
STOCKHOLM/COPENHAGEN/OSLO –
TRANSLATION AND SENSE OF PLACE IN
MARTIN KELLERMAN'S COMIC STRIP
ROCKY

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INTRODUCTION

Martin Kellerman's newspaper strip *Rocky* is considered a very important part of Swedish and particularly Stockholm culture. It is an autobiographical comic strip in funny animal style that began publication in the free newspaper *Metro* in 1998. The strip centers on Kellerman's alter ego Rocky's troubles with women, his job as a cartoonist, his friends, and the everyday life of partying and being bored. Kellerman has won the Bellman prize, which celebrates an artist's "ability to bring forth Stockholm in an artistic perspective" as well as the Bern prize, which is given every year to someone who "has made a valuable contribution to the rendering of Stockholm's nature and culture."¹ As such, there seems to be something very Stockholm about his strip.

However, when the strip was translated into Norwegian (by Dag F. Gravem in *Dagbladet*, from 1999) as well as into Danish (by Nikolaj Scherfig in *Politiken*, from 2004), the setting was changed from Stockholm to Oslo and Copenhagen respectively, and Rocky changed his passport rather seamlessly. To some members of the audiences in the other Scandinavian countries, Rocky appeared to be inherently native and readers are sometimes surprised to learn that Rocky is in fact "as Swedish as surströmming [sour herring] and Systembolaget."²

The strip's easy transition from one Scandinavian country to another poses certain questions concerning the translation of strips, how text and image collaborate in making place, issues of representation, as well as questions about cultural differences and similarities. Is there something distinctively Scandinavian about *Rocky* that allows the strip's main character to change nationality as well as home town when he crosses the border? Or, is it the non-specific place markers of the strips that allow this transition to happen so smoothly?

This article examines the *Rocky* universe through a comparative analysis of the different Scandinavian translations that explores how a sense of place is constructed in the strips. The article discusses the function of *Rocky*'s many different places in local, inter-Scandinavian, and global relations. The strips have been analyzed with a specific focus on how place is presented and this article discusses both the most typical examples and the more exceptional ones.³

¹ Bellmanpriset: <http://www.stockholm.se/KulturFritid/Stod/Kulturpriser/>. Bernspriset: http://www.svenskapen.se/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=107&Itemid=33&lang=sv, author's

² Skotte, "Oversætteren," author's translation. Surströmming is a fermented fish product and an acquired taste, and Systembolaget is the specific government controlled place to buy alcohol, both considered distinctly Swedish to a Danish audience.

³ The material for this analysis is the Norwegian, Swedish and Danish versions of the strips up until strip number 1549 which is the last strip in the Danish translation published in book format (Kellerman, *Rocky 6* (Scherfig Trans.)).



The importance of the comic strip format as a structurally limited space should be noted, since in the small panels of the strip, there is not much room for visual information, such as backgrounds, site-specific cues, or direct mimetic reference. How the artist chooses to make use of this restricted space then becomes very relevant for its anchoring in specific places or just the opposite, its unmooring: the visual aspects of the strip can cut the story loose from its setting and make it more easily transposable to another context.

Using geographer Doreen Massey's concept of a "progressive sense of place," in combination with formal comics theory on text, image, and their mutual relation, I will offer possible answers as to why Rocky can at the same time be distinctively Swedish and simultaneously inhabit the Scandinavian sister capitals without necessarily causing the reader to stop and wonder. How is a sense of place constructed in the strips and how can this be matched with a different cultural context?

ROCKY AS SWEDISH IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

The newspaper strip is a comics format with a long tradition in the Nordic countries, and it is still very popular. Some of the region's most prolific and popular comics artists, like Frode Øverli, Nikoline Werdelin, or Tony Cronstam, work in this format, often commenting on local and national events and making jokes that relate to the specific national context. The humorous newspaper strip is the standard: a few panels worth of build-up and then a joke to end the strip. Rocky and his friends are at the center of the strip and it is often their relationships and personalities that coax the loudest laugh from the reader, through a sustained acquaintance with their ups and downs, especially as strips in more recent episodes connect over days to form longer narratives. *Rocky* is meant to be a funny strip, but it does not always have a hilarious point to end the last panel. The humor is not necessarily easy to pin down and can be vulgar, pointless, sarcastic, aggressive, or very subtle, but also sometimes bordering on cliché.

