss how gender has been addressed, analysed and questioned in some sub-disciplines within geography, especially economic, social and planning geography.

Re-defining Economic Geography

Gender geography has constituted a continuous element in the subject of economic geographical research. With the help of detailed micro studies, the specific life forms of women in contemporary Nordic welfare state societies have been exposed. Constant changes in the economy affected the subjects of study, such as the period of major structural transformations, resulting in redundancies and closures in the beginning of the 1980s, when the consequences turned out to be very different for men and women respectively. Women had greater difficulties getting a new job and they more often became stuck in a situation of permanent contingency (Forsberg, 1989; Gonäs, 2006). These studies broadened the understanding of economic restructuring (Johansson, 2000). The effects of the industrial closures were furthermore dependent on the local geographical context. Regardless of place and branch, the consequences for female workers turned out to be more severe than for the male workers (Forsberg, 1989). Due to the strong dependence on primary and secondary production, the masculinities and femininities in sectors like food, fishery, forestry and mining became of interest for local gender analysis (Dale, 2002; Frangoudes & Gerrard, 2019). Changes in the relative attractiveness of primary resources, such as timber and minerals, and the following transformations of traditional masculinities and femininities were targets for analysis. As alternatives to more structural labour market analysis, questions of gender identities and performativity were elaborated and analysed (Heldt Cassel & Pettersson, 2015; Laszlo Ambjörnsson, 2021), together with an intersectional understanding of immigrant women and their attachment to the labour market (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013; Zampoukos, 2021).

Whereas the studies on the Nordic labour market have a focus on the women's subordinated situation, the corresponding studies from the Global South have, to a greater extent, focused on the strength of women and their empowerment (Hannan, 2000). Their capabilities and survivability have been stressed, both as entrepreneurs and as head of households. The close relationship between a transforming primary

sector and its effects on household gender relations is exposed (Lindeborg, 2012). These studies show an ambition to give a voice and visibility to such overlooked aspects within mainstream economic geography.

An increased focus on entrepreneurship offers illustrative examples of how identity and ideology of hegemonic masculinity are imbued into the definition of (successful) entrepreneurship (Pettersson, 2002; Pettersson et al., 2017). Female entrepreneurship is shown to be closely connected to family situations, not least in rural locations (Lindqvist Scholten, 2003; Gunnerud Berg, 1997; Hedfeldt, 2008). To start a business is a strategy for women to support themselves and their family members, in Nordic as well as in other geographical contexts (Förte, 2013; Westermark, 2003). For immigrant women, especially those living in a rural community, to start their own business could be the opportunity to earn their own income (Webster, 2016). Equally important is the ambition to become a successful entrepreneur, including innovative and economic aspects. The driving force behind earning money, experiencing demands and appreciation might be just as important for female entrepreneurs as for male (Stenbacka, 2017).

With the use of critical social theories, discourse analysis, performativity and post-feminist theories, contemporary gender studies have managed to broaden the definition of economic geography and have contributed to the discourse with new discoveries about entrepreneurship in a spatial context (Hinchliffe, 2019). The masculine connotation of entrepreneurship, which made female entrepreneurs invisible, has been questioned, as it negatively affects the understanding of innovation and prosperous (successful) ideas.

To summarise, gender studies on economy and labour market have shown the importance of broadening traditional economic geography to include the situation of the female workforce, women dominated sectors and female entrepreneurs in the analysis. They challenge socio-spatial attributes such as urban-rural, migrant-native and masculine-feminine; in so doing, they have explored actor-structure relationships and their interdependence. Furthermore, they have shown how the gendered labour market and gendered discourses about entrepreneurship constitute important aspects of the economy.

