Navet - An Ethnographic Approach to an Open Drug Market

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Abstract

Aims - This thesis describes an open drug market and its suspected drug users in a Swedish city. This drug market is located at the local bus hub called Navet, in the city of Sundsvall, which has a reputation of being a place to avoid because of the substance abuse and accompanied crime. The aim was to disclose what happens at Navet that is associated with drug related activities. Method - two observers visited Navet from November 2016 to March 2017 at different times of the day with an ethnographic approach to take notes of the daily life at Navet, using their own experiences as basis for the description and analysis. No interactions with the actors at Navet were initiated by the observers. Results - Navet is more than just a drug market, it also provides a meaningful social aspect for the actors by spending time at Navet granting a feeling of belonging to a group. Four different groups of people were identified, the traveling citizens using Navet for transportation, people using navet as their meeting place without taking part of the drug activities, the suspected drug users and the young suspected drug users. The most frequent and openly used substances was alcohol followed by unspecified pills, other types of illegal substances were suspected to be common at Navet but never witnessed to be consumed. Conclusion - As rumored, Navet is a place where drugs and suspected drug users are present during almost all hours of the day. However, the generally perceived feeling of hostility and danger is exaggerated, contributing to a worse reputation of Navet compared to what can be supported through this study.

Keywords - ethnography, observation, drug market, suspected drug users
Forewords

We would like to take the opportunity to thank our supervisor Teresa Silva for all constructive criticism and help during this study. Also, a big thank you to Andreas Zehlander for initiating the project and supervising our early data collection. Lastly, we want to extend our gratitude to Daniel Lejfalk and Adam Forzelius for their great support and company during writing.
One of the first things that the authors got to know about the city of Sundsvall, when moving there, was that Navet (the area around the bus station in the centre of Sundsvall) was a place to avoid because of high amounts of drugs and crime. This was not only communicated by new acquaintances from Sundsvall, but also from taxi drivers, policemen and during lectures at the university.

Sundsvall is a mid sized city in Sweden with slightly less than 100 000 inhabitants (Statistiska centralbyrån, 2017), located in the mid-east of Sweden. Navet is an area in Sundsvall that all the busses connect to, it is also located close to the city mall, this makes Navet a place with a high amount of passing through people. According to Boggs (1965) this constitutes a high risk spot of any given city, a high amount of people passing through means a high amount of general crime. The main problem at Navet is that of an illegal drug market that attracts people to buy illegal drugs and staying in place to use said drugs, as well as socially interact with others of the same habits. This leads to practically permanent visitors of Navet who in some of the cases do not have any other homes or places to be. Navet consists of two main parts in this regard of an open drug market. The waiting hall and the bus stops which are very close together and acts as a meeting place for people with intentions to buy, sell or use drugs.

Navet is built around four bus stops and a larger lot for long distance busses. The suspected drug users often use the city bus system which, combined with the waiting halls availability and Systembolagets\(^1\) location, makes Navet a natural hub for them in the same way as it is an effective hub of travel for other people. During winter, the outside areas, such as the bus station, was almost completely vacant but according to the police and the general population it was a different situation when the weather allowed for it, during spring and summer. By then most of the problems with the drug market moved outside as well as the social function of the waiting hall. Although the suspected drug users moved from inside to outside the change of scenery only meant moving 20 meters to the Navet bus station.

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\(^1\) Systembolaget is the only chain of stores that sells alcohol of more than 3.5% of volume in Sweden.
Figure 1. The location of Navet in the center of Sundsvall.

In figure 1, the area marked red was the suggested area from the police regarding potentially highly frequented places by suspected drug users. The blue line represents the area in which the majority of the observations were conducted, especially after December 2016. This limited area is what in this study would be called Navet. A majority of the area inside the blue lines is made up of bus stops or parking lots. The turquoise lines represent the waiting hall of Navet. The black area, just outside to the left of the blue area is representing Systembolaget.

At Navet there were several spots that attracted crime and people of believed low socioeconomic status. During the period of observation, the waiting hall was the most
troublesome of the area. The high concentration of problems at this spot could be explained by the cold climate outside and the already existing drug market that moves indoors to this very location. This room very clearly houses the main part of the drug market and drug use during winter. The public opinion was that Navet and especially the waiting hall was a very unsafe and rough part of the city that a lot of people avoided because of a belief that the people frequenting this area were dangerous. The waiting hall had a closing time although that did not change the situation in a significant manner because it was so late most of the people, including the suspected drug users left earlier, mostly by bus. Similarities were found in the study by Grønnestad and Lalander (2014) in a Norwegian city, where a bench was described as a “no-go area”. As well as at Navet, the citizens avoided the area associated with the open drug market creating a lack of social control. This could, at Navet, be associated with the broken windows theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), where criminality could partially be explained by the lack of social control. Another applied theoretical approach was a version of the subcultural theory by Cohen (1961) that helped explain parts of the situation at Navet.

Stedman (2002) described, in a psychological aspect about people’s sense of place, which could contribute to an explanation why the suspected drug users had chosen Navet. The place is associated with symbolic meaning and satisfaction in regards to other geographical places creating an attachment and enhance valued attributes of the place, such as transportation and public toilets. Stedman’s (2002) conclusion could be applied on the drug related activities at Navet as a result of satisfactory attributes and historically symbolic meaning of the place as somewhere to perform drug related activities, since Navet has been associated with that for a long time. Two spots that was likely to contribute to the satisfactory attributes is Systembolaget and the center of Navet, the bus hub. Systembolaget plays an important part in the attraction of people with suspected drug use since alcohol was an easy sort of drug to come by.

