

TRYGGARE SVERIGE

Socialantropologen Katrina Johnston-Zimmerman brukar beskriva sig själv som en "professional people-watcher" och har bland annat blivit uppmärksammad för hennes sätt att belysa behovet av fler kvinnor i ledande befattningar inom samhällsbyggarbranschen. Under hösten utnämndes hon av BBC till en av de hundra mest inflytelserika kvinnorna i världen. Stiftelsen Tryggare Sverige träffade Johnston-Zimmerman för att ta del av hennes tankar kring feminism kopplat till stadsplanering.

What are the most interesting observations you have made when studying human behavior in the public space?

I usually divide my observations into two different categories, direct observations and indirect observations. Direct observations are the actions that I see people take. Like waiting for the bus or sitting on a bench. Indirect observations are the small footprints that we all leave behind, like a coffee cup in a random place or written messages. For example, one message in Odenplan said "Kram och hej". I don't know what it means or why it's been written but it's a positive thing to say. The people who leave those kinds of messages won't get credit for it, they know they won't and yet they still do it. My favorite left-behind object right now is "the paper coffee cup", I find it everywhere, on a wall, between postboxes, on a bench, in the middle of a street, etc.

The messages in a space can change the feeling of a certain space. If there are injection needles lying in a square, people's perception of the square will surely change. The indirect observation is what I find the most interesting, to see what kind of feelings a place evokes.

In your direct observations, have you noticed any differences in how men and women use the public space?

There are some differences, especially regarding the lone woman. Women alone in public space is fascinating to me because they behave themselves differently. Their position and posture changes, whereas the lone man just carry on as they would while

being in company of others. It's always easy to spot the lone woman.

Have you observed any differences between cultures?

Yes, Americans are conservative in general, it's a culture. The Italians understanding of a piazza is that it's completely your space. There is a shared ownership. Americans on the other hand can only sit down if there is grass and a blanket. Or they will sit on a bench if it is provided for them.

"What I have found is that the most successful spaces are the ones that people are programming by themselves."

In Philadelphia where I live there is a large Italian population. There, people place trees, tables and flowers outside their windows or doors. There is an understanding that the space outside one's door belongs to everyone. I wonder if that's a cultural thing. What I have found is that the most successful spaces are the ones that people are programming by themselves.

Do you think that a feminist perspective should be included in the education of architects/urban planners?

Since women are being skipped over for promotion a feminist perspective most definitely should be included in the education plan. What is positive is that there is now a cultural shift in the US where women are creating their own businesses

and thereby changing how cities are built while also giving women more power in the planning process.

“If we say that we are humanists we look at society as one homogenous group, in that sense we say that the city is for everyone yet it won’t be for everyone.”

There is clearly a need to address certain problems in the correct way. If we say that we are humanists we look at society as one homogenous group, in that sense we say that the city is for everyone yet it won’t be for everyone. By using the term feminism, the aim is more clear.

How does your position on the BBC’s 100-list add to this?

It’s crazy to be on that list as an anthropologist, yet I’m humbled and it feels great! It is all about getting the message out there. The message about that our urban environments are bizarre and stressful and primarily made and changed by men.

Is there an ongoing project that you recommend us to follow?

I think that the most fascinating project right now is going on in Barcelona, how the city is taking measures to implement the concept of superblocks. The purpose is to prioritize human needs instead of traffic, and the outcome will be interesting to follow.