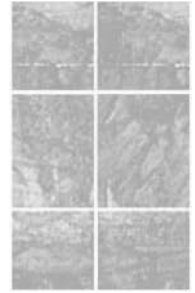


# A strange familiarity? Place perceptions among the globally mobile



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## ABSTRACT

How do globally mobile people perceive and make sense of a new place in which they have to create an everyday life for themselves? And how may their place perception be communicated through photographs? These are the questions around which this article revolves. The visual material discussed in the article stems from a participatory research project, in which North Denmark functions as a setting for studying local particularities and global convergences. Analysing part of this material, the article explores the perception of – and affiliation with – places and localities, pointing to how perceptions of strangeness and familiarity occur along unexpected lines of difference and similarity depending on the embodied positionality of the involved participants.

## KEYWORDS

belonging • defamiliarization • difference • epistemic privilege • globalization • mobility • place perception • volunteer-employed photography • visual methods

## VISUALIZING GLOBAL CONFLUENCES AND LOCAL PARTICULARITIES

How do globally mobile people perceive and make sense of a new place in which they have to create an everyday life for themselves? This is an empirical question which simultaneously calls for considerations of how to explore 'the everyday' or the mundane, as well as larger-order relationships between the local and the global. The material employed to investigate this question consists of photographs taken by recent immigrants to the region of North Denmark, in

combination with their adjacent comments on whether the images depict phenomena making them feel at home or not within their new setting. Being curious about newcomers' development of place affiliation and feelings of belonging, we handed out cameras to 26 newcomers of 21 different nationalities and received in exchange 481 photos and adjacent comments. Our aim was to procure images of habits, daily rituals, objects etc. that stand out to the participants when they consider their place affiliation. In other words, we were interested in their mundane or everyday experiences of their (un)belonging.

In describing the relationship between the global and the local, Massey (2005: 101) states: 'there is an overwhelming tendency both in academic and political literature ... to imagine the local as the product of the global but to neglect the counterpoint to this: the local construction of the global', and she points to how this deprives local places of their agency. Freeman (2001: 1008) challenges this very tendency in her analysis of the practices and agency of Caribbean higglers (market traders), illustrating how 'small-scale' individuals are 'engaged in complex activities that are both embedded within and at the same time transforming practices of global capitalism'.

Our interest in studying global convergences and local particularities informed our methodological choice of photography. We saw the photographs as a valuable mode of communicating the perception of globalization and maintained local differences, because of its cross-cultural potential. However, as the analysis of some of our material will demonstrate below, viewers' cultural and social standpoints impact on their ways of seeing and interpreting everyday surroundings, and furthermore impact on their readings of signs of globalization within the local setting. Engaging with research participants whose life stories all involve moving from abroad to the region of North Denmark may thus contribute to new perspectives on 'difference' in the face of globalization.

Our methodology brings to the fore the question of human-image relations, which Pink (2011) also focuses on, referring to Pinney's notion of 'corpothetics' – that is, 'a desire to fuse image and beholder' (Pink, 2011: 7; Pinney, 2009: 422). Questioning the notion of 'epistemic privilege', Mannay (2010) argues that visual research methods in general are useful for making the familiar strange and suspending our preconceptions of familiar territory. At a more general level, Shklovsky (1988[1917]) operated with the concept of 'defamiliarization' – seeing art as a technique to counter the 'habitualization [which] devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife' (p. 274). In short, 'defamiliarization' can be seen as a technique to study everyday life, because it serves 'to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception', which for Shklovsky constitutes 'an aesthetic end in itself'.

However, it is not so much the aesthetic potential of our photographs which interests us, but rather how they may turn our attention to the realm of embodied experiences that 'operates outside of talk' (Back, 2007: 95). In order to capture the familiar parts of daily life that are often left unspoken, we chose to employ newcomers to document their place perceptions. Choosing a team of

participants who had resided in the region for a relatively brief while, we hoped they would be able to assist us in defamiliarizing what is to us a familiar setting.