Interestingly, when Rocky was translated into English and published by Fantagraphics in 2005, the Swedish setting was kept, which suggests that the Scandinavian aspect of the strip was an important part and would perhaps not have made sense if transferred to an American scenario. In "a note from the American publisher," it is pointed out how some things have been preserved whereas others have been left out:

The original *Rocky* strip bristles with contemporary pop-culture and local reference, many of them very specific to Sweden. We have tried to maintain this European flavor, while



tweaking, dodging and weaving as necessary in order to insure that certain punch lines or sequences are not indecipherable to English-speaking audiences [...] We should note, however, that thanks to the bullying hegemony of American culture, many of the references (Tarantino, *Seinfeld*, *The Godfather*, *Rambo*, hip-hop, etc.) are actually in the original *Rocky* strip to begin with – as is the character’s Monty Python obsession. When Swedish text (signs, newspapers, etc.) is simply background material, it has been left alone, but when it actually serves a narrative purpose, it has been translated. [...] A few strips (such as in-depth discussion of Swedish rap-stars) were excised from the book as being too hopelessly Swede-centric.⁴

This quote touches upon many of the aspects of the strip I will analyze, which are directly related to the way place is conveyed: the strip’s general global cultural content, specific Swedish references made in the speech balloons and diegetic text, and the possibility of some Swedish aspects of the strips that might appear indecipherable to readers outside a Swedish context. Notably, the publisher’s comment discusses only the textual aspect of the strips, and this foregrounds one of the conclusions in this article: that text plays a very significant role in anchoring the strip in a certain national context.

Rocky is a very dialogue-driven strip, a point noted by several scholars, including Kristy Beers Fägersten, who in her analysis of the use of English words in the original Swedish-language specifically mentions the emphasis on dialogue as a motivation for her linguistic analysis of the strip.⁵ In her conclusion, Fägersten discusses the ways in which code switching to English is used in *Rocky* and mentions the expression of cultural alignment with American hip-hop culture as one of the reasons for the use of English in the strip.⁶ This underlines how through shifts in language and via direct reference, *Rocky* moves in an intercultural and intertextual web which is also the reason the American publisher can leave many references in the text unexplained. Although filled with specific Swedish references, *Rocky* is also an expression of a globalized cultural field and its protagonist frequently travels to other countries. Most strips take place in a Scandinavian setting, but the scene changes regularly and many of the everyday situations are recognizable to readers outside Sweden, in Scandinavia as well as globally.

⁴ Kellerman, *Big Payback* (Thompson Trans.).

⁵ Fägersten, “English in *Rocky*,” 240.

⁶ Fägersten, “English in *Rocky*,” 260–261.



PROGRESSIVE SENSE OF PLACE

Rocky's frequent use of English, extensive references to foreign TV-series, movies, and music, as well as its characters' many travels across the globe, are an effect of globalization and a global exchange of goods and cultural products. Globalization is not always seen as positive and can be viewed as a process which threatens the local character of places. In response to this concern, Doreen Massey offers concepts of space and place which emphasize the effects of globalization as something that can help us conceive of place as progressive. One response the threat of globalization is to return to a sense of place as something safe, something with a stable and recognizable identity, but Massey contests this idea in her analysis of four qualities of place in a globalized world. "First of all, it is absolutely not static. If places can be conceptualized in terms of the social interactions which they tie together, then it is also the case that these interactions themselves are not a motionless thing, frozen in time. They are processes."⁷

In Massey's understanding of place it follows that places are in a constant flux, continuously being created and re-created by the interactions that take place in them and in relation to them.

"Second, places do not have boundaries in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures."⁸

Here, Massey emphasizes that places do not need borders to define them, that they are in effect just as defined by their links with their surroundings and are not necessarily threatened by outsiders crossing over these border and supposedly penetrating the place's "true" identity.

"Third, clearly places do not have single, unique 'identities'; they are full of inner conflicts."⁹ So we might also want to pay attention to these conflicts in trying to understand a place and get a sense of it, whilst being acutely aware that there is no such thing as *one* identity of a place.

Fourth, and finally, none of this denies place nor the importance of the uniqueness of place. [...]

There is the specificity of place which derives from the fact that each place is the focus of a distinct *mixture* of wider and more local social relations. There is the fact that this very mixture together in one place may produce effects which would not have happened otherwise. And finally, all these relations interact with and take a further element of specificity from the accumulated

⁷ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 155.

⁸ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 155.

⁹ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 155.



history of a place, with that itself imagined as a product of layer upon layer of different sets of linkages, both local and to the wider world.¹⁰

This notion of place emphasizes the way places are a mixture of many different aspects, layer upon layer of different signifying as well as social practices. It is both specific to *this* place but continuously changes and is recreated anew when this particular place is linked to other places or is in conflict within itself. Place in this sense is a conglomerate of the physical reality of the place, its histories, the way it interacts with other places, and also the many imaginations that are being made in relation to this place. This includes artistic representations of a place, the stories told, the images, the photographs, all the many ways in which our imagination connects with a certain place.