Another possible explanation for the presence of suspected drug users and other drug related activities at Navet is given through the broken windows theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). In their theory, criminality in certain places are connected with loss of social control by society letting criminal activities roam freely. This loss of social control is based, according to Wilson and Kelling (1982), on how a building or an area is decaying and not repaired,
making the citizens not wanting to reside at that specific place - letting the criminal activities take control. At Navet the lacking social control may come from expectations of crime or drug activities from the citizens and police which in turn makes it less likely that strong reactions against this takes place.

The general population of Sundsvall has described through informal conversations, a sense of insecurity and unease around the area of Navet. Some people have also stated that they avoid Navet either by not taking the bus at all or if they do, sometimes they get off at an earlier stop with the only purpose of avoiding Navet. The open drug abuse at Navet has been described as a big problem in Sundsvall from the police, the general population and from the media. It is with that background this research will focus on what this proclaimed open use of drugs looks like, in the eyes of the researchers. This study was important to conduct because Navet had a reputation of being connected to heavy drug use and criminality, that either had to be confirmed or rejected.

**Research Question**

The research question of this study was: What happens at Navet that is associated with drug related activities?

**Ethnographic Approach in Criminological Research**

Ethnography is a type of research that focuses on the actors perspective and is often connected with observations and sometimes interviews (Lalander, 2011). In order to describe the field of interest, an ethnographer typically takes part in the daily life or day-to-day activities of the studied phenomenon. Davies and Hughes (2014) described different types of approaches to the ethnographic research. The first approach was the participant observations, this method requires the researcher to take a role within the setting of the study. Within ethnography a way of complementing a collection of data is through interviews with persons of interest (Flick, 2014). As could be seen in Cepeda, Nowotny and Valdez (2016), and Furst and Balletto (2011) interviews were used as a major part of the data collection in ethnographic studies. The second approach, and the one used for this thesis, was the
non-participant method, where the researcher had a passive, reflective and observational role in the studied context (Davies & Hughes, 2014). The second approach is more suitable in some contexts, for example when studying drug environments as it would be questionable to require a researcher to use drugs in order to take part in the studied field (Lalander, 2011). This does, however, happen in ethnographic research and particularly when studying criminological contexts like drugs and gangs (Davies & Hughes, 2014; Sandberg & Copes, 2012; Worley, Worley & Wood, 2016).

The ethnographic method within sociology and criminology could be traced back to the Chicago school in the 1920s (Anderson, 2006). The method was utilised by the researchers in the making of a number of theoretical stand points applicable to criminology which are still playing an integral role, almost a century later (Sarnecki, 2009). Examples of theories developed was the social ecological theory by Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925) and the theory of differential associations (Sutherland, 1934), both used to describe the origins of criminal behavior from sociological perspective. Worley et al. (2016) described the ethnographic approach in a criminological context and what kinds of contributions ethnography could offer. In their study, eight ethnographers were interviewed about their concerns regarding ethics, insider-outsider dilemma and personal risks in the ethnographic research. There was a strong overall opinion from the participants that the ethnographic research could provide useful information in the field of criminology (Worley et al., 2016). However, they described substantial negative consequences following their field work, like getting shot twice, not being able to get a specific job because of the stigma of being associated with what was done during the ethnographic work and becoming incarcerated for 159 days. Even with such extreme risks as they endured, Worley et al. (2016) argued that there are no substituting methods to getting qualitative data of high quality in large volumes over an extended period of time.

**Method**

The type of study made was a qualitative study using an observational-based ethnographic approach to answer the research question. An ethnographic method is used when the researchers observe the field of interest and take part in it, which is useful when exploring
social and cultural contexts (Flick, 2014). The aim of an ethnographic study is to describe the field, rather than developing a theory, as it is in other qualitative researches. Flick (2014) explained that an ethnography is based on the field notes made by the researcher and later on presented as a report or publication. The ethnographer is involved in the participants everyday lives, watching, listening and documenting all that happens and is said, to create a description of the research question (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) further explained how the ethnographic research focuses on exploring the nature of a social or natural phenomenon, instead of creating an hypothesis to assess the situation. The research is made to describe a small number of cases in detail, as of its qualitative ground. Lastly, the analysis of the data is conducted to interpret the actions of the participants in a report where quantitative and statistical data is scarcely used at most (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998).

In this study the observational type of research was preferable, without any direct contact with the participants. The idea of the study was to describe a normal day at Navet and specifically those events in which suspected drug users and dealers were the primary actors. Other actors included in the study were the people that could contribute to the social environment of Navet. As described by Flick (2014), the ethnographic research data collection is made by the researchers taking a part in the studied environment in a way that does not affect the behavior of the actor/s. In this study, the data was collected by the researchers acting like normal citizens, waiting for the bus or sitting on a bench to take a rest. No interactions with the actors were initiated by the researchers in order to keep the facade of being normal citizens. As the data collection was observational, this study was based on the researchers’ perception of Navet and the people visiting Navet.