## **METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION**

The data collection for this project was based on volunteer-employed photography (VEP) (Garrod, 2010), which implies that the researchers enter into cooperation with individuals and/or groups and work with them and/or allow them to gather data alone, while at the same time utilizing them as the subject(s) of the study (Garrod, 2008). Hence, digital cameras<sup>1</sup> were sent in June 2012 to 26 research participants who had self-assigned in response to a Facebook advertisement asking for volunteers who had arrived in North Denmark from 2010 onwards, meaning that participants had been residing in North Denmark for less than 2½ years at the time of taking the photographs.

As seen in Table 1, our participants comprise 13 men and 13 women aged 20–41. They are all highly educated, although this does not necessarily translate into job security. Only 2 of the 26 had left their spouses behind, 13 moved to Denmark with their spouse or partner, 6 either met their spouses or partners or joined them in Denmark, whereas the remaining 5 identified themselves as single. Additionally, 8 of them moved to Denmark with 1 or more children and 2 became parents after arriving in the region. These characteristics most likely influenced their place perception inasmuch as their residence in the region seems to be rather a choice of emplacement more than a question of displacement. The greatest variance in participant characteristics concerns national origin – and this fact clearly impacted on their interpretations of their surroundings, as they often made active comparisons with their country of origin in their comments.

We not only gave our participants a camera, but also a specific assignment as to what to photograph. Inspired by Noland (2006) we asked the participants to take two different kinds of photos of elements from their everyday life: elements which either made them feel at home in the region, or made them feel like a newcomer. It was further explained that the photos could be of anything (e.g. objects, places, buildings or persons) just as long as they could say: ‘This makes me feel at home’ or ‘This makes me feel like a newcomer’. Furthermore, inspired by Garrod (2008) who recorded good experiences with combining the collection of photos with the use of logbook entries, we asked the participants to attach comments<sup>2</sup> to each photo as they uploaded them to our online photo storage. As Mannay (2010) argues, studying the way in which people assign meaning to pictures can be helpful in overcoming the common problem that visual materials are often under-analysed.

Previous studies of belonging have underlined the importance of the physical surroundings or the environment for people’s development of place affiliation or sense of belonging (Gustafson, 2001; Sixsmith, 1986). Through her combination of qualitative methods and quantitative modeling, Sixsmith

**Table 1.** Some participant characteristics.

Gender	Age	Country of origin	Highest level of education	Employment	Number of photos
Male	29	Iran	PhD	Unemployed	12
Male	37	Venezuela	PhD	Unemployed	27
Male	34	Ethiopia	PhD	Temporary position	13
Male	36	Hungary	High school	Unemployed	21
Male	29	Brazil	University	Unemployed	15
Male	26	Bangladesh	PhD	Temporary position	19
Male	38	USA	PhD	Yes, permanent position	32
Male	23	Czech Republic	University	Unemployed	12
Male	40	Scotland	University	Unemployed	16
Male	29	Nicaragua	PhD	Temporary position	15
Male	27	India	PhD	Temporary position	11
Male	20	Romania	University	Unemployed	15
Male	26	New Zealand	PhD	Yes, permanent position	17
Female	24	USA	University	Yes, permanent position	17
Female	24	Lithuania	University	Unemployed	26
Female	24	Latvia	University	Unemployed	16
Female	27	Italy	University	Temporary position	12
Female	33	Peru	University	Unemployed	20
Female	24	France	University	Unemployed	16
Female	33	Switzerland	High school	Unemployed	18
Female	28	Lithuania	University	Temporary position	14
Female	35	USA	PhD	Yes, permanent position	13
Female	24	Lithuania	High school	Temporary position	22
Female	41	Iran	PhD	Unemployed	32
Female	22	Germany	High school	Yes, permanent position	15
Female	33	Poland	University	Temporary position	35
<b>13 males; 13 females</b>	<b>Aged 20-41</b>	<b>21 different nationalities</b>	<b>Highly educated</b>	<b>But often unemployed</b>	<b>481 photos in total</b>