As such, *Rocky* both contributes to our sense of a place (Stockholm/Sweden/Europe) through its portrayal of everyday life in the city and its links with other places, and is in itself a network of references which consists of numerous internal conflicts, oppositions, and links that constantly change and reassert their place as both specific and interrelated. It represents a place identity that is special and fluid at the same time, place as process being constructed as time passes.

When Massey emphasizes that a new conceptualization of space “inherently implies the existence in the lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in various relations of paradox or antagonism,”¹¹ she points to a complicated notion of space that can be analyzed in comics through their combination of image and text and the way they refer to their surroundings and audiences.

Comics and place, and the connections between geography and comics, is a growing field in comics scholarship and there are many fruitful recent combinations of geography, human geography, cartography, and comics studies.¹² Studies of the ways comics interact with and use space and place to address issues of autobiography, socio-economic debates, health problems, and political discussions all make important contributions to the interdisciplinary field of comics and geography. The field is still young, however, and there are numerous theoretical and methodological ways of approaching space and place in comics yet to be explored, which may yield important contributions to the discussion. This is why I find that Massey’s concept of a “sense of place” is useful in approaching the issue of place in *Rocky*, because a sense of place is

¹⁰ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 156.

¹¹ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 3.

¹² See for instance the aptly titled *Comic Book Geographies* (2014) edited by Jason Dittmer or Holland, “Mapping Bosnia”; Donovan, “Graphic Pathogeographies.”



what the translators are trying to recreate in their versions of the strip. When Dag F. Gravem searches for a parallel to Upplands Väsby where Rocky grew up, it is important to find a municipality with the same sense of place and which is situated in relation to Oslo in the same way Upplands Väsby is to Stockholm, both geographically and in terms of the associations the places invoke.¹³

The *Rocky* strips create a sense of place that contributes to our understanding of place in general, and, in the case of places that have an actual reference in our experienced world, also become part of the web that signifies the place in question – *Rocky's* Stockholm may impact our sense of how Stockholm is as a place. American readers of *Rocky* will add to their imaginative impression of the Swedish capital and its inhabitants, and construct an image of Sweden and Scandinavia in general that is tinged with a *Rocky* flavor.

As geographer Jason Dittmer has noted, there are several kinds of spaces and places at stake in the medium of comics, one of which is “place in comics’, [which] refers to the role of comics’ representation in the constitution of particular places.” A crucial aspect of this representation is the role of what Dittmer calls “space in comics,” that is “the way that images and text in comics are alchemically set in relation to one another and therefore compose a topological space.” We will begin by examining how “place in comics” is influenced by the “space in comics” in this particular strip.¹⁴ The following looks at how *Rocky* constructs the places its main characters inhabit through the use of specific structural elements in comics.

TEXT, IMAGE, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF PLACE

I will focus here on the ways in which *Rocky* makes reference to existing places and constructs a sense of place by looking at three specific structural elements: diegetic text (within the narrative), speech balloons (dialogue), and image (visual components of the panel), and specifically the ways in which these contribute to either specify a particular place or generalize it. As translation scholars Frederico Zanettin and Nadine Celotti both stress in *Comics in Translation*, it is crucial to pay attention to the images in the translation of comics and a verbal and visual interpretation is key to a successful translation.¹⁵

¹³ Gravem, “Lost in geography.”

¹⁴ Dittmer, “Introduction,” 16–17.

¹⁵ Celotti, “Translator as Semiotic Investigator”; Zanettin, “Comics in Translation Overview.”



Several scholars have pointed towards the anchoring function of text, as proposed by semiotician Roland Barthes, as an aspect of comics that can help specify an otherwise “floating chain” of plural possible signifieds in the image.¹⁶ This anchoring function can also be used to place the action in a specific (geographical) context. Whereas the image adds visual information about the surroundings, the text can provide additional information or even make very specific reference to guide the reader’s understanding of exactly *where* the action takes place. As mentioned, Kellerman uses text rather extensively in his strips and there are particularly two ways that text serves an anchoring function in relation to a particular place: through texts that are part of the narrative, such as signs or posters, and through the references to place names in speech balloons. These two uses of texts in the strip play a role in the substitution of places in the process of translation.

SIGNS TO SHOW THE WAY

The use of text within the narrative – on for example signs, posters, shops – is perhaps the simplest way to point to a specific setting. In her discussion of four different verbal kinds of text in comics, Nadine Celotti terms this verbal content “linguistic paratext” and points out the different ways this can be dealt with in.¹⁷ As *Rocky*’s American publisher notes, the strip’s texts serve the purpose in the English translation to give a sense of the surroundings’ Swedishness and are only translated when the story depends on their content for the execution of the strip. A strip where Rocky has just returned home from New York shows how this use of diegetic text can easily be replaced for translation purposes and changes the setting through the indicative reference of signs:



Figure 1. Kellerman, Martin, *Martin Kellermans Rocky*. Volym ett, Kartago, 2008, p. 24 © Martin Kellerman and Kartago Förlag.

