

Defining the Bahá'í Community of Városmajor: The Role and Relevance of Collaborative Mapping Workshops

2025.01.07.

Code word: NAS235

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1. Introduction

The moment I decided to become an anthropologist happened about two years ago, in front of a bar. It was a few months before having to apply for university courses, and I spontaneously decided to join my friend at a concert that was advertised by one of the anthropology professors. It turned out that no one showed up from our university, so it was only my friend, the professor, and me. Still, we stayed for the whole concert, had a great conversation, and by the end of the event, I was convinced I would choose cultural anthropology as my master's. During the conversation about my application, the professor asked me what I wanted to research, which caught me a bit off-guard as I had never thought about this question, in fact, I barely knew what anthropology was. The first thing that came to my mind was that my paternal grandmother is Bulgarian, and my paternal grandfather is Persian, so maybe I could use this background for the research. My professor, specializing in anthropology of religion, immediately put Iran and religion together and suggested me to look into the Bahá'í Faith. I did not know anything about the Bahá'ís, nor I would have ever thought that I would study religion. However, as the topic sounded fascinating, I thought it would not hurt anyone to get in touch with the community and see whether this was something that could interest me.

After starting my master's, I got connected to a Bahá'í family through another anthropology student who once wanted to work with the Bahá'ís. I met the father of the family in his carpet shop, in Csaba utca, almost exactly one year ago. I remember the day very well, because it was the day before my birthday, in December. We sat on a stack of carpets, sipped some tea, and chatted for a few hours. The conversation was fruitful enough that one year later I am still conducting my research with the Bahá'í community, and I still visit the carpet shop every week to drink some tea and have a conversation with him. After the first meeting, I slowly got to know the Bahá'í community, and I learned that the members that I got connected to were part of a small local Bahá'í community, called the Városmajor neighbourhood. This means that in this area of Budapest, they are concentrating on building a local community whose life is based on Bahá'í principles. This mission is part of the objective of the global Bahá'í community, that is, Bahá'ís all over the world are trying to build small local communities to spread the ideas of the Faith and to connect more and more localities into the global organization of the Bahá'í community.

Therefore, the coincidence that I fell into the life of this neighbourhood was not only fortunate because it was only a 15 minutes' walk from my house, but also because it turned out to be a particularly interesting community: a very active group of Bahá'ís who only started

working on the formation of this neighbourhood community very recently. It soon became clear that this is exactly what was the most intriguing feature of my fieldwork – that I get to witness the emergence of this local Bahá'í community. Hence, the focus of my research became understanding the processes of how the community defines itself – both in the physical sense of where its borders are and in the symbolic sense of who belongs to the community and who does not.

While trying to understand these processes of definition, I found myself in an interesting situation. I felt like my position and role were very unclear on the field. Who am I in this community? Am I an anthropologist? Or a friend? Am I Persian in their eye, or maybe a Hungarian? Or have I become a Bahá'í through my active participation? As I took part very actively in the life of the community, I felt like these roles became very blurred. The beauty of anthropology is that all these questions and the experience of this *undefinedness* in themselves are very interesting, and not at all unrelated to my research question. That is, the negotiation of my role has had strong implications for understanding (and experiencing) how this community defines its borders and its identity. Through negotiating and defining my role, it was also defined who belongs to this community and who does not, who is a Bahá'í and who is not. In this sense, we have gotten to define each other in this process.

That said, all these dilemmas that could derive from working with a community whose borders are undefined led me not only to consider them when reflecting on my positionality but to embrace them as an integral part of my fieldwork. Part of this is that the undecided positions have allowed for a rather reciprocal collaboration, as I was not obviously defined as an *outsider* or as a *researcher*. When choosing the research methods of my research, I wanted to consider how these circumstances of emergence and undefinedness should be approached properly. In what ways can research methods shape a research? What are the methodological challenges and curiosities when working with a community that is in the early process of expansion and self-definition? How can the ethnographer's undefined positionality be of use in a research? I decided that mapping workshops would be a useful tool, not only for assessing the questions of the research – such as studying where the community imagines its geographical borders – but also for fostering and maintaining the collaborativeness. The idea of the collaborative mapping workshop was that the participants – the members of the neighbourhood who attended the workshop – first created individual mental maps to see how everyone imagined the Városmajor neighbourhood, and then discussed and negotiated a common vision to draw a map collectively. This workshop was collaborative not only in its execution, but also because both the task and the outcome were designed to be useful for all participants, not just for the research. Therefore,

even though this fieldwork has been the base of my thesis research, this text is not meant to cover the entire research with all its methods and findings. Instead, this paper is primarily concerned with how the questions of my research – Where are the borders of the Bahá'í Városmajor neighbourhood? Who belongs to the community and who does not? – can be studied through employing collaborative mapping workshops, and why the utilization of this research method has much more far-fetching implications than just gathering information for the assessment of the research questions.

First, the paper will provide a general overview of the Bahá'í Faith and community-building process which is crucial for understanding the notions and nuances later discussed. This section will also provide context for the Városmajor neighbourhood, which I will also explain shortly along with some insight into my fieldwork process. Then, before discussing the realization of the collaborative mapping workshops, the paper will discuss what these workshops mean exactly, and what are some of the potential implications of including such a method in a research. Lastly, the paper will examine the contribution of collaborative mapping workshops to studying the emerging Bahá'í Városmajor neighbourhood. More particularly, how these participatory workshops help to gain insight into the processes of defining the community through studying the specific question of: How do the members of the community imagine their environment? Where do they see the borders of the neighbourhood? What are the most emblematic places and reference points in the area? How similar are these visions? How can these visions converge during the collective mapping exercise and what kind of negotiations are needed to agree on a vision? When it comes to collaborative mapping workshops it is specifically interesting – as well as important – that it is not only the event of the workshop that can be and should be analysed. It is a long collaboration of people that should start from the planning of the workshop until at least the utilization of the final product, if not until the never-ending maintenance of trust between collaborators.

Overall, the paper shows how collaborative mapping workshops can contribute to social scientific (anthropological) research by demonstrating their role in understanding how the emerging community of the Városmajor neighbourhood defines its borders physically and symbolically, specifically, how they mark off their borders, and how identity is derived from this process. Despite mental mapping and collective mapping being exercises that have been increasingly popular in the past decades in various fields of study (Ben-Ze'ev 2012; Iconoclasistas 2016; Waterman 1980), their use – collective mapping in particular – is more prevalent in action-oriented spheres, and much less popular as a research method in social scientific research. Therefore, hopefully, this paper will not only provide insightful information

about how the Városmajor neighbourhood is trying to define itself, but also about how research methodology has foundational implications not just as a separate tool for answering the research questions, but as something capable of shaping the entire understanding of the research. This includes its influence on the power dynamics between *researcher* and *research participants* through fostering trust and collaboration and encouraging collaborative knowledge creation.