(1986: 294) arrives at the conclusion that ‘home is a multidimensional phenomenon ... each home features a unique and dynamic combination of personal, social and physical properties and meanings.’ This is a basic pattern we also found in our coding of the uploaded photos, using Nvivo to sort the material into nodes depending on what was depicted in each photo and described in the comments. Looking at our material, many of the photos and attendant comments do in fact relate primarily to the physical environment, and this

is the part of the dataset we focus on in the analyses below, because it offers interesting perspectives on the preservation and/or eradication of difference in the face of globalization. As a sensory experience, photography clearly relates to the visual, and hence it is hardly surprising to find so many photographs depicting the physical surroundings our participants move through – in essence, all photographs depict ontological elements which are there to be seen. However, the comments in the photo-logs help us identify when the photos, according to the participants themselves, are ‘about’ the physical surroundings and when they are meant to convey another message.

## **INTERPRETING GLOBAL/LOCAL SPACE FROM DIFFERENT POSITIONALITIES**

Aiming at debating the preservation or eradication of ‘difference’ in the face of globalization, we focus on the twin questions: *What do our participants perceive as unique to the particular setting of this study?* and *What do they perceive as recognizable?* In the present analysis, we focus on the photographs within the dataset that relate to perceptions of physical surroundings in the form of urban landscapes, buildings, signs, and nature/environment/weather.

According to Manzo (2003: 48), research on place affiliation and belonging has tended to phrase this mostly as rootedness and comfort ‘and has not explored the role of negative/ambivalent feelings and experiences as fully’. Yet the experience of feeling at home need not only be connected to something positive; it can also reflect negative experiences in one’s country of origin, as our material demonstrates. Similarly, feelings of being a newcomer are both connected to something exciting/interesting, but also to more negative experiences. Recognizing that our participants are on the move – literally across national borders, through the region or city with their camera, and abstractly through developing place affiliation or not – is paramount in analysing our data. As Pink (2011: 4) argues about images in general, researchers should ‘locate the production and consumption of images as happening in movement, and consider them as components and configurations of place’. As we will show, perceptions of cultural difference and similarity occur through a wealth of visual impressions, and the experiencing of something new/unfamiliar may in fact contribute to feelings of belonging, whereas experiences of the globally recognizable may both be alienating as well as reassuring.

In her critical discussion of the character and novelty of global capitalism, Massey (1994: 162) remarks how ‘the local high street is invaded by cultures and capitals from the world over ... it seems you can sense the simultaneous presence of everywhere in the place where you are standing.’ One iconographic image of such high-street invasion of global capitalism is McDonald’s. There were, indeed, several images of McDonald’s restaurants in our dataset. However, the kinds of comments attached to these images vary widely, affirming Massey’s point that our experiences of such changes

are dependent on our place within class, gender and ethnic relations (p. 164). For example, one participant (female, US) simply stated that ‘the omnipresence of McDonald’s’ made her feel at home and another (male, Brazil) commented: ‘I feel at home when I eat at McDonald’s: it tastes exactly the same all over the world.’ However, McDonald’s may in fact not be perceived as omnipresent by all, and one participant (male, Bangladesh) commented: ‘As a foreigner, the first thing that made me feel like [a newcomer] was McDonald’s. In Bangladesh we don’t have any McDonald’s throughout the country; [it was a] good experience for a foreigner.’ And one participant (2nd female, US) clearly attached emotional significance to the presence of McDonald’s also in Denmark, uploading a picture of her son eating a Happy Meal: ‘Giving my son a Happy Meal as a special occasion makes me feel very much at home. This is something I enjoyed as a kid, and it makes me so happy to be able to give him the same experience.’ Although both of the latter comments attach clear positive significance to the presence of McDonald’s, one of them distinctly associates it with being a foreigner, while the other clearly experiences it as contributing to a reassuring sense of belonging.

