



About Engagingscapes: What Else a Chimney Can Be, if not a Chimney...?

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Abstract

The exponentially spreading changes recently do not allow the previous objective technical approaches, the renewal of thought is not linear anymore, but brings new creative runs. The intellectual revolution of our time brings emotions and feelings into the transformations of thinking and then reality. The paper introduces the concept of 'engagingscapes' designed by artistic practices in the site of Csepel (a part of Budapest, in the capital of Hungary) in the 2010s. 'Engagingscapes' especially emphasizes the importance of mental models and the process of bodily understanding. There and then, artistic practices, which actually scape-designs, acted as unique forms of cultural communication, paid attention to civic imagination, cultural and participatory politics, for empowering to ask the question: what else...? The retrospective study is an observational review and reassessment of artifacts, events, documents and interviews with the aim of analyzing previous interest in Csepel.

Keywords

community art, site-specific art, urban renewal, brownfield zone, empathy

1. Introduction

As an invited summer course lecturer, I organized a sound walk for a dozen architecture and landscape design students of the Cairo Higher Technological Institute¹ on the 11th of August in the year of 2014 (see Figure 1). Some soundtracks of Janet Cardiff's (2005) were introduced into the site of Csepel's brownfield zone (in Budapest, Hungary): dogs barking, New York taxis honking, children's song, and shots and screams became audible, and at the same time alive, among the rusty infrastructure. Stories became written into their spaces (Batista and Lesky, 2015).

First and foremost, the puzzlement on the students' faces and the hurry-scurry of their distracted looks were revealing about the intensity of their bodily experiences. Then the next phase came: the analyst,

the interpretative reflexivity, which was working against their immersions and searching for any meanings of their ephemeral feelings. Finally, after the tour, the group was quietly passing by one of the eighteen² chimneys of Csepel Works at Nagykalapács Street and thinking. One student, Khalid, asked me a question: "But...

what else a chimney can be, if not a chimney...?"

Probably his trained-engineer-self was listing case studies about various rehabilitations, as well as landmark productions. Meanwhile, he was trying to fit in the previous performative event of Cardiff's sound walk – he was preparing 'a place for the not-yet-realized' (Erdély, 2002, p. 101), as well as formulated a simple question:

...what else...?



Figure 1. Sound walk in Csepel. Source: One of the participants.

I do not know, if the young Egyptian man remembers that moment and that place – I can tell only my side: his naively honest question is still echoing in my ears, accompanying me in my (brownfield) excursions, and from time to time intensifies in order to be answered again.

So (see Figure 2):

A chimney could be a light-organ.
It could be an exclamation mark.
A moon rocket.
A nostalgic landscape in twilight.



Figure 2. A montage of 'lofty' art projects.

From left to right: Light-organ in Zsolnay Cultural Quarter, Pécs, 2012. Source: University of Pécs, Faculty of Art; Remember the good times, Csepel, 2013. Source: SPACE; Metropolis città mestizo, Rome, 2012. Source: MAAM project (Museum of the Other and the Elsewhere)³; Blue Hour, Csepel, 2017. Source: Camilla Wexels Riser and Liv Kristin Holmberg.

But above all, it can be a surface for taking it for ourselves: source for a mediated environment I might call 'engagingscape'.

2. A retrospective analysis about the 2010s of Csepel

I have chosen one particular site for my empirical research on 'engagingscapes', namely Csepel, the XXIst District of Budapest. Csepel is historically multi-layered, having witnessed the economic and political interest of the past (as a flagship of the state in the socialist period

of political propaganda after WW2), and are likely to become the subjects of diverse and conflicting interests in the future – meanwhile its 2010s' presence is absent. After the prosperity-and-failure of the iconic (heavy industrial) Csepel Works, its giant infrastructural body lost its identity- and cohesion-building power, what was left: 'inherent emptiness' (Erdély, 2002, p. 101; Kovács, 2017).