Expanding the Definition of Spatial Identities and Migration

The intersection of space and gender promotes analyses that expose the production of contextual identities as either confirming or transforming certain power structures, which will be discussed in this section. The spatial approach in investigating gender identities is a particular form of intersectional analysis, recognising ‘the significance of space in processes of subject formation’ (Valentine, 2007). Nordic gender researchers have obtained their empirical data from diverse social contexts and from different parts of the world, thereby contributing with several spectra of methodological and theoretical insights. In Global South studies, the spatial context is analysed to understand fully the place-specific character of discrimination and

power relations (Lindell, 2011). When war and displacement constitute the focus of the study, it is shown how female actors use their social locations attained before the war. War and displacement are not only about the relationship between ethnic groups. Gender and class need to be considered when working for peace and sustainability (Brun, 2005).

Identity and migration are two closely related themes, and the gender perspective has increasingly become implemented as an important dimension of migration research. The demographic composition entailed a growing interest in young people's migration patterns. It was found that women tended to leave more sparsely populated areas for urban areas, and that women's and men's future visions differed increasingly; specifically, young males remained in their home region to a greater degree, partly because of greater possibilities to relate to local role models (Dahlström, 1996). Gender differences concerning the monetary outcome means that men, generally, benefit more from migration compared to women (Nilsson, 2001). These findings opened up for studies on migration and non-migration, male coping strategies in relation to unemployment versus women's migration practices in relation to education and the entering of alternative sectors (Stenbacka, 2008; Karlsdóttir, 2009). The concept 'spatial capital' functions as an analytical tool in explaining a decision to migrate or stay and needs to be understood in relation to gender and the overall composition of different forms of capital. Privileged positions and the possession of a symbolic capital influence what future horizons are visible and desirable for young individuals (Forsberg, 2019).

In several studies, individual narratives have been interpreted and analysed in relation to spatial power relations, such as hegemonic constructions of rural versus urban gender norms. However, while migration is often viewed as a means to avoid these predetermined roles, young people who remain might also contribute to changes. Young individuals are increasingly seen as agents in, rather than victims of, urbanisation processes and transformations of traditional gender norms (Stenbacka et al., 2017).

The threefold model of space, introduced by Lefebvre (1991) and developed by Halfacree (2006), has inspired Norwegian research on internal migration and how these migration streams relate to preservation and transformation of local gender relations or gender contracts. This model for interrogation of rural change highlights the way in which migration interacts with place, and that migration is an outcome of the spatiality of the destination and the intentions of the in-migrants (Grimsrud, 2011). Female migration both sustains and challenges spatial traditional gender contracts (Munkejord, 2009).

The statement in gender studies that sexual identities cause specific migration patterns has been investigated from a geographical perspective by Wimark (2014). His study on migration patterns among gay men in Sweden and Turkey contradicts this hypothesis. He found that the migration patterns are more linked to life processes and patterns, similar to those of heterosexuals, and less to the sexual identity per se. Thereby, he challenges existing notions on rural-urban migration streams among homosexuals.

Local and global restructuring, including an intersectional approach, inspires several studies on migration and labour market processes. A study by Júlíusdóttir et al. (2013) on Icelandic migration constitutes an example, where the social and spatial mobility among women is analysed as intersecting with ethnicity and class. Labour market transformation gives rise to internal and international migration streams; immigrant women have taken over low-strata jobs. Migration among male Icelanders, on the other hand, initiated by the ups and downs of the construction industry, recruited for skilled jobs in peripheral regions in Norway, is probably merely filling gaps in regional labour markets in a similar way as immigrants in Iceland. Such processes, also understood as socio-spatial mobility, contribute to geographies of labour, by paying attention to a segmented and segregated labour market where gendered coded work involves categories of race and class (Zampoukos, 2015). These studies contribute theoretically to an understanding of how national and international migration streams are closely connected and that migration streams need to be analysed as parts of a wider web of diverse streams, rather than a link between two destinations.

Internationalisation of the workforce has increasingly become a theme in studies on international migration and gender. Studies on female labour migration, in relation to motherhood and living conditions for children left behind, contribute with intergenerational perspectives. Global power relations, leaning on economic and political relationships, are revealed (Aragao-Lagergren, 2010). An intersectional approach illuminates the way gender, class and nationality/ethnicity interact, inform and reproduce spatialised domination and labour exploitation (Hierofani, 2016). Such geographical power asymmetries are present in the bodies of individuals and have an impact on the sending as well as the receiving countries (Webster, 2016).