¹⁶ Barthes, “Rhétorique de L’image,” 44–45. See for instance Groensteen, *Système de La BD*, 153–154 and *Reading bande dessinée*, 100.

¹⁷ Celotti, “Translator as Semiotic Investigator,” 38–39.



Figure 2. Kellerman, Martin, *Rocky the big payback*, Politisk Revy, 2006, p.25 © Martin Kellerman and Politisk Revy.



Figure 3. Kellerman, Martin *Rocky the big payback*, Schibsted Forlagene, 2005, p.36 © Martin Kellerman and Schibsted Forlagene.

In the Swedish version, Rocky and Gonzzo travel from panel to panel via the T-bane (underground) train, from the stop Slussen via Mariatorget, Zinkensdamm, and Hornstull, which makes it possible for the reader to place them geographically and follow their conversation as it moves along the red line on the map of the metro.¹⁸ This scene corresponds in the Danish version with a trip on the S-train from Enghave via Dybbølsbro to Vesterport and Nørreport stations,¹⁹ all recognizable and easy to place within specific coordinates in Copenhagen's Vesterbro district, just as the Norwegian trip takes the friends from Jernbanetorget via Stortorget and Nationalteatret to Majorstuen stations in central Oslo.²⁰ The substitution of signs is a very direct method for switching the reference to place, but it also relies on the content of the images and the general similarity between the places that are being swapped. Part of the success of this change of scenery, several hundred kilometers away, is that Kellerman's images do not contain site-specific information. He draws in a clear style, without much detail, and the generic interior in this example makes the train coach plausible as a representation of the inside of a train in many other countries. Most major European cities have some sort of public transportation train passing

¹⁸ Kellerman, *Rocky* vol. 2 (Swedish), 28.

¹⁹ Kellerman, *Big Payback* (Scherfig Trans.), 25.

²⁰ Kellerman, *Big Payback* (Gravem Trans.), 36.



through its center, and the Scandinavian capitals share a number of other physical, geographical, and societal similarities, which makes the transition from Stockholm to Oslo and Copenhagen go over without too much trouble. If Martin Kellerman had used a realistic style and with meticulous detail visually described the specific transport system of Stockholm, it would have been less convincing to transform it into the Norwegian tunnel train system.

Kellerman's use of signs to point to specific stations outside the window of the coach also indicates the way, temporality works in comics.. Just as with spatial cues, temporality can be introduced through text as well as the succession of images in comic strips, but in this case, there is a marked discrepancy between the temporality of the panel sequence and the dialogue between Rocky and his friend Gonzo. This discrepancy arises exactly from the use of signs to indicate the stations the characters pass on their way.

In reality, there are at least a few minutes between the stations on the route, regardless of what city the strip depicts, but the dialogue is linked from panel to panel and suggests that the characters' exchange is of much shorter duration. As comics scholar Thierry Groensteen notes, speech balloons inscribe temporality to the panel, for instance when a question is posed and answered.²¹ In this example with the coach ride, the temporality of the conversation is at odds with the passage of time outside the conversation as it is linked to place. In order to explicate the sense of place as one being travelled through, the strip departs from a realistic depiction of conversation and creates a comic strip temporality which is possible because of the combination of speech balloons, diegetic text, and images.

TALKING ABOUT THAT PLACE

The above-discussed examples also show another way in which text is used in the strips to ground the narrative in a site-specific setting: direct reference to named places through text in speech balloons. Arrived home after the fiasco of his New York trip, Rocky points to his locality by insisting that he would much rather be in Stockholm/Copenhagen/Oslo over the summer. This situates the conversation at very specific geographical coordinates, and the particularity of the setting is expanded, as Rocky maps out destinations within the city to the reader. For those readers familiar with the place names Reimersholme (Israels Plads/Marienlyst) and Långholmen (Islands Brygge/Bygdøy), their mention will help create a map of each of the cities. The structure of this map is similar enough that, if painted in broad strokes, the change from one city to the other is not a problem: all the capitals have city basket courts, water, and places to swim close by.

²¹ Groensteen, *Système de La BD*, 158.



The social map of the city traced by the movements of Rocky and his friends, then, connects physical sites in a network that can look very similar from one city to the other.

The smoothness of the transformation of *Rocky* from Stockholm to Oslo and Copenhagen requires the translator to be very familiar with both the primary city and the city it translates into. Both Dag F. Gravem and Nikolaj Scherfig have discussed extensively how they acquaint themselves with Stockholm in order to give the places the same connotations in the translated versions.²² This study is not about the technicalities and art of translation, however, but the way that Kellerman's speech balloons refer to Swedish places which are then translated into similar Norwegian and Danish places (areas of the city, specific bars, suburbs) is an important aspect of how a sense of place is created in this strip, even if this translated version of Oslo or Copenhagen is in fact a version of Rocky's Stockholm.