With my retrospective approach, hereby I introduce the results of my secondary research based on my

earlier empirical exploration conducted between 2014-2017, that contained methods such as participant observations, workshop activities, semi-structured deep-interviews, actor and place mappings. Besides, it was complemented by literature, document, and artifact analysis, chosen from or linked to the years of 2010s.⁴ The exact time frame was consciously selected, for as much in the 2010s the 'second transition' took place in Hungary (Orbán, 2014), with the long-term arrangement of national conservative and populist governance system. My point of view is the same as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu understands 'participant objectivation'. It "undertakes to explore not the 'lived experience' of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself." (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 282)

In the followings, firstly, the highlighted periods of Csepel, and secondly, the works of cultural communication born in the examined period are presented, in order to explain the concept of 'engagingscape'.

2.1. Social spatialisation of Csepel

In the book: *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, sociologist Rob Shields uses the term 'social spatialisation' "to designate the ongoing social construction of the spatial at the level of the social imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well as interventions in the landscape (for example, the built environment)" (1991, p. 31). So spatialisation offers a way of talking about the pre-constructed cultural discourses of sites, in the relationships established between sites, how they came into those associations and under what authority, and by which groups. (Shields, 1997, 2013, 2017; van Loon, 2002; Bartmanski et al., 2023)

The phrase of 'spatial turn' is a common denominator for the shifting of interest towards the social construction of space, to be understood relationally. So, spaces are already admitted as socially configured, but there is the claim to ask questions about the spatiality of the social: how does space anchor, frame, enable and constrain

certain classes of action and order...? (Bartmanski-Füller, 2023, p. 4)

According to the locals I interviewed⁵, Csepel, has had four 'Golden Age' variations:

(1) the era of 'Manfréd Weiss Steel and Metal Works' Budapest lived its 'Golden Age' by the turn of the 20th century, started to grow up to its capital function and image in the period of 'dualizm' within the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. Festetics, Eszterházy, Károlyi as influential magnate families moved in as well, their palaces in historical style were echoing the baroque Vienna and the renaissance Italy. New civil multi-story houses were also appearing in eclectic style; 3 to 6 floor tenement houses with open corridors and internal courtyards were built around. Csepel used to be village at that time, with around 2.000 inhabitants at the edge of newly merged neighbouring cities of Buda, Pest and Óbuda (from 1873 unified as Budapest). It served and tended the demands of the metropolis, as the north-eastern peak of Csepel Island belonged to famous Bulgarian gardeners, who were producing traditional Bulgarian primary vegetables, within classical family cooperation.

The history of industrial working class coincided with the development of Weiss Manfréd Works, and they have been becoming a concept for the forthcoming political movements. In 1882 Manfréd and Bertold Weiss, the Weiss-brothers with Jewish ancestry, after commercial studies in Germany, have founded a canned food factory in the VIIth District of Budapest, at Lövölde Square. Also due to the rapid urban growth at that time, the thriving Weiss factory had to look for new location: in 1892 the final choice has fallen to the almost green-field Csepel. Because of seasonal downtime in the canned food production (Sic!), more fundamentally, because of the moving conflicts of high-power political goals in Europe, from 1886 the Weiss factory started to manufacture ammunition too. Go on the way towards the WW1, the factory was supplemented by a steel work, a foundry, and a rolling mill. On 250 acres, in 216 buildings, the Weiss Manfréd Steel and Metal Works became the 2nd largest defense plant within the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy.

In 1913 the Works employed over 5.000 workers on a daily basis (Berend, 2013, p. 328), in the years preceding the WW2 the company became an *industrial empire*, with over 40.000 employees. These numbers well-known and with that, they tell about the *modern urbanization* history of a traditional structure which turned into an industrial society. Some architecture still shows its beginning, for example the housing site of the Works' functionaries or the hospital-building.

(2) the 'Red Csepel' epoch

After the WW2, in 1948, the Works was nationalized. A period has entered which meant full socialization: state ownership, centralization and planned economy directed processes. At the 'twilight of traditional world' it was the group by the character of work (Ferge, 1969), so not the property but the *position in division of labour* that determined new in/equalities.