Studies on rural masculinities contribute with knowledge on intra-gender relations associated with spatial urban-rural tensions, which in some contexts might appear stronger than inter-gender conflicts (Bye, 2010). Emphasising discursive elements of rural masculinities, such as traditional and backwards, reveals the presence of hegemonic urban ideals and othering processes (Stenbacka, 2011). The construction of spatial rural identities from 'the inside' demonstrates the prevalence of non-hegemonic masculinities. Contrary to emphasising 'macho' traits (Aure & Munkejord, 2015), masculinities are explored as factors structuring a broader understanding of spatial identities.

It is relatively uncommon for gender geographers to rely on historical data, but there are some. One example is Gräslund Berg (2011) who in her analysis of medieval maps identified hidden traces of female activities. Another example is Loftsdóttir (2008, 2015) who scrutinises the Icelandic nationality and explores an Icelandic struggle with 'otherness' at different times in history: one in 1905, and the other in 2008. Her analysis reveals that Icelandic nationality is normalised as male, and it identifies Icelandic anxieties about being classified with the 'wrong' people – since this could disturb the attempt to situate themselves within the 'civilised' part of the world. However, the historic association with the exotic and its gendered manifestations is, today, viewed as an asset in branding the nation within the context

of the tourist and state industries. Thus, the author illuminates how gender identities and constructions are made into commodities.

A micro-perspective on space is represented by studies on the body as a site, where power is played out. A combination of urban theories and intersectional approaches has inspired studies on the gendered body, being in and out of place. The nation-race-sexuality relationship, including post-colonial theory, is developed by Molina (2007) in her study on home and homelessness and the problematic racialised female body. This refers to the women's strong private disjunction, the exclusion from the home and the connotation as 'stranger'.

Summarised, these studies can be characterised as analysing geopolitical processes 'on the ground' (Jacobsen, 2019). Studies on spatial identities, based on empirical material including narratives and observations, effectively illuminate gendered spatial power geometries of dominance and subordination. Entering a particular room or space implicates for example to be in one or the other position. The gender-geographical analyses are per se devoted to intersectional perspectives, and in addition to gender and space, they often also include social categories such as race and class. The gender-geographical research field consists of empirical contributions that stretch across regional, national and international scales. Political geographical processes are made visible through field studies on regional and international gender relations of power. Migrants' sense-making and migration biographies are central, as are individuals' perceptions of how gender identities are shaped in relation to space. As such, these studies exemplify how gender geography studies elaborate on the theoretical socio-spatial arena.

Highlighting the Mutual Interdependence of Gender and Planning

Prevailing gender relations impact how planning takes shape. This relation also works the other way around, i.e. how the society is planned will affect how gender is experienced and practised. This section comprises works on planning and power balances in public spaces. However, the intersection with private spaces and arenas included in everyday lives is explicit. By using feminist theorisation and planning theory, planners' conceptions of gender and the manner in which they incorporate a gender perspective into comprehensive physical planning is scrutinised. Planners themselves, as gendered actors, are sometimes the subject of studies. Dichotomies, private and public space, everyday life and networks, are examples of central concepts used to expose gendered planning processes.

Control over space, the right to mobility and accessibility to urban spaces are all gendered aspects of planning, which are analysed in studies using concepts such as social production of space, empowerment, post-colonialism and intersectionality. The production of urban space as processes that exclude women engages several geographers within the Nordic countries. One subject of analysis is fear in relation

to public urban space. Koskela (1997), for example, sees fear as both a consequence of the unequal status of women, and a preserver of the same inequalities. Women's relations to space involve exclusion, following from the risk of violence and incidents of sexual harassment. Spatial consequences are traced from events infused with such social and emotional aspects. By scrutinising media discourses of fear and crime, it is shown that these representations of cities 'in fear' become part of the description of urban places and create generalised patterns of gendered and racialised fear of violence in public space (Sandberg, 2020).