When Doreen Massey underlines internal conflicts and antagonisms as part of a place, this can be seen as one of the ways in which Stockholm is transferred to another context, because the relations and oppositions between social groups within a geographical area is one element that is retained in the translation of Rocky. Social differences are often connected to imaginations about how certain places "are" – their place identity – and in relation to this, what kind of people live there and how they act, and what their values are. Much of *Rocky's* humor is related to prejudice linked to a certain area, and this prejudice can resonate with the reader and point to the specific imaginative geography of these cities.



Figure 4. Caption: Kellerman, Martin, *Martin Kellermans Rocky Volym två*, Kartago Förlag, 2008, p.20 © Martin Kellerman and Kartago Förlag.

This conversation between Rocky and his friend Tommy centers around the dynamics of city life, and particularly how some people complain about noise coming from bars at closing time. This conflict between the partying segment of the city-dwellers and the people who want quiet nights in the Swedish capital is just as familiar a problem in Copenhagen and Oslo. Rocky and Tommy set up a spatial division between the happening St. Eriksplan versus the smaller city of Borås or

²² Skotte, "Oversætteren."



the suburbs, where the pair suggest the complainers should move. Here, the conversation is again dominant and the dialogue contributes to our sense of place through an enactment of absurd suggestions from fictive curmudgeons. This strip also points to how Stockholm as a place is, to speak with Doreen Massey, constantly being changed and does not have a single, unique identity. It changes over time, but its “identity” is also dependent upon who interacts with it or observes it – for Rocky and his friends, the city is a place to be loud and have parties in, whereas the neighbors of the bars consider it a space for living and getting a good night’s sleep, regardless of what bar lies next door.

DRAWN PLACES

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons it does not pose a greater problem to transfer *Rocky* from Sweden to another Scandinavian country in Scandinavia is the lack of visual information pointing specifically to Stockholm/Sweden. In a review of *Rocky 6: single og sur (Rocky 6: Single and Sour)*, Christoffer Zieler criticizes the change from Sweden to Denmark in the translation and mentions that “Denmark is drawn so it looks like Sweden.”²³ On close inspection of the strips, however, the Swedish origin of the strips cannot always be determined from the drawings. Very often, interiors or exteriors are generic, with no specific national landmarks or architecture, and could just as easily be from Denmark or Sweden. As Kellerman has noted, in an interview about the Norwegian version of the strip: “The strip takes place in Stockholm, but I don’t exactly draw Rocky in front of the City Hall – it is more a question of small details you will recognize, if you know the city really well. It should be easy to transfer to other cities”.²⁴

Reading through the many strips it is noticeable how the background scenes in the strip show scenery which could be anywhere, and how a strip will often repeat the setting from panel to panel, as seen here in an example from the Danish translation:

²³ Zieler, “Medrivende tomgang”, author’s translation.

²⁴ Kellerman, *Rocky 5 (Gravem Trans.)*, 105, author’s translation.



Figure 5. Kellerman, Martin, *Rocky 2. Don't call it a comeback*, Politisk Revy, 2007, p. 15 © Martin Kellerman and Politisk Revy.

A contrast is established between the two bars Stereobar (Sw: Sjögräs) and Louises (Sw: India Star), where the interiors do not exactly *look like* the actual Copenhagen bars. On the other hand, the panels do suggest the mood of the places and resembles bars of that particular kind. The strip contrasts a hip bar with a dive bar; we get what the background and people are there for. The contrast between the two bars, which is a point in the strip, is based on lighting, which in the panels is shown through a change of background color from white to black. Even if the images of places in Stockholm does not correspond 1:1 to their Copenhagen and Oslo counterparts, they still work as representations of these places because of their lack of specificity. The visual part of the strips often contributes to the general mood of the places they happen in, aids in setting the scene, and conveys certain aspects of the surroundings that help suggest the *where* of the narrative.

Sometimes, however, the drawings show elements that are very Stockholm-specific or particular to Swedish culture and society:



Figure 6. Kellerman, Martin, *Rocky 2. Don't call it a comeback*, Politisk Revy, 2007, p. 118 © Martin Kellerman and Politisk Revy.

In this Danish version of a notably text heavy strip, the text contrasts with the images in the first panel. The weather man is pointing to what is clearly a map of Sweden as he mentions how the



fog has moved on to Denmark's Funen and Jutland. The general point of the strip is the bad weather in Sweden, which is something that is also debated widely in Denmark and Norway, but it is not enough to simply change the TV-station's logo to the Danish TV2 and alter the areas to Danish ones in the speech balloons, when the image is so specifically of Sweden. A map is one of the most concrete visual means with which to anchor a narrative in a specific place, so this cartographic information needs to be translated as well, if the strip is to make any sense. As it stands now, we are left to wonder why the Danish TV station uses a Swedish weather map to show how the weather is in parts of Denmark. It is very illustrative in this strip how the already-limited space of the four panel strip is even further limited by the sheer amount of space taken up by the speech balloons, leaving very little space in the panel to visually define the place the characters act and speak in.