About 30 informal conversations with the citizens were conducted in order to get an estimation of their opinion about Navet and the suspected drug users. A majority of their opinions were similar regarding the definition of a drug user. Their personal thoughts and opinions about Navet were also subjects that were sought after in order to get some examples of the citizens views on these matters. As a substitute to the complementing interviews often used in ethnographic studies informal conversations were a key to a deeper understanding of the field, through the public opinion (Flick, 2014).
The definition of suspected drug users used for this study were people suspected of using both illegal and legal drugs openly, including alcohol. As it was impossible to know for certain if a person were using drugs or not, suspected drug users include people that the general population would suspect as a drug user according to the informal conversations with the citizens of Sundsvall. The citizens defined the suspected drug users as people spending a lot of time at Navet with no apparent agenda, with torn faces and ragged clothes and sometimes strange behavior. Oftentimes in groups of people with similar attributes.

Prior to establishing Navet as the place of interest for this study, a number of places of interest regarding the drug market had to be examined in order to conclude what place(s) were the most frequently visited by the suspected drug users. In cooperation with the local police, twelve places of interest where the frequencies of suspected drug activities were high, or hot spots were pointed out as targets for the study, which was conducted quantitatively. These hot spots were visited in a total of 22 different times where 175 observations of people behaving as they were intoxicated or performing any kind of drug related actions. As figure 2 is showing, there were two specific hot spots that were most frequent in the number of observations, “Vänthallen” (the waiting hall) and “Navet”.

"Vänthallen" is the waiting hall for the bus station, Navet, and those two hot spots combined were representing a vast majority of all the observed suspected drug users. The ethnographic work for this study were focused on only these spots as the probability of observing suspected drug users were the highest at those places.

The observations for this study were conducted by two male students in their mid-twenties. Firstly, the observations were spread over different time periods to find out on what time of the day and on which days the activity was the highest. The observations themselves contained blending in with the people at Navet, watching them and listening to them as they communicated and socialized with each others. This was easiest at the waiting hall, as it is a small open room with a lot of benches to sit on, so it was easy to get close enough to the suspected drug users to hear them talk. At Navet, it was a bit more difficult as the people
mostly were going elsewhere, from or to a bus, or to other places of the centre of Sundsvall. The amount of time visiting these two hot spots varied, depending on the activity, but were generally never longer than 20 to 30 minutes. The reason behind this was to not raise unnecessary suspicion about the observers as “normal” people usually do not wait for the bus for a longer period of time. The observations started during November 2016 and ended in March 2017, so the weather has been a potential factor as to where the suspected drug users have been loitering as the winter in Sundsvall can be quite harsh at times. The clothing of the observers has been civilian and as non-attention-raising as possible.

All the data collected during these observations were written down at the same time as it happened as well as some thoughts and analyzes of the observers. This was done using applications on telephones, which was very useful as looking down on a telephone is probably not raising as much suspicion as writing notes on a notepad. As all the data collected has been anonymous regarding the actors at Navet, there has been no need to test the research with the ethical board. An ethical concern has been reporting actual crime to the police, which happened at one occasion when a suspected drug user were trying to sell stolen goods to the researchers.

As Sandberg and Copes (2012) concluded, one of ethnography's biggest strengths is the ability to function without strict rules regarding its design. Following this the selection of what was left out or not from the observational notes is based on what was relevant in a specific case to accurately describe what had been observed in base of the objective of the study. Although frequency has played a determining role at times, certain situations has occurred at many times and can therefore not be ignored no matter the deemed relevance. The observation notes that were perceived as descriptive for the general daily life at Navet were promoted because of their relevance, as a technique mentioned by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995). In some occasions, specific sightings were used as examples as they could act representatively for the overall situation at Navet.
Viewing the Field - Navet and the Waiting Hall

The People and the Social Aspects

Who are the people at Navet?

During every day of the week, a high amount of people visits Navet in one way or another. After the observations, four different categories of people could be confirmed; (1) the travelling citizens, with no suspicion of being involved in drug activities. (2) The ones using Navet as their meeting place to hang out and spend time at. (3) The ones at Navet involved in the illegal drug market in some way and hanging out with other people with an incline to do drugs or other crime. (4) The young people suspected to be involved with the drug activities but not staying at Navet for more than a couple of minuets.

The citizens passing through Navet.

It became obvious, during the observations, that the “normal” population of Sundsvall did not like spending time at Navet and the waiting hall. Previous to the observational part of this study, informal conversations with inhabitants of Sundsvall and people working in - and around Navet were made. In these conversations, it was apparent that they actively avoided Navet and the waiting hall. At some occasions, people were observed coming into the waiting hall, looking around at the suspected drug users and turned around to wait for the bus outside instead, in freezing conditions. Inside the waiting hall, they usually sat in the vacant seats (not the ones preferred by the suspected drug users), looking at their telephones and glancing to the tables with information about the buses, seemingly wanting to get out of there.

The people using Navet as a meeting place.

Apart from the suspected drug users, another group of people were observed as regular visitors, especially at the waiting hall. This group contained of younger people of presumably immigrant background, as they did not speak swedish amongst each other. All of them were males and in groups of between five and fifteen. This group of people were present at almost all of the conducted observations. They never did anything but sitting and talking to each other or playing with their telephones. It was hard to specify their age, but they were
The suspected drug users.

It was easy to distinguish the people of this group, as they almost always sat in the same places, with the same people and looking like what people generally thinks the stereotypical drug user looks like, as described in the informal conversations. Their clothing often ragged and dirty, usually tracksuits and sweatpants, looking like they have been worn for weeks without washing. Most of the older ones had worn faces, possibly as results of long-term drug use of various substances.