Also, how planning practices have been influenced by the changing ethnic composition of the population is analysed from a gender perspective. Integration policy is interpreted as a practise of difference, rather than fulfilling the goals of the integration policy expressed in terms of similarity and equality (Grip, 2010). Analysis of bodily aspects within urban public spaces shows the intersection with global political processes. Sexist and racist violence is interpreted as linked to the global geopolitical context, as well as to national contexts of political processes and the local urban context where life is lived (Listerborn, 2016).

Analysis of regional planning from a gender perspective spans from a variety of aspects. One example is identity politics and culture as a regional resource, another is planning of transport corridors at the European level and a third example is consequences of regional enlargement (Friberg, 2008). Within the European Union, policy aims to enhance regional learning and increase gender equality; intentions that are challenged but also enriched by regional variations. Political concepts and visions might be shared, while local gender relations complicate the implementation (Stenbacka, 2015). Conceptual tools such as homosocial networks and hegemonic masculinity add to an understanding of the informal character of regional planning and a multi-spatial local and global networking (Forsberg & Lindgren, 2010). Politicising gendered power relations is also scrutinised by investigating the goal of creating a gender equal city (Sandberg & Rönnblom, 2016).

Transport and mobility studies, sub-fields within urban and regional planning, have contributed to theoretical and empirical conquests. Commuting, a practice that affects social life, is investigated in relation to work, housing and the consequences for everyday life and the relationship between family and work life. Applying a time-geographical framework and method of analysis, with its specific conceptual apparatus, contributes to an increased understanding of the gendered aspects of commuting (Lindqvist Scholten et al., 2014). Gender based transport research account for diverse aspects shaping the work trip, and recent research confirm earlier identified inequalities and attached balances of power, with regard to women having less spatial reach and access to the labour market (Gil Solá, 2013; Friberg, 2008). Transport planning, for many years affected by a masculine gender code, is being challenged by researchers who add alternative, often qualitative, methods to the understanding of transport systems and their users. Applying qualitative and critical epistemologies brings increased knowledge to the transport planning research field (Joelsson & Scholten, 2019). The diversity of social positions, such as gender, age and ableism, is key to understanding the planning practices regarding equity and accessibility; transport planning is an explicit political practice.

To sum up, the mutual interdependence of gender and planning has engaged geographers since the introduction of gender geography. As a result, planning has been enriched by theoretical perspectives and empirical investigations that connect planning to challenges in everyday life. Interestingly, quite a few have used the theoretical framework of time geography in planning research from a gender perspective. Along the way, it has become evident to add a gender perspective in exploring the concept of commuting and women's everyday lives. In studies on segregation and displacement, the intersectional aspects of space, race and gender have contributed to wider understandings of power and exposure, threats in public spaces and methods for planning at local and regional levels. Theoretical understanding of gendered socio-spatial relations intersects with planning practices in gender-geographical research.

Emphasising Nordic Distinctiveness – A Synthesis

A significant part of Nordic gender geography has been inspired by theories developed by Anglophone feminist scholars. In some fields, the theories have been applied to studies in a Nordic context and have been useful in explaining and analysing certain features. However, in other fields, these theories have generated research that question its validity. Feminist researchers from countries outside the Anglo-American world have increasingly come to examine how so-called international research is biased, as a majority of published studies come from the United States and England (García Ramon et al., 2006), and several studies have highlighted a need to reformulate theories that have arisen in the Anglo-American part of the world and formulated new theories with a solid base in empirical research in different contexts. Setten (2003, p. 134), for example, pays attention to competing notions of landscape. Moreover, with her study in southern Norway, she explores 'the often taken for granted idea of the visual, scenic nature of landscape and what by leading Anglophonic feminist landscape scholars is seen to be a penetrating masculine gaze inherent in the visual', and landscape as 'the material manifestation of a polity and its body of customs and practices'. Landscape as scenery is contrasted with landscape as customary practice in place. If researchers are to engage critically in both landscape discourses, she argues, the dynamism of lived lives needs to be included. Along the same strand, Forsberg and Gunnerud Berg (2003) challenge the theory of 'the rural idyll' – including a traditional gender arrangement – as the driving force for counter-urbanisation migration. With empirical examples from Sweden and Norway, the authors found quite different results. The migrating families were much more well-informed about the living conditions in the countryside and the rural landscape than just relying on old-fashioned and stereotypical myths. The decision to move to a rural environment could not be traced to purposes related to traditional gender practices.

