Amusement Leaves the Port: Pleasure Institutions and the Reshaping of Gothenburg’s Material and Nonmaterial Borders, 1860s-1923

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Abstract
Spaces of pleasure tend to unite people and bridge sociocultural boundaries while involving exclusion mechanisms and tools for social control. Institutions of pleasure also contribute to the spatial configuration of cities. This article explores the role played by pleasure institutions in marking material and nonmaterial borders in turn-of-the-century Gothenburg. It examines how internal city borders, and, in particular, those between areas seen as “port districts” and those conceived as the “city centre,” were constructed, maintained, and given meaning through institutions of pleasure, and how these borders in turn shaped the city’s pleasure culture. Analyzing different social actors’ share in the social practices and discourses that constructed these borders, I argue that pleasure institutions played an important role in the reconfiguration of Gothenburg’s urban space in the course of the city’s tension-fraught entry into urban modernity.

Keywords
Gothenburg, pleasure institutions, borders, port district, urbanization, alcohol restriction policy, workers’ movement, emigration

Pleasure institutions matter in the making of the modern city. They were crucial for Gothenburg’s development from a peripheral port town into a city with an international profile and its own cultural identity. This article argues that there is a deep entanglement between the making of a city’s map and its representations, inner-city borders, and pleasure institutions. In Gothenburg, the long turn of the century around 1900 was a crucial period in the tracing and reconstruction of inner-city borders that interacted with different forms of pleasure. At that time, European cities were seeking ways into “modernity,” among other things, by boosting their amusement facilities. In a port city, with its image of unruly pleasure institutions in disreputable sailor towns, the “modernization” of both urban space and pleasure involved the tracing of new borders between “the port” and “the city”—not least through institutions of pleasure. Institutions of pleasure, as understood here, embrace all forms of public amusement staged either in spatial manifestations, that is, a specific building or a fixed outdoor site, or through

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regular organization, that is, street music or festivals taking place at varying places. Institutions of pleasure were shaped through both practice and discourse, through city planning as well as through media representations. Such institutionalized pleasure was part of people’s daily lives and of their imaginary, and thereby contributed to giving the city a particular socio-spatial order.

Although not all, but a number of these institutions of pleasure qualify as pleasurescapes. A crucial feature of pleasurescapes is the floating nature of their boundaries, which is due to the constant need for involved actors to adapt to changing spatial and sociopolitical circumstances. Some pleasure institutions reviewed in this article are, instead, clearly and purposely demarcated areas in urban space or appear as temporary performances, such as the enclosed parks or prearranged outdoor concerts. The term pleasurescape here applies to those spatial ensembles of amusement, mainly bars and pubs that spontaneously emerged in the urban space as a response to spatially and temporarily confined social needs. These pleasurescapes—temporarily—catered to the early modern sailor community in Majorna, lined trading routes through the city center, or accommodated emigrants on their transit stay in the port city. In doing so, the pleasurescapes were distinguishable by different degrees of commercialization and institutionalization, two features that firmly cement the term within urban modernity. To be certain, pleasurescapes, and their inherent relationship with boundaries, have a peculiar tendency to interact with inner-city border-making processes. Yet, as this article will show, this holds true for pleasure institutions that fail to qualify as pleasurescapes, as well.

Around 1900, Gothenburg metamorphosed from a small port town on the Northern European periphery into a well-known maritime city whose three hundredth anniversary in 1923 was celebrated in newspapers from all over the world. During the long turn of the century, Gothenburg accomplished its entry into industrial modernity while also confirming its status as Sweden’s foremost port. The city experienced substantial population growth mainly due to immigration from surrounding agricultural regions. With 105,000 inhabitants in 1890, Gothenburg’s population grew to 168,000 in 1910; however, the city was still relatively small. The city authorities, urban planners, and the bourgeois elite, nonetheless, were ambitiously striving to place Gothenburg on the European map of big cities, providing it with wide boulevards, a supply of high culture and “decent” popular amusement.

This article covers the period from the decline, in the late 1860s, of the sailor town pleasurescape of Majorna, to the 1923 city jubilee. Similar to other cities during these decades, Gothenburg underwent important changes to its urban fabric. In the 1860s, plans were made for the old garrison town to develop outside its ramparts. In 1868, the formerly independent sailor town of Majorna was integrated into the city and, as a consequence of this administrative act, Majorna’s urban fabric changed profoundly. From 1870 onward, at the opposite side of the city, Gothenburg’s new central, Parisian-style boulevard Kungsportsavenyn (no. 7 on Maps 1 and 2) was laid out. The new esplanade at the head of the boulevard, with its museums, theater, and concert house, became the center of the city’s anniversary celebrations, the perceived culmination point of Gothenburg’s development from a port town into a world-renowned city with an international port. In 1923, Gothenburg’s three hundredth anniversary and the opening of the Liseberg amusement park (no. 6 in Maps 1-3) demonstrated that the port district had lost its former role to other “modern” forms of public pleasure that had changed the fabric of the city.

