



**Háskólinn
á Akureyri**

Hug- og félagsvísindasvið

Fjölmíðlafræði

2012

Oddeyri and its image

Where does the image come from and where can it be seen?

Herdís Helgadóttir

Lokaverkefni við Hug- og félagsvísindasvið



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Lokaverkefni til 180 eininga B.A. prófs við Hug- og félagsvísindasvið

Leiðbeinandi:

Markus Meckl

Yfirlýsingar

„Ég lýsi því hér með yfir að ég ein er höfundur þessa verkefnis og að það er ágóði eigin rannsókna.“

Herdís Helgadóttir

„Það staðfestist hér með að lokaverkefni þetta fullnægir að mínum dómi kröfum til B.A. prófs við Hug- og félagsvísindadeild.“

Markus Meckl

Útdráttur

Oddeyri er frekar smátt og gamalt hverfi á Akureyri. Hverfið byggðist upp frá miðri nítjándu fram á miðja tuttugustu öld. Til að byrja með var hverfið ekki hluti af Akureyrarkaupstað en það breyttist fljótlega eftir að hverfið byrjaði að byggjast upp. Ímynd Oddeyrar hefur alla tíð skorið sig úr og verið frekar neikvæð. Ímyndin hefur fylgt hverfinu í fjölda ára og áratuga. Markmið þessarar ritgerðar er að varpa ljósi á þessa ímynd, skoða hvaðan hún kemur og hvernig hún birtist. Þessi neikvæða ímynd orsakast meðal annars af því að húsin í hverfinu eru lítil og gömul. Annar áhrifapáttur er saga hverfisins. Á Eyrinni, eins og hverfið er yfirleitt kallað, hefur alla tíð búið margt fólk sem ekki hefur haft mikið á milli handanna. Litlu og gömlu húsin hafa því ekki endilega fengið það viðhald sem þau hefðu þurft. Allt ýtir þetta undir hina neikvæðu ímynd sem segir að hverfið sé á einhvern hátt verra en önnur hverfi í bænum.

Til að varpa sem bestu ljósi á ímyndina var saga hverfisins skoðuð. Einnig voru tekin viðtöl við fólk sem hefur búið og/eða starfað á Eyrinni og/eða starfað í bæjarstjórn Akureyrar.

Abstract

Oddeyri is a small and old neighbourhood in Akureyri. The neighbourhood was built from around the mid 19th century till the mid 20th century. In the beginning Oddeyri was not a part of Akureyri but that changed shortly after settlement started in the area.

The image of Oddeyri has always been different from the image of Akureyri and been quite negative. The image has followed the neighbourhood through many years and decades. The aim of this essay is to clarify this image, its reasons and the way it can be seen. This negative image is for example caused by the fact that the houses in the neighbourhood are old and small. Another factor is that in the history of Oddeyri, or Eyrin as it is usually called, the inhabitants of the neighbourhood have not been the wealthiest in town. Therefore, the small and old houses have not necessarily got the maintenance they would have needed. These facts promote this negative image, that the neighbourhood is somehow worse than other neighbourhoods in Akureyri.

In order to show the image in the most realistic way, the history of the neighbourhood will be reported along with interviews with people that have lived in Eyrin, worked in the neighbourhood or in the town council.

Sérstakar þakkir

Jón Ingi Cæsarsson

fyrir aðstoð, upplýsingagjöf og áhugasemi.

Helga Hauksdóttir,
Kristlaug Svavarsdóttir,
Andrea Hjalmsdóttir,
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fyrir viðtöl og upplýsingar.

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Introduction

Oddeyri is a small neighbourhood in Akureyri, Iceland. Building in the area started around the mid 19th century and it was fully built around 1950. The first houses in the neighbourhood are one of the oldest in Akureyri and the “newer” part of Oddeyri is already over 50 years old. Almost since the beginning of habitation in the area, Oddeyri has had a negative image.



Mynd 1: Akureyri (Oddeyri and Brekkan).

This negative image of Eyrin, as a poor working class neighbourhood somehow inferior to other parts of Akureyri, is still alive. Though the neighbourhood is a nice, quiet place, with an ideal placing in the heart of Akureyri, the history of the neighbourhood affects its current image. The small size and old age of both the houses and streets of Oddeyri do not help with improving this image. Small and cheap houses have attracted people with a low income while those with higher income have preferred other neighbourhoods with newer buildings.