There was one young couple, also have been attracted by the Works, and moved to Csepel in the hope of a better life. After their little son entered into preschool age, Mária got a job at the Works and became professional female driver, one of the first. His husband, János, worked as a welder for 35 years at the Works. Both retired from the Works, and are grateful towards their former working place, because they received much support, also vacation opportunity, once they could also visit Moscow.

Csepel was nominated as a flagship of the state in the *socialist period* of political propaganda, with the (heavy) industry becoming the main beneficiary of investments (Szabó, 2009). The memories of the *privileged status quo*, the experiences of the masses of workers who flowed into Csepel every day, and the numerous *neighborhoods of prefabricated blocks of flats* are indeed evocative. But the modernization squarely meant improvement of hard indicators, such in occupational structure, as there was reduction of peasant population, and increase in the overall education and skill levels, as well as improvement in material living conditions (Andorka et al., 1986).

There was a young man, who used to be a soldier and lost his left arm because of a bomb-shell in the WW2. István got a job as an accountant at the Works, but he lived with

his family, wife, three daughters and the mother-in-law in a former Jewish house in the center of Budapest. He became acknowledged co-worker at the Works, but after his retirement he has never entered there.

The modernization was certainly without political democracy, modern mentality, or economic modernization, as well as social integration could not achieve neither (Andorka et al., 1986). We can talk about a *forced modernization* (Kulcsár, 1986) in this case, with all of its negative signs: with empty individualization for a kind of reflexive survival (Hankiss, 1986).

(3) the transition time lasting until 2010⁶

Global trends that did not spare Central Eastern Europe or Hungary, shocked and shook also the identity of Csepel from 1990, demanded *transition* from once focused on industrial mass-production to a highly diversified service and information society. By this time Csepel's nature as an island brought its *locality* to the fore. Its new, relative distance from the changed scope of power relations, from the center – spatially and in significance – *locked Csepel in itself*, with all of its own certainties from/about the 20th century.

The 'A-B-C classification model' (CABERNET, 2006) is about the redevelopment potential of brownfield sites. The model is set up on the basis of geographical and social distance of brownfield locations from a city center. The 'A category' is for so called 'self-developing' sites, the regeneration of which can be realized in the free market economy. The 'B' is for 'potential development' sites which require some (indirect) form of public funding. Regeneration of the 'C category, non-developing' sites "represents a financial loss for the investor. It is carried out in justified cases (environment protection, safety, real estate market support etc.) with public funding and often by public enterprise. ... The regeneration costs will not guarantee the increase in value of the site that would enable future development." (Dolezelova et al., 2014, p. 35.) The Works is categorized as C-type reserve site in the 'A-B-C classification model'.

(4) Csepel in the 2010s

The area has been becoming under *rehabilitation*⁷, due

to all aforementioned periods. There was, for example the nostalgia towards the introduced professional working methods and working culture of settled foreign – namely German, Jewish, Bulgarian – nationalities from the 19th century. Furthermore, due to *re-urbanization* processes, linking alongside the Danube riverside and the green areas, the wish for a family-house-with-a-garden-within-the-city: *belonging* has been coming into view, along with the search for a feeling of 'home'⁸.

The examined projects, emerging in this period, focused on its post-industrial character, from cultural initiatives as well as artistic communication point of view, became active representations of Csepel, after a productive force to re-arrange and transcript local values. During the production of these artistic experiences in Csepel, the main 'message' (Brosio, 1994), that was formulated is the aspiration to address "in-Csepeler-s", so "Csepel-less people"⁹, those locals and not locals, who are formally or informally connected to Csepel, but who has a kind of empty spatialization towards Csepel, and with whom the local contributors miss the interactions in the everyday life of Csepel. What seemed to have been articulating is a non-conceptualized, instinctively evolving phenomena of care. Philosopher Nel Noddings' believed that caring „rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness" (1984, p. 2), which prioritizes concern for relationships. According to Noddings, each caring relation consists of (at least) two people, the 'one-caring' and the 'cared-for', who have reciprocal commitment to each other's well-being. But one does not have either the capacity or the duty to care for everyone - one does hold an obligation to be prepared to care for particular others: for 'the proximate stranger' (Noddings, 2013; Burton and Dunn, 2013; Adhikari et al., 2023). The curiosity to make stranger-Csepelers be known; the wistfulness to have insights into the different life-worlds of Csepelers; the imagination to experience transparent walls of homes in Csepel – several from those expressions and longings that were articulated by the local contributors during the preparation phase of projects. Their pressing feeling rooted in the desire to re-introduce Csepel as a place, which is "just 10 minutes far" from the center of Budapest (by suburban train). So, make Csepel be recognized as it is here and another (not there and other