Scholarly research into the sociocultural aspects of Gothenburg’s past is scarce as generations of historians have mainly focused on the port’s economic history. A recent volume on “Gothenburg through the ages,” published by historians from the University of Gothenburg for the city’s four hundredth anniversary, sets out to close this still existing gap, without however taking into consideration the city’s history of pleasure. Historian Jan Christensen analyses how Gothenburg, between 1850 and 1920, thanks to generous donations from the city’s economic elite, was transformed from a mere trading center into a city of culture, boasting a symphony orchestra, a concert house, a large theater, museums, and a university. Musicologist Olle Edström has explored
the importance of live music for Gothenburg’s public life, a crucial insight that also illuminates this article. Yet the role played by popular amusement in general in Gothenburg’s modernizing project still awaits investigation.

It is widely accepted that big cities played a decisive role in the definition of high modernity between 1880 and 1960. Historians also agree that the development of mass culture, especially in big cities, was a driving force in the standardization and conventionalization of spheres of life that came to characterize the epoch of high modernity. Yet the focus on mass culture embodied in public pleasure cultures also highlights the inner tensions and contradictions of the modernizing project. Pleasure institutions were as much an instrument for emancipation as they were a tool for control; they had effects of democratization as much as of exclusion and segregation. As such, they contributed to the segregation of urban spaces. In addition, they served to trace material and nonmaterial borders in the urban fabric. This article engages with this imprint of modernity on the port city of Gothenburg. It analyses how dominant social forces, that is, the city administration, cultural entrepreneurs, urban planners, the liberal workers’ movement, and bourgeois commentators set out to restructure the city’s pleasure institutions to make them conform to ideals of disciplined public pleasures. Public policy, urban planning, and media representations, such as travel guides, widespread book publications, and newspapers all contributed to the construction of borders within the city by turning pleasure institutions into crucial elements in defining and demarcating urban milieux, in particular the role of the port district.
Focusing on border-making, this article connects to the flourishing field of border studies, which, over the past three decades, has broadened and nuanced the conception of frontiers, applying it to phenomena other than national or state boundaries, and not least to city borders. In fact, as sociologist Markus Schroer puts it, “the city is full of borders, visible and invisible,” which are constantly subject to change. As notably argued by Stein Rokkan, the foundation of old cities with territorial borders was the most obvious attempt to protect property at the same time as controlling both inhabitants and in- and outbound traffic. With the disappearance of physical
barriers around the city, that is, the demolition of city walls in many European cities in the middle of the nineteenth century, internal city borders gained importance.\(^{19}\) This was also the case in Gothenburg: From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the city started to expand outside its former ramparts and developed new types of inner borders. Moreover, with the administrative integration of formerly independent municipalities from the 1860s onward, borders that had previously delimited the city were absorbed and had to be given new meaning. The same applies to material borders within the city, in particular the river between Gothenburg and Hisingen, the moat between the city’s early modern center and the “new” Gothenburg, and the canals and streets in the old center.

To be sure, borders are subjective experiences that can differ according to a person’s social status, gender, and national or ethnic origin; borders can be visible for some and invisible for others, easy to cross for some and difficult to pass for others.\(^{20}\) However, this article will not deal with the perception of borders by the city’s inhabitants. Instead, it focuses on the construction of borders through institutions of pleasure as enacted and controlled by public officials, the police, urban architects, cultural entrepreneurs, and contemporary bourgeois observers. The article explores how pleasure institutions were used by city authorities, planners, and social movements as tools to master public space. In addition, it examines the way in which these pleasure institutions were represented by contemporary observers. This analysis considers institutions of pleasure as arranged events, as pieces of architecture, and as enclosed spaces that all had their share in shaping the city map—both materially and in people’s imaginations.

I draw on a variety of sources, including official city council statements, documentation from associations involved in institutions of pleasure,\(^ {21}\) and police records.\(^ {22}\) These archival sources

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**Map 3.** Gothenburg in 1927. Stadsingenjörskontorets Karta över Göteborg, 1927.

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Note:
1. Krokäng Park.
6. Liseberg.
are supplemented by newspaper articles, travel guides, literary accounts of the city, and written personal memoirs. Early twentieth-century publications with their nostalgic descriptions of “the old Gothenburg” are also referred to, in particular the book *The Old Gothenburg* by novelist and journalist Carl R. A. Fredberg. Published on the occasion of Gothenburg’s anniversary, this three-volume work, which explores different city areas, special places, and people from a historical point of view, quickly sold out. Apparently, it served many city dwellers’ need to find security and reassurance from historic accounts in a context of intense urban change.23

The article focuses on how the changing borders within Gothenburg interacted with institutions of pleasure. Adopting a successively narrowing perspective, the article starts by considering the “natural border,” the Göta Älv River between Hisingen and central Gothenburg. In the late-nineteenth century, Hisingen was associated with a major working-class pleasure institution, Krokäng (no. 1 in Map 3), which emphasized the border between both the classes and the two parts of the city. The second section studies the symbolic border between Gothenburg and the sailors’ district Majorna. From the incorporation into the city of Majorna and the decline of its former pleasurescape in the late 1860s, pleasure institutions played into the construction of a symbolic border between the formerly different municipalities. Third, the text explores officially arranged pleasure institutions: enclosed amusement parks, Liseberg in particular, and free concerts conceived to discipline the workers’ leisure time. These pleasure institutions unfolded across the urban space, creating borders and delimited areas. Fourth, the article considers the pleasure-related border-markers that, from the 1870s onward, developed between the old city center and the “new” Gothenburg that was unfolding along wide boulevards leading away from the waterfront. Fifth, the article focuses on the old city center with its canal structure to give an account of the port-related pleasures there and their decline in the early twentieth century.