2. The Bahá'í Faith and Community Building Process

In order to understand the context and the notions used in this paper, it is essential to provide a short overview of the Bahá'í Faith and the community-building mission connected to it. The Bahá'í Faith was founded in the middle of the 19th century in Iran, with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. According to the Bahá'í Faith all religions are manifestations of the same one God, however, as each age has its own problems which demand its own solutions, every manifestation is suited to the “*current social needs*” and the “*maturity of humanity*” – as worded in the Bahá'í writings. This means that Bahá'ís accept all religions, making Jesus, Moses, Buddha, and Muhammad – among others – “*divine messengers*” of the same God. The Bahá'ís accept Bahá'u'lláh as the most recent “*messenger of God*”, who delivered teachings that are currently the “*most relevant*” for humanity. One of the most essential of these principles is the oneness and unity of all religions and all humanity. As also visible from this principle, the Bahá'í teachings reflect very directly on the issues of globalization, stating that in this day and age questions of globalization are crucial to be thought of and worked on in order to reach the main goal of the “*New World Order of world peace and harmony*”. Part of this “*New World Order*” is the mixing of all nations, for which it is essential to recognize the oneness of humanity and encourage freedom from prejudice, equality and mutual understanding amongst each other.

Before succeeding with the further explanation of the Faith, it is important to stop for a moment and think about the context of the emergence of these ideas. Where did these ideas come from? What influenced them? Were they really new ideas? Firstly, the influence of modernity is quite clear when looking at these principles (see the concept of development, as well as the ideal of equality, etc.). Secondly, the 19th century was the time that globalization first began to make its impact, which is again, directly reflected in the Bahá'í teachings. Moreover, in recent decades many new religious movements have been gaining increasing popularity, which share very similar principles to the Bahá'í Faith. This has led many studies to consider the Faith as a new religious movement. However, the interesting thing about the Bahá'í Faith is that it came before these movements, which on one hand can make it the “*the*

old new religion” (Warburg 2006), and a pioneer for those that followed. On the other hand, it also has to be noted that its categorization as a new religious movement has not been uncontested (for this debate see further Warburg 2006). Nevertheless, considering the context of the foundation of the Faith – 19th century Iran – definitely provides an essential framework for understanding it.

Next to the importance of beliefs and spirituality, in the Bahá’í Faith it is also essential that these cannot be separated from “*action*” and everyday life activities. This is demonstrated on the official website of the Worldwide Bahá’í Community (www.bahai.org), where on the home page there are two main menu items: “*What Bahá’ís Believe*” and “*What Bahá’ís Do*” (The Bahá’í Faith n.d.). The inseparability of these two aspects mean that Bahá’ís have to live and act according to their beliefs, helping humanity on its way to reach the “*New World Order of peace*”. Because of the importance of “*action*” in the Bahá’í Faith, the Bahá’í Community has a very specific and structured “*action plan*”. One of the main pillars of action is the community-building, which refers to the process of spreading the Bahá’í teachings and involving people in the action towards the “*betterment of the world*”. In practice this means that Bahá’ís all over the world are working on building local communities – such as neighbourhoods – in which they strive for a community life based on principles crucial for “*universal peace*”, such as equity, empathy and love towards one another. These local communities give space for organizing children’s classes to provide spiritual education for children, junior youth activities for “*spiritual empowerment*”, devotional meetings, study circles to build capacity for the “*service of humanity*”, leisure activities, and a general community life in its all-encompassing sense. The goal of these communities is to become self-organized through the involvement and initiatives of more and more like-minded people. Altogether this allows for the constant recreation of capacity, making possible the exponential growth of these local communities, which are then systematically connected to each other within the complex institutional organization of the global Bahá’í Community. Put in the words of the Universal House of Justice¹, the governing institution of the global Bahá’í community:

“Energies are, at the same time, focused on smaller pockets of the population, each of which should become a centre of intense activity. In an urban cluster,

¹ The Universal House of Justice was first elected in 1963, after the death of Soghi Effendi, the last successor of Bahá’u’lláh. The Universal House of Justice has supreme religious and administrative authority in the Bahá’í Faith and community, which includes supervising and guiding the community-building process. It is located in Haifa, Israel, and has nine members – nine being an important number in the Bahá’í Faith – who are elected for five years.

such a centre of activity might best be defined by the boundaries of a neighbourhood. ... The activities that drive this process, and in which newly found friends are invited to engage—meetings that strengthen the devotional character of the community; classes that nurture the tender hearts and minds of children; groups that channel the surging energies of junior youth; circles of study, open to all, that enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of the teachings to their individual and collective lives—may well need to be maintained with assistance from outside the local population for a time. It is to be expected, however, that the multiplication of these core activities would soon be sustained by human resources indigenous to the neighbourhood or village itself—by men and women eager to improve material and spiritual conditions in their surroundings.”
(Ridván 2010 – To the Bahá’ís of the World | Bahá’í Reference Library n.d.)

First, this quotation gives a somewhat blurry definition of neighbourhoods. It seems like the “*boundaries of the neighbourhood*” are considered already-existing, that is, the borders of the neighbourhoods are created by the infrastructure of the city, and not by the Bahá’í community. The quotation also explains how this community-building process should look like: community life should first be supported by people “*outside the local population*” – which refers to Bahá’ís who move into the neighbourhood to initiate this process – however, over time it should be the new members of the community – people already living in the area – who sustain it.

This community-building process has been employed by many local Bahá’í communities throughout the globe. As the communities are growing, new terms, techniques and mechanism are being added to the Bahá’í community-building process, that is supervised by the Universal House of Justice. Even though in other countries the Bahá’í community has great experience in this process, Hungary is considered to have a smaller, and therefore not-as-developed Bahá’í community. The history of the Bahá’í Community of Hungary reaches back more than one hundred years, however, throughout this time the community life had to be rebuilt from the start a number of times – once after the Holocaust², and then after the fall of

² The Bahá’í community started to form in the 1930s in Hungary, partially due to Abdu’l-Bahá’s visit to Hungary in 1913. In these years the Bahá’í community consisted of members of Jewish origin, which soon made it difficult to organize gatherings and to increase the community. In 1939 in a secretive meeting, the community elected the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Hungary (a local institution in the Bahá’í institutional system), but soon the activity and the community were completely abolished due to the Holocaust (Koczóh 2023).

state socialism. Therefore, though the history of the Bahá'í Community of Hungary is rich, the community has also been through some adversities. It is hard to put the Bahá'í community in numbers, as even though the Faith is recognized as a church in Hungary – as of 2020 – in the previous censuses the Bahá'í Faith could not be chosen as one's religion, therefore there is no official data regarding the number of people who identify as Bahá'ís in Hungary. However, according to my conversations in the Bahá'í community, there are around one thousand registered Bahá'ís in Hungary, from which about 50-100 people attend Bahá'í events and participate actively in the action of the community. Accordingly, the Bahá'í Community of Hungary is still in the early stages of its community-building process, which, in turn, means that significant changes have taken place over the past year, since the beginning of my fieldwork.