Most of the suspected drug users were male, in a proportion of 4 out of 5, in ages that seemed to be around 30 to 60. They were more often than not socializing in groups, sometimes as many as 20 people at a time. The most frequently visited spot of the suspected drug users were the waiting hall, as it was too cold for them to be outside for longer periods. They often walked in and out of the waiting hall, to go across the street to Systembolaget to buy alcohol or to stand outside to smoke. Most of them seemed to know each other in some way or another. That could express itself by a short greeting, a quick question or simply a recognizing nod as they came into view. In the waiting hall, the suspected drug users clearly preferred two different areas to sit in, either in the seats directly inside of the entrance or in the back of the room, with an overview of all the seats. If the suspected drug users were not in those two spots, they would be standing between the doors in the entrance of the waiting hall, or just outside the building. Noteworthy was that almost everyone in this group were believed to be intoxicated with alcohol and/or other substances during the observations. This conclusion was made as they often times openly drank alcohol, talked loudly and incoherent to each other about buying or using drugs.

The young suspected drug users.

The majority of suspected drug users at Navet and the waiting hall were estimated to be between 30 and 60 years old. However, a smaller group, the young suspected drug users were also often present. It was sometimes hard to recognize the younger suspected drug users as they did not look as weathered and torn as the older ones. They could often be recognized by...
their apparent intoxication, mumbling, twitching and with a wandering gaze. Something notable that was observed of the younger suspected drug users was their choice of company. They did usually not spend time with others at their own age, but with the older suspected drug users instead. It felt like the older ones taught the younger, told them when to sit down and be tranquil and talked to them about their experiences with the law enforcement and drugs. At some point, a significant amount of the younger suspected drug users appeared to be protégés to their elders. For one example, there was a woman who always was accompanied by a younger woman with similar looks. Both physical appearance and their type of clothing suggested that they were related to each other. The younger woman appeared to look up to the older woman, for example by, helping her with shopping groceries and always following her around. Another example of this type of relationship between the younger and the older suspected drug users were when an old man had brought a chess board to the waiting hall. The other suspected drug users came to watch as the old man played a young man and the impression was that the young man listened to the old man and really appreciated his words of wisdom.

Cohen (1961) described, in his own adaption of the subcultural theory, that as a result of the working class youths struggle to achieve the established goals set by the middle class of society, crime becomes a solution. The type of crime that would arise from this phenomena is generally shortsighted and in search of satisfying hedonistic needs. Cohen (1961) also claimed that, to this type of subcultural crime development, the group has a vital function as well as the elders teaching the young while at the same time offering protection and a sense of belonging, which nurtures the ongoing subculture. Dismissing the origins of crime, the working class youths, the theory by Cohen (1961) was applicable to the young suspected drug users at Navet. The most prominent factors recognized from the subcultural theory was the group dynamics initiating new members by the elders taking an interest in the young, which was observed multiple times and described, for example the mother and daughter who always accompanied each other. Another factor that applied this theory to the young at Navet was the shortsighted and hedonistic lifestyle, based on the seemingly spontaneous alcohol and pill consumption that also applied to all suspected drug users at Navet. Criticism targeting this theory was based on the lack of empirical data, Sarnecki (2009) questioned the
possibility to find youths who had entirely rejected the established goals set by the middle class.

**The young suspected drug users that did not spend much time at Navet.**

There was another group of young suspected drug users present at Navet as well. This group contained people in their teens. Out of the few times these people were observed, all of them were males. They did usually not spend much time at Navet, only a couple of minutes, possibly the time it took waiting for the right bus. It was obvious these young people knew the older suspected drug users as they would greet them and shake hands. At a few occasions a transaction of drugs and money was suspected between these two groups. This group of young suspected drug users were more often in groups of two-three people or more, as opposed to the other group of young suspected drug users.

A likely scenario was that this last group of younger suspected drug users were more caring about their appearance in order to stay “under the radar”. It is possible that they were not as far outside of the society as the other suspected drug users and did not want to stay at Navet for longer periods of time because of the risk of getting recognized by someone they knew. The suspected transactions of drugs and money that this group of teenagers were involved in, were short in time and in contrast with the other suspected transaction observed, who seemed to be more prone to have a conversation and were in no hurry to complete the transaction. That is a distinct difference to the younger suspected drug users socializing with the older suspected drug users, who clearly did not care about the possibility of getting recognized or drawing attention from the police or other people.

As these suspected drug users most likely were teenagers, they could be presumed to attend school. This raises the question whether or not the schools could be a secondary marketplace for the drugs circulating at Navet. Of course, there is a possibility that these individuals does not attend school, but their age indicated that they should. This conclusion is based on the fact that in Sweden, 98% of the population attend a gymnasium after the ninth grade (Skolverket, 2014). The ages of people attending a gymnasium is normally up to 19 years, depending on date of birth.
The social aspect of being at Navet.

The suspected drug users at Navet and the waiting hall did not seem to view themselves as a part of the normal society, with the exception of the younger suspected drug users who mostly buy or sell drugs at Navet and spends their time elsewhere. There has been no detection of interaction between the suspected drug users and the normal citizens in any way, nobody from the normal citizens has been making any type of contact with the suspected drug users.

Some social conducts of the suspected drug users could be found; Firstly, it was very clear that the suspected drug users were using specific areas inside of the waiting hall, as their own spots. Not in such a way that other people were told to leave if they sat in their spots. If that would happen, the suspected drug users would simply stand between the doors in the entrance or outside. This behavior could indicate that the suspected drug users were aware of their social alienation but at the same time did not have the intentions of interfering with other people.

