

Digital Maps for Linguistic Diversity

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Language maps have been criticized for being oversimplified and “generalized snapshots in time of a variable that is in constant change” (Luebbering et al 2013a: 383; Mackey 1998). Characteristics of languages such as flows and movements as well as the lack of clear borders, for instance, demand contextualization and clarifications that are challenging to visualize. Given the central role of these maps in educational books, atlases, etc., we ought to find more appropriate and accurate pedagogical modes of presentation of linguistic data.

Linguistic Landscapes Studies

This poster takes its point of departure in a research project* investigating linguistic landscapes, that is landscapes constructed by the combination of “road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” in a given “territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997:25). By studying which languages materialize in our surroundings, we can reach an understanding about which languages that are used and represented in a society, and thereby about which languages that are allowed to be seen and which are not, providing information about language discourses, policy and power relations. Our project focuses more specifically on the representation of languages in 7 locations in Northern Sweden.

One of **digital humanities** most valuable contributions is within the area of visualization. It is not only a mode to convey scientific results in graspable packages – it is also a way to raise new questions, make visible new patterns and causal relations between variables. Deep maps for instance (Least Heat- Moon 1991; Bodenham & Corrigan 2015) can combine complex layers based on various data linked to objects and enable the user to interactively compare these different layers. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) allow for a greater flexibility in the use of data in term of accessibility, analysis and display, which in one of the reasons why digital cartography is today an increasing area in visualization studies (Foka, Buckland, Cocq, Gelfgren, 2020; Luebbering et al 2013a; 2013b).

Digital mapping for visualization can offer solutions for meeting the challenge of successfully representing linguistic diversity.

Language maps have been criticized for failing to represent today’s diverse linguistic environment and for embedding issues of power and perception, for instance in cartographic decisions, with implications for the representation of various groups of language speakers. Here, we seek to find digital forms of visualization that are non-authoritative and allow to render the flows and dynamism of languages and language use.