**On the Other Side of the River: Hisingen and Working-Class Amusement**

During the long turn of the century, alcohol consumption was perceived by the authorities as a major social evil and, as such, it was a recurring topic at city council meetings. In 1865, alcohol sale was entrusted to a non-profit-making company, the Göteborgs Utskänkningsaktiebolaget, renamed Göteborgssystemet at the beginning of the twentieth century. Göteborgssystemet issued renewable licenses to chosen pub owners, paid regular salaries to barkeeps, and invested its surplus earnings in projects combating alcohol abuse. Gothenburg’s police force and, from 1913, a new administrative body, the so-called “sobriety office,” were responsible for registering and administering the various licenses for selling spirits, wine, beer, coffee, and even cocoa. Through this registry, which amounted to a genuine bureaucratic apparatus, the police and the sobriety office guaranteed the maintenance of the alcohol regulation policy.24

Göteborgssystemet’s impact on Gothenburg’s pleasure institutions was huge and manifold, ranging from modeling the spatial development of pubs and drinking halls to shaping practices of eating, drinking, and dancing in cafes, restaurants, and elsewhere.25 Göteborgssystemet was equipped to determine the spatial features of alcohol-selling institutions in a twofold manner. First, the licensing system was designed to make sure that pubs and cafés did not mushroom in an uncontrolled way. In addition, the pubs’ inner and outer appearance had to conform to a standard: drinking halls had to be spacious and well-lit enough to prevent people drinking in hidden corners.26 In 1898, in addition to the city’s own control system, a legal act by the Regional Representation of the Swedish Kingdom banned the sale of spirits in supposedly vulnerable city districts lacking appropriate urban infrastructure. The ban covered the recently incorporated areas: the workers’ housing districts Annedal and Landala, most of the former sailor town Majorna, and Lundby on Hisingen where the popular pleasure institution Krokäng was located.27
The clearest border within Gothenburg is the Göta Älv River, which connects the port to the North Sea. As in many port cities stretching along an estuary, the river divides Gothenburg into a northern and a southern shore, with the city’s historical center on the southern bank. In the late-nineteenth century, the river’s northern bank on the island of Hisingen became home to large-scale shipyards and industrial plants that accounted for an important part of Gothenburg’s industrialization and economic development. In contrast, the inland areas of Hisingen only became part of Gothenburg with the administrative absorption of Lundby municipality in 1906. By 1907, this agricultural hinterland had turned into a major urbanization project under the direction of Albert Lilienberg (1879-1967), head of Gothenburg’s central urban planning office from 1907 to 1927.

Even before its incorporation and the island’s urbanization, Lundby on Hisingen was home to a major pleasure institution for Gothenburg’s working classes, the Krokäng Park. Since the 1890s, this natural park had hosted festivals and fairs during the summer, with dancing areas, music, theater performances, and playful competitions. Although it featured the city’s largest dance floor, Krokäng was poorly kept, full of large trees, and without significant infrastructure. As it had no restaurants or cafés, people had to prepare their own food and coffee on a site that bore little resemblance to a well-laid-out city park. Nevertheless, between 1903 and 1934, Krokäng was home to a major pleasure institution run by the social-democratic workers’ movement, the Arbetarekommun. Herman Lindholm, leader of the social-democratic movement and later prime mover behind the Liseberg amusement park, founded Krokäng in 1906 along the lines of officially accepted amusement that excluded alcohol consumption. Under Lindholm’s leadership, and following a nationwide trend, the rural site developed into a so-called Folkets Park (people’s park), with a merry-go-round, shooting ranges, and a stage for performances (Picture 1). The workers’ movement’s mouthpiece, the Gothenburg newspaper Ny Tid, helped...
position Krokäng as an institution that literally “belonged” to the workers, representing it as a major site for public pleasure, sociability, and gathering, for example, during the 1909 strike wave. Workers and their families, many of whom lived in Majorna and on Masthugget (no. 2 in Maps 1 and 2), spent their Sundays dancing and playing in the park, crossing the river by ferry early in the morning and returning home in the late afternoon.

The bourgeois newspaper Göteborgs Aftonblad called the amusement on offer in Krokäng “folknöje” (“popular pleasure”), marking a difference from events in city center pleasure institutions, which were instead termed “öffentlicha nöjen” (“public pleasure”). Krokäng had a demarcating function in several respects that was kept up by both the workers’ movement and the bourgeois press: as an institution of popular pleasure it emphasized the borders between the social classes in an extremely socially segregated city by translating them into a pleasure-bound spatial architecture. Crucially, the workers’ amusement park was situated “on the other side” of the city where no spirits were sold—in Krokäng Park no alcohol was sold at all—and not within the modernizing parts of the city’s south bank. With its countrified style, Krokäng stood out not only in clear contrast to downtown urban forms of public amusement, but also to institutions of pleasure situated in carefully laid out city parks such as Slottsskogen. The type of sociability and amusement offered in Krokäng became outdated with the opening of the modern Liseberg amusement park, whose creators explicitly targeted the working classes by offering roller coasters instead of Punch and Judy shows—and an even bigger dance floor. In 1934, after a long period of economic troubles, Krokäng closed its doors and, with it, Hisingen lost its sole major site of institutionalized public amusement.