Another example of how place-specific visuals can change the meaning of the strip is seen in a strip from a sequence where Rocky helps his little brother move to a house in the countryside:

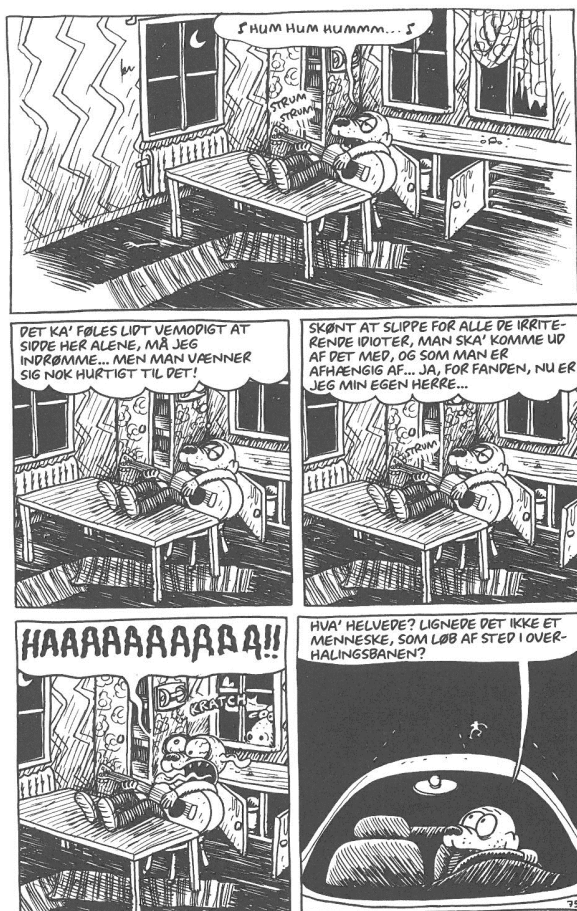


Figure 7. Kellerman, Martin, *Rocky 4. På ferie*, Politisk Revy, 2009, p.34 © Martin Kellerman and Politisk Revy.]



In the Danish translation this place is (in previous strips) specified as Lolland, which to Danish readers has the right connotation of being far away from the capital and a rural area. All the more surprising then, when a moose is shown to be what frightens Rocky's younger brother in the strip! In Norway and Sweden, this is a realistic scenario; in either country the humor comes from the kid scared by an animal in its natural habitat. The strip still works in Danish, but the appearance of a moose adds a certain surrealism to the strip. The moose has either crossed the water from Sweden, heading for Lolland (which has happened), or Rocky's brother is imagining that all kinds of wild animals, including ones not native to Denmark, are roaming the forest, but the joke works just the same – he is scared to be alone at his desolate farm. Translating the strip into Danish despite the presence of the moose is not necessarily a mistake, because even if *Rocky* is primarily a realistic autobiographical strip, Kellerman sometimes chooses to use visual metaphors or exaggerate the actions shown to underline the joke.²⁵

SWEDEN, SCANDINAVIA, AND THE WORLD

In *Rocky*, there are three notable kinds of places. First, there are Swedish places with Stockholm at the center. Second, there are inter-Scandinavian places, as for instance when Rocky goes to the Roskilde festival in Denmark or visits his brother in an Oslo prison. And finally, there are international destinations, pictured when Rocky travels to places like Thailand, the USA, or Japan. The way these places are constructed, and how the strips contribute to imaginations of them, are not necessarily the same, especially because the places change in translation from Swedish to Norwegian and Danish locations.

When the strip is translated, the Swedish places are transferred to Norwegian or Danish counterparts. As we have seen, Stockholm is often constructed through dialogue, and is shown from different angles when the friends walk through the city, hang around in bars, or travel across town. In addition to showing antagonisms between real city people and suburbanites, *Rocky* also illustrates a marked difference between the city and the country. The Scandinavian countries (and many others for that matter) have a tradition of owning summer cottages where people can spend their weekends and holidays away from the city. When Rocky goes to a house like this in one of Kellerman's strips, it is not exotic when the strip is translated to the other Scandinavian languages, because this practice is well known there. The silliness of the inexperienced

²⁵ Klaus Kaindl has noted how images will be "interpreted or 'read' only within a functional context, which may in turn be cultural specific" ("Multimodality in Translation," 189) and links this to the way images are perceived in comics, underlining how important it is to consider images when translating comics.