The second noticeable social aspect of the suspected drug users was what types of drugs they were using and in what way. Even though it is prohibited to drink alcohol in the centre of Sundsvall, the suspected drug users sat daily at Navet and in the waiting hall drinking openly in front of other people. They probably knew that they were not allowed to, but they kept doing it anyway. The reasons behind this openly forbidden, or at least stigmatized behavior was possibly based on the social acceptance within the social group of suspected drug users at Navet. It became clear that the suspected drug users did not want to use heavier types of narcotics openly at Navet or the waiting hall, as they would sometimes whisper to each other, almost inaudible, about going to other spots to use drugs. If they only drank alcohol in public because of the social acceptance of alcohol or because of the lower risk of getting arrested is hard to say without asking them in person. Since all kind of handling of narcotics is illegal in Sweden, like producing, possession, conveyance and consumption (Ekbom, Engström and Göransson, 2011), the aspect of getting arrested was probably an important factor. They may have found a limit to what type of drugs they can use in the open without getting in to trouble. As the suspected drug users did not use other types of substances than alcohol, pills
and possibly cannabis at Navet, but by listening and watching, it was suspected that they were using other types of drugs as well but with more discretion. While talking about consuming other types of drugs, they lowered their voices as to not get overheard and then moved away to other locations, such as public toilets. The avoidant behavior regarding other substances indicated that the suspected drug users did not want to openly consume every type of substance in the presence of the other citizens and potentially the police. The avoidant behavior could either be a result of a social adaption towards the general norms of society or a defensive act to not get in trouble with the law enforcement, or a combination of both. This suggests that the general norms of the society is more accepting of the open use of alcohol, even in places that are prohibited. The social acceptance seems to have been normalizing the alcohol as something that is not a problem worth time and resources to counteract. The other types of substances does not seem to have been normalized by the general society and does still prohibit the open usage of “heavier” substances. This raises the question if these types of substances are to become normalized and accepted in the same way as alcohol is perceived to be today.

Lastly, were several occasions of the suspected drug users acting socially questionably. For example, there was a man around 30 years old who almost daily spent time at the waiting hall. He always looked intoxicated and frequently talked loudly to himself. At one particular occasion, he was dancing around inside of the waiting hall with a new telephone in his hand, listening to dubstep music using the telephone as a speaker, not caring about anyone else in the room while other people clearly became annoyed by his loud music. Another reconnaissance of strange behavior was when a man went inside a public restroom, just outside of the waiting hall. This restroom had previously been recognized as a place used by the suspected drug users to either buy/sell drugs or as a place to consume narcotics. The door to the toilet opened half way after some time, and a stream of urine spurted out of the public toilet to the pavement outside. These two events are examples of behavior that contribute to the feeling that the suspected drug users live by their own social contexts, not really caring about the norms and rules of the society. If these actions were a result of intoxication, mental health problems or personal view and negligence of norms, is hard to say, it could be a combination.
Socially deviant behavior of this nature at Navet could be partially explained by possible mental health problems of the individuals responsible, or a combination of mental illness and drug use. According to Johansson and Wirbing (2005), alcohol and drugs are common means to self medication among people with mental health problems as well as personality disorders. To tell the specifics of the presumable present mental health problems at Navet based off of the observations is not possible, but Fridell (1991) made general estimations of Swedish drug addicts. Fridell (1991) estimated that anxiety and depression affects 30-60% of all Swedish drug addicts, and various personality disorders in 65-80% of all Swedish drug addicts. This could indicate that mental health problems is a factor in the lives of the suspected drug users at Navet, that may induce behavior to be considered strange and challenging conventional norms of the general public. Mental health problems consolidates a social stigma surrounding both the people at Navet and the location as well, enhancing the already established unease or discomfort from the citizens. To which extent these aforementioned mental health problems is represented at Navet needs further analysis to disclose.

**Hostility and aggression.**

What has been found through the many observations is a complete lack of hostility and aggression from the suspected drug users directed outside of their social group. It is highly likely that a number of suspected drug users recognized the observers while in their normal territory, but the observers were never approached friendly or targeted through aggression, there were no interaction except for the situation when a man tried to sell stolen goods to the observers. On one occasion a small group of suspected drug users left the waiting hall as the observers entered for the first time that day, it was clearly a statement, they had noticed and did not want to be around when the observers were there. Even while being uncomfortable enough to leave, no will to approach socially was shown. On a few occasions their preferred seats were taken in the waiting hall and that only lead to split up groups of suspected drug users standing up, they even seemed unwilling to have social interactions outside of their groups. Similar situations happened many times but not even a word was spoken.

As this is the interpretation of two men in their twenties, there is a possibility that other people may perceive a sense of hostility or aggression. But as no other person, apart from
within their own group of suspected drug users, was observed to even be contacted by the suspected drug users the conclusion was that no one had any apparent reason to feel threatened at Navet.

The Open Drug Market

The type of drugs used at Navet.

As the observations has been limited in time (between 10 and 30 minutes at a time on each location) it was impossible to be certain of all the types of drugs used by the suspected drug users at Navet. The types of drugs are what the researchers suspected them to be as it was impossible to get a closer look at the substances. Alcohol were the most common openly used drug. The suspected drug users drank from bottles and cans more often than not. At the waiting hall, the smell of old, dried up alcohol was present at numerous occasions, making it an unpleasant place to stay at for longer periods. Even when they did not actively drink, there was always at least one plastic bag of alcohol from Systembolaget standing on the floor of the waiting hall or visible in someone's backpack.