The “ghetto” image can be seen in many places and is for example illustrated in the depreciatory expression “Eyrarpúki”. Children from Akureyri are aware of this image and it affects the way kids from the neighbourhood look at themselves. The image can even be seen in the administration of the town, where the neighbourhood is politically underrepresented, and in the debate on the development of the area, like the examples from both Iðavöllur and the “strip-club meeting” show.

Akureyri

Eyjafjörður lies in North-eastern Iceland. Around the year 900 Helgi magri and his wife, Þórunn hynna, were the first settlers in the fjord. They settled first in Árskógsströnd and then in Bíldsá in the inner part of Eyjafjörður. The first trading place in Eyjafjörður was Gásir, where trading started in the 10th century (Jón Hjaltason, 1990).



Mynd 2: Eyjafjörður.

Akureyri is placed in the inner part of Eyjafjörður, which made the town an ideal place for marketing for the people of the fjord. The habitation of Akureyri started in the 15th century, when English and Danish merchants began sailing to Akureyri instead of Gásir. In early sources, three trading places are mentioned; Akureyri, Hjalteyri and Oddeyri (Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1986).

In the early days of Akureyri, the town was a part of the Hrafnagil district, a province south of Akureyri. In the year of 1859, there was a proposal that Akureyri, along with Oddeyri, would be detached from Hrafnagil and made a jurisdiction of its own. In 1862, Akureyri got its municipal rights and four years later, in 1866, Oddeyri became a part of Akureyri. During the time of the monopoly, 1602-1786, the only people in Eyjafjörður licensed to trade were settled in Akureyri. Due to that, the habitation of Eyjafjörður developed around Akureyri. However, the sand spit was not big and soon there was a lack of land in Akureyri. (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995). Because of that, people started looking a bit further north, to Oddeyri. The two towns were most likely merged due to a lack of lots and

housing for trading in Akureyri. In Oddeyri there was plenty of space and the habitation grew in the next decades (Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1986).

Oddeyri

Oddeyri is a large sand spit which has emerged with the alluvium of Glerá, a river that runs through Glerárdalur valley. Oddeyri was a place for politics and shopping long before people started settling in Akureyri. The place is first mentioned in annals from the year 1305. For a long time, Oddeyri was the place of the Parliament of Eyjafjörður but it is not known when the parliament started there or when it was moved to another place. (Lárus Zophoníasson, 1977). The only sources telling the

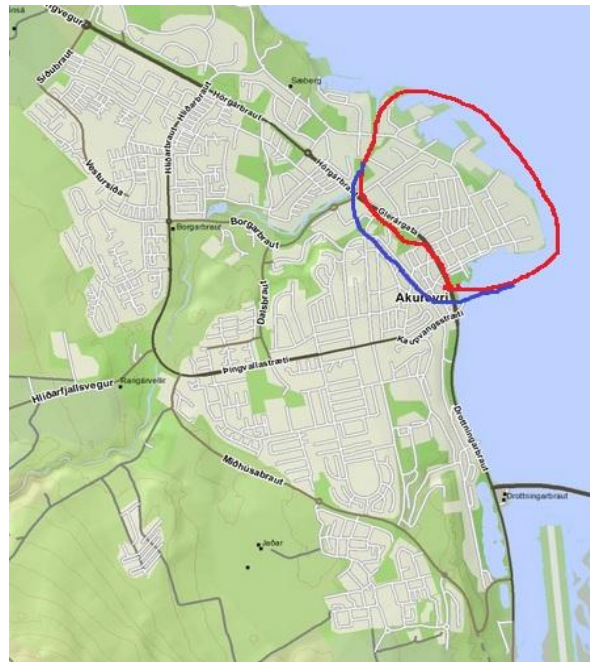


Mynd 3: Oddeyri in 1895.

story of Oddeyri as a place for parliament are from the year 1551. That was the year after the last Catholic bishop in Iceland had been executed and the sources tell that two Danish ships were sent at this occasion to fetch the bishop but found out that he was already

dead. Then the crew members called every respected man in the fjord and made them swear their loyalty to the Danish king. After that event, a long time passed till Oddeyri was mentioned again and around three centuries passed until people started looking at Oddeyri as a place to settle (Jón Hjaltason, 1990).

When Oddeyri became a part of Akureyri in 1866, the neighbourhood was bigger than it is today. Its boundaries were Brekkugata in the west and the sea in east, south and north. Nowadays the eastern boundaries have moved and Oddeyri, or Eyrin as the area is usually called, now reaches from Glerárgata to the sea (Lárus Zophoníasson, 1977).



Mynd 4: Akureyri and Oddeyri. The red line marks the current size of Eyrin, the blue line marks the previous size.