Contextual Gender Theorising

Within Nordic gender geography, there has thematically been a shift from an empirical focus on women, to structural-relational analysis and an actor perspective, and from one single gender theory to a range of various gender theories, along with a pronounced increased interest in intersectionality. A specific characteristic is the use of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Nevertheless, the qualitative methodologies have had a significant and growing precedence in relation to quantitative methods. This is more so in contemporary studies, where questions of gender identity and performance are gaining ground in feminist geographical studies.

Some female researchers have made important contributions to formulating alternative socio-spatial gender theories. Ann-Catrine Åquist (1992), from Sweden, specifically oriented her research towards a critical assessment of a geographical theory, namely time geography, first developed by Torsten Hägerstrand (1985). She did this by analysing the theory through the lens of women's everyday lives. Inger Birkeland in Norway (2002) challenged the geographical theory of the nature/culture relation through interpreting interviews by female travellers to Nordkap using the French philosopher Luce Irigaray and the French feminist non-dualistic understanding of gender. In Denmark, Kirsten Simonsen (2007) developed a space-specific practice theory that has been applied in several Nordic gender studies. Her body-oriented spatial approach has likewise been of inspiration to many (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020).

With her path-breaking book *Gender Trouble* (1990), the philosopher Judith Butler has made an impressive impact on gender research worldwide. Her linguistic oriented theory effectively articulates how gender is produced in social processes, and that gender is socially constructed. She took this standpoint further and challenged the heterosexual assumption in traditional feminist theory and questioned the sex/gender dichotomy. For her, gender is performance, and identities do not pre-exist their performance (Gregson & Rose, 2000, 438). Her analysis has influenced feminist research in essential ways, and she has also been cited in gender geography works. However, her psychoanalytically inspired analysis has some constraints for spatial gender analysis. Nelson (1999) articulated the limitations with Butler's approach by stating that it means 'a subject abstracted from personal, lived experience as well as from its historical and geographical embeddedness' (Nelson, 1999, 332). In addition, she argues, performativity 'provides no space for conscious reflexivity, negotiation or agency in the doing of identity' (Nelson, 1999, 332). We believe that Nordic gender geographers' interest in subjects, actors and the materiality of places has led them to extend the search towards other theoretical approaches. Most importantly, the acknowledgement of individuals' gendered biographies – biographies that are constructed within one's culture – means that space and time are crucial dimensions and that the subject pre-exists the performance (Brickell, 2003). The strength of geographical analysis is the ability to identify and challenge both structural and material circumstances as well as the identities, biographies, performances and intentions of gendered actors.

Among attempts to develop gender-geographical theory, we will exemplify by presenting the local gender contract analysis and the ‘going gender’ approach. The intersectional analysis has gained much attention as it problematises the simple dichotomy of gender in traditional gender theory, inspiring deeper examinations of other influential attributes such as age, sexual identity, ethnicity – and space. By applying the concept of a local gender contract as an analytical tool, it is possible to explain how, seemingly contradictory, gender relations can appear simultaneously, and that individuals’ or groups’ own reflections may arise from pre-existing perceptions of space (Forsberg, 2001; Forsberg & Stenbacka, 2017). In our view, the concept of local gender contract acknowledges the complexity of spatial scales, enabling studies on micro-, meso- and macro-level; it adds the spatial aspect to the intersectional approach. It is an attempt to develop a gender-geographical theory as it lends itself to analyses of spatial variations and explores gender relations as developing from the intersection of structures and actors. It enables a possibility to break the tendency to homogenise gender relations through visualising the importance of spatial particularities. With this concept, it is possible to distinguish and analyse gender relations in different spatial contexts within different scales, rather than striving for ‘order’ or spatial generalisations. Early influences on this came from Nordic philosophers and historians such as Hanne Haavind (1985) from Norway and Yvonne Hirdman (1990) from Sweden, who, from different perspectives, contributed to an understanding of the relativity of female subordination. This was, in many works, transferred to geography by introducing space, in order to explain the variety of local gender relations and of how they were negotiated and re-negotiated.