As an institution run by the workers’ movement allied to the temperance campaign, no alcohol was served at Krokäng during its first years of existence. As a Folkets Park, Krokäng was part of a shared initiative by the city authorities and the workers’ movement to foster institutions of “decent” pleasure for the working classes who did not have access to bourgeois pleasure institutions in the city center. As such, Krokäng formed part of a public policy designed to restrict alcohol consumption. From the 1860s, alcohol restriction measures were intimately interwoven with the development of Gothenburg’s institutions of pleasure and served as a tool for controlling public space. Both of these aspects were particularly prominent in marking the symbolic border between central Gothenburg and Majorna, the city’s sailor town.

Combating Alcohol Consumption and Deviant Pleasure: The Symbolic Border Between Gothenburg and the Seafaring Community of Majorna

In the former sailor town of Majorna, major urbanization from the 1870s to the 1930s and the alcohol regulation policy worked hand in hand to transform the area, in particular its informal pleasurescapes, while creating the myth of the sailor town’s otherness that was spread by many turn-of-the-century accounts.

Historically, and similar to other port cities, Gothenburg’s sailor town had developed outside the city’s administrative borders, in the independent municipality of Majorna (no. 3 in Maps 1 and 2). Living there enabled seafaring people to come and go even when the city gates were closed at night. Before the enlargement of the Göta Älv river and the construction of the more centrally located Masthuggskajen quay in 1882-1892, large ships had to dock in Majorna. Hence it was there that, from the seventeenth century, a seafaring culture developed with numerous small pubs and informal sites of pleasure, including a number of brothels. This pleasurescape avant la lettre, lacking systematic commercialization and institutionalization, was intimately linked to the area’s spontaneous and irregular building development. Gothenburg’s twentieth-century city architect Albert Lilienberg held that Majorna’s urban fabric “contrasted sharply with
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the rectangular structure of the garrison town Gothenburg. The absorption into the city of Majorna in 1868 entailed profound spatial transformations for the as yet scarcely urbanized area; especially, but not only during Lilienberg’s time in office at the city’s planning bureau, entire quarters of buildings—including their amusement sites—were replaced by new housing constructions.

Carl R. A. Fredberg’s account of Majorna’s lost institutions of pleasure became highly influential in shaping Majorna’s image, creating the narrative according to which Majorna’s administrative incorporation brought “law and order” to the formerly unruly seafarers’ district. This dominant narrative has it that the urbanization project, combined with the Göteborgssystemet and the ban on alcohol sales, destroyed Majorna’s informal pleasurescape. While the spatially concentrated ensemble of loosely institutionalized amusement sites declined, officially licensed and genuinely institutionalized forms of pleasure did not replace them. Turn-of-the-century travel guides, town descriptions, and police records registering alcohol license renewals mention no major pleasure institutions in Majorna at that time. Instead, by the early twentieth century, “old Majorna’s” seafaring culture, characterized by uncontrolled urban growth, hard drinking, and prostitution in countless small pubs, had faded to a myth that perpetuated the former sailor town’s otherness. Particularly influential in this regard was Carl Fredberg’s widely circulated Gothenburg anthology, published in 1919. The author goes into some depth in describing Majorna’s past pleasurescape, affirming that “still at the beginning of the 1860s, fifteen pubs and ten alcohol outlets, without counting the numerous informal pubs, served a population of only 7,000 people.” Cheap alcohol, he went on, was the root cause of “social demoralization” in Majorna (“en verklig samhällets pärtherd”), with the police officer’s wife running a brothel and her husband sitting and socializing with clients. To be sure, this imaginary border between deviant premodern Majorna and the industrializing city with its ideal of disciplined popular pleasure served to reassure a middle-class readership at a time of massive urban change.

On a material level, a particular pleasure institution dating back to the seventeenth century marked the former administrative border between Gothenburg and Majorna. Unlike Majorna’s informal pleasurescape, the Henriksberg tavern endured throughout the nineteenth century, representing one of Gothenburg’s busiest pleasure institutions. Situated exactly on the former municipal border, Henriksberg was a vibrant public amusement venue that featured countless dancing evenings and other festivities in its large festival room. Well into the twentieth century, it was a symbolic border-marker between Gothenburg and its former sailor town, which had become relatively empty of public pleasures. With the harsh alcohol restrictions reigning in Majorna, and the opening of more centrally located quays, the center of seafarers’ and dockworkers’ amusement moved closer to the city, settling around the square Järntorget (no. 4 in Maps 1 and 2) in particular.