The history of Oddeyri

In the 19th century, several debates were ongoing in which way would be best to enlarge the town. The land of Akureyri was fully built and many wanted to look further south and buy the land where the newly built Naustahverfi now stands. Others wanted to look further north, to Oddeyri. In 1850 Björn Jónsson bought Oddeyri, because he believed that a village would develop in the area. He was sure that the land in Oddeyri was good both for living on and for growing vegetables. Many disagreed and stated that Oddeyri would never be a proper land for habitation. They were sure that the river Glerá was too unpredictable and would in the end destroy all possibility of erecting a town there. Eggert Briem, local sheriff of that time, said that he did not see a reason for the two areas, Akureyri and Oddeyri, to become one town. However, his opinion was that if merchants wanted to, they could move their business to Oddeyri, where there was plenty of land (Jón Hjaltason, 1990).

Eight years later, in 1858, two houses rose in the area: Lundur and a farmhouse. In the same year those two houses are mentioned for the first time in a letter by Eggert Briem. Briem mentioned there that the owners of Oddeyri were planning to build a village there and had already built two houses. This letter is the



Mynd 5: The first houses in Oddeyri.

first source of habitation in Oddeyri. Those two houses were erected because the owner of Oddeyri wanted to be able to watch over his land. The farmhouse was

demolished around 1880 but Lundur is still standing; its current address is Eiðsvallagata 14. (Lárus Zophoníasson, 1977). The house was built by Lárus Hallgrímsson, without permission from the authorities. Despite the lack of building permission, the authorities did not choose to act upon it because they seemed to understand the fact that Björn Jónsson needed a representative to watch over Oddeyri. The house was sold later the same year and had several owners until the year of 1872, when Gránufélagið, a trading company of farmers in Northern Iceland, bought it along with a large part of Oddeyri. In the fall of 1872, Gránufélagið started trading in Oddeyri. In 1880 Lundur was sold again and a canning factory was established in the house. The factory was there for about ten years and after that the house was used for living. In 1982 the house was listed by initiative of the town council. The owner of the house had it dismantled and rebuilt with a similar appearance as the original house (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995).

The starting of Gránufélagið trading in Oddeyri laid the foundation for the urbanisation of the area. In 1859, when people were living in Lundur and the farmhouse, the inhabitants of Oddeyri were 18. In 1875 the inhabitants were 11 and ten years later they were 110. In the next five years the population doubled and in 1890, around 220 people were living in Oddeyri.



Mynd 6: Gránufélagshús.

Oddeyrin was still a private property of Gránufélagið and the development of the area was strongly connected to the trading company. Gránufélagið rented out lots for people to build houses (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995).

The first shopping house was built in 1873 and is still standing; its current address is Strandgata 49. The house is yet today called Gránufélagshús, or the house of Gránufélag, though there have been many owners of the house since Gránufélagið. The house was originally built in Vestdalseyri, in the East Fjords. The original owner was the Danish trading company Örum and Wulff, that started trading in Vestdalseyri in 1850. Gránufélagið bought the house, along with five other houses, and moved it to Akureyri in 1873. The appearance of the house is not entirely the same as it was originally but today the house looks very similar to what it did in 1885. The house has served many different purposes through the years. There have been, for example, shops, a pub, a machine shop and offices (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995).

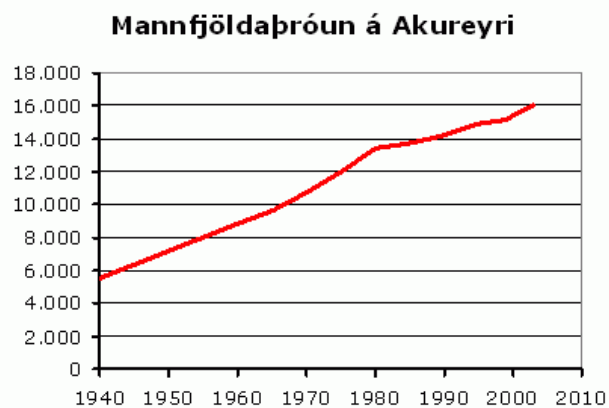
Gránufélagið built more houses close to Gránufélagshúsið. Some of them are still standing but it is not known for sure when each house was constructed. In 1917, five years after Gránufélagið had given up its activities, the first description of

the houses around Gránufélagið was written. In the description, four houses are described, owned by Hinar sameinuðu íslensku verslanir, or the United Icelandic Trading Companies (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995).

