YOUTH IN THE SPACE: SOCIO-SPATIAL THEORIES AND PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT – The paper is focused on the ways in which young people understand, create space and perceive their identities and themselves. It draws on space/identity theories, reconceptualises issues, highlights definitions and introduces into focus the meanings of space and identity. The first half of the study introduces the interpretation of space from a socio-cultural approach by focusing on the thoughts of Rob Shields, Henry Lefebvre, Marc Augé. The second half of the study – based on anthropological interviews - presents the socio-spatial processes of young people, the spatial realization of processes discovered by the relevant theories.

Keywords: spaces, places, identity, cultural geography, social spatialisation

INTRODUCTION

A core notion within both modern and postmodern discourses, "identity" has been a much-contested concept for as long as we can meaningfully speak of identification indeed - enlightenment discourses. How "identities" are constructed and who is doing the construction of identities have been questions on the agenda of the past centuries. It was only recently, however, that the constitutive role of space in the construction of individual and group identities has become theoretically acknowledged (Korpela K.M., 1989; Proshansky H. M., Fabian A. K, Kaminoff R., 1983).

People and their sense of space is closely related to the perception of themselves reflecting an intimate interaction between the individual and its social environment (Hall Edward T., 1987, p. 251). The so-called reconstruction theory has reacted to the above-mentioned statements of Hall according to which people react to their surroundings in an active way while their self-perception is affected and formed by psychological and social factors inherent in individuals and the society (Cséfalvay Z., 1990, p. 65). Individuals go through different stages of different quality throughout their lives; consequently, their sense of space must vary in each phase selecting the information that derives from their social environment in different ways (Cséfalvay Z., 1990, p.79). Therefore, in our research we examined a group of young teenagers (aged 17-20). In the above-mentioned age group, due to the sensitiveness and emotional instability of the given life period, several spatial attachments are formed that can be interpreted as the characteristics of age and can be related to strong demands of communities and that of age groups.

The following essay will explore some of the issues raised in these and other related questions and will show how the research issues can interpret space from a complex perspective. We attempted to reconstruct and reveal the realization of these socio-spatial theories based on the interviews recorded in community and recreational spaces as well as shopping malls favoured by young people.

Theories of social spatializaton

Space can be apprehended as a category and as a material reality. For philosophers it is a principle of understanding, one of the forms of knowledge, a tool of theory on a level with time to which, of course, it is linked (Benko G., Strohmayer U., 1997, p. 23). Sociologists consider space in a

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double light, as a product of society and as a factor of social production. In its relationship with space, based on the work of present and past generations, humankind creates places. For their part, anthropologists have focused their attention on the most qualified spaces to which they ascribe a triple function: identificatory, relational, and historical.

Sociological aspects

In social spatialization, spaces are not only over-coded, but physical space itself is "produced" via classification schemes with various (ideological) divisions such as good and bad areas (for example, the "red-lining" effect on urban districts when banks and mortgage companies refuse to lend money to high-crime or high bankruptcy areas); ours and theirs; this place and that place; spaces and places for this and that.

It is more than the production of, for example, functional urban environments that are at issue here (Shields R., 1997, p. 192). This "production" of space also concerns social and cultural reproduction. People learn the comportment associated with their gender and "know their place in society", as the old saying goes. Ideologies and cosmologies are reproduced through this training of bodies as well as through the tutoring of outlook via images of community, nation and world. These are often expressed in spatial/urban images - the heavenly mountain, the global village. A complex of spatial practices and conceptual assumptions guide not only the production of the environment and landscape in terms of social norms regarding the allocation of functions and activities to their appropriate spaces, but also the practical use and inhabitation of the resulting spatialization. For example, many will remember being ordered throughout the schooling years: "Don't run; walk!" in the school corridors, only to feel conspicuous and strange when running in the street or corridors in later life. As a cognitive and practical habitus, social spatialization is a source not only of 'templates' or algorithms (traditional routines), but of allegorical solutions (attempting to solve new problems by someone's views as "Right" or "Left") and conceptual shortcuts (attributing stereotypical qualities to a person from a given region or place) (Shields R., 1997, p. 193). The linkage between the production of cultures, social reproduction and the production of a whole social spatialization is of central importance.

The postmodern space: way of the philosophy

Space, one might say, is nature's way of preventing everything from happening in the same place. Much of Henri Lefebvre's (1974) work is essentially a fugue on this simple proposition. Richly embellishing the theme in The Production of Space, he identifies the following kinds of space: absolute, abstract, appropriated, capitalist, concrete, contradictory, cultural, differentiated, dominated, dramatized, epistemological, familial, instrumental, leisure, lived, masculine, mental, natural, neutral, organic, original, physical, plural, political, pure, real, repressive, sensory, social, socialist, socialized, state, transparent, true, and women's space.

At the end of all this, there can be little doubt that "[...] space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning" (Lefebvre H., 1974, p. 105). Most social theorists (Foucault M., 1986; Soja E., 1989) by now have been aware that Lefebvre's project is aimed at a reorientation of human inquiry away from its traditional obsession with time and toward a reconstituted focus on space. There has been scarcely a project in theoretical human geography, architecture, and urban planning within the past two decades that has remained untouched (consciously or otherwise) by Lefebvre's problematic (Dear M., 2000, p. 45).