Järntorget had been a site of alcohol-related public pleasure since the early nineteenth century. In 1884, the poet and writer Albert Cederblad (1846-1901) remembered the square as a place for beer drinking—as well as for a pleasure activity known as “chimnöje,” popular during the 1860s and offered by the Café Carusell at Järntorget. The square, one of the busiest in town, was close to the Masthuggkajen quay, which opened in 1892. Well into the twentieth century, seafaring people, together with dockers and other port workers, spent their leisure time on the streets and in the bars around Järntorget. As the area was much less affected by the alcohol restriction policy than Majorna, bars and cafés abounded in and around the square, with theaters and cinemas opening as well. As port activities moved to Masthuggkajen, Järntorget took on Majorna’s former role as a sailors’ district, featuring hard drinking and street violence. At the same time, with the opening of the Arbetareföreningen’s (workers’ association) headquarters at Järntorget in 1909 (Picture 2), the square developed into the spatial center of the social-democratic workers’ and trade union movement—and into a center of officially arranged public pleasure.
The Management of Public Amusement and the Creation of Bordered Pleasure Spaces

From the introduction of the Gothenburg-System regulating alcohol sales from 1865 to the creation of the Slottsskogen city park (no. 5 in Maps 1 and 2) in 1874 and the 1923 opening of the Liseberg amusement park, the city authorities, the city-owned company Göteborgssystemet, and the workers’ organizations cooperated to create a supply of amusement that was “suitable” for the popular classes to distract them from drinking alcohol. This management of public pleasure played out across the urban area and contributed to creating bordered spaces of pleasure, with Slottsskogen to the southwest and Liseberg to the southeast of the old town.

Classical concerts were key to the joint action by the city council and the workers’ movement to combat alcohol consumption. Classical music was deemed particularly “elevating” for the workers’ moral behavior. Public funds were granted to the Arbetarinstitut (workers’ institute) to finance easily accessible concerts for working people.56 Starting from 1895, so-called folkkonserter (people’s concerts), performed by the city’s military band, took place on Friday evenings in the large hall of the Arbetarinstitut’s building at Skanstorg in western-central Gothenburg. In 1899, however, when a commission reported rising alcohol consumption, the city council concluded that Gothenburg still lacked sufficient institutions offering “suitable” (“lämplig”) amusement for the working classes, and that this lack was the major reason for continued alcohol abuse, mostly among men.57 To counter this, additional concerts were to be staged in areas where working-class people lived and worked, specifically in a housekeeping school in Majorna and in a gymnasium on Redbergslid in the industrial eastern part of the city. In its proposal to the city council, the Arbetarinstitut saw it as crucial for the music offer to embrace Gothenburg’s entire extent, from east to west, including Majorna, the Landala working-class district, the Nordstaden central port district, and the industrial area around Redbergslid.58 The spatial impact of the concerts increased further when in 1901 the city council allowed the organization of open-air concerts.
performances. Again, sites for open-air music were to be chosen to encompass the whole city, stretching the length of the waterfront. Concerts were to take place in public parks, on Hisingen, and in squares in the heart of the city center, at times of day when working people were leaving their workplaces to go home.59

Göteborgs Arbetareförening, founded in 1866, and the Arbetarinsti tut, founded in 1883, were major actors when it came to offering concerts, theater, and cinema to the male members of the working classes.60 Women were not formal members of these associations61; gender boundaries therefore played an important role in organized pleasure. Alcoholism being perceived as a masculine vice, countermeasures such as the open-air concerts were adapted to the supposed interests, needs, and living conditions of the male population. Nevertheless, other measures to discipline people’s leisure time targeted both sexes. During the long turn of the century, amusement parks created new types of material borders in the urban space, specifically between spaces of daily life and those designated for pleasure. To avoid people strolling in the streets during their free time and to counteract the spread of alcohol-selling pubs, city officials and the workers’ and temperance movements sponsored the development of enclosed areas of public amusement, much easier to control than pleasure institutions dispersed around the city.

The finest examples of the endeavor to spatially enclose public pleasure are the Slottsskogen city park, created from 1874 onward, and the Liseberg amusement park, opened in 1923. Unlike Krokäng Park, with its unkempt natural style, Slottsskogen and Liseberg were purpose-designed parks serving the explicit aim of distracting, relaxing, and entertaining the broad public. In contrast to Krokäng, which emphasized and strengthened class boundaries, and the centrally located bourgeois pleasure institutions, virtually inaccessible to members of the working classes, both Slottsskogen and Liseberg were designed to bridge class differences by attracting a mixed public of both sexes.62 The spatially enclosed areas, while tracing visual borders between the amusement site and the “regular” urban space, diluted nonmaterial class boundaries, albeit only superficially.63 Slottsskogen combined bridle paths with shooting ranges and Punch and Judy shows, thereby appealing to members of both the upper and lower classes.64 However, Slottsskogen’s extensive outdoor spaces, especially its dance floors, seem to have mainly attracted young working-class people, especially men.65 Two bourgeois observers, writer Anna Törnström and artist Ida Törnström, remarked in their memoirs of turn-of-the-century Gothenburg that visiting the park was inappropriate for unmarried women, and neither was it practiced by middle-aged men.66 In close proximity to the exclusive new bourgeois housing district Linnéstaden, built around 1900, far from the port,67 Slottsskogen eventually became an enclosed space for popular pleasure. As for Liseberg, social mixing was its explicit aim and a major argument put forward by the park’s advocates in the city council. Liseberg’s initiator and first director, social-democrat Herman Lindholm, and its construction director Jenzén considered social control a means of helping (self-)discipline the workers, whom they expected to exert more control over their (drinking) behavior under the watchful eye of the middle and upper classes.68

