

## Obituary



### **Anders Löfgren** **31 May 1960 — 4 August 2006**

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Anders Löfgren died in Trondheim on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2006 at 46 years of age. With this, Nordic geography lost one of its most distinctive critical voices.

Anders came to Trondheim, Norway, in 1992 to take up a lectureship in Social and Cultural Geography at the University of Trondheim. He had recently completed his Doctorate degree at the University of Lund in Sweden on young

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<sup>1</sup> © Nina Gunnerud Berg and Anne Sofie Laegran, 2006. Photograph © Dodo Parikas, 2004

people moving away from home and the role of dwelling in becoming an adult. As a student and a colleague at the time, we remember how he argued enthusiastically for seeing migration, in particular of youth and young adults as positive, not as a problem, which was what Norwegian as well as Swedish regional policy had done up until then. He saw becoming an adult as being about questing to reach out as well as creating homes. By putting homes in plural he stressed how people in the late modern world experience different places and may create several equally-valued homes. He called upon regional policies as well as communities to recognize this as a virtue, celebrating differences and new ideas rather than making young people feel they should stay in order for communities to survive. Without doubt he used his own experience in this work; initially considering Trondheim as unexcitingly provincial and just a temporary place to work, Trondheim became his home just like Southern Sweden, where he grew up and conducted his studies, remained so.

The city of Trondheim, as well as the region surrounding it, also became the focus of his research. With his first PhD student Hans Kjetil Lysgaard he studied the attempt to build the “Mid Nordic region” comprising the middle parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland. They showed how this was a creation constructed by bureaucrats and politicians, but without the backing in the population necessary to actually form an institutional region. In this as well as his work on city development in Trondheim, Anders took a critical view of the political establishment. He argued that rather than making progressive policies based on the assets of the region, politicians tended to adopt clientist strategies focusing on subsidies and compensations, and in doing so failed to meet the challenges of the globalised world. This, in Anders’ view led to nothing but victimization of the region and its people.

In his research as well as teaching, Anders was strongly anchored in social theory and combined new concepts from the cultural turn characterising Anglo-American geography in the 1990s with the Nordic welfare geography tradition. He represented a new voice opening up the norms of “what is geography” to students and colleagues as well as the public. In addition to what has already been mentioned, he was interested in gender and sexuality and was starting to implement queer perspectives into his work on urban geography. However, his destiny led him to focus on disabled geographies in the latest stage of his career.

Anders valued teaching highly and put a lot of effort into his lectures as well as his supervising role. As a lecturer he was enthusiastic and questioning. Students rarely came out with neatly structured notes, but more likely several new ideas and questions to think about. As a supervisor, he was encouraging but challenging, and his intriguing questions were the best sign that he thought the work was promising. Particularly in the first few years Anders also spent a lot of time with his students out of work hours, organizing several reading and “support”

groups with Masters and PhD students, involving food and wine as well as academic discussions. Many of the students remained his friends years after graduating. Anders showed his great care for students up until the end, in setting up a trust in his name. Through the trust Anders will continue to support Masters students at the Geography Department at NTNU, providing funding for fieldwork and conference attendance.

Anders was among those academics who took on a lot of responsibilities for the collective, no doubt at the cost of publications. He contributed strongly to making the Department a great and fun place to work; initiating and always taking part in coffee and lunch breaks, after work drinks, and other social gatherings at work. He was also generous in inviting colleagues to his birthdays and parties at home. Anders was working hard to put his academic visions into practice right from the start, being instrumental in revising the whole course programme of the Department to increase the focus on social and cultural geography and social theory. He was head of Department at a time of great changes in the University sector in Norway from 2000. It was a challenging position to be in, implementing reforms from “above”. There were a lot of long nights in the office, and also some hard but necessary arguments in the meeting room as well as the corridor. Though he had a strong capacity to work hard, several of his friends and colleagues started worrying about his health.

He had just come back from the AAG meeting in New York City in 2001 when a seizure revealed that he had a tumour on his brain. During the first operation to remove it he had a stroke, which left him with a physical disability. Before the operation Anders had been told he could face a change in personality, and this did worry him. After a few weeks of recovery, Anders was back at work and it was clear he had changed from being a colleague who spoke fast and a lot, to one who spoke less and slowly. His personal features, opinions and values were basically the same. However, in a documentary broadcast on Norwegian and Swedish Radio he expressed how the illness had made him realize there was more to life than work, and that it was maybe not always important that things were done exactly his way. He had learnt to appreciate and enjoy life more by simply being with friends and reading good books.

The last five years for Anders was tough, with the tumour coming back several times and the left side of the body being partly paralysed. But he did not let this stop him. He continued coming to work three days a week, attending seminars, supervising students and always giving input in the Department meetings. He attended his last conference in Lund in May 2005 and gave the paper “Your little doorstep is my wall: a personal experience of living in a disabling society.” This was a personal, captivating and thought provoking tale of his experience of how society fails to accommodate the needs of differently abled bodies, anchored in a

time geography framework. The paper has been reworked into an article and will be published in the September issue of *Norwegian Journal of Geography*.

Anders will be deeply missed as a creative researcher and thinker, a great colleague and a dear friend, by us all in the Department, but also in the Critical Geography network around the world.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: Anders Löfgren was a founding member of the *ACME* Editorial Advisory Board, a position he held until his untimely death.