The emergence of postmodern thought has provided an important impetus for reconsideration of the role of space in social theory and in the construction of everyday life. The significance of space is widely conceded, yet programmatic statements on postmodern spatiality remain rare. Fredric Jameson's (1984) essay "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism" provided a touchstone for a postmodern spatiality, asserting that space is the "[...] supremely mediatory function" in the construction of a postmodern society.

With "Where there is space there is being", Lefebvre (1974, p. 56) goes back to the beginning in his search for the meaning of space. He is highly critical of previous ontologies describing space

strictly in geometrical terms as an "empty space". This construct, he asserts, enabled modern epistemologists to adopt the notion of space as a mental thing, capable of absorbing a myriad of meanings according to the analyst's whim. Subsequent work in the science of space has produced either mere descriptions that never achieve analytical, much less theoretical status, or else fragments and cross-sections of space. There are plenty of reasons for thinking that descriptions and cross-sections of this kind, though they may well supply inventories of what exists in space, or even generate a discourse on space, cannot ever give rise to knowledge of space (Dear M., 2000, p. 48). Instead, what we have is an indefinite multitude of spaces, piled one upon the other, each pored over and dissected by analysts from respective disciplines.

Against this, Lefebvre posits the need to uncover the theoretical unity among three fields that are usually apprehended separately: the physical (nature); the mental (logical and formal abstractions); and the social one.

Lefebvre organizes his understanding around separate concepts of space: absolute space, which is essentially natural until colonized, when it becomes relativized and historical; abstract space, associated with the space of accumulation, in which production and reproduction processes are separated and space takes on an instrumental function; contradictory space, where disintegration of the old and the generation of the new occurs in response to the contradictions inherent in abstract space; and differential space, the consequent mosaic of different places.

At the core of the Lefebvrian project there are the concepts of production and the act of producing space; i.e. "[...] (social) space is a (social) product". Four precepts are constitutive of this project:

a) Physical (natural) space is disappearing, which is not to say it is of diminishing importance.
b) Every society, every mode of production produces its own space.
c) Theory reproduces the generative process.
d) The passage from one mode of production to another is of the highest theoretical importance.

In sum, the Lefebvrian ontology assumes that space is present and implicit in the very act of creation and being, and that the process of life is inextricably linked with the production of different spaces. The production of space is inherently a political project, the consequences of which Lefebvre does not shy from.

Anthropology: the dimensions of "places - non-places"

In the work of Marc Augé titled as *"Non-Places: Introduction in Anthropology of Supermodernity"* (1995), the author approaches to certain "impersonal" places based on the theory of places and non-places.

According to his definition, *places* can be interpreted as the ones that create social atmosphere and that are related to individual *identity* (the author sets the place of birth as an example), *places of human relations and memories* (which an individual or a given age group associate remarkable memories and experiences with). Augé claims that malls, similarly to motorways and airport lounges, do not involve the characteristics of a place; hence he considered them as *non-places* creating social solitude (Augé M., 1995).

Based on space theories, Ray Oldenburg, an American sociologist, created the terminology of recreational places on the basis of which - besides the notions of *home* (as first place) and *school/workplace* (as second place) - he drew attention to the socializing and community functions of *third places.* Oldenburg interprets the theory of *third place* as a community place where people have the opportunity to spend their leisure time in the company of others under pleasant conditions. These places play an important role in the life of a certain community or group strengthening the sense of belonging and unity, helping the formation of social relationships, as well as – due to their function providing security and stability - "protecting" newcomers (Oldenburg R., 1989). Although the so-called third places vary in size and appearance (external and internal layout), geographical location, etc., they share many similarities as well. Oldenburg sums up the characteristics of a place as follows:

generally, people prefer meeting friends at gathering places where they can have a good time without the pressure of keeping themselves to strict rules and everybody can be himself (*neutrality*). The third places apply the theory of "everybody is equal": they are accepting and inclusively welcoming everyone without setting criteria related to the membership (*equality*). These places may promote the evolvement of social interactions (*social relationships*) creating a good atmosphere at the same time (*places of recreational and leisure time activities*). Facilities with the easiest access and longest opening hours are the most popular ones (*accessibility and location*) (Oldenburg R., 1989).

In international specialized literature, several researches have focused on Oldenburg's theory. In many cases, the published studies selected "disputed" community spaces as subjects for their research. Based on a former research, we focused on the studies specialized in shopping centres as third places for young people emphasizing their role of identification and socialization that motivate young people to spend their leisure time in a meaningful way.

Several studies have highlighted the fact that these spaces can become important, bustling cultural places, full of life as well as "occupied" shelters where young people - being "far" from the rules of the adult society - can affirm their identity and assert their sense of belonging (Matthews H.,Taylor M.,Percy Smith B., Limb M., 2000; Valentine G., 1996). These features characterize the shopping malls as well, where the adult control is less present than in the case of other public places (clubs, pubs). Researches specialized in home (Sibley D., 1995) revealed that dissatisfaction with the socializing atmosphere of home may make young people spend more and more time in public places. Frequent conflicts with parents may result in that young people try to avoid them by attempting to isolate themselves and protect the places of their leisure time activities (Katz C., 1998). Lieberg M. (1995) claims that, in young people's life, shopping malls are interpreted as isolated, *safe* places where they can go to find shelter and escape from home or to be together with their mates. The above-mentioned theory of Lieberg was justified by the research of