2.1. Exploring the Városmajor Neighborhood of the Bahá'í Community of Hungary

After understating the global, as well as the Hungarian context, we should focus on the specifics of the protagonist of this research: the Városmajor neighbourhood of the Bahá'í Community of Hungary, and the fieldwork that has been conducted there. As the name of the neighbourhood suggests, it is located next to the Városmajor park, in the XII. district of Budapest, a central area of the capital, with good transportational hubs nearby. Even though members of the Bahá'í community had been living around this area, the neighbourhood was declared as a focus neighbourhood about two years ago. One of the pivotal points in the establishment of the neighbourhood was the creation of the youth centre – a community space for the Bahá'í community, located in Csaba utca, in the Városmajor neighbourhood. The centre was renovated during the Covid-19 pandemic, and was provided for the use of the community in 2021 by one of the Bahá'í families. The foundation of the youth centre, along with its advantageous location – such as Bahá'ís already living around there, being well-connected to other parts of the city, having parks nearby, and being a family-friendly location with many schools – made this area the perfect candidate for the creation of a focus neighbourhood. Becoming a focus neighbourhood set this area on track for rapid change and expansion. Since then, around ten Bahá'ís have moved into the neighbourhood in order to enhance the community-building process and organize the community life in the form of regular devotional meetings, children's classes, junior youth groups and study circles. In the past year pioneers have also moved into the neighbourhood from Austria and England to help and support the community-building process based on their experience in more developed Bahá'í communities.

These Bahá'ís – who live in the neighbourhood and are the most active in the community-building process – form the “*core team*” of the neighbourhood (as they call themselves).

One year ago, when I decided to do my research with the Bahá'í community, I got connected to a member of the community who works in this emerging Bahá'í neighbourhood. Through this connection I began to attend devotional meetings that were organized in the neighbourhood every Friday. This gave a good opportunity for me to learn about the Faith and get to know the members of the community. Connections began to form which later turned into friendships and more casual hangouts. A few months after I started my fieldwork – at the end of February – one of the girls that I had gotten close to asked me if I wanted to tutor a children's class with her. I was very honoured and flattered that she had thought of me and would trust me with such a task, so I happily accepted the offer. This became my first big involvement and responsibility in the community, which meant a bigger commitment than just going to the neighbourhood once a week to do the children's class. It involved studying about the Bahá'í approach to education, meeting every week to plan for the classes, and reflect on the previous ones, therefore, I found myself going to the neighbourhood at least two or three times a week. Luckily – and by interesting coincidence – I live only 15 minutes from the Városmajor neighbourhood, which ended up being an important element of my fieldwork, which has not only made it easier for me to participate in the life of the neighbourhood, but also became an integral part of considering my positionality.

As I spent more and more time in the neighbourhood and participated in the community-building process, I realized that the most special characteristic of my fieldwork is that I get to witness the expansion of this neighbourhood community from almost the very beginning. This has not only provided me exceptional insight into the development and the early stages of the Bahá'í community-building process, but also created the perfect opportunity for studying how this community defines itself. Therefore, in the following sections this paper will examine these processes of definition from various different aspects, through the application of collaborative mapping workshops.

3. What are Collaborative Mapping Workshops?

In itself, *collaborative mapping workshop* is not necessarily a term that exists or is widely spread as a methodological tool even within the field of anthropology. Still, it is a name that could sound familiar and be understandable, as there are approaches and methods that carry

very similar names, such as mental mapping, collective mapping, collaborative research, and collaborative workshops. Of course, this similarity is not a coincidence, but an indication of how collaborative mapping workshops are a combination of these methods.

The two-part workshop that we organized in the Városmajor neighborhood, and which I will explain in more detail later, consisted of two main elements: individual mental mapping and collective mapping. As the collective map was not completed during the first occasion, we organized a second session, making this workshop into a two-part activity. Before proceeding with the analysis and discussion of the workshops, first, the methods involved should also be explained and understood.

3.1. Mental Maps

Mental map is a notion that has been adopted and reformed by various disciplines, such as urban studies, psychology and geography. Even though throughout different times and disciplines its approach has varied considerably, all these interpretations share the same base assumption, which is that every individual perceives the world differently, and therefore has their own mental image of each place/space/area.

The concept of mental maps was first developed in the field of psychology in the 1940s and then was quickly adopted by urban studies. Kevin Lynch's book *The image of the city* (1960) was one of the foundational works that introduced the notion of mental mapping to urban studies. Lynch was an architect and urban planner, but the impact of his work reached social sciences, which remains visible to this day as it is nearly impossible to avoid his name when discussing mental maps. Even though Lynch's work has been criticized, his pioneering in pointing out the importance of subjective mental images of the city and their influence on how people navigate their environment can hardly be contested. Lynch defined mental maps as "*environmental image, the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual*" which is "*used to interpret information and to guide action*" (Lynch 1960: 4). Overall, he emphasized the role of the physical environment (such as what the main cues are when navigating in an urban environment, and how *imaginable* and *legible* the city is) in the creation of mental images instead of focusing on how certain elements are interpreted, socially constructed, or experienced.

In the 1970s and 1980s mental mapping became more and more popular, however, instead of following Lynch's lead in focusing on the physical structure and the cues of the city, these studies started considering factors such as how belonging to certain social classes or ethnic

groups could influence the perception and use of the environment (Banerjee–Baer 1984; Waterman 1980). Also in the 1970s Yi-Fu Tuan, a geographer, collected some of the functions of the mental map in one of his writings. According to him mental maps make it possible to communicate about certain spaces, to rehearse physical activity in the mind, to remember places, events and people, and to store and structure knowledge (Tuan 1975). This understanding of mental images is still compatible with Lynch's idea, however Tuan elaborated on its functions, which bears with importance for justifying the use of mental maps in social scientific research. In other words, these functions play an important role in why mental maps are an interesting and useful tool for studying topics such as social memory.