Some people seemed to primarily use alcohol, rather than other types of substances. In general, these people were older than the other suspected drug users and were much less erratic in their bodily movements and the changing of positions/seats inside the waiting hall. They were almost always sitting still, often continuously drinking and mostly did not move outside the waiting hall. This primarily alcohol using group tended to have a much more familiar and friendly attitude towards each other than the people suspected of using various types of substances. Their intoxication also seemed to help with their bonding and in what sort of mood they presented to one another.

On several occasions, the suspected drug users were observed using pills of unknown character. The pills were used by people of all ages and genders and were consumed at Navet and the waiting hall, mostly open. It was clear that they tried to keep the transaction of pills between each other somewhat hidden. The ingestion of pills could easily be done without raising attention from other people, so the suspected drug users did usually not leave the waiting hall or Navet. What these pills contained was hard to tell, but the suspicion was that
they were some kind of pharmaceuticals. When the pills were distributed amongst themselves, they tried to cover the transfer of pills and money as a handshake or hiding behind a pillar or covering the transaction under a jacket. It was obvious, from their behavior, that the suspected drug users knew the pills were not as “OK” as alcohol, but still not as bad as heavier types of drugs and narcotics since these heavier types were never used or handled openly at Navet or the waiting hall, as far as the observers could see.

Some suspected drug users were rolling cigarettes, possibly containing cannabis. They were heard talking about cannabis at some occasions and sometimes the sweeter kind of smell from their smoke could be recognized outside of the waiting hall, where the suspected drug users often stood in groups smoking. However, it is possible that the cigarettes sometimes only contained tobacco as it is cheaper to buy the different contents of cigarettes and rolling them by themselves than buying regular packs. The economic situation of the suspected drug users could be seen as a strengthening factor of this possibility.

Outside of alcohol, pills and potentially cannabis, no other types of usage or possession were witnessed. However, stories of the suspected drug users using syringes inside of public toilets were told by the people working in and around Navet. For example, a culture-house including a museum and a library called Kulturmagasinet, some hundred meters from Navet, have had problems with suspected drug users using heroin at their toilets and at their exhibitions. The same was told about toilets inside of a shopping centre close to Navet. During the observations at the waiting hall, a group of suspected drug users were overheard talking about going to a multi storey car park to consume drugs. The impression made from hearing about that was that they were going to do heavier types of drugs than just alcohol or cannabis. At a public toilet, close to Navet, a person was inside the toilet for a long period of time. After a while, a woman approached the toilet and knocked on its door. The woman looked like what the normal population would call a stereotypical drug user, with dirty clothes and a worn face. She called out “It’s Karin², open up!” The door opened just a little bit and a hand reached out towards the woman. She gave the person inside a zip bag of some kind of white powder and something that looked like a credit card, and then quickly walked away.

² Karin is a notional name.
With these observations, the feeling left imprinted was that the suspected drug users at Navet were using multiple types of substances, although some of the substances appeared to be consumed at other locations than Navet. At Navet and especially at the waiting hall, the openly usage of drugs were of a more socially accepted kind in the form of alcohol and pills, and the pills content was hard to specify. This is of course a simplification of their drug use, as all the individuals have differences between each other. Some of them only used alcohol, although a minority, some of them did not consume pills and so on, but the general conclusion of the open drug use was a combination of different types defined by what they could get their hands on.

The people suspected of using multiple substances regularly stood out from the primarily alcohol using people in the way they behaved, both in a social context and alone. They were represented by people of all ages and were rarely suspected of having used drugs at Navet but possibly at other locations. In contrast with the primarily alcohol using people, they were more often on their feet and walked in and out of the waiting hall and between bus stops. At some occasions, these people were observed shouting at each other in an aggressive manner and talked badly about others who were not present. They did not seem to be as friendly towards each other as the primarily alcohol users were and were often observed being alone, talking to themselves. One man, while suspected high on some type of substance, walked around the waiting hall complaining loudly out to the room about the heat without talking to anyone in particular. In response to the complaining, another man that were suspected of using multiple substances, mumbled “This lunatic has to has to shut up now”, which indicated the not-so-friendly tone in between the suspected multiple substance users. Another man was observed sitting on a bench inside the waiting hall, drooling and talking incomprehensive to himself in a way that never was observed of the primarily alcohol using people. These three examples were typical behavior for the suspected multiple substance users, proposing a social hindrance compared to the primarily alcohol using people.

Buyers and sellers.

At a first glance there appeared to be two economic groups at Navet, the sellers of various substances and the buyers. The latter group is often thought of to be the ones loitering around
Navet. This simplistic view of the drug market occurring at Navet is not accurate. Through observations became clear that most of the providers of drugs were also the people buying, not at the same time but a person selling one day may be looking to buy the next. There were a minority of people who seemed to be slightly more in the selling end of the deal and spent less time at Navet compared to those who were buying more often. It appeared to be a market based on demand alone rather than supply combined with demand and a hierarchy where the people on the top never had been observed but the vast majority of the observed suspected drug users were parts of the bottom section to finance their own consumption of drugs. The people that were suspected of being sellers, higher up in the hierarchy, were not many, probably only two or three. Since each person did not seem to have access to drugs at the same time there had to be different sellers and buyers at any given day.

Since there were not many people suspected of primarily being sellers of drugs without also apparent consumption, the few either sold in high amounts or the suspected drug users themselves were responsible for a majority of the selling. If the market was supplied by a few actors, they would probably be involved in organized drug trafficking at a higher level of the market’s hierarchy.