The enclosed amusement sites of Slottsskogen and Liseberg were integral parts of the authorities’ and the workers’ and temperance movements’ endeavor to master public space by disciplining (working) people’s leisure time. Late-nineteenth-century city guides and anthologies represent Slottsskogen as a major public amusement and entertainment venue, offering concerts, an open-air theater, dance floors, and several restaurants.69 Naturally, this city-promoting literature very seldom mentioned any deviant behavior, instead celebrating working people’s and families’ cheerful enjoyment of the natural surroundings, thereby contributing to the construction of Slottsskogen’s image as a place of sobriety.70 Yet, despite all the emphasis on people brewing coffee in the park,71 writer Albert Cederblad remarked that alcoholic drinks, if required, had to be brought from home because no café at Slottsskogen sold them.72 From 1908, not even beer was sold in the park, whose main café was run by the religious temperance society Vita Bandet.73

At Liseberg, alcohol and even spirits were sold, albeit under strict control. This policy followed some officials’ conviction—as well as that of business interests—that alcohol had to
be offered for the amusement park to represent a genuine alternative to existing pubs and also to attract the middle classes. The comparatively small size of the park, easier to police than the 785,000 m² of Slottsskogen, may have played into this decision. In addition, entry into Slottsskogen was free, whereas it cost 50 öre to get into Liseberg in the mid-twentieth century. Liseberg was built for the 1923 jubilee exhibition. Its initiators and advocates in the city council saw the amusement park as a response to the city’s long-standing need for easily accessible but “decent” amusement for the broad public that could finally counter alcohol abuse efficiently. Once the anniversary celebrations were over, the park would become a permanent business with the municipality as its major shareholder, thus making sure that this major pleasure institution remained under the city authorities’ control.

Liseberg—similar to the entire jubilee exhibition—was conceived as a demonstration par excellence of Gothenburg’s rise as a modern city at a time when amusement parks all over Europe were becoming a means of translating the modern urban lifestyle into funfair rides. The ambition of Jenzén, construction director and later business head of Liseberg, was to make it “Europe’s greatest amusement park,” boasting the continent’s longest roller coaster and various other amusement rides, in addition to dancing and concert halls, open-air theaters, and several restaurants. As for Slottsskogen, Carl Fredberg was not the only one to compare the park to its counterparts in Stockholm (the Djurgården), Paris (the Bois de Boulogne), and Rome (the Villa Borghese). According to the park’s creators and contemporary observers, Slottsskogen would transform Gothenburg’s urban image, still very much characterized by the port. This also holds true for Liseberg: the amusement park, located far from the port, was a means of dissociating “modern” Gothenburg’s image, public life, and popular amusement from the port, with its associations of deviant pleasures. Wide boulevards outside the old city ramparts were another important aspect of the construction of “modern” Gothenburg. Starting in the 1870s, pleasure institutions for the (upper-)middle classes around the new boulevards came to emphasize the border between the new center and the port district.

Inside and Outside the City Ramparts: The Port District versus “New” Gothenburg

Until the 1840s, the city walls of the former garrison town represented a highly visible border. However, even after the ramparts were demolished, and until the twentieth century, the moat still formed a boundary between the old and new city centers—especially in people’s mental maps. The old center around the port was associated with seafaring, commerce, and trade—and their related forms of pleasure. The new center developing around the large boulevards became associated with the bourgeois lifestyle, including its pleasure institutions. The old city center remained home to official buildings, the town hall, national bank, and main churches among them. City planners, however, along with contemporary observers and commentators, turned the new districts southwest of the port into the symbol of “modern” Gothenburg. In 1904, the encyclopedia Nordisk familjebok represented the area around the junction of Kungsportsavenyn and Vasagatan as the city’s “most fashionable district,” while that within the old ramparts constituted its “main part.”

By the 1860s, Haussmann-style boulevard culture had arrived in Gothenburg. Wide boulevards contrasting with the narrow streets of the old center led the way toward the city’s future, which, according to the city’s liberal elite, was to be shaped by high culture as much as by port-related commerce. The Kungsportsavenyn boulevard—the French term indicating the ambition of aligning Gothenburg with the French metropole—was conceived as the city’s new center, including ample provision for public pleasure. At the boulevard’s top end and as part of the jubilee exhibition, anniversary architects Sigfrid Ericson and Arvid Bjerke designed a large esplanade flanked by an art museum, an art hall for temporary exhibitions, a theater, and a
concert hall. The new building ensemble at Götaplatsen placed high cultural amusement at the visual center of the city—similar to Liseberg located far from the port.