A gender contract concerns the formal, as well as informal, mechanisms that affect the way men and women relate to and confront each other, on both a structural and a personal level. Men and women shape and reshape these contracts by acting in line with, or in opposition, to them. Gender contracts are, in spite of its formal connotations, informal negotiations on what behaviour is expected from men and women, respectively. These contracts work at the metaphysical level, including cultural myths and representations; the concrete and institutional level, for example, in employment and politics; and the individual level, among men and women at home, and in relationships. The contracts are rigid and solid but not fixed, and they provide some scope for negotiation, albeit not on equal terms. Embedded in the contracts are significant power relations based upon male superiority (Hirdman, 1990).

The local context is active in reproducing and maintaining, as well as transforming, gender relations and thereby reshaping the gender contract. Changes in the local labour market will affect how men and women relate to each other, as we saw in the Norwegian example that introduced this chapter. In addition, spatial variations in gender contracts at local and regional levels will affect, and be affected by, other activities and outcomes from policy and planning. Thus, this concept, embracing a space-sensitive approach, is developed to strengthen analysis in research as well as in development of policy.

A further analysis along this line is the going gender approach. ‘Going gender’ is a spatial activity that involves agency and structure (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020). Our main argument is that gendered practices are in motion because of individuals’

struggle to perform according to diverse and sometimes conflicting gender contracts in various places and milieus. 'Going-gender' analysis focuses specifically on the instability of gender practices. People can 'go gender' in different ways and to varying degrees, depending on their gender, age, sexuality, biographical and geographical background. These demanding gender practices may be intentional and involve negotiation. For example, when people move or migrate between places, they have to handle the intersections and dilemmas of diverse gender contracts by applying a 'going gender' practice. This emphasises the transfigurative character of 'doing gender' and, most importantly, acknowledges the reflexive attitudes and strategic approaches of individuals.

Conclusion

From our analysis of Nordic gendered geographies, we identify a potential for a significant contribution to gender theory and to socio-spatial analysis of power. Regardless of dissimilarities in research topics, methods and theoretical concepts, gender geography can contribute to a contextual gender theory, emphasising space as both a designer and an interpreter of gender relations. Socio-spatial gender theorising can modify the idea of universal and all-embracing theoretical explanation of how gender is constructed. Gender geography explains how gender relations are produced, reproduced and re-negotiated in everyday lives at the local level; in such analysis, there are implicit spatial and material aspects. Regional and local gender relations become a player in the structure-agency relationship. Thus, a socio-spatial power analysis benefits from a contextual understanding of gender.

Even though the number of female geographers is steadily increasing, the future brings some challenges. Webster and Angela Caretta (2019) exemplified some of the difficulties that young female geographers still encounter in their way into the present neoliberal academy, where the present workplace cultures and power relations may act in a preventive way. They testify to an increasing precariousness of academic jobs and growing managerialism together with new demands for entering the contemporary academic job market. Another challenge is that Nordic feminist geography has failed to make a notable impact on overall gender studies, and gender geography has not become an obvious and respected sub-discipline in geographical teaching and research. Still, mainstream teaching takes the supposed gender neutral 'man-and-environment' perspective as its point of departure, and gender research seldom appears as representing successful research at the departments' websites.

Furthermore, there are still traces of suspicion, more so after some right wings' public attacks on gender research and its supposed political infiltration. Even if there is considerable gender research going on, as we have shown, we are still waiting for a gender turn in spatial research in the Nordic geography departments. There is a vibrant development in contemporary gender theory, waiting to be integrated into geographical research. A final challenge is to engage more male researchers to

adopt a gender perspective in their studies. There is a potential for exciting new orientations and theoretical improvements with engagements by the next generation of geographers.

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