The 20th century

Planning of Oddeyrí

In the early days of Eyrir, the structure of the neighbourhood was marked by the fact that the land was a private property. The owner, Gránufélagið, decided who could erect houses and where. It was not till after 1890 that the town council and the building committee of Akureyri started interfering with Oddeyrí.



Mynd 7: the inhabitants of Akureyri.

Around 1880 a few houses had risen in the southern part of Oddeyrí and the street Strandgata had begun to shape. Soon, other streets started forming, Lundargata, Norðurgata and Gránufélagsgata. The first attempt to plan the inhabited district was made in 1877, by Einar

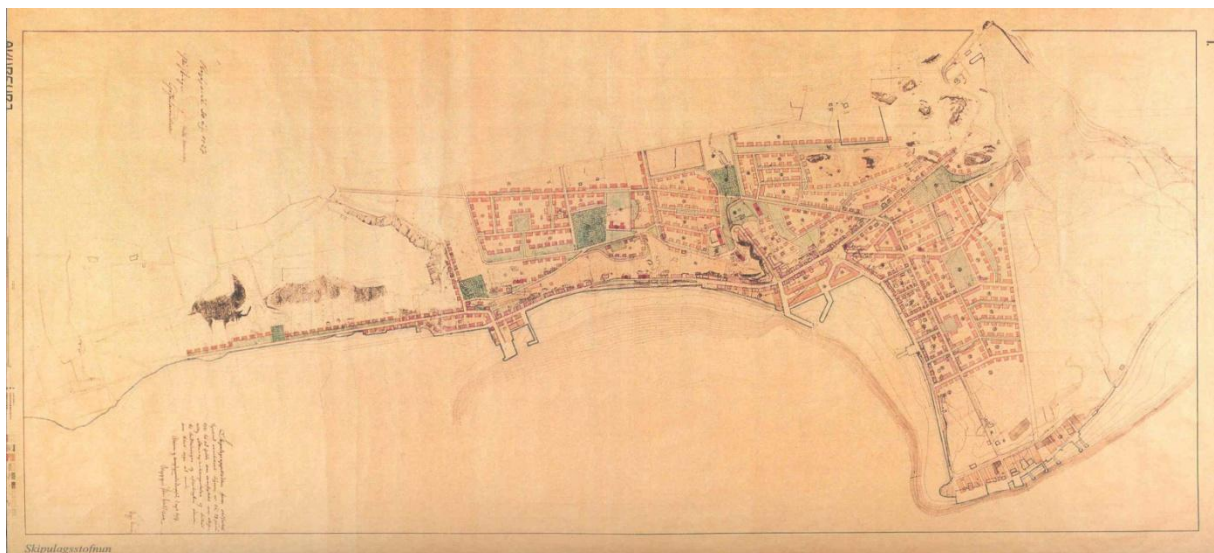
Ásmundsson. This plan has not been found and his ideas are unknown, apart from the fact that he asserted that with proper planning, 30.000 people would be able to live there (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995). The inhabitants of Akureyri are still far less than 30.000, in January 2012 they were 17.875 (Hagstofa Íslands, 2012).

Twenty years later, in 1897, the town council agreed to have a new plan made of Oddeyrí. In the archive in Akureyri there exists an undated plan which is

considered to be the one from 1897. This plan shows that the inhabited district of Oddeyrí had grown and some of the oldest streets can be seen on the plan, though none of the streets are named there. Several maps exist from around the year 1900. At the time there were several houses and streets in Oddeyrí. In a plan from 1901 one can see that by that time, the inhabited district of Oddeyrí had grown. Strandgata was almost fully built, along with other streets that are not mentioned by name in the plan. This plan shows that around the year 1900, the oldest part of Eyri had been formed in its current state. After 1926, several plans were made of Eyri and the newest one is for 2005-2018 (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995).

Planning in the 20th century

In 1921 the Icelandic government accepted planning laws. A planning committee was arranged and its job was to evaluate and accept plans. The law said that it was necessary to survey and plan every town with over 500 inhabitants and that the



Mynd 8: The plan from 1927.

government would help financing the survey. In 1927 the plan for Akureyri was ready. There, the town was divided into three parts; the old Akureyri, Eyrarlandsbyggð and Oddeyri. During that time, transportation within these three parts of the town was still quite difficult so it was assumed that each of the three parts of the town should have to be quite independent from the other parts. Each of the parts would then get its centre and in Oddeyri an amusement park, shopping area and playground were planned. The shopping area was supposed to be close to the place where the current centre of the town is placed. The amusement park and the playground were planned close to the sports field Akureyrarvöllur (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995). These ideas did not become a reality but today the centre of the whole of Akureyri is placed where the centre for Eyrin was supposed to be.