Created from 1870 onward, Kungsportsavenyn abounded with cafés and restaurants. Yet it was two pleasure institutions in particular that gave the boulevard a touch of the sought-after metropolitan style. During the long turn of the century, Lorensberg (no. 8 in Maps 1 and 2) and Trädgårdsföreningen (no. 9 in Maps 1 and 2) became Gothenburg’s most representative and publicly visible pleasure institutions. In their heyday in the 1890s, the two institutions figured in every city guide, posted advertisements in the city’s official address book, and had their program announced daily in the city’s newspapers. Both Lorensberg and Trädgårdsföreningen were places of mainly—but not exclusively—bourgeois pleasure, offering entertainment in a “tasteful” park atmosphere markedly different from the narrow streets and taverns located in the old center, where hardly any green spaces existed.

The botanical garden known as Trädgårdsföreningen was created when the city walls were demolished in the 1840s. Situated immediately in front of the moat, the garden constituted, together with Kungsparken, which stretched along the former ramparts, a green strip that visually marked the border between “old” and “new” Gothenburg. Trädgårdsföreningen’s visible border function was enhanced by the grandiose architecture of the park’s buildings and by cultural facilities that claimed public life for the “new” Gothenburg, while leaving the official and business part to the old center. Since its foundation in 1842, Trädgårdsföreningen has been a venue for musical performances. When the garden’s former music pavilion was moved to Slottsskogen in 1886, the newly built restaurant came to host an important concert program in which well-known musicians from Sweden and abroad performed. Yet Trädgårdsföreningen did not only host indoor concerts for the middle classes, but also free outdoor concerts by military brass bands that were popular among the lower classes. To be sure, the same summer concerts performed in Trädgårdsföreningen with an entrance fee and for free at Slottsskogen had a different social character. Working-class people were supposedly not at ease in Trädgårdsföreningen; however, from the late-nineteenth century, the botanical garden’s bourgeois character was to some extent attenuated by the regular performance of outdoor concerts targeting a broad public that included the working classes. From the late-nineteenth century onward, both Trädgårdsföreningen and Lorensberg marked a clearer border between the port district and “new” Gothenburg than between the social classes. In fact, not even Lorensberg was a genuinely exclusive place, although from the 1860s onward it mainly targeted the (upper)-middle classes.

Before the construction of Kungsportsavenyn, the Lorensberg estate was home to a popular garden restaurant located on the city’s outskirts. When Kungsportsavenyn and, particularly, the tram network were built in the 1880s, the area was incorporated into the city. From 1870, and under a succession of different so-called källarmästare (landlords), Lorensberg developed into the city’s main institution of bourgeois pleasure. Its advertisement in the 1885 city address calendar announced “[. . .] yet more improvements [at Lorensberg], such as the installation of electric light both inside and outside the buildings”; and the 1890 advertisement read, “the city’s noblest restaurant and café [. . .] French cuisine; the interior equipped in a modern style.”

Lorensberg’s restaurant and music pavilion offered various forms of entertainment, hosting temporary attractions—many in an exoticizing colonialist style, such as the performances by “negerkomiker” (“negro comedian”) Tom Lucette in the 1880s—as well as dances and other soirées. In 1885, a circus was opened and, in 1891, a music hall, which was replaced, in 1897, by a folkteater (people’s theater). Both the music hall (closed in 1896 due to a ban on alcohol sales at variety shows) and the folkteater featured a light, accessible repertoire, such as comedies and revues also aimed at the lower classes. Small shop owners would venture to Lorensberg to sip lemonade with their children and watch balloon artists. Yet Lorensberg was still a place where, as a Göteborgs-Posten column from 1896 reported, a seaman could easily spend his monthly salary in a single day. Seafarers unaware of the pleasurescape around Järntorget could
stay in the port area to seek entertainment without spending all their money because, as the city’s modern popular amusement facilities moved away from the waterfront, the port district remained home to port- and mobility-related pleasure institutions up to the 1910s.

**Around the Central Port: Canals, Streets, and the River as Dividing Lines between Fading Spaces of Pleasure**

Within the former city walls and in a comparatively small area, canals, streets, and the river functioned as physical borders between different microcosms, each of them built and maintained for a specific type of port- and mobility-related pleasure. Pleasure institutions on Skeppsbron (no. 10 in Maps 1 and 2) and in Västra Nordstaden (no. 11 in Maps 1 and 2) catered for people “on the move”: doing their business in the port, shifting commodities from Hisingen to Gothenburg, or in transit during emigration to the United States. Nevertheless, these port-related pleasures started to decline from the 1910s onward.

At the turn of the century, “big port business” was conducted on Skeppsbron, an area reserved for trade and other port industries but not for public life. The sole pleasure institution, situated on the quay from 1858 to 1910, advertised its raison d’être, namely, catering for people doing business in the port, through its name: the Café de Commerce. The café shared its representative address at Skeppsbron 1 with several trading firms, a hotel, and other port-related activities. Throughout the 1880s, Café de Commerce was home to a music hall that bourgeois observers represented as both famous and notorious. According to Carl Fredberg, Swedish and international female artists performed “suggestive songs” on the music hall stage. The bourgeois newspaper Göteborgs Handels-och Sjöfarts-Tidning announced its program on a daily basis while seeing the place as “infamous.”

Close to Skeppsbron, on Ekelundsgatan, the concentration of brothels was certainly no coincidence, but formed part of these port-related pleasures. With the 1908 ban on prostitution, however, the brothels closed down, as did the Café de Commerce. In 1910, urban planners replaced the ambivalent institution with a restaurant run by Göteborgssystemet, thereby integrating the waterfront into the city’s official pleasure infrastructure. Elsewhere in the port area, especially in Västra Nordstaden, changing modes of transport were one major reason for the decline of port-related pleasure institutions in the early twentieth century.