This example of four photographs depicting the same motif reinforces Pink’s (2011: 9) point that:

Images are not ‘of’ places or things ... rather they are inevitably and unavoidably *in* places: they are produced by moving *through* and not over or on environments, and they are not stopping points so much as outcomes of and in movement. (original emphases)

The interpretation of what is depicted *in* these pictures crucially depends on the fusion of image and beholder – the place, as Massey (2005: 131) argues, must be understood as fundamentally open, ‘unfinished business’, dependent on ‘the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now’.

Shopping and dining opportunities may at first sight seem like indicators of high-street similarities and globalization’s eradication of difference, a fundamental closure and end to all negotiation. Thus, a woman from Germany commented on how she received the same advertising material in her Danish letterbox that she used to receive in Germany (from a German supermarket chain also with stores in Denmark), and others commented on the presence of familiar retail chain stores like IKEA, H&M and 7-Eleven, or the familiarity of the local market (see Figure 1).

Several also commented on how they purposely sought to buy products from their countries of origin (e.g. French wine, New Zealand butter, Swiss chocolate or South American spices and beans) to increase their sense of feeling at home in the region. This global exchange of products directly influences the local streetscape, as also noted by a participant who made this comment about a particular street: ‘Danmarksgade in Aalborg has the highest concentration of International stores. These stores are fundamental to find



**Figure 1.**

some ingredients for the food that helps us feel at home in Aalborg' (male, Nicaragua). While such examples on the one hand speak towards the spread of global capitalism and global exchange of products, we argue that they also speak to maintained perceptions of the importance of cultural differences between products – in these cases mobilizing cultural differences for symbolic or emotional gain, to enhance one's sense of feeling at home, or engaging in re-negotiations of Aalborg as a place for shopping.

Another consideration brought forward by Massey (1994: 163) in her effort to critically engage with simplifying discourses of globalization and its supposed attendant 'time-space compression',<sup>3</sup> is the focus on the local contexts of globalization. As Massey observes 'much of life for many people ... still consists of waiting in a bus-shelter for a bus that never comes' (p. 163). Quite literally, however, this is one element of persistent cultural difference perceived by our participants: buses in North Denmark do arrive on time and do follow a reliable schedule (at least in the eyes/camera lenses of our research participants). While no less than five participants pointed out the novelty of this experience in their photos and comments, Massey is of course right in pointing to how – despite possibilities for online interaction and shopping – people do actually venture out into local public space to fulfil their needs (social, nutritional or otherwise). Social engagement beyond cyberspace appears a necessity, however many possibilities for technological time-space compression exist, 'the online is still no substitute for offline sociality' (Hjorth, 2007: 230). And, interestingly, not a single one of the 481 photographs depict mobile phones, computers or other communication devices, which one could

have imagined the participants would see as devices helping them to feel at home in their new environment.<sup>4</sup>

This finding is contrary to evidence presented in literature on migration and media, such as for example De Block and Buckingham (2007) or Bonini (2011), the latter speaking of media as ‘home-making tools’ for transnational migrants. We suggest that this discrepancy is due to methodological differences. In both of these studies, ‘the home’ is taken to refer to the migrants’ country of origin, Bonini (2011: 869) speaking of migrants as ‘sharing a sense of displacement, more or less intense’. Our study, on the contrary, makes no such assumption, embarking rather from the premise that sensations of belonging and place affiliation may also develop in new places of residence. Specifically asking the participants to photograph things that either made them feel at home in the region or like newcomers, their presumed use of media technologies (after all, they were recruited through a Facebook advertisement and engaged in online photo storage with us) may have figured as neutral in this respect. While the use of media may contribute to maintaining links to the place of origin for transnational migrants (Bonini, 2011; De Block and Buckingham, 2007), these studies do not indicate that such media uses may contribute to developing place affiliation with the *new* place of residence. Thus, among our entire collection of photographs, there is only one picture with a mobile phone in it, but here the point with the picture is something else entirely (see Figure 2) – namely how bright Danish summer nights are, even at 10.17 pm. Some differences related to time, space and geography do persist, irrespective of whatever other changes globalization may lead to.