anymore, in the nexus of spatial and social distance).

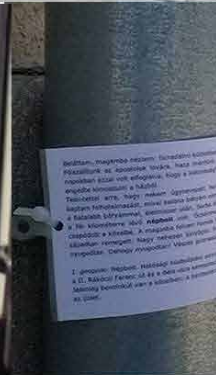
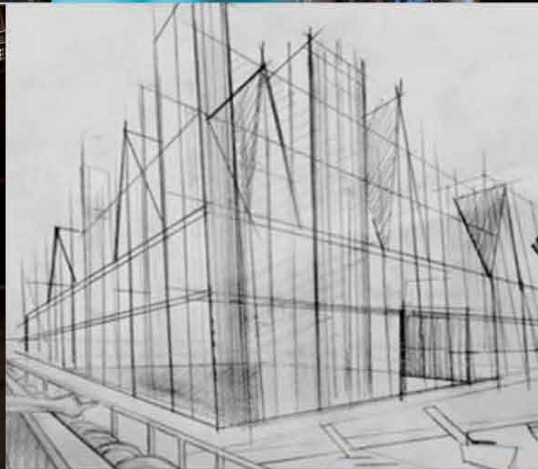
The first period is interwoven with nostalgia. The red-epoch has resulted in a controversial modernization. The transition-time was demanding a transformation: from a focus on industrial mass production to a highly diversified service and information society. The 2010s-ongoings are all about re-habilitation, re-generation, re-development because of the effects of the periods mentioned above, furthermore, it is interspersed with political division and opposition. Consequently, the community was forced to face its quintessential social values, such as opinion, need, love, honesty, power, respect, dignity, doubt, vision, and stance. At the first attempt, that presupposes 'the right to research', which means for each participant of the community, the opportunity should be given to collectively examine the real situation, to reflect on the own experiences about local issues, and to take steps to promote the own situations.

3. Engagingscapes in Csepel

The *locale* offers a particular type of factor. Moving across Csepel, we find post-industrial sites, vacant premises, soc-real buildings, bunkers, socially unstable places, neglected land, roadsides, railroad embankments, inaccessible places, ports, purlieus of infrastructural facilities and networks; which all have merged into a series of states of mind about *traces of their 'former status as places'* (Vidler, 1992, p. 184-185). They are giving significance to the ordering mechanism of the human body itself that provides the organic tissue "by which the city might be recognized, memorized and thereby lived". Watching them from close up, these sorts of scenes become personal in a primary mode, they are responding to 'affective needs' (Ibid, p. 185). Post-modern conditions put these urban peripheries to the fore, with the relevance of *locales* that *left the context*; also by opening up artistic practices, with the *thesis of de-semanticization*. The reintegration of poetic values into the everyday perception of these peripheral locations can put it back on a path that is relevant to lived experiences (Corner, 1999) – therefore, cannot obviously determine, rather can *create spatiality, based on aesthetic dimensions*.



Figure 3. A montage of 'engaginscapes' of Csepel.