In 1944, a new plan of Akureyri was made. That plan showed Oddeyri in all main parts in the same way as the plan from 1927 did. During the next few years, several plans were made of the town, containing ideas about increasing the size of the inhabited district on the landfill in Strandgata. These ideas were never accepted. In 1974 a plan for the years 1972-1993 was published. There it was confirmed that the eastern part of Oddeyri should permanently be dedicated to industrial activities. The western part of the neighbourhood should remain a residential quarter and it was suggested that the oldest houses in Strandgata, Lundargata and Norðurgata would be preserved in its original state (Guðný Gerður Gunnarsdóttir og Hjörleifur Stefánsson, 1995).

In the early 20th century, the neighbourhood grew and the inhabited district moved further north. It also seems that the negative image of the neighbourhood started forming in the 20th century. Jón Ingi Cæsarsson, former chairman of the planning committee of Akureyri and a former member of the Oddeyri neighbourhood committee, says that the image of Eyrin has its reasons and they are

completely normal: “In the early days, the neighbourhood was built around Gránufélagið and the people who lived north of Strandgata were mainly workers that worked for Gránufélagið. Those were not the wealthiest people in town and therefore the houses that were built were quite small. If the houses in Eyrin are big, they were almost without exception built as apartment houses. It was not popular here in town to live in an apartment house so many people would build a small detached house rather than to live in an apartment.” (Jón Ingi Cæsarsson, munnleg heimild, 23. febrúar 2012).

“Oddeyri was growing till around 1960 so there are not many new houses there. The neighbourhood started forming in the southern part, where Strandgata was one of the first streets. Then the inhabited district constantly moved further



Mynd 9: Oddeyri in 1930.

north and the streets in the northern part of the neighbourhood were fully built around the year 1960. Because the neighbourhood is old and the houses are small, of course it is a good choice for

people with less money. As time passed by, the houses simply got to get old and in a state of disrepair because people did not have the money needed for maintenance” (Jón Ingi Cæsarsson, munnleg heimild, 23. febrúar 2012).

The 21st century

Today the historical value of this old part of Akureyri is acknowledged. The oldest streets of the neighbourhood are now to be preserved in their original state. Currently in the Eastern part of Eyrin, closest to the sea, there is an industrial quarter where fishery is an important industry. In the western part of the neighbourhood there is a residential quarter, a school and a kindergarten. In the latest plan of Eyrin, it is assumed that the industrial part of Eyrin will shrink and the residential part will grow bigger and reach further to the east. Oddeyri is the part of Akureyri that has the most inhabitants per hectare, around 20, explained by the small size of houses in the neighbourhood. That number, 20 inhabitants per hectare, is what authorities consider a desirable use of the land. Eyrin has around 600 apartments, according to the latest plan of Akureyri, which makes it quite a small neighbourhood. The future of this small and old part of Akureyri seems bright; its school and kindergarten have both recently been renewed and enlarged, the historical value of the oldest streets is acknowledged and the plan is to help the neighbourhood grow in the coming years (Umhverfisstofnun Akureyrarbæjar, 2006).

The future planning

In June 2008, Jón Ingi Cæsarsson proposed that a focus group for Oddeyri would be established. He wanted this group to review the situation and the future of the neighbourhood. The group consisted of Jón Ingi, who was the chairman of the group, two members of the neighbourhood committee, one representative from inhabitants, one from employers in Oddeyri and one representative from the port authority. In December 2009, when the group had been active for over a year, it published a report as a result of its work. In the introduction of the report it says that “the area is truly one of the best building lands in town and the settlement in Oddeyri runs very well with the key areas of the town”. The main finding of this

report concerns the Eastern part of Oddeyri, where there is an industrial neighbourhood the committee would like to see develop into a residential quarter (Akureyrarbær, 2009).

In the eastern part of Eyrin there is an industrial neighbourhood, sometimes called Kelduhverfi, which has gotten old and needs maintenance. The report says that the neighbourhood committee wants to see changes in this area. The committee's priority is that this area will become a residential quarter with houses no bigger than 3-4 floors. It is clear that the history of the neighbourhood is important to the committee; it is proposed that information about the history of the neighbourhood will be available for people that pass by and that some of the old houses will be renewed instead of building new houses. The committee considers it important that this new inhabited district will be a part of Eyrin and have the characteristics of the neighbourhood. The renewal of the eastern part of Oddeyri seems to be a priority to both the neighbourhood committee and the focus group that worked on this report. The current plan does not say anything about changing this part of the Eyrin from an industrial to a residential quarter but the committee suggests that the plan for this part of the town will be revised (Akureyrarbær, 2009).