Stockholmers when they go to the country and are afraid of the dark or the wildlife is more a question of an opposition between city and non-city than a national matter.

Rocky is a very Scandinavian character also in the sense that he often visits the other Scandinavian countries, and in the strip there are many jokes that make reference to the love-hate relationship between Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes. So when the strip is translated into another Scandinavian language and simultaneously moved there, some of these inter-Scandinavian jokes have to be changed or otherwise adapted to their new setting. Despite their similarities, some customs are distinctly national and as such, not all references or scenes in the Swedish version can be directly transposed. In this strip, Rocky and his crew are at a Swedish *kräftkalas* (crayfish party), which is visually so distinct that the Danish translator had to circumvent the scene and change the narrative:



Figure 8. Kellerman, Martin, *Martin Kellermans Rocky Volym två*, Kartago Förlag, 2008, p.23 © Martin Kellerman and Kartago Förlag.

In the Swedish version, the conversation revolves around the customs of this Swedish tradition, how much the characters hate the *snapsvisor* (drinking songs) sung at parties, and the inevitability of ending up under the table at these gatherings. Because it is customary to wear hats and decorate the surroundings at a Swedish *kräftkalas*, several strips in this scene were changed in the Danish version so that a *Swedish* friend had invited Rocky and friends to a *Swedish* crayfish party, and the songs they hate are *Swedish* drinking songs. This changes the strips' content from a reflection on Swedish, and Kellerman's own, national identity and traditions, to the way the Scandinavian neighbors regard each other's traditional ways. Where the original strip paints a picture of Sweden from within, the Danish version offers a view from outside and constructs the for Danes familiar stereotype of the drunken Swede and his exotic traditions.

When Rocky and his friends travel to other Scandinavian countries, the translation often just changes the destination to one of the other Scandinavian countries, as in this example:

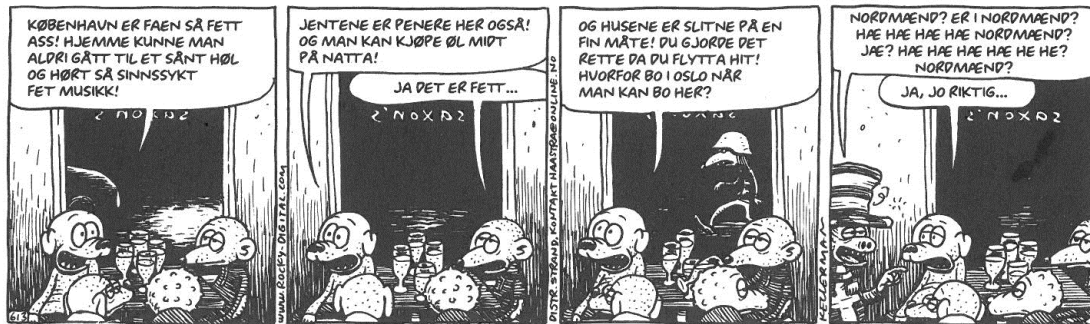


Figure 9. Kellerman, Martin, *Rocky 3*, Egmont serieforlaget, 2007, p.14 © Martin Kellerman and Egmont Serieforlaget.

In the Danish version, the gang visits their friend in Oslo, but in this Norwegian version, they go to Copenhagen, which in both cases allows for inter-Scandinavian comparisons and interactions with the brotherly Danes/Norwegians. The drawing in the last panel makes more sense in the Norwegian version, because the person approaching them seems to be wearing a Danish (or perhaps Swedish) flag shirt. Not much in the surroundings definitively designates this place and the travels throughout Scandinavia can be changed to fit the translation's origin country and its relationships with the neighboring countries.²⁶

When Rocky visits a Scandinavian country other than his home, there is not necessarily a big difference visually between the countries, and when a strip takes place in mountains (which are not part of Danish landscape), this is easily changed in the Danish context to a trip to either Norway or Sweden. But when the strip moves outside Scandinavia, sometimes the visual content of the strips becomes more pronounced and provides more information about the place visited. It is difficult to imagine these strips outside of their geographical location, translated into other places:



Figure 10. Kellerman, Martin, *Rocky 4. På ferie*, Politisk Revy, 2009, p.5 © Martin Kellerman and Politisk Revy.

²⁶ Dag F. Gravem has discussed some of his rationales for the inter-Scandinavian travels in his column "Lost in Translation," in the Norwegian *Rocky Magazine* ("Lost in Oslo"; "Lostivalguiden"; "Lost på hytta"; "Rauky på Gutland").