Strictly demarcated by the river and two canals, Stora Hamnkanalen and Östra Hamnkanalen, the Västra Nordstaden quarter was an area of less prestigious port-related movements and activities. Stora Hamnkanalen drew a clearly visible border between the cosmopolitanism of Skeppsbron—alluded to in the French name of its main pleasure institution—and the port district in Västra Nordstaden, frequented by the less well-off. In this area, two forms of mobility, trade with Hisingen and the emigration traffic, had constructed specific small-scale pleasurescapes over several decades. Both of these types of traffic ceased in the early twentieth century along with their accompanying pleasurescapes on Torggatan (no. 12 in Maps 1 and 2) and Sillgatan/Postgatan (no. 13 in Maps 1 and 2).

Due to Gothenburg’s population growth in the late-nineteenth century, more commodities had to be brought from agricultural Hisingen. With the 1874 construction of Hisingsbron Bridge, commerce between Gothenburg and Hisingen increased sharply. The trading route from the bridge to the central market on Gustaf Adolfs Torg led through Torggatan in Västra Nordstaden. Thus, due to its high frequentation, the street developed the traits of a small pleasurescape, featuring bars, cafés, and a cinema. When a new bridge over the river was inaugurated in the 1930s, commerce took alternative routes and the pleasure institutions once situated on Torggatan disappeared. Even more ephemeral, yet quite unique, was the migration-related pleasurescape in Sillgatan/Postgatan.
In the course of widespread Swedish emigration, Västra Nordstaden became a place of border crossing, a space of transition from one continent to another. Between the late 1860s and 1915, Wilson steamers bound for Hull (where emigrants continued to Liverpool to board ships to the United States) departed from Gothenburg’s central port. During this period, the narrow street linking the train station with the embarkation station at Packhusplatsen, Sillgatan (renamed Postgatan in 1895), became an emigration microcosm. Sillgatan/Postgatan hosted the shipping company headquarters, numerous emigration agencies, cheap hotels, alcohol shops, beer houses, and restaurants. Amusement played an important role in this space of transition and turned Sillgatan/Postgatan into a spatially and temporally confined pleasurescape. A Swedish emigrant later recalled the street in a way that set aside all the hardships involved in migration, focusing only on the pleasures on offer:

What a party! What a gay mood! What merriment there was on the street at the beginning of the century! When the boats arrived or departed the whole street was decorated with flags and banners. When the shops in the centre of town closed at seven o’clock, “society” was drown [sic] here! Everything was open here, accordion music in the cafes, girls from all over Europe’s underworld, con men, watch peddlers, emigrants and railway laborers filled the streets and shops.

The city authorities, however, do not seem to have made any effort to end or police the activities on Sillgatan/Postgatan. The pleasure institutions on the emigrants’ street were debated neither in the city council nor in the press. It seems plausible that the authorities, temperance societies, and bourgeois observers mentally dissociated the spatially and temporarily delimited amusement on Sillgatan/Postgatan from the city community itself. Most people frequenting this pleasurescape—and spending a good deal of money there—were about to leave the city and were supposedly of less concern to the authorities than “drunken workers” in Majorna or Lundby. With the 1915 founding of the Swedish America Line, establishing a direct connection between Gothenburg and New York, the embarkation point moved to Stigbergskaien near Järntorget and the emigration-related pleasurescape on Postgatan ceased to exist.

Conclusion

The reshuffling of inner-city borders and the adaptation and insecurity this involves for the population are characteristic of urban development. Certainly, this dynamic of constant change is the product of cooperation as much as conflict; it is made up of building projects as much as resistances, of both urban renewal and resilience. This article, aiming to offer an overview of Gothenburg’s turn-of-the-century pleasure architecture, does not give an account of the numerous conflicts that the process of urban change inevitably involves. Further research will need to delve into this dimension, which remains hidden here. Nevertheless, the article shows that institutions of pleasure—through their sheer presence, their performances, and representations—are key to interpreting the (re)drawing of inner-city borders, both materially and nonmaterially. We can affirm that pleasure institutions, ranging from single music-hall cafés in garden restaurants, to amusement parks and open-air street concerts, had an important share in the redefinition of inner-city borders in turn-of-the-century Gothenburg. As the city expanded by absorbing the surrounding areas and stretching further inland; as the authorities endeavored to police public space, workers’ leisure time, and alcohol consumption; and as the liberal elite strove to position Gothenburg as a home for high culture, institutions of pleasure were crucial in reordering the city. They were essential for demarcating parts of the city from one another—on a spatial, social, and symbolic level. Moreover, institutions of pleasure had an important share in Gothenburg’s modernizing project, which situated public life at a distance from the port and projected popular amusement as alcohol-free. City planning, social reform activities, and changing modes of transport came together to deprive the port areas in Majorna and Västra Nordstaden of their public
pleasures. A large part of these pleasures became domesticated in bordered green spaces in the city center and, from 1923 onward, in Liseberg.

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