Appearing of the image

The town council

The positive outlook for the neighbourhood is in contrast to the negative image. The image appears in many places and the town council is one of them, where the neighbourhood is statistically underrepresented. Eyrin is a quite small

neighbourhood, compared to other parts of Akureyri, with around 600 apartments, or around 12% of the flats in Akureyri. In the town council there are 11 members, so even if Eyrin is a small neighbourhood, one member of the town council should be from Eyrin every electoral period. The statistics from the past periods show that Eyrin has not had this many representatives. Statistics are available from the year 1970 and show that from 1970-1986, one member of the town council each period came from Eyrin. Since then, in the last 26 years, Eyrin had only one representative in the town council, in the electoral period 1994-1998. Some of the deputy council members have usually come from Oddeyri. The current period, 2010-2014, is the first period when neither a member nor a deputy member of the town council has come from Oddeyri (Brynja Björk Pálsdóttir, 2012). This underrepresentation has an impact on the administration when it comes to planning and developing the area. This political underrepresentation might also be one of the reasons for the negative image of the neighbourhood. This can be illustrated through the case of the kindergarten and the discussion about the strip clubs below.

Oddeyri – a place for strip clubs?

In the beginning of the 21st century, the number of strip clubs in Akureyri increased. Kristín Sigfúsdóttir, a former member of the Akureyri town council, was the chairman of the Alcohol and drug committee of Akureyri around the year 2000. “Some people wanted to call it art but I knew the dark sides of the clubs’ activities through my work with the Alcohol and drug committee. The subject was discussed all over the town and there was an advertised discussion meeting on the topic of strip clubs. This was a hot topic so there was a lot of talking during that meeting. There was an idea of placing all the strip clubs in one of the neighbourhoods and banning them in other parts of the town, and Eyrin was mentioned in that context” (Kristín Sigfúsdóttir, munnleg heimild, 21. febrúar 2012). Kristín says she found the

idea of placing all the strip clubs in Eyri ridiculous. The fact that it was even mentioned illuminates the image of the neighbourhood. This image becomes even more evident when looking at the discussion concerning the schools of Oddeyri.

A dangerous kindergarten?

There are two schools in Oddeyri; Oddeyrarskóli, a primary school, and Iðavöllur, a kindergarten. In May 2000 the old building that had housed Iðavöllur for years was demolished. By that time, people had been trying to get the kindergarten rebuilt for years. The old house was in poor condition



Mynd 10: Iðavöllur.

and both Health Authorities and the AOSH (Administration of Occupational Safety and Health) had demanded compensation. The debate is reflected in an article in the newspaper *Dagur* in May 1998. The article is called “Hættulegur leikskóli?” or “A dangerous kindergarten?” The article reports suspicions that the old house could cause asthma and have bad affect on the health of the people in the house but many disagreed on these suspicions. A crowded meeting was held two days before the article was published. At the meeting, parents from the neighbourhood stated that the kindergarten was way too small and that the house was in an unacceptable condition. Jón Einar Jóhannsson, then the chairman of the parent’s association of Iðavöllur said at the meeting that the kindergarten had a bad reputation because of its inadequate facilities. The answer he got from Sigríður Síta Pétursdóttir, then head of the kindergarten department of Akureyri, was that the kindergarten and its house were acceptable and that the problem came from the kids’ homes. She

stated that most of the kids in lðavöllur came from old houses in Oddeyri and that might be the reason for their poor health (Björn Þorláksson, 1998).

This shows the negative image the neighbourhood has, that people from other parts of the town are ready to state that the houses in Oddeyri are in such a bad condition that they can spoil people's health. "The head of the kindergarten department in Akureyri stated in that meeting that the houses in Oddeyri were almost ruined," says Kristlaug, now the head of lðavöllur. Kristlaug says that both Oddeyrarskóli and lðavöllur are doing many positive things and that they should perhaps do more of bragging in the media to help improving the image of both the schools and the neighbourhood as a whole (Kristlaug Svavarsdóttir, munnleg heimild, 28. febrúar 2012). The media is clearly an important tool in this battle with the negative image. According to Kristlaug, positive news about schools doing a good job, are a big help in the battle for an improved image.