The artistic examples which cover information about peripheral locations are interpretations based on the spatial logic of *inherent emptiness*¹⁰ that is able to store, carry (Nyíri, 2005. pp. 23-27) and let the concrete and unique character of these places change. Objects, human beings and social goods found in peripheral locations are signals that are capable of constituting and bearing representations, but they always need an interpreter (Bodor, 2006) and targeted, thoughtful generation of alteration (Dúll-Varga, 2016). The senses – visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory and that of taste – are all part of this situation (O'Connor, 1995), which are already given in public space environment, where our body is affected simultaneously by multiple stimuli of (outdoor) spatial perception, in its sub-modality. On this basis, the sensory experience escalates further driven by psychological, social, cultural and political layers and by their cumulative mechanisms.

Life Forms III, 2017. Source: Éva Bublá; Geocaching, 2017. Source: HÉV; Reed tales, 2017. Source: HÉV; Apartment-adventure-tour, 2017. Source: Training Spot Theater Group, Gábor Födő, Imre Nagy Primary School and Elementary School of Art, Jonas Bjerketvedt and HÉV; Aquarium-project, 2017. Source: LedPuppets; Somnivre, 2017. Source: Panda Electroacoustic and Tímea Ferth; ImageMusic, 2016. Source: Panda Electroacoustic; Images for music / Shadows on walls , 2016. Source: Imre Nagy Primary School and Elementary School of Art; Glassperformance, 2016. Source: VJ Bios & Csilla Szilágyi; Angyaltánc Angel Dance, 2016. Source: Tamariska Dance Studio; Mapping Budapest, 2015. Source: Jessica Dolby; Remixing the City, 2015. Source: Don't Eat Group; Reality Room, 2014. Source: O11 Group; Subjective Csepel, 2014. Source: Jan Pfeiffer, Tímea Tóth and Attila Balogh; Remember the good times, Csepel, 2013. Source: SPACE; Promenade, 2013. Source: Artus - Stereo Akt; Oasis, 2013. Source: Studio Nomad; Special edition, 2013. Source: Budapest Barangoló; Hidden visions, 2013. Source: Hungarian University of Fine Arts; 3D Pixel, 2013. Source: Klára Orosz and Újirány.

“... [The artwork/event is] extended to the personal space [of audience]. ... The reflectiveness of observing sticks on the participants.... The point is a small deviation ... and the return. ... to tip out, then it is her/his own task to find a way back... back to the banalities... The performance is the enemy, compared to that, ... consciousness grows strong.” – as one of my interviewees said.

The last quote is what psychologist Richard Gerrig and David Rapp call ‘willing-construction of disbelief’ (Gerrig-Rapp, 2004), which is to say, the recipient has to make a voluntary effort to resist the convincing power of fictional narrative. The process that we captured here is not just the activity of experiencing immersion, but afterwards also the construction of a type of de-subjectivisation. This kind of reflectivity stresses the importance of judgement and ‘thinking what we are doing’ (Arendt, 1959), traits and orientations that resemble what political scientist Ben Berger calls *civil/ social-moral engagement* (Berger, 2009.).

The notion of ‘engagement’ often arises in political theory (e.g. in relation to how to make democracy). There are many components but generally it can be said to mean ‘involvement with the lives of our communities’ (Putnam, 1995), also considered as origin of social capital. The different types of engagement depend on *attention* and/ or *activity* as sources most often play with the ideas of interactivity, entanglement and commitment, as Berger unfolds (2009, p. 340). You can engage *in*, that means a participation with not necessarily attentive activity, so performing perfunctorily. The state of engaged *by* is the status of a spectator viewer. Meanwhile to engage *with* implies both, attention and activity (Ibid); for example attention towards a dilemma, and activity to explain that dilemma, such as:

... what else...?

With that, I introduce the notion of 'engagingscape' to describe how artistic practice could produce an open-ended 'microbiopolitical' (Thrift, 2004) response to peripheral locations. And as filmmaker, -theorist Marc Boumester premises: "the virtual and the actual are both seen as being reality, and that there is nothing beyond this reality. The actual exists and the virtual 'subsists', it can be energy, material, motion or a concept, but in any case it is real. ... Instead of creating a false duality ... we need to regard both as being operands that can act directly." (Boumeester, 2017, p. 40)

In the formula of 'engagingscape', beside the location, the affect is a key element too, the form of thinking that often indirect and non-reflexive but still a kind of intelligence that body parts respond to and participate in (Thrift, 2004, p. 60). The experience of immersion creates an energy that engages attention and moves emotionally. As emotions are considered more and more a vital part of the body's anticipation of the moment, affects can also be understood as a kind of 'corporeal thinking' (Damasio, 1999).