In extending the point that the geography of a place impacts on such everyday experiences as the length of day, the data material also abounds in pictures of and comments about the Danish weather – no less than 40 photos in total, taken by 18 different participants. Most photos were taken during the summer month of June, when days are long and nights are short in North Denmark.<sup>5</sup> Such photos are premised upon an everyday life lived at a particular latitude.

The particularities of the geographic location also figure in several other images. For example, the fact that the two largest cities in the region – Aalborg and Nørresundby – are practically two cities in one divided by the fjord but connected by two bridges (one for trains and one for cars, bike riders and pedestrians) shines very much through in the photographs. A female participant took a picture of the railroad bridge, commenting ‘Bridge connecting Nørresundby and Aalborg – TWO towns. Old locals are even little “enemies” or teasing each other. Isn’t it ridiculous? This you can also find in my country’ (female, Lithuania). Whilst she saw the bridge as a symbol of recognizable friendly rivalry, another participant (male, Ethiopia) took a picture of the other bridge opening for a small sailing ship, and made the comment that the fact that both cars and ships were accommodated by alternately opening and closing the bridge made him feel like a newcomer. Such symbolic read-





**Figure 2.**

ings of the bridges to locals like ourselves, who frequently cross those same bridges, serves precisely to ‘defamiliarize’ the habitual. Pink’s (2011: 4) notion of multisensoriality leads her to suggest that we should dispense with the idea of the visual as being dominant, and rather understand images as being produced and consumed as part of the experience of multisensory environments: a point that serves to underline the added value of combining the collection of photographs with comments, because the comments underscore the absence of epistemologically privileged standpoints.

The harbour front on both sides of the fjord was perceived as a place where very many and varied activities take place, hence some participants commented on the use of old ships as restaurants, the importance of easy access to the sea in terms of trade and industry, cultural events such as the Aalborg Regatta, etc. While one participant (female, Latvia) saw the Regatta as a welcome spare-time attraction, another participant (male, Bangladesh) rather perceived these sailing boats as something reminding him of fishermen from his country of origin. Although both had positive emotional reactions to the sight of these boats, they clearly associated rather opposite elements

of leisure and work with it, speaking to the preservation of cultural as well as economic differences in the face of globalization.

We have several other instances in which participants ostensibly include the same motifs in their pictures, yet attach widely diverging comments on how they perceive or make sense of the visual impression they record. For example, there are three virtually identical photos of the same large factory located at the harbour front, but the comments and interpretations of the sight diverge widely. A Latvian woman states that she feels not at home seeing all the pollution, a Scottish man states that it reminds him of Scotland in the old days, and a man from Bangladesh interprets the factory as a sign of progress while commenting that he assumes that the smoke coming out of the many chimneys is cleaner than that which is emitted from factories in his country of origin. Clearly, our participants move about and create an everyday life for themselves within the same observable physical site – yet how they interpret the social order it signifies seems to depend largely on their own trajectories and their place and movement within that order. Pink (2011: 7) argues that images are on the move in several senses; for example, they ‘form part of a world in which we are continually moving forward and this is the very source of their production and the environment of their consumption’. The three participants who photographed the factory all interpret their own movement in space in relation to the visual impression they encounter and add an implicit or explicit understanding of time/progress to their visual impression. Their culturally or socially specific experiences impact on their unique ways of seeing and making sense of both the local and the global cultures and the structures they operate within.

### **READING THE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS TO FIND ONE’S WAY**

One way in which newcomers may quite literally attempt to find their way through a local setting is through interpreting the signs or visual clues of the environment. Thus, there is an aesthetic aspect to moving about in the urban landscape – something our participants may have become extra aware of given the task we had presented them with. Previous studies using VEP have reported that participants seem to be more observant and reflexive when equipped with a camera by the researcher (Garrod, 2008). On the other hand, Hjorth and Gu’s (2012) study of smartphone visuality in Shanghai, China, exemplifies how young Chinese men and women may also engage in aesthetic appreciation of their surroundings when not prompted by researchers. In their case study, however, the end goal of these young people’s smartphone practices seemed to be ‘geospatial sociality’ (p. 710) rather than aesthetic appreciation in itself. Our much more generative approach resulted in us receiving images of cobblestones, narrow streets, sculptures, water fountains, playgrounds, flower beds, graffiti and litter in the street – the unfamiliarity of the setting for our

participants may indeed have 'increased the length of perception', as Shklovsky (1988[1917]) argues, but not necessarily the 'difficulty of perception'. Hence, most comments about the aesthetics of public space are positive, such as this comment: 'The fact that I can see flower decorations in the streets of Aalborg give me the sensation of a friendly place, where people respect their common grounds. This makes me feel at home' (male, Venezuela).