Less opportunities

According to Andrea Sigrún Hjalmsdóttir, instructor at the University of Akureyri and a member of the town council, there are many things that can affect the image of Oddeyri and the way people from the neighbourhood experience this image. "The kids in Oddeyri don't have as many opportunities to practice sports for example. They need to walk quite a long distance to get to sports practices and the case is the same with many other things, such as the youth club". Every school used to have a youth club but now the kids in Oddeyri have to go to another neighbourhood, Brekkan, to be a part of the youth club. Andrea says there are not only these practical things that affect the image of the quality of life in Eyrin. "Researches have also shown that the people living in Eyrin have less education, on

the average, than people in the rest of the town” (Sigrún Hjálmsdóttir, munnleg heimild, 23. janúar 2012).

Less self-esteem

The image of the neighbourhood is also reflected in the negative image of the students in the schools. In Oddeyrarskóli there was a research regarding the view the teenagers in the school had towards the neighbourhood. The research had four focus groups which each included five students from one class, classes 7-10. “All of the groups mentioned that kids from other parts of town think Oddeyrarskóli is not as good as other schools in town. However, there was a clear difference depending on where the kids came from; the kids from Akureyri noticed the negative effects of the image much more than kids that recently had moved to the town. Still, all of the kids said they were happy with their school,” said Helga Hauksdóttir, the principal of Oddeyrarskóli. This can shape the kids’ identity, thinking that you come from a neighbourhood that is somehow worse than others. There have been researches regarding the self-esteem of kids in the primary schools of Akureyri and according to Helga, kids from the school always seem to have less self-esteem than kids from other schools. “The kids have lower expectations towards themselves and less confidence when it comes to things like for example studying” (Helga Hauksdóttir, munnleg heimild, 17. febrúar 2012).

The schools of Oddeyri

Oddeyrarskóli was built due to pressure from parents in the neighbourhood that were not very fond of the fact that their children had to walk a long way to school. In those days there was only one school in Akureyri, Barnaskólinn á Akureyri. In the

late 19th century there was a primary school in Eyrin for some years but it was not big and it was housed in several different buildings. It was not until after 1950 that Oddeyrarskóli finally was built. On December the 7th 1957 the school was opened. At first it was only a small house but the school has grown through the years and the latest additions were made in 2001 (Oddeyrarskóli, e.d.).

Iðavöllur was built in 1959 and was lead by the “Save the children” association till the year 1975, when the corporation gave the kindergarten to local authorities. The establishing of Iðavöllur was a big step in service for the people of Akureyri. In 1969, when Iðavöllur had been conducted by the association for 10 years, it was the only kindergarten outside the Reykjavík area that was active the whole year. In the first years of Iðavöllur, around half of the kids came from Oddeyri. Most of the other kids came from the next neighbourhood, Brekkan (Anna Elísa Hreiðarsdóttir og Guðrún Hafdís Óðinsdóttir, 1999). Iðavöllur was rebuilt in the beginning of this century and the new facilities were opened in March 2001 (Kristlaug Svavarsdóttir, munnleg heimild, 28. febrúar 2012).

Aware of the image

Helga Hauksdóttir, the principal of Oddeyrarskóli, says that the staff and students of the school can feel that the image of the neighbourhood is not as positive as they would want it to be. Helga herself is raised in Akureyri, in Brekkan. “I have always been aware of the negative image of Eyrin, that the neighbourhood is considered somehow worse than other parts of the town. For example, when I bought my first flat, it did not even occur to me to buy a flat in Eyrin”, Helga says. But when she had gotten to know the neighbourhood and worked there for some years, she said that her image of Eyrin became very positive. “Eyrin is a charming little neighbourhood” (Helga Hauksdóttir, munnleg heimild, 17. febrúar 2012).

This negative image has always followed the neighbourhood. The houses there are usually small and old and the people living there generally have little education. However, people from outside Akureyri are not aware of this image and are more willing to move to Eyrin than



Mynd 11: Oddeyrarskóli.

people from Akureyri. “A part of the image is geographical. The houses in the neighbourhood are old and there are few opportunities for Eyrin to grow. Most of the flats are small, cheap and a good choice for people that haven’t got much money. There have never been many doctors, lawyers or people with high income in Eyrin. I think that the big and old houses were often bought by people that couldn’t afford to maintain the houses. This has been changing and nowadays it is quite popular to buy old houses and give them a face-lift.” Helga states that through the years it has been a constant struggle for the neighbourhood to have sufficient service and to be recognized as a part of the town no worse than others (Helga Hauksdóttir, munnleg heimild, 17. febrúar 2012).