**Heightened activity around the 20th.**

Each month, around the 20th, a heightened activity of suspected drug users were observed at Navet. Regardless of circumstantial conditions like weather conditions or day of the week, the suspected drug users seemed to be in larger groups and plentier in numbers total. As this increased frequency appeared every month of the observations, questions about the origins of occurrence were raised.

A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be based on the assumption that the suspected drug users did not have any stable jobs. This would mean that they probably were receiving welfare money and/or sickness pension from different authorities. According to Försäkringskassan (n.d), most of these payouts occurred between the 18th and 20th of every month depending on what day of the month the person were born. An opposing argument could be that, if the suspected drug users have jobs, the days around the 20th would be the days before their salary payments and therefore possibly a time of financial struggle for some
of them. The heightened activity could be a consequence of them trying to acquire drugs and money easier before the next payment. There is a possibility that both of these scenarios are true, but the perception of the suspected drug users by the observers were that most of them did not have a job given the amount of time they were spending at Navet. A majority of the actors at Navet were recognized as the same recurring people at Navet during the months of observations. This leads to the conclusion that the first scenario is the more likely of the two, but neither of them can be neglected.

Environmental Circumstances

Navet - a “no-go area”?

Grønnestad and Lalander (2014) concluded that the geographic focus of their study, a bench, had become a “no-go area” for the public and entirely taken over by drug users. The bench was described as a meeting point for the people that were a part of the illegal drug scene of the city. The site was only used by the people using illegal substances, making it a no-go area for the other citizens (Grønnestad & Lalander, 2014). Similarities were found in the waiting hall and Navet, it was mainly visited by and occupied by suspected drug users although the public often passed by, or in the waiting halls case came in to wait. But as the waiting hall had a sometimes needed function it separates from the bench in its attraction of all kinds of people. During winter in Sweden, a waiting hall might not be something to shy away from and because of the temperature, people were forced to visit the suspected drug users most common location. A significant amount of citizens who entered the waiting hall left within minutes if not sooner. One example of this was an observation of a young woman entering the waiting hall on a very cold day. Instead of taking a seat or staying she looked around and within seconds she had left to wait for the bus outside. That again could indicate the waiting hall being a “no-go area” for each new individual entering. A person must enter the waiting hall rather than just walk by as you could, to a bench to determine if it is a place you would want to be staying at for a while or not.

As described, the waiting hall is similar to the bench (Grønnestad & Lalander, 2014) in some regards, but to call it a “no-go area” would be to exaggerate. The citizens of Sundsvall still uses the waiting hall on a daily basis waiting for their buses. However, an avoidant behavior
from the citizens towards the waiting hall was observed. The exact reasoning behind people turning around after entering the waiting hall was not possible to know without asking them, but some possible reactive scenarios could be; (1) They saw groups of suspected drug users and felt discomfort in their presence. (2) They could have entered the waiting hall with the only purpose of looking up bus departure times and then left because the bus was about to leave. (3) Some might have set out to meet up with someone at the waiting hall to go somewhere else, the waiting hall is after all a bus stop. Based on the observed behavior and facial expressions the first alternative seemed to be the most frequent scenario.

Why are the suspected drug users at Navet?

In comparison to other parts of Sundsvall centre, the amount of suspected drug users were very high at Navet. By observing the suspected drug users, some possible factors explaining their choice of place appeared. The first factor of note was the enabling nature of the area. At Navet, there was a lot of benches and bus shelters, making the area usable as a meeting place during all seasons. Especially the waiting hall, which was open and warmed up at all times. Another important factor was the location itself and its function. Navet is located in the central parts of the city, making it a good place to meet up at, with easy communication through the use of busses. The suspected drug users had an immediate connection to almost everything needed for daily life. An easy way to get there, a warm place during winters and a lot of places to sit down outside during the summer. Systembolaget was also very close, making it easy for the suspected drug users to go buy alcohol as soon as they wanted to. The closeness to shops and boutiques allowed the suspected drug users to go buy food and if needed, and likely shoplift to get quick money, which was observed at one occasion. As it is in the central parts of the city, the suspected drug users were often checked by police or security guards, but they had easy access to other more secluded places close by, if needed, to potentially use their narcotics. The high flow of people at public places could also be an important factor as Boggs (1965) stated, in which the suspected drug users could hide in the masses as they met up with buyers and sellers of substances. All of these enabling factors are what Stedman (2002) called satisfying attributes which combined with a continuously developing symbolic meaning strengthening Navet as a place to use drugs among the suspected drug users provides an explanation to why they prefer Navet over other locations.
As alcohol use was the most observed type of drug use, the closeness to Systembolaget should be considered to have an important role in why the suspected drug users were located at Navet. This suggests that a relocation of Systembolaget would have an impact on the stagnant position of the suspected drug users every day life. Whether or not they would relocate to a new close by position to Systembolaget or just walk back and forth is uncertain.

**The impact of weather.**

The weather during November through March in northern Sweden is mostly associated with snowy conditions along with subzero temperatures. The waiting hall and Navet were more populated by the suspected drug users during the colder days of the winter than the less cold days. The amount of people were much higher inside the waiting hall during the days with temperatures below -15 degrees celsius than during the warmer days in March. When it was raining or heavily snowing, more activity from the suspected drug users appeared inside the waiting hall than outside.