Non-authoritative and dynamic visualization

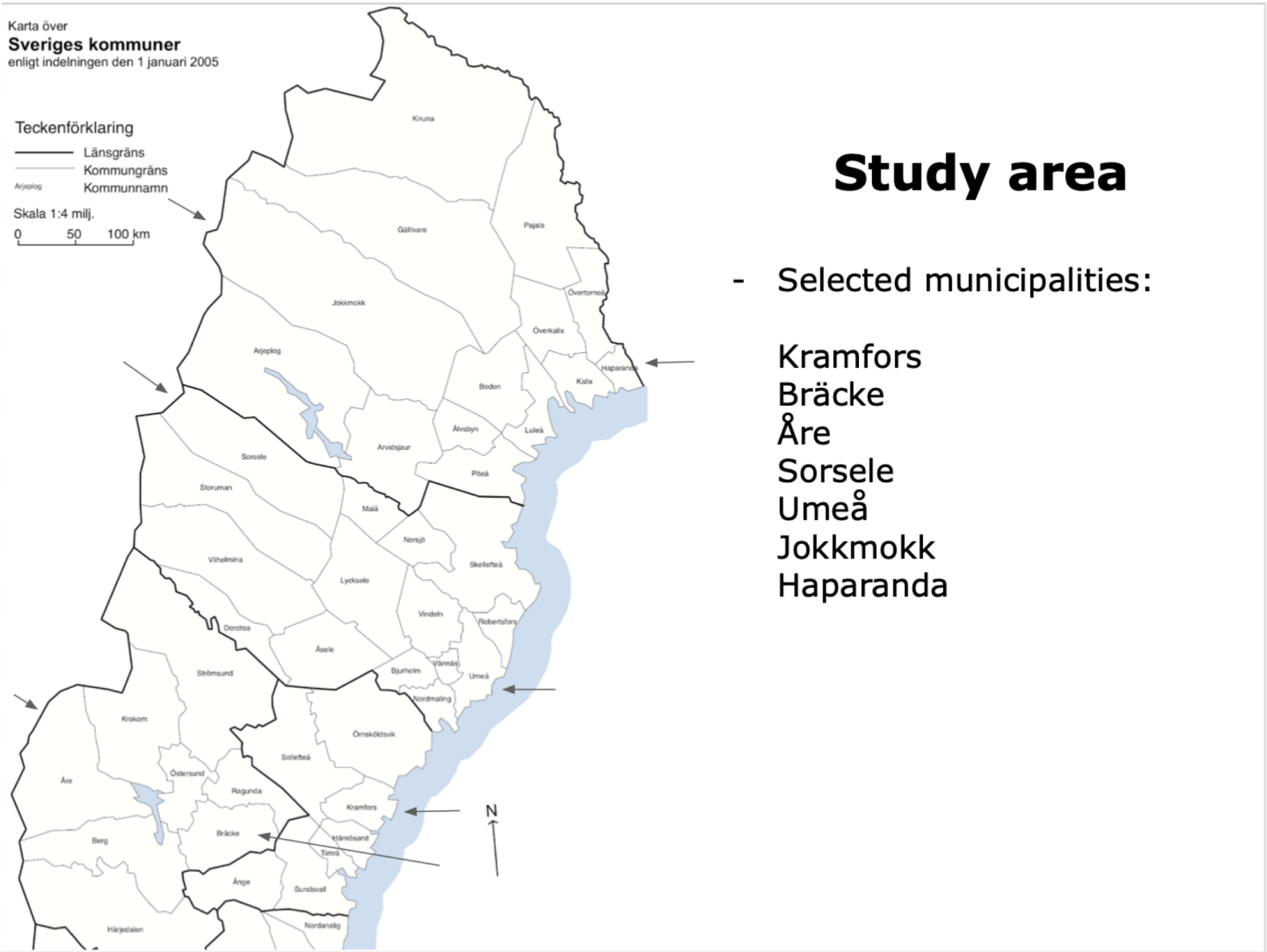
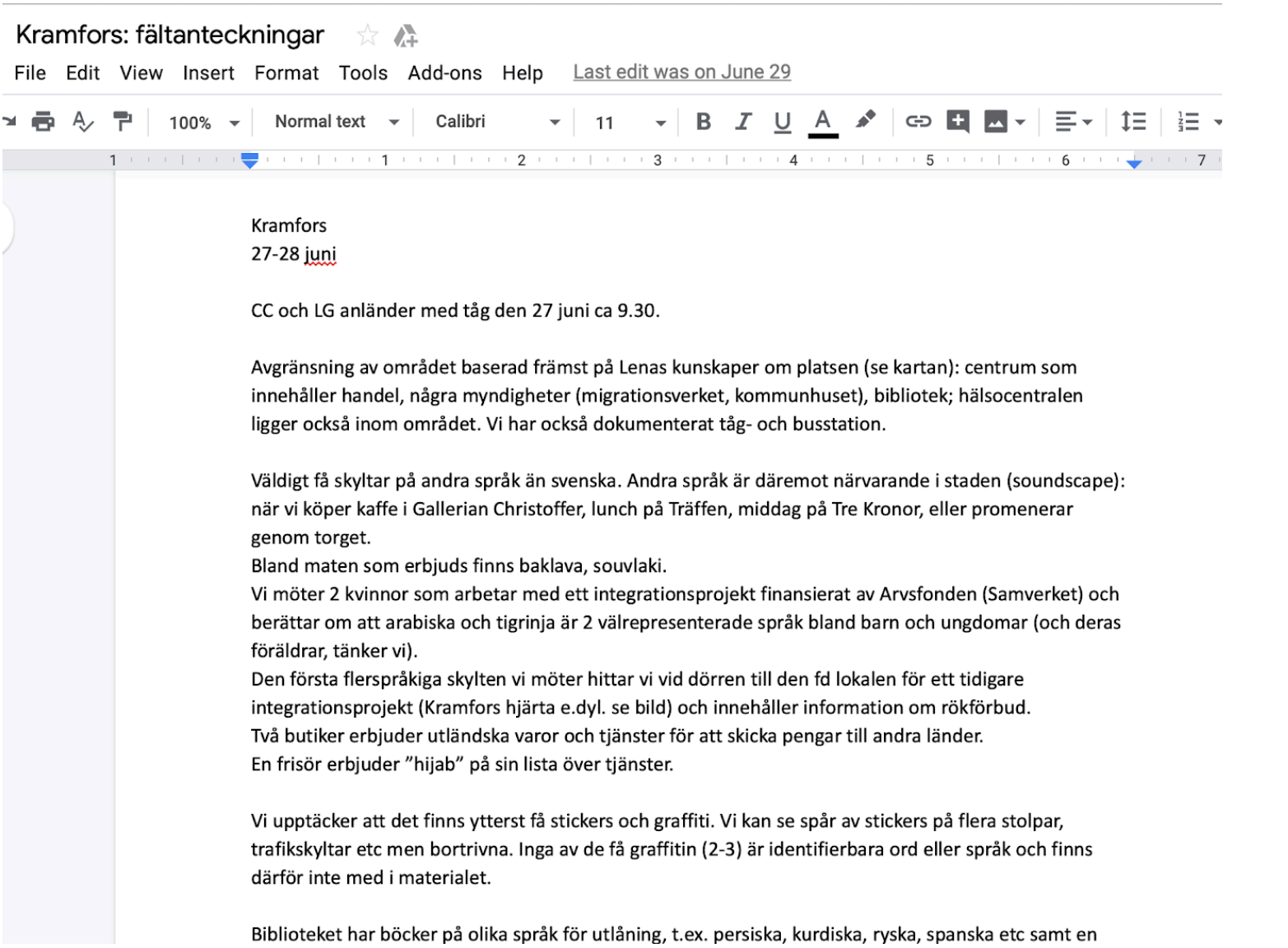
In order to find a mode of rendering the dynamism of multilingualism, we strive for including various layers of data:

- Ethnographic data (fieldnotes, etc)
- Socio-demographic data
- Contextual information about the data collected
- Vernacular signs (temporary signs, street art, stickers etc)

In a next step, we will strive for complementing with additional data such as:

- Photos collected via crowdsourcing
- Social media data (collected at a specific time and place, for instance an event, a festival)

In June 2019, we conducted **fieldwork in Kramfors** and documented the city center. The photo documentation reveals a strong dominance of monolingual signs in Swedish. Our observations and interactions in different places in the city center, on the other hand corroborates what is indicated in the demographic data, i.e. that a larger part of the population has a non-Swedish origin and language (10,5 %, from 5 different groups of countries). The cultural and linguistic diversity is however not represented in the linguistic landscape of the city center. However, other data also tell us that integration projects take place, organized by the Church, the municipality or the school. In the next step of our project, we will integrate the different dataset and investigate the dynamics of place making process through language choice in public spaces.



* The Language of Place-Making, FORMAS 2019-2021 (University of Helsinki: Copp lie Cocq; Ume  University: Lena Granstedt, Eva Lindgren, Urban Lindgren & Humlab)

The vernacular and participatory dimensions of the datasets will enable us to better grasp – and render – the varieties of uses and the dynamism of languages.

Such visualization shall not only serve as a methodological tool, but also as a means for communication of knowledge about the presence of languages and their speakers, and/or the lack of representations of these languages. Thereby, such visualization can contribute to an increased awareness about linguistic diversity and multilingualism - a first step for developing means for inclusion, for understanding place-making processes and apply this knowledge to the creation of public spaces that are inclusive and provide a better understanding and the prevention of segregation.

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