“I think that the image of Eyrin has become more positive through the past years. The school here is nice and small and when families are moving to Akureyri, they are often advised to move to Eyrin because of the school. Still the image seems to be retreating slower than I thought” (Helga Hauksdóttir, munnleg heimild, 17. febrúar 2012).

Working towards a better image

Helga said that the school systematically works towards a better image for the neighbourhood. "Little things mean a lot. Things like sending the students greeting cards on Christmas and on their confirmation help in making a positive image of the school." Still, Helga says that the school has never gotten rid of the negative image that follows the neighbourhood. Around the year 2000, when immigrants started coming increasingly to Akureyri, many of them settled in Eyrin. Helga says that after consideration, it was not a wise decision. "Schools and neighbourhoods that have a large amount of immigrants often get a negative *ghetto* image. This department was just another brick in the wall and people are waking up to the reality that the department has made the image worse." This department has been reviewed and will probably be shut down in the near future (Helga Hauksdóttir, munnleg heimild, 17. febrúar 2012).

A fading image

Kristlaug Svavarsdóttir, the principal of Iðavöllur, agrees with Helga that the negative image of the neighbourhood affects the schools. "The neighbourhood has a certain negative image, especially amongst people around the age of 55 and older. I think the image is fading away because the young people do not seem to look down on the neighbourhood," says Kristlaug, who started working in Iðavöllur in the year of 1992. "When I started working there, people asked me "Are you really going to work at the asylum?" My friends were quite shocked, simply because of this negative image Eyrin has." However, Kristlaug says she has never regretted starting working in Eyrin (Kristlaug Svavarsdóttir, munnleg heimild, 28. febrúar 2012).

"The reforming of the kindergarten was a step towards a more positive image for the neighbourhood. When the new facilities for Iðavöllur were opened,

we started systematically working towards a better image. We let the media know of every positive thing we did". It is clear that both the primary school and kindergarten in Eyrin see the need to systematically work towards an improved image for the neighbourhood. This is an interesting fact that tells people that the image is something that one might have to worry about. "This negative image surprises some people that live in Eyrin. Inhabitants of Eyrin are fond of the neighbourhood and some of them are not aware of this negative image" (Kristlaug Svavarsdóttir, munnleg heimild, 28. febrúar 2012).

Outlook

The image of Oddeyri is old and deep-rooted. It appears in many different places and ways, such as the schools, the word on the streets and the town authorities. Contrary to the negative image, there is also a different view on Eyrin, as a nice and friendly neighbourhood. Jón Ingi Cæsarsson is an enthusiast when it comes to Eyrin and he has talked to many that remember life in Eyrin 80-85 years ago. "The image I have gotten from talking to people that remember old times is that Eyrin was a neighbourhood of labourers, craftsmen, renters and tradesmen". In the early 20th century, Eyrin was a small community where everybody knew everybody. Though the most of the inhabitants of Eyrin were not wealthy, Strandgata seems to have been an exception. "Strandgata had a whole different status than the other streets. There lived the few employers and people who could be considered as wealthy. In the cross streets there was a whole different atmosphere. The people living there were mostly poor people renting small flats. The same can be said about the newer streets, when they started building there was also a lot of poverty". A recurring theme in the talk with older people is the supportiveness and solidarity between the people. Jón Ingi knows many stories from the early 20th century with this theme.

Many people in need got help from the people in the neighbourhood. "I heard of an old lady who lived alone in a basement room. There was disorder and drinking in the house so the old lady felt uncomfortable there. Then her friend talked to a friend who was able to get her a new room, where she lived happily for the rest of her life". Another story tells of an old handicapped woman who lived with her son who also was handicapped. She went to a fisherman and asked him to help her get some fish so she and her son would have something to eat. He took it so literally that every time he came ashore, he brought some fish to the old lady. Later, his brother started doing the same thing. These stories are no exceptions and it seems that despite poverty, people have stuck together through difficult times (Jón Ingi Cæsarsson, munnleg heimild, 23. febrúar 2012).

While some people think the image is fading away, others point out that the kids in Oddeyri seem to have lower self-esteem than kids in other parts of Akureyri. The inhabitants of Eyrin are working towards an improved image so there must still be a reason to worry about this old image. This old and friendly little neighbourhood has some good work going on, yet the positive things and work do not seem to get through to the image. Getting rid of an old and deep rooted image is not something that can be done in a short time, it is an ongoing process, like the examples from the schools of Oddeyri have shown.

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