Starting from the 1980s and 1990s new ways of approaching and using the mental maps emerged. An example of some of the prominent authors of these decades is Fredric Jameson who was a Marxist political theorist that encouraged the application of mental maps not just in reference to the city, but also to „the power network of so-called multinational capitalism itself” (Jameson 1991: 127, as cited in Duck–Haenni 2015). In this case the core definition of mental maps – being a mental image of one's perception – is still applicable, however the subject of the image, which used to be strictly the city, has been broadened. Jameson points to the power relations of capitalism as a factor behind the construction of our perception and experience of the world (Jameson 1991). In this sense, in these decades, hand in hand with postmodernist theory and deconstructivism, the importance of how these mental images are constructed became more salient (also see Soja 1996).

Thus far we have seen that mental maps can be a great base for inquiry as they contain vast information about how one perceives a certain area. When studying a neighbourhood – such as the Városmajor neighbourhood of the Bahá'í Community of Hungary – mental mapping is especially relevant. Based on the previously mentioned theories and uses of mental maps, they can contain information about how people navigate within the neighbourhood, what the reference and central points and places are, where people imagine its borders, who belongs there and who does not, and so on. Ultimately these personal images and narratives provide great insight into what the neighbourhood means for the people who live and experience the space every day.

3.2. Collective mapping

Collective mapping workshops are usually used to challenge dominant narratives on territories (Iconoclastas 2016). This is based on the assumption that traditional maps – even

though they are often thought to be an objective and accurate representation of reality – are a form of authority, producing and reproducing the narrative of hegemonic powers (Michel et al. 2018). Therefore, collective mapping aims to challenge these hegemonic narratives by creating maps that make issues visible that are otherwise hidden on traditional maps. For this, it is fundamental to involve the individual and everyday experience of the people through the co-creation of the map, hence the collective title.

By visualizing oppressed issues and experiences collective mapping often focuses on giving voice to marginalized groups and experiences. On one hand visualization is a very powerful tool for articulating and highlighting overlooked issues. On the other hand, mapping these matters and perspectives can also enhance community resistance (Ortega et al. 2024). Therefore, when studying how a certain community understands its surrounding, collective (mental) maps offer an effective way to visualize and emphasize a consensual point of view on the understanding of the area. Moreover, the exercise in itself can foster collaboration and collective thinking – both to enhance community-building, and to hinder traditional power relations between *researcher* and *researched* when used as a research method.

3.3. Why Use Collaborative Mapping Workshops?

The most self-explanatory answer to the question of why it is relevant to use collaborative mapping workshops in my research, can be derived from the research questions. As the main focus of my research is understanding how the emerging community of the Bahá'í Városmajor neighbourhood defines itself and its borders, it seems evident that mapping would be a useful tool for studying how people imagine the physical and geographical borders of the neighbourhood. In this regard, the use of both individual mental mapping and the collective mapping seems justifiable. Still, the question of why using these specific techniques or why including both techniques remain unanswered.

The workshop was designed to start with the creation of individual mental maps, in order to give space for all participants to imagine the neighbourhood, and remember their own experiences, memories and emotions connected to it. The presentation and discussion of individual maps provided an interesting starting point for negotiating the collective map based on the individual narratives (images). Therefore, individual mental mapping was not only useful for the data-gathering of the research – to see individual perspectives, similarities and differences of perception – but it also served as a great tool for advocating everyone's experience, and transitioning into the spirit of the workshop.

The relevance, and arguably the advantages of collective mapping – other than its usefulness for exploring the topic of the research – mainly concerns its approach to and influence on research dynamics and knowledge production. As the name suggests, an essential feature of the workshops is their *collaborativeness*, more specifically, their approach to knowledge as something that is co-produced. In this sense, one of the base assumptions of collaborative workshops is that everyone's knowledge is equally valuable, implying that it is not the researcher alone who is capable of producing knowledge for the research. One mechanism that establishes this relationship between the collaborators during a collaborative workshop is the equal opportunity to initiate and lead narratives. It is not the researcher who asks the questions and guides and forces narratives, but all the participants can have an equal chance to raise questions, tell stories and create narratives. From this aspect, collaborative mapping workshops have implications for much more than just being a tool for gathering information. They shape the relationship of the collaborators – the *researcher* and the *participants* of the research – and the way the knowledge is generated.

Similarly, when studying the relationship between researcher and the research participants, an important aspect is how reciprocated and balanced this relationship is. When it comes to collaborative workshops, their collaborative feature can allow for the creation of something that is actually beneficial for the community. This supports the less-exploitation-like nature of the research, in the sense that it is not about the researcher taking knowledge from a group of people and using it for their own purposes – in a way that the group may never know about or understand it – but it creates knowledge that can be useful for all parties. This is realized through having all collaborators take initiative in planning the workshop and discussing the goals and the future use of the map. Additionally, it is not only the final product that is useful for the community, as the process itself can foster collaboration and help community-building among its participants.

It is crucial to mention that collaboration can also be fragile. If executed carefully and respectfully, it can influence the entire research through shaping the relationships, fostering trust and collaboration. However, in order to reach this, it is essential to realize that these workshops do not only consist of the actual event of the workshop. Just as their capability of shaping the research, their employment is also all-encompassing: they include the planning, the realization, the evaluation and the afterlife of the product and of the collaboration. Put differently, a good collaborative workshop event can easily lose its collaborative essence if for instance, the researcher uses the produced material without the consent and approval of the other collaborators. In this case the trust would be betrayed and the whole goal of the

collaborative workshop would be lost after the seemingly successful realization of the mapping workshop.

Altogether I chose to include these mapping workshops in my research, because they do not only provide a platform for learning about the questions of the research, but they also create an opportunity for collaboration and the creation of something that is insightful for everyone.

4. From Concept to Practice: Analysing the Outcomes of the Collaborative Mapping Workshops

4.1. An Overview of the Workshops

Before getting into the detailed analysis of the workshops, I will provide a general overview of their design and realization to help the navigation and understanding of the further analysis. It is important to emphasize that the collaborative mapping workshop did not start with the first mapping session. It was essential to involve the community of the neighbourhood in the planning process. In practice, this meant that the first step was to make sure that the idea of mapping the neighbourhood was something that could be useful and interesting for the community. I had conversations with members of the community about wanting to organize a workshop, and everyone was very open to and supportive of the idea. Creating a map during the workshop proved to be a good suggestion, people seemed excited about it and confirmed that it would be useful for the community. The Austrian pioneers even told me that in their hometown, they had already done such an exercise to map their neighbourhood and to follow the community-building process. The next step was to brainstorm and consult about the design of the workshop. I took charge of outlining the structure of the activity which I then shared and discussed with participants. This meant having conversations about what to include in the workshop (such as whether they think that it is a good idea to do both individual and collective maps) and what should be the order of the tasks. During this process, my goal was to create opportunities for participation and collaborative planning and to make sure that the activity was not only suited to fulfil the requirements of my research, but to fit the needs and preferences of all the participants. To my surprise, this was harder than I expected. For example, the main feedback I got was regarding how much guidance was needed from my part in the explanation of the collective mapping exercise. Originally, I did not want to limit the exercise by giving specific suggestions or leading the task at all, however, the feedback indicated that the group preferred some form of coordination on my part as the *organizer*. In this sense, planning and

discussing the design of the workshop ended up not only fostering collaboration through involving participants in the process but also resulted in the collective negotiation of my role – such as how much guidance I should provide for the workshop, that is, am I more of an organizer or a participant as everyone else?

