DASH Final Conference
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Manuel Heckel, University of Stuttgart

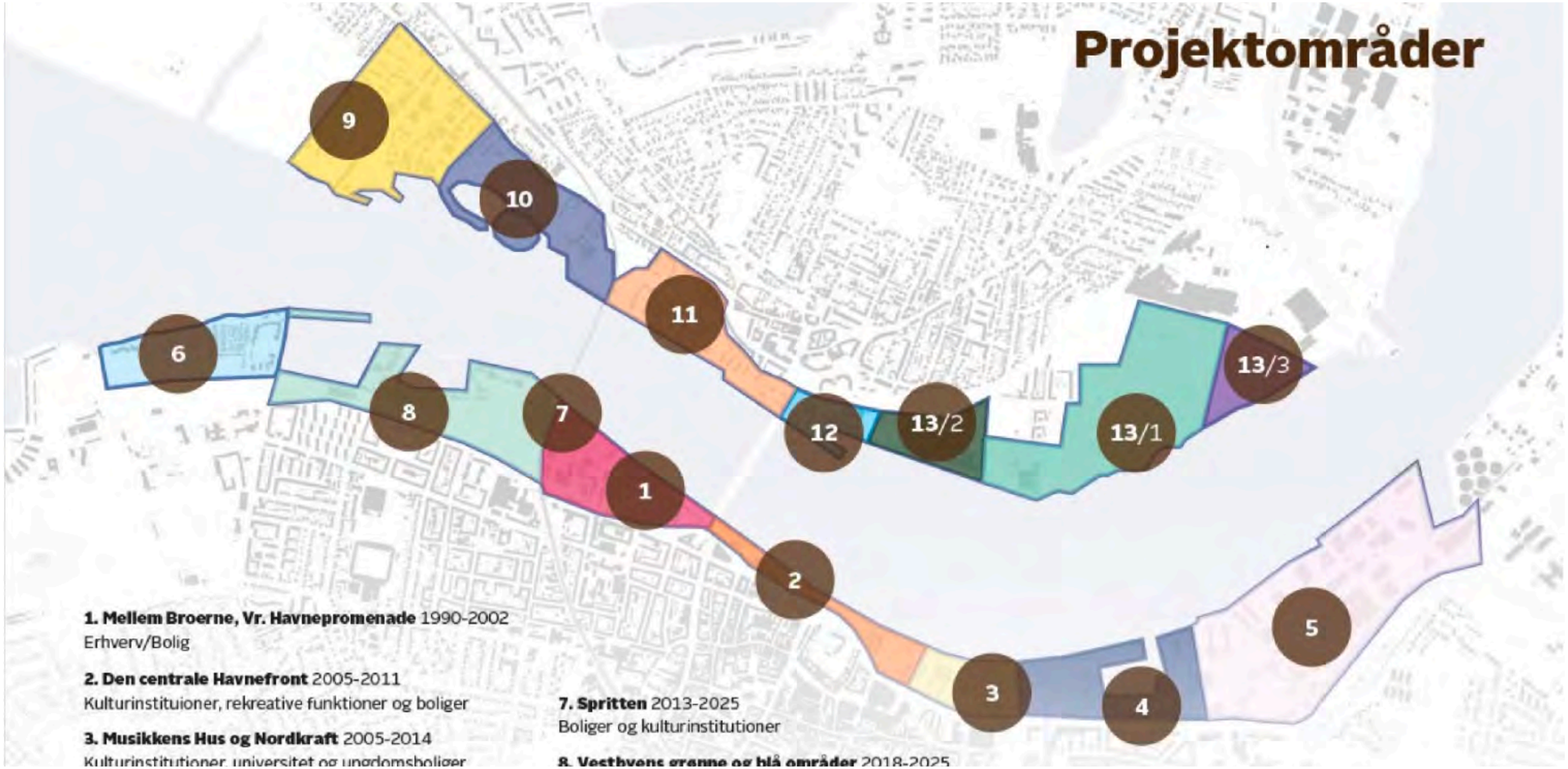
Towards a ‘Science of the City’

Starting points

1. Open, processual world
2. Analysis in addition to strategy and ideology
3. Integrated (social) sciences: Lefebvre's science of the city

Bhaskar's critical realism and Bhaskar's/Danermark's concept of 'laminated systems' helps us to 'extract from fragmentary sciences a science of the city' (Lefebvre) that explains the (public) production of space

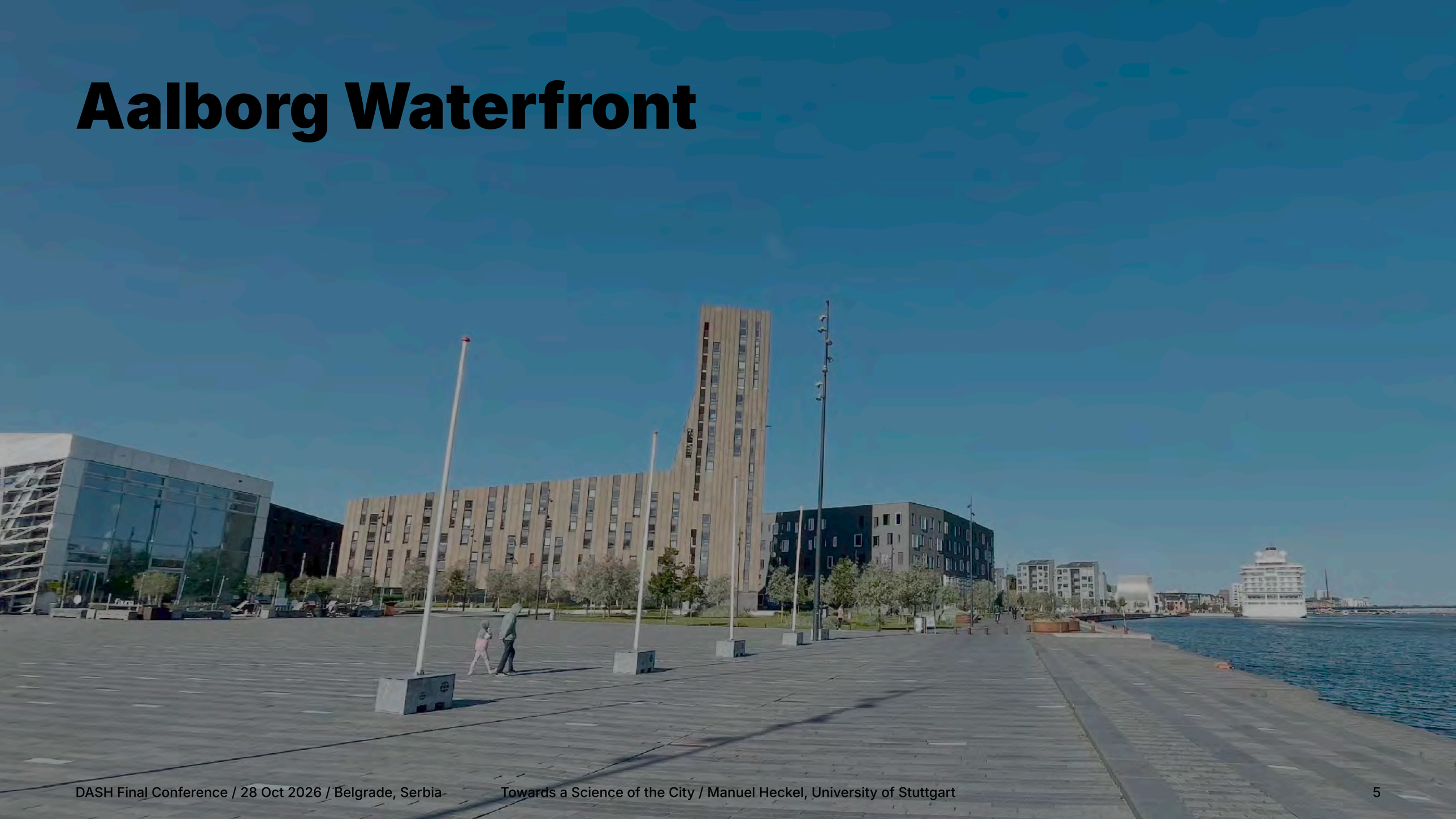
Aalborg Waterfront



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- Original plans relied on private investment
- Capital flight after 2007
- Unanticipated, discontinuous change: outside of believed event regularities

'… we were a team of colleagues working … on urban regeneration. How can we do it? What can we do? And then suddenly no investments. … it was kind of a shock for the city that suddenly they went away. It was going so well, and suddenly they went away. We had a lot of plans for doing fantastic things around. And suddenly these investors were gone.'

Aalborg waterfront

- Aalborg ‘regroups’ and mobilises local capacities to develop the waterfront
- Discontinous change of planning as reaction
- Shock as challenge

‘And we thought, how long will this [the financial crisis] take and what can we do and what about our city and what about our development plans? So we knew that we had to do something else. … and it was to use this pause to think a little bit more about what do we want to build? Could we do it in other ways? We tried to reflect on the quality of what we had done. … What can we learn from this? What are they doing in other places? … And we also convinced the system, our leaders, that this was the time for experiments.’

Towards a Science of the City

– How do we make sense of these changes? How do we explain Aalborg waterfront?
– How do we develop (non-reactive) strategy from analysis?
– We need explanation (theory), and we need 'global' explanation

'Theory is necessary to figure out what's really going on. People always want to be saviors for their community. It's like they see a baby coming down the river and want to jump in and save it. We need to stop being so reactive to the situation that confronts us. Saving babies is fine for them, but we want to know who's throwing the goddam babies in the water in the first place.' (Black civil rights activist Michael Zinzun, quoted in Sandercock 1998:85)

Critical realist metatheory

- Openness of the world
- Stratification of the world
  - Depth ontology: mechanisms, events, experience
  - Emergence: irreducible causal powers of strata (typically studied in disciplines)
- Lamination of totalities/systems in the world

- Epistemic integration: cross-disciplinary understanding and transdisciplinary explanation of phenomena; the science of the city extracted from fragmentary sciences (or what Lefebvre calls 'global' explanations)

So what?

- **Explicit ex ante metatheory for transdisciplinary work**
  In planning and research practice, we often implicitly integrate. Critical realism gives us a philosophical meta-theoretical foundation

- **Educating ‘integrators’**
  Explicit metatheory helps us educate planners who see the world as open, stratified, and processual, and who can develop integrated explanations of phenomena to develop integrated responses/designs

- **Developing strategies and forward-looking reflexivity**
  Comprehensive explanations (disciplinary depth and transdisciplinary breadth) help us develop responsive strategies (instead of e.g. reacting to discontinuous change)