

# A Guide to Visiting Cities By Boris Sieverts

- 1. Get topographic maps with a scale of 1:25,000 of your city. (Available at the local planning department)**
- 2. Find out which neighborhoods are underrepresented or missing from the self-image of the city.**
- 3. Visit those places. Find out what is special about them. Stay in these places for a while. Take photos of places, things and people that you think are typical and photographable at the same time. Talk to people who have been in these places for longer than you have.**
- 4. Develop your photos and make prints. What do you see? What is not visible from the photos? Could it even be captured in a photograph?**
- 5. Go back to those places. Be patient. Just sit back and let the boredom pass.**
- 6. Go back several times with and without a camera. Start conversations, have coffee in the most unassuming cafes. Get drunk in the middle of the day. Sober up in an inappropriate place. Come back with a sleeping bag and a tent or stay in a pension, a bed and breakfast or a small hotel.**
- 7. Go back to the planning department to get maps and aerial photographs covering a smaller area of your interest at a scale of 1:5000. Get two copies and mount one set to a contiguous image and hang it on the wall of your apartment or your office (In case you don't have enough wall space rent a space with sufficiently large wall-space for that time.**
- 8. Let the image do its work. Compare the structure of the places you found underrepresented in step 2 with those places that seem to be stamped with the identity of the place. What do you see? Try to put it in words. Take notes.**
- 9. Hang the maps and aerial photographs in scale 1:5000 next to your topographical maps in scale 1:25,000. Compare. Memorize everything as well as you can. Put the second set of maps and aerial photographs into a roll and make them part of your travel equipment.**
- 10. Let the project rest. Spend some days or weeks at your day-job or travel to countries far away. As your desire to continue the investigation increases you will gain clarity about the character of your project.**
- 11. Never read the local newspaper. The superficiality of their observation is in contrast to the weight that the printed paper gives it. That would lead you in false directions and set you back. Probably each of your own observations has more weight at this point.**
- 12. Instead visit the archives of administrative offices, housing agencies, the local memorabilia shelves of antique shops, map archives, image archives, historical associations. Breathe the spirit of those places.**
- 13. Persistently follow the questions that you encounter. Not in order to find the truth, but in order to hear a lot; that helps to dissolve the boundary between internal images and factuality.**
- 14. Vary and elaborate on steps 1 to 13 until you feel competent enough for steps 15 to 19.**
- 15. Imagine you would have to turn your most private, your innermost feelings outside and you could neither speak or write. But you know those places. Which places would you show to tell something about you? In what order would you display them as to increase their effect?**
- 16. A person you talk to comes from a neighborhood that is prominent in the self image of the city. What feeling for this 'terra incognita' would you like to give that person?**
- 17. What are the identity-creating elements that this 'terra-incognita' has itself? Don't fall into the trap of urban planners and local politicians but rather recognize these elements for what they are. Most of the time you will walk around them.**
- 18. Are there sensations? If yes what are they? Do these sensations express something more clearly that permeates the whole area – like some smells that you can only sense very close to the ground? Use it at all cost! (Even if the volume of these sensations forces you to redesign the whole arc of your story). Other sensations are useless, but will rarely exist anyways.**
- 19. Take friends and strangers to your personal places. Risk embarrassing moments. Put your preferences in words that express these preferences and give the grounds for them. Memorize the formulations that make the embarrassment disappear.**
- 20. Fine-tune your approach over the years.**