In Sixsmith's (1986) study of 'the meanings of home', she asked her informants particularly about which places they thought of as 'home', resulting in many descriptions of particular buildings or rooms. In comparison, we have received surprisingly few images of the houses or apartments where our participants live. Instead, many of our participants took pictures of various other specific buildings or types of buildings they associate with the sensation of being at home or being a newcomer. For example, although timber frame houses are now rare in Denmark, several participants have taken pictures of these old houses. But clearly they associate very different things with these, depending on their previous life experiences: for one person, having these kinds of houses is 'unique and charming' (female, US), for another it is 'cosy and warm' (female, Lithuania), for one it is 'European' (male, Brazil), whereas a man from Ethiopia comments: 'The way this house is built has some similarities with the way houses are built in Ethiopia, too. We commonly build houses by using a wooden structure and filling the remaining with mud, with small windows in it.' The perception of difference and commonality in this example seems to occur along unexpected axes of comparison, given otherwise prevalent discourses about the nature of globalization as leading to familiar dichotomies of 'the West'/'the rest' and 'the global North' vs 'the global South' – dichotomies which are in this instance disrupted through an insight into perceptions of strange familiarities.

While the participants did not take photos of their own houses or homes or of technical devices designed to help people stay in contact, as one might have expected, the kinds of objects from their domestic lives that they did take photos of were things like their piano, sofa or stereo, as well as culturally significant symbols like handicraft items and flags, or a mock Mona Lisa reproduction followed by this comment: 'This makes me feel at home because I made it, and it's a little bit of France in Aalborg in my flat. It's a part of my identity that I needed to have' (female, France). Based on their study of Americans moving to Cape Cod, Cuba and Hummon (1993: 119) argue that 'place identities grounded in the dwelling may persist despite a previous pattern of mobility, insofar as the home is a veritable storehouse of identity symbols', and furthermore 'frequent residential change may intensify a sense of dwelling as home, given that its contents are easily transportable' (p. 127). However, we were surprised to find how few images we received either from inside people's homes or of the 'bricks and mortars' of their houses. Although one person (female, Switzerland) photographed her front door, and a few photographed views from their windows, there was also a participant (female,

Lithuania) who photographed somebody else's (very elaborate) door plate, commenting that seeing this made her feel like a newcomer: 'I feel sad when I see such nice details around me, then I miss my family in Lithuania.' Although well aware that we had not specified a specific interest in homes or dwellings, it seems noteworthy that so few among our participants thought of their place of residence when asked to photograph what made them feel 'at home'. Thus, in some respects they may feel 'displaced' as Bonini (2011) argues about trans-national migrants.

One detail of the urban landscape is how signs are posted. Although ostensibly designed to facilitate manoeuvring, some signs and symbols in public space left our participants baffled rather than imbued with a sense of direction. Starting with a photo of a downtown map, one commented how 'maps of the city are always a welcoming thing for foreigners' (male, US). The same person, however, took another photo of a sign in a public park, stating that here 'is a LOT of information about a very nice park ... but only in Danish'. However, some signs are related to universal symbols, and therefore require no language skills to read, as one participant wrote about a photo of a disabled parking space (female, US). Another took a virtually identical picture, stating that such reserved parking sites were a novelty to her, which also went for her comment accompanying a picture of a bicycle lane symbol (female, Iran).