The first mapping workshop was organized on a Wednesday afternoon, at 2 pm, in the youth centre, the community space of the Bahá'í neighbourhood. This venue was not only ideal because it could provide a perfect space for the mapping workshop in the neighbourhood, but it could also provide all the tools that were needed for such a workshop – papers, pens, pencils, glues, etc. – as this is the place where the community holds children's classes, meetings and all sorts of gatherings for which these tools are often used. I arrived at the youth centre half an hour before the set appointment to arrange and prepare the space (see picture 1 and 2). I set up a big table, laid out a huge piece of paper, put out writing utensils and other accessories, and arranged the chairs around the table in a way that allowed approaching the map from various angles. After I set everything up, I sat on the couch to go through my plan for the workshop. When I looked at the clock and saw that it was already five minutes past 2 pm I started reciting the sentence that I had been telling myself during the whole day: it is okay if things do not go as planned, these group workshops always need flexibility. I was also reminding myself that I should have learned in the past year that – as it is often remembered in jokes – in this Bahá'í community a half-hour delay is always to be expected. Fortunately, this time half an hour was not needed, within a few minutes people started arriving. Altogether nine people came out of which two were children. The workshop was opened with a short prayer session³, as most often Bahá'í meetings start with a devotion to get into the spirit of serving and working together. We sat in a circle, in the living-room-style main room of the youth centre, some sitting on the couch, some on benches or chairs, and some on the carpet. After saying prayers, and singing a couple of songs together, I said a few introductory words about the mapping, including the explanation of the structure of the workshop, and asking for permission to record the conversation.

³Bahá'í praying sessions are most often called devotions. During these devotions anyone who wishes can say, chant or sing a prayer in any desired language. Activities in the community often begin with a devotion, during which some individuals say prayers, and the group collectively sings a few prayers set to catchy melodies.



Picture 1 and 2 – Illustrating the space arranged for the first mapping workshop

For the first exercise of the workshop – drawing mental maps individually – the instructions were to make a sketch of the neighbourhood to help see how each member of the group imagines the neighbourhood, and to provide a starting point for the discussion on how the collective map should be designed. I also participated in this task by drawing my own mental map of the neighbourhood. After finishing the sketches, everyone presented their sketch to the group, which was followed by a short discussion about what is outstanding on these maps, leading the discussion to brainstorm about the collective map. In order to help the conversation – and based on the advice I got during the planning of the workshop – I provided some ideas of how widely a map can be used, such as to illustrate the borders of the community, to illustrate the networks of the community, or to map important places, people, and memories. To help the discussion I also proposed some questions, such as “What are the specific themes or topics you would like to explore in this mapping workshop?”, “What goals would you like to achieve through this exercise?” and “How do you envision using the maps we create today in future actions or initiatives?”. After arriving to a common understanding of how this map should look like and what purposes it should be used for, we started the collective mapping. For this we went from sitting in a circle in the living room area, to the other side of the main room, to gather around the table.

The mapping was a chaotic process of drawing and discussing. Kids were running around trying to join the mapping by drawing on the paper. Some people were finishing their lunch during the session, jokes were flying around constantly, as well as conversations not tightly connected to the mapping. It was the atmosphere of a group that is close-knit, and spends a lot of time together, therefore the organization of such an occasion seemed almost just another task that is done together. As time was passing the kids left with their father to go to the park,

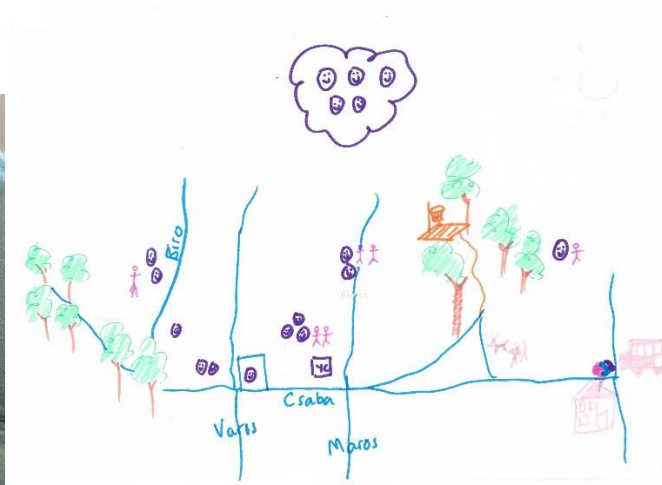
then others also started leaving for different obligations. Two hours after the beginning of the workshop the group decided to take a break and finish the mapping on another occasion. We closed the workshop by quickly reflecting on how we felt during the workshop, how we should continue the map, and by setting the time for the next occasion.

Before the second occasion I listened to the voice recording of the first session and collected all the goals that were set during the first workshop. The setting of the second occasion was very similar to the first one. We met in the same place, on the same day of the week, in the same hour, just two weeks later. I arrived at the youth centre a bit earlier once again, to set the scene for the workshop. This time we were six (including me). As it was a continuation of the exercise, we started the session by standing around the map and revising the goals that were set by the group during the previous workshop. This laid the way for knowing what had to be done and what were the elements that were still missing. To my surprise, this workshop was just as long as the previous one – around two hours. After the group decided that the map was done for now, we hang the map on the wall in the youth centre and concluded by a longer discussion to think about the future of this map collectively.