4. Conclusions

'Engagingscapes' especially emphasized the importance of artistic practices, as unique forms of cultural communication, in this sense, operate like 'microbio-scapedesigns' that pay attention to the art of self and are interested in an intimate geography committed to research and alteration, through a set of affective practices and on the fringe of urban professional circles.

On a discursive level, a new image-bank was claimed to discuss: what is Csepel look like now, and what is its prospect...? For example, compared to the four 'Golden Age-variations' that existed. With that, civic imagination was reclaimed: the capacity to conceptualize alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions. That also "requires the ability to see oneself as a civic agent capable of making change, as a participant in a larger democratic culture." (Jenkins, 2016, p. 23)

In conclusion, participatory culture met political and civic participation to search for asserting new voices against social apathy that played crucial role in the active research to find alternative, more sustainable modes for Csepel in the 2010s.

Sociologist Rob Shields writes: "all [Henri Lefebvre] had ever written about was love" (1999, p. 7).

Well then, the introduced artistic practices and researches of Csepel, all had sent about was:

empathy

for empowering us to ask the question:

what else...?

Footnotes

¹ Budapest Summer Training Course 2014, organized by: Research Group of Urban Studies (Budapest), Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest) and Higher Technological Institute (Cairo).

² I counted the number of chimneys (any types) on Google Maps/Satellite, on 17 May 2017.

³ The example was chosen as a cross-reference to other formats of factory-landmarks, eg. towers with different functions.

⁴ These were elaborated based on four projects in that I took part: (1) Between 2014 and 2015, on the basis of a Doc-Team Fellowship by the Austrian Academy of Sciences; the research project was called: 'The Artist as Urban Planner.' (2) In 2016, in the frame of a Tandem Europe Exchange Program, called 'Take your place/Make your place', organized by Artopolis Association (H) and Creative Scene (GB). (3) Between 2016 and 2017, based on the 'PICTURE' project (Investigating Artistic Interventions in (Post-)industrial Environments), built upon the partnership of Artopolis Association (H) and Scenekunst Østfold (N) via the IN SITU program (European Network for Artistic Creation for Public Space). (4) Still in 2017, the event series of 'FactoryGarden', organized by a group of local civilians, for promoting public and site-specific arts in Csepel.

⁵ Between May-July 2016, I conducted 16 semi-structured deep-interviews with local community leaders (in Hungarian language).

⁶ In 2010, it was the sixth parliamentary election in Hungary since the Transition. It became a milestone in the changing political attitude also in Csepel, as after the periods of liberal- (1990-1994, party: SZDSZ) and social-democratic- (1994-2010, MSZP) minded mayors, then the national conservative and populist (2010-2014 and 2014- , Fidesz) trend gained majority in the local government.

⁷ Examples for rehabilitation projects: Integrated Social Rehabilitation of 'Ady' Housing Estate (Plan of Action Area, 2009); 'Gate of Csepel' Social Urban Rehabilitation Program (Final Plan of Action Area, 2011); Social Rehabilitation of 'Csepel Southern Residential Center' (Plan of Action Area, 2012).

⁸ As Wendy Wheeler, cultural scientist writes, we are looking for emotions or actions driven by feelings – and she conceptualises that as nostalgia – that “... turns us towards the idea of the individual as non-alienated, as knowing and being known by others in, the commonality of the community which is identified as ‘home’” (1994:99).

⁹ In Hungarian: „csepeltelenek”.

¹⁰ About ‘inherent emptiness’ in spatialization, read more in ‘Budapest Peripheral Locations: Where Inherent Emptiness Turns into More-Than Representative Density Formations’ (Kovács, 2017).

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