Often in the strips, foreign, non-Scandinavian surroundings become a reservoir for amusing sequences. Definable space is here at the center of the jokes, as is the case in the above strip where Rocky desperately tries to buy a train ticket in Japan. The Japanese signs, the Japanese-looking animated figure on the display, and the massive rack of technologically advanced machines anchor this strip in Japan, and the otherness of the environment is what causes the laughable frustration Rocky experiences. Here, the drawn content of the strip fills up with references to Japan, thereby anchoring the image very squarely at these particular coordinates, setting the strip markedly apart from the Swedish/Norwegian/Danish hometown scenes. No matter which Scandinavian version of the strip you are reading, Japan is shown as visually different and exotic compared to the dreary everyday surroundings of bad-weathered Scandinavia.

The way non-Scandinavian places are imagined also draws heavily upon our collective imagination, and stages them as stereotypically “Japanese” or “Thai.” Complaining about things is the motor in much of *Rocky*’s humor, and just as the protagonist moans about Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, the places they live in, and the problems of getting around in Japan, Thailand gets its own dose of criticism when Rocky visits his girlfriend in her Thai-style hut, made of bamboo and with hammocks for beds:



Figure 11. Kellerman, Martin, *Rocky 4. På ferie*, Politisk Revy, 2009, p.27 © Martin Kellerman and Politisk Revy.

What Rocky’s girlfriend considers to be a cozy hut with a cute dog, is to Rocky a flea-ridden and horrible place with a mutt that stinks and bad, depressing movies on TV. Here, the sense of place as specific to Thailand comes just as much from the imagery as from the text. International destinations are often expressed more vividly and specifically in the images, but whether in Sweden or abroad, Rocky can always find something to complain about.



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Because it is an autobiographical strip situated in an empirical world that the reader is acquainted with, *Rocky* creates places through drawings and written text in ways that connect the places mentioned with places that can be located on a map. In the strip, a certain sense of place is created throughout the many strips as Stockholm, Sweden, the Scandinavian countries, and a number of international destinations are continuously shown and talked about in the panels.

Rocky impacts the reader's imaginative construction of how these places look and what the people there are like because places, if looked at through a progressive sense of place, as Doreen Massey suggests, are constantly changing, always in process. This is also influenced by cultural representations, like for example comic strips. A progressive sense of place also emphasizes that places do not have a unique place identity fenced off by borders, and that their specificity arises from the constellation of multiple place identities within a geographic area. In this sense, the Stockholm outlined by *Rocky* is one that is mapped out by its relation to other parts of Sweden, the dynamics of opposite movements within the city, and the ways in which the characters pace the streets of various areas of the city. If we consider places as multiple, processes that do not have borders, and that are characterized by their relations to other places, what is also translated in the strips from Swedish to Norwegian and Danish is a certain sense of place which is shared by the three countries.

The newspaper strip is spatially challenged, compared to graphic novels or comic books because it rarely has more than a few panels to show where the action takes place, and if too much detail is shown, the panel gets too cluttered and might come off as illegible. As a newspaper strip, *Rocky* therefore does not have much room to show surroundings and place-specific cues. In addition to this, *Rocky* is a very text-heavy comic strip where much of the content is generated by static characters in conversation. Much of the creation of the site-specific sense of place happens in the text, either as signs in the background within the diegesis, through direct reference in speech balloons, or indirect conversations about places that do not necessarily anchor them with a place-name.

Rocky's reliance on text makes it easier to transpose the strip from a Swedish context to Denmark and Norway through a translation of the text. Sometimes, however, this translation clashes with the images and creates either unintended expansions of the jokes or makes the meaning of place break down, because the difference between the two countries is realized as a clash between text and image. The text is Danish/Norwegian and refers to Danish/Norwegian cultural events, but



the drawings betray their Swedish origin.

Also, the Scandinavian capitals and countries share many geographic, linguistic, and cultural similarities and so, as long as the visual reference is not clearly identifiable as Stockholm or Swedish, it will not be noticeable that the place has been changed. It is possible to draw maps of Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm using the paths and positions of bars, apartments, stores, and hangouts from *Rocky*. Laid on top of each other, they will geographically be very different, but structurally, they will illustrate the same sense of place, created through social relation and lived life.

The strip's crossing of Scandinavian borders also offers up material for jokes based on the differences between the neighboring countries, but these also work in translation so long as the very national-specific visual cues are integrated into the narrative in some other way. Looking at the relationship between text and image in the construction of place, the visuals play a larger role when Rocky travels outside of Scandinavia, where environments are often drawn to suggest the foreignness of the site, which is often mentioned and discussed in the strips. In this sense, *Rocky's* general point of view is Scandinavian, and the translated versions are told from the same perspective. It is the similarities between the Scandinavian capitals that make this possible, but it is their differences which sometimes disrupts the illusion of *Rocky* being Danish/Norwegian, when the reader spots a Swedish visual reference that points to Södermalm and not Vesterbro/Grünerløkka.

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