4.2. Analyzing Individual Mental Maps

Since the workshop began with the creation of individual mental maps, the analysis should also start with these, as they will serve as reference points in the subsequent sections. Most of the maps had Csaba utca at the centre, besides, when presenting the maps to each other Csaba utca was usually the first element that was mentioned. Csaba utca is the street where the community centre is located, as well as the street on which multiple of the core team members live. There were also no maps that did not include Csaba utca, which all strongly suggest that this is the main navigational and reference point for the members of the group. The other essential element of the maps that was included in all the illustrations was the Városmajor park, which also became the centre of two of the maps out of the seven (see picture 5). This indicates that the park is also an essential area for the members of the community. Even though the maps somewhat differed in what territories they covered, three streets were illustrated by all the participants: Csaba utca, Maros utca, Városmajor utca. That said, every map covered at least three streets, but maximum five, which shows the differentiations between the area covered by the images and implies the size and borders of the neighbourhood. The most depicted place was the youth centre, which was illustrated on all maps, followed by the carpet shop, which was only not illustrated by two participants. The shop (also located in Csaba utca) is owned by one

of the prominent members of the community, the same member that provided the youth centre for the use of the community. As the shop is close to the centre, it is a focal point of the neighbourhood, often serving as a space for meetings or spontaneous conversations. The maps somewhat varied in how many public places (such as stores, cafes, restaurants) they depicted: two maps did not include any, four included less than three, and only one included more than three. This shows that most maps did not illustrate many public places – compared to other things that were depicted – which suggests a kind of consensus that the most illustrated, and therefore most significant places are the ones that are directly connected to the Bahá'í Community (such as the youth centre, the carpet shop, people's houses).



Picture 3 and 4

Other than the built environment, all maps illustrated people, emphasizing the close connection between physical environment and the community that lives in it. However, only two maps included people outside of the core team. Some people did reflect on this when presenting their maps by saying that they did not include other people, because they did not know where they lived. One map solved this issue by putting these people in a cloud (see picture 3 and 4). Even though most images only indicated the core team members, visualizing the homes resulted in interesting reflections. When presenting the map to the group, one of the participants reflected on seeing the community members located on the map:

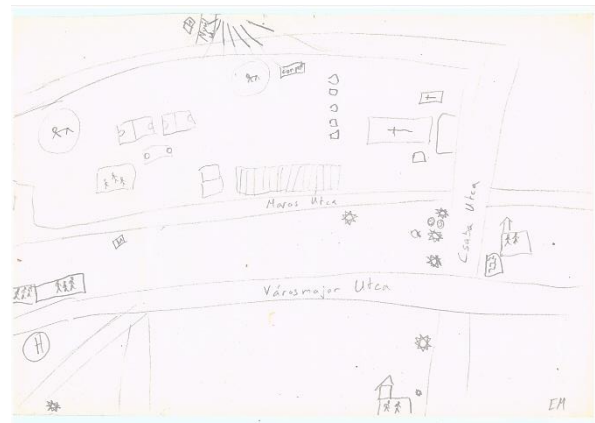
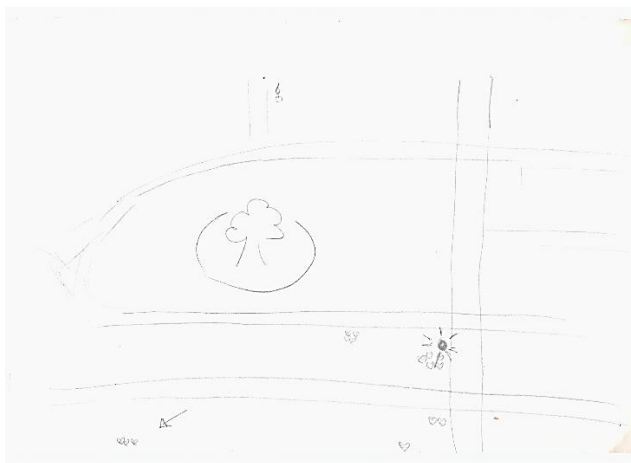
“Here is Csaba utca. It was so good see that all of us live here. I mean except for [deleted the names for anonymity reasons] ... lame [says jokingly] ... You see that most of the dots are here. And it's so good to see that we are all like so concentrated to like one area.”

This reflection is interesting for many reasons. One, it seems like this first exercise was already illuminating in the sense that the participant got to reflect on how close people live to each other through visualizing them. Second, this thought does not only acknowledge the community members' proximity, but it also evaluates it as something "good". This indicates the importance of being close to each other in the physical sense, which was later reassured by another comment:

"In my head if I draw the neighbourhood ... [name of the community members that are deleted for anonymity reasons] they are in my head they don't live in the neighbourhood. It's too far off. ... And it made me a bit sad."

While in the previous example being close to each other was evaluated as something "good", in this case, other members of the community living further is proclaimed to be "sad", again emphasizing the importance of physical proximity. This also means that the borders of the neighbourhood are fixed, they cannot be extended by having core team members living a bit further.

A symbol that appeared on two mental maps was the light in different forms, and on both maps it signified some form of Bahá'í activity. On one map a sun symbol indicated the youth centre, and a candle the place that was visited by by 'Abdu'l-Bahá – one of the main figures of the Faith – while on the other image stars illustrated devotional meetings and study groups, and a big light the place visited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (see picture 5). The metaphor of light is often used in Bahá'í writings referring to things such as God and spirituality. That said, the map that illustrated study groups and devotional meetings was the only map that displayed any kind of activity.



Picture 5 and 6 – Maps with symbols of light

4.3. Analyzing the Collective Mapping

After the individual mapping, we started the collective mapping activity, which was a chaotic event with various things happening parallelly, participants coming and going, sometimes getting distracted or tired. Still, looking at the final product and listening to the voice recordings, the workshop did have its own structure and train of thought. Before the workshop, it was not decided what to map exactly, and I also decided not to provide a big print map, in order to have freedom in the visualization of the territory. As everything had to be figured out and discussed from the start, the first interesting thing to look at is the group discussion about what to portray on the map.

The discussion of how to approach the collective map started out by figuring out the layout of the map, for which the individual maps seemed to be of help. In the following quotation it is visible how the mental maps were used as a reference point for discussion:

“Actually, the main place where we hang out and have a lot of conversations and spend a lot of time is the park. And it’s not part of the street network, and not part of where people live, so all of us have put the park a bit on the side, or many of us... And while the park is not the center in the terms of... so the streets that we work with are mainly Csaba, Maros, Városmajor, still the park feels very central. ... many of our memories and many of the things are in the park. I wouldn’t put it somewhere in the side, even though both Ignotus and the other side of it is not so relevant at this point.”

This quotation does not only demonstrate the use of individual maps but has interesting implications for how the significance of particular places and areas are justified. In this sense, the quotation suggests that places where a lot of time is spent, and where conversations are held become focal for the community of the neighbourhood. It is important to note that having conversations refers to talking to new people and building connections that potentially will lead to working together on the community-building. This can also be understood as an indicator that activity connected to the community-building process is central, which was already visible from the individual maps. According to the quotation, another important aspect that makes the park central is the memories that have been made there. It is also very interesting that the participant was referring to how most individual maps illustrated the park as non-central. It seems like the participant was proposing that the mapping exercise could serve as a tool for

reshaping how the community looks at and understands the neighbourhood. This idea was reassured later during the same discussion when the participant stated:

“This process can strengthen our understanding of the neighbourhood and really make things more conscious. ... Really making it more conscious so also when we go out into the neighbourhood, we have a more conscious map of where we are.”