However, as pointed out previously, the unexpected and unfamiliar may be perceived as welcoming. This was the case for a series of the photos we received of bicycles and everyday practices involving cycling. For example, one participant (male, US) uploaded a picture of a traffic sign indicating rules for using the bicycle lane (see Figure 3) and another (male, Iran) took a picture of one of the bicycle counters dispersed through the city, automatically counting the number of bikes that passed on that particular date, as well as indicating their speed – 'it's a cool one' according to our participant.

Signs in urban space may serve to either inform or fail to inform, they may be considered part of a lingua franca or they may be seen as unfamiliar. But they may also be perceived as entirely alienating: one participant uploaded two photos of signs warning that the area was under surveillance, as well as a photo of a swastika painted on a bus shelter, along with this comment: 'Though this swastika was most likely a teenage prank, it is unsettling to see this kind of symbol of hate' (male, US). Other alienating signs in public space refer to gender relations and attitudes towards exposure of female bodies in the urban environment. Particularly evocative was a photo of an advertisement for a local strip club, clearly advertising in the street: 'This stuff is banned in my country. This makes me feel I am abroad' (male, Ethiopia). Other participants also uploaded images of mannequins displaying women's underwear in shop windows, commenting for example that 'this kind of advertisement is not allowed in my religion and my country' (female, Iran) or 'it makes me feel like a newcomer, that dummies suggest a sexual content to the public. That could



**Figure 3.**

never happen in my home country' (male, Hungary). Cultural and social differences seem to remain a significant factor in the production and reception of signs and symbols, even in the face of what may have been conceived as a universally decipherable piece of information about direction or content in public space.

### **CONCLUSION: STRANGE FAMILIARITIES**

The last three examples actively contrast images of everyday life in North Denmark with 'my country'. As Pink (2011: 8) suggests, the visual-place-event may be conceptualized as an environmental configuration involving perceiving embodied persons. Although the visual may be seen as a privileged mode of communication in the context of globalization, it is also clearly the case that what is ostensibly the same visual impression often triggers rather opposing sensations of 'at-homeness', underlining the lack of any neutral epistemic position. And while there may indeed be instances of time-space compression, making it possible to buy food from one's country of origin or imagine taking the train 'home', there is still something

distinct about the geographic setting, causing some everyday practices to appear strange, whilst others may appear familiar and some, perhaps, merely strangely familiar depending on one's embodied positionality, always on the move.

In spite of all the talk of global capitalism's eradication of difference, the Danish currency, electric sockets and mailboxes still differ from most other places in the world, Danes write songs for special occasions, drive on the right-hand side of the street and go to the beach even when it is raining, all of these being examples of objects and mores which some of the participants find distinctly quaint and unfamiliar. While such differences may not be exactly alienating, one of the participants in particular indicated 'a feeling of being confused and "homeless"' and talked about North Denmark as my here-and-now-home' (female, Poland). This expression does seem to indicate a sense of displacement but, as argued above, we consider it important to appreciate how sensations of 'at-homeness' may arise also in the face of transnational mobility. Visual approaches to the study of places may assist us in de-familiarizing an otherwise familiar setting and highlight the importance of the embodied positionalities of observers.

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## NOTES

1. We chose to hand out digital cameras in order to attract participants for the project. We could probably have made use of our participants' mobile phones instead as they are now almost always equipped with a camera. Hjorth (2007: 230) argues that camera phones are more suitable 'to capture the trivialities of the everyday', because digital cameras are usually brought along purposely for occasions deemed 'special'.
2. These comments vary greatly in length, from a few words to more than 50 in a few cases.
3. Massey (1994: 147) defines time-space compression as 'movement and communication across space ... the geographical stretching out of social relations, and ... our experience of all this'.
4. Hjorth and Gu's (2012) study of the use of smartphone or camera phone images indicates how mobile media may become a tool for asserting one's 'geospatial sociality' through more or less public sharing of images through social media (p. 710). Such practices of online image sharing, however, differ significantly from sharing with a researcher what makes one feel at home in a particular geospatial setting.
5. June 2012 was our data collection period. However, some participants also uploaded pictures from their private archives, for example, pictures of snow.

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