Based on the observed impact of weather, an assumption about spring- and summertime would be that the suspected drug users are not as prone to be indoors at the waiting hall. And the suspected drug use would be more prevalent on the streets and parks around the central areas of Sundsvall. Whether the frequency of suspected drug users would increase, or not, during the warmer periods of the year is hard to say. But, if they are more outside than during the winter, the general perception could be that there has been an increase of drug users.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to describe what happens at Navet that could be associated with visible drug activities. The result of the observations was the following: Navet is an area frequently visited by people suspected to be using and selling a variety of drugs and substances. Depending on the weather and on the date of the month, the amount of suspected drug users differs, especially inside of the waiting hall, as it offers protection and warmth at all times. As of other people, Navet is still used in its purpose, as a bus hub connecting every bus-line in the city and also with regional traffic, but there is a probable disinclination from
the citizens to visit Navet and the waiting hall. The suspected drug users are people who generally know each other, but does not always spend time with each other. Some different groups of suspected drug users, depending on their substance orientation have been discussed. Firstly and most common is a group of people that appears to mainly use alcohol and secondly there is a group that possibly are mixing different substances. The possibility of mental health problems of these suspected drug users were discussed. Regarding age differences of the suspected drug users, most of them appear to be between 30 and 60 years old, estimated by the observers. The ones younger than 30 appeared to have a higher variety of suspected substances used. Some people, that seemed to be mostly teenagers, did not spend as much time at Navet as the other suspected drug users, but appeared to visit Navet for a short time, possibly to buy drugs from other suspected drug users. Whether or not this latter group of young suspected drug users have a different connection to the society was also discussed and compared to other people spending hours at Navet as they perhaps do not want to get recognized as associates in the open drug market. During the time of observations performed, no apparent contacts or attempts of contacts between the suspected drug users and the rest of the citizens of Sundsvall were observed. There were never any hostile acts nor foul language towards the citizens or the observers from the suspected drug users. However, as the observers were two young men, there is always a possibility of gender and physical factors that has to be considered. As this study was made using an ethnographic approach and the data was collected and analysed by the authors, if someone else would have made the same types of observations, the results may not be the same.

As stated in the introduction, this type of study is important to conduct because Navet had a reputation of being connected to heavy drug use and criminality and has a substantial influence on the general view of Sundsvall, that had to be either confirmed or discarded in order to support future decisions about Navet by the police or other types of instances. Introduced in the beginning of the thesis, one of the first things that we, as new inhabitants of the city, encountered was to stay away from Navet because of the high amount of drugs circulating. Information has been gathered that could, through this studies results, change the reputation of Navet. The psychological and social aspects by Stedman (2002) and the lack of social control (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) contributes to this study’s importance, helping to describe why an open drug market like the one at Navet is allowed to exist. These general
factors suggests that the results are applicable to places with similar attributes and normalized view of open alcohol use.

To increase the usefulness of this type of study, future studies should consider: (1) to include interviews with the observed actors, preferably after the observations are completed. The information from these interviews would help understand the situation and could help distinguish what information is the most relevant to describe the field. (2) Changing location to a larger city to use as a base for their research to investigate potential differences. (3) Performing a similar study with observers of different characteristics, gender and age for example to include the possibility of varying interpretations. (4) To conduct the same research during all seasons of the year, as these results indicate that the drug related activities location changes depending on temperature and weather.

Usefulness of the Ethnographic Method

Ethnography has proven to be a useful method to describe Navet and the people acting at Navet. Some advantages of using ethnography was that the data were unaffected by the observed actors opinions and since the observers made an effort to stay anonymous, the data was hopefully not affected by the actors trying to influence the results in any way. The method was time efficient, regarding to the comprehensiveness of the data, leaving more time to analyze and discuss the findings. The observations created an understanding of the situation based on impressions and the atmosphere at Navet, that would not be possible to achieve in any other way.

The ethnographic method did not help, in this study, to provide certainty regarding if the observed circumstances were objectively correct, since the data collection was based on the observer's own experiences and interpretations. Another problematic factor with this method is the impossibility to completely erase the interpretation bias, since the data is completely dependent on the observers. This problem is possible to minimise by complementing the data with other sources giving indications whether or not the ethnographic data is plausible.
Limitations

This study results is mostly generalizing for cities of the same size and culture as Sundsvall, with similar areas as Navet. It is problematic to use the results in other contexts since its purpose is to explain the ongoing situation in a limited, local environment, and the drug activities at that specific place.

Regarding reliability, the authors took great carefulness in detailing the methods of this study, in the observations and the following interpretations. Other researchers may be making different interpretations of the same situations that was observed at Navet. This fact should be considered while conducting or reading this type of study as it is always a possibility when collecting data depending on anyone else's point of view.

To be able to get a full picture of Navet, interviews with both suspected drug users and people frequenting navet without any association to the drug market would complement the data gathered and interpreted. An interesting and deeper discussion could be made based on the statements from both groups compared with what has been seen but that would require a substantially large amount of time that was not available.

The risk of getting recognized by the actors at Navet was a limitation. They might have changed their behavior if they suspected that someone was watching them and especially if they connected these people with the police or some other type of instance. Since none of the actors confronted the observers, there was no way of knowing whether or not this actually happened and had an impact on the results or if it is only a concern.

Time has been a strong limitation. Within ethnography it is not uncommon to perform the data collection over extended periods of time, often multiple years, like the participants in Worley et al. (2016) where at least two studies had been conducted for more than six years (Adler & Adler, 1983; Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991). Without that option in this study the information from Navet is not complete regarding the likely effects of weather, flow of substances trafficked that can increase or decrease over time or trends in what substances are
commonly used. The observations were only conducted during winter and early spring and the results suggested that the activities around Navet would be different during spring or summer time.
References