The group agreed – without any contesting opinions – that the park would be placed as a central element of the collective map. The other main point of negotiation before starting the actual mapping was establishing the main goal of the map. It was easily agreed that the main aim of the map would be to visualize the community-building process. The conversation consisted of discussing the details of how to visualize this, rather than raising concerns or counter opinions. Here is an extract of this brainstorming process:

“So what we are trying to do is to advance the community-building process. So it would be nice if the map would show the community kind of. So it’s the people. But it’s also like institutions ... what kind of institutions in the neighbourhood that are part of the community. Or the ice cream shop that [name deleted for anonymity reasons] was talking about.”

The reactions were agreeing with the idea by elaborating on it: *“Meeting points. That would be interesting to see where are the places where people interact with each other. Or where people meet.”* At the same time, these comments also express what people find important when it comes to depicting the community-building process, that is, they provide insight into what the community-building means for the group. For the first time, these quotations mention institutions and other public spaces – such as the ice cream shop. However, they are still referred to as meeting points and as spaces for interaction amongst the members of the community. It seems like everything can be understood as a tool, as space and as an opportunity for community-building.

During the discussion the collectively created map was not only considered as something that passively depicts the neighbourhood and its community-building mission, but also as an active tool for enhancing it:

“I could imagine that it could be beautiful to in some ways to like put some kind of symbol in every household where conversation is already spreading. And also then when for example parents see the map, they see ‘oh wow there is so many people living in our area, thinking about these questions’. I think it can be very encouraging.”

When mentioning “parents”, the participant is referring to the parents of the children who attend the children’s classes in the Városmajor neighbourhood, while “spreading conversation” refers to conversations about the Faith and connections that are being built based on ideas connected to the teachings of the Faith. This quotation suggests that the closeness of community members, or rather, like-minded people concentrated in an area is considered something that must be appealing to everyone. For one, it is visible again that the geographical proximity is of central value for the group. However, this idea interprets the map as an active tool in helping the community-building, through the visualization of the community. This led the group to consider making the map interactive:

“It would be also nice to have it on the wall and then everyone who comes in is invited. If you want you can also put your name where you live. To add yourself to the neighbourhood, to the community kind of.”

In this quotation it is also expressed very explicitly that being on the map means being part of the community, that is, placing oneself on the map means joining the community. This has strong implications for the interpretation of the map: on one hand this means that whatever is illustrated on the map is strongly connected to the community, on the other hand in this sense the map could perhaps become an *official* tracker of who and what is part of the neighbourhood.

After this discussion, in which the goals and the future function of the map were established, the group decided to start the mapping. The participants were taking turns in being active, it was always one or two people leading what and how to map, while others were helping in the execution, or being distracted by a side conversation. During the activity negotiations were mainly happening about where to draw what and whether things should be proportionate to the *actual* sizes and distances. To help the orientation the group pulled out google maps on the phone and drew the initial sketches with its help. During the second session – which was organized to continue the unfinished map – it was debated whether networks should be illustrated on the map. While some participants were in favor of the idea, others were arguing

that it would make the image too chaotic. We concluded that the map would not indicate the connections between people for now, however in the future we could come up with solutions, such as putting the map on a magnetic board in order to be able to map the connections more dynamically and less permanently.

The houses of the community members – including core team members, children who attend children's classes, and people that are "part of the conversation" – became an important element of the map. I asked the group whether they wanted to illustrate the core team with the same colour as the other community members. To this the answer was very clear. One person said yes, "*Because we love everyone equally*", to which another participant also reacted: "*And because we want to work consciously as well not think about us and them. We want to think about us*". This momentum highlights the effort of the community to build a community that is based on equality, which should be clear when looking at the map.

Interestingly, during the drawing sessions memories and stories connected to the different spaces and areas were not recalled. The conversations were either about the practicalities of where to draw what, including talking about where people live, which sometimes led to conversations about certain people and how they participate in the life of the neighbourhood. Toward the end of the second occasion as we were gathered around the table in the youth centre, a boy started waving at us from the street, through the big window of the room which faces Csaba utca. He seemingly waited for someone to invite him in. He ended up coming in and joining the workshop, which generated an interesting moment, when one of the participants explained him what we were doing:

"It's an exercise for us to read reality. Because you know like what we are trying to do is we are trying to create a sort of community-building process that leads to the strengthening of the community. And one thing that's very important when doing something like this is that you don't forget anyone. You know. When you think about community, you can't just forget people. So what we are trying to do is not to forget anyone. And so we thought about what if we do a map that helps us visualize. ... so we're trying to make this map to forget people less. And realize how many people do we actually know. Do we know many people that are maybe not involved in community building at all?"

This quotation gives a great insight into the interpretation of the workshop. Again, the central element of it is the community-building process, and how the map can enhance it by

visualizing the community, that is, by seeing how (and whether) each person is connected to the process.

We closed the workshop by hanging the map on the wall (see picture 5), and reflecting on the mapping and its product. During this discussion some people highlighted how nice it is to see that there are so many people in the area. As for the future of the map, the group agreed to reflect on its use in January, at the end of this cycle – which is a period of activity within the Bahá’í community-building process with different phases that repeat each cycle – *“and then we can see how reality develops in the course of every cycle”*, as one of the participants articulated the idea. It was also agreed that the map is not a completely finalized illustration, as multiple people have not been placed on the map. If members of the community who did not participate in the workshop can add someone or themselves they could do that any time. Hence, the map was proclaimed to be an interactive map which can track the growth of the community.



Picture 7 – The “final” map

4.4. Description of the Collectively Created Map

Lastly, we should look at the *final* product of the workshop, the collectively created map. According to the previously analysed discussion, the centre of the *final* map is not Csaba utca, rather, it is the park that fills out most of the space on the image (see picture 7). The houses illustrate homes (orange), institutions (green) (such as school, kindergarten, swimming pool,

theatre), and stores (purple). The pink squares in the park depict recreational areas, such as the basketball court and the playground. The collectively drawn map covers a bigger territory than what was covered by most individual maps, however it does not include areas that were not mapped on the individual sketches. Rather, it seems to be more detailed, especially when it comes to the illustration of people's homes and the institutions.

Within the houses each person that is in connection with the community of the neighbourhood is illustrated with a pink heart, while the outline of the heart differs according to what age group the person belongs to (children, junior youth, youth, adult). Another aspect to be mentioned is that even though during the mapping workshop the main language was English, the titles on the map are in Hungarian. This is probably because most people in the neighbourhood are Hungarian, however this is not true for the core team of the Bahá'í community of the neighbourhood. The map being in Hungarian could suggest that the participants thought of the community in a broad sense – not just as the core team – when picturing the audience of the map.

5. Interpretation of the Results, Conclusion

The workshop showed that there was a general agreement between the members of the community about what places are central in the neighbourhood, and how these places gain their importance. It was uncontested throughout the activity that the community-building process is the central concern of the group through which they interpreted the neighbourhood – including institutions, public spaces, and the people. Places and residents of the neighbourhood that are not in touch with the Bahá'í community were never mentioned – in either segment of the workshop, as well, things and people were only visible on the maps if they were connected to or served as a tool for the community-building process. During the discussion the importance of certain places was reasoned through their role in community building, that is, the most emblematic places were the ones that provided space for interaction and meetings. This all shows the importance of the community-building process in the interpretation of the neighbourhood and its community. The other most central element that was highlighted during each stage and discussion was the importance of geographical proximity. This all implies what the requirements are for being recognized as a member of the neighbourhood community. In this sense, the criterium seems twofold: living in the neighbourhood (within its imagined borders) and being part of the community-building process. This shows that the analysis of the workshop does not only provide information about how the community members perceive the

geographical borders of the neighbourhood, but it also provides insight into the symbolic borders of the community. More specifically, visualizing the neighbourhood showed who is considered to be part of its community.

When it comes to the clarity of the geographical borders of the neighbourhood, the research found that even though the borders of the neighbourhood are not completely sharp, during the discussions there were no debates about where they are, suggesting a general agreement. Here, it is interesting to recall one of the quotations in which the participant said that it was sad to see that one family from the core team was not depicted on either of the individual maps. Even in this case, despite sadness being expressed, it was not a question whether their house was within the borders of the neighbourhood. This implies that the borders are fixed and just by being active in the community-building process one cannot be completely part of the neighbourhood community, which again supports the two-fold criteria of being a member.

Many dilemmas arise from these findings. For example, why is it that all maps and connected conversations neglected to mention anyone or anything that is not connected to the Bahá'í community in some way? How could a community expand if the potential new members are completely invisible to them? And if the neighbourhood is set in the already existing infrastructure of the city – which we could see being emphasized in the definition provided by the Universal House of Justice at the beginning of the paper – why not use these existing infrastructures, communities and opportunities? In a way, creating this map that lacks anything not already connected to the community, suggests a complete rewriting of the area. More specifically, it seems that the community does not place itself within the given structure of the neighbourhood or within the community of residents who had been living there, but rather aims to start everything from scratch. Another interesting question that has not been studied is whether this invisibility exists the other way around as well. Do the residents of the area know about this community and its action? Or is the community just as invisible from the outside as the outside is for the community? Is this invisibility mutual? These questions seem highly relevant given the implications of this paper and should be addressed in my future research.

The employment of both individual and collective mapping exercise proved to be fruitful. The individual maps did create an opportunity for expressing and comparing individual perspectives, which resulted in being interesting both for the analysis of the results and for having a base for the negotiation of a collective vision. For instance, this design made it possible to recognize how the group used the collective map to reshape their approach to and understanding of their environment – deciding not to put Csaba utca as the centre of the map

even though it was central in all the individual maps. Treating the map as an active tool – not just a passive illustration – was also prevalent in other instances. It was advocated that displaying the map can encourage people in their participation, through the visualization of the community. In this sense – and throughout the whole workshop – the notion of the community was used with an outstandingly positive connotation, almost reaching a value-like significance. The group decided to treat the collective map as an interactive platform, which can track the community-building process in the neighbourhood. It was also agreed that we would have follow-up meetings and reflections about the use of the map, and potentially continue working on it.

I believe that nothing testifies more for the hitherto success of the workshop than the continuous use of the map. As hopefully visible from the quoted interpretations this workshop was created and executed in a collaborative way which did not only provide insight for the writing of this paper, but was primarily meant to produce a collective occasion and a map that could serve as a tool for the community of the neighbourhood. By employing collaborative mapping workshops one of my goals was to provide a platform for everyone to advocate and interpret their own narratives. Of course, at the end of the day I am the one choosing which quotations to include and how to present and interpret them, however, I believe that this is where the role of collaboration – in its widest and strictest sense – becomes relevant. Participating in the life of a community, building friendships and connections, as well as fostering trust and collaboration with the help of tools such as collaborative workshops help to make sure that the dynamics of the research are more balanced and participants feel responsible for each other. In the analysis of the workshop I used many quotations to show and emphasize the narratives and the exact wording of the participants. Even though in a research paper it is unavoidable to summarize and interpret these narratives, this text has been approved by the participants of the workshop. Still, ethical dilemmas arise. Can a researcher really dissolve into being just another collaborator? More specifically, was I really a collaborator in this workshop? I believe the answer is yes and no. On one hand, it would be a mistake to claim that my position as a researcher, as someone who is going to write about the activity, was or could ever be completely forgotten and evened out. Next to this, in the early stages I was clearly looked at as an organizer, in the sense that I provided the idea of the workshop, I set the occasion, and I initiated the outline of the activity. However, later, especially during the collective mapping, this organizer role did not have much importance anymore. Creating the map collectively was the perfect demonstration of how knowledge was everyone's to share, there was not a role for me or anyone as an *organizer* or *leader*. The map had to be created together, where the only relevant

knowledge was the community members' image and experience of the neighbourhood. Despite all this I still find it very important to emphasize the trickiness and fragileness of collaboration by reflecting on my positionality and making efforts to maintain and cherish the shared trust that outlives the extent of collaboration. Hopefully, through this example the paper has demonstrated how collaborative tools are capable of contributing to the overall dynamics of the research, which ultimately means the reconsideration of the acquired knowledge through advocating for the collaborative production of knowledge.

Altogether, while these workshops and its findings did provide an outstandingly ample variety of information for understanding how the Városmajor neighbourhood of the Bahá'í Community of Hungary defines itself, its members and its territory, they have also raised just as many questions for further research. For example, it would be very interesting to flip the questions and learn about how the community is seen or whether it is seen at all for people that are not part of the neighbourhood community. What is certain based on this study is that the topic of defining entities and their borders can hardly be understood from one side. To understand these processes of definition, the perspective of *the other sides* – what the entity is defining itself *against* – will always come up as questions. This paper began with dilemmas of my position in this undefined community and is ending with dilemmas about how *outsiders* see this undefined and potentially even invisible community. Ultimately all these dilemmas aim to understand the definition of the same community – the Bahá'í Városmajor neighbourhood – through studying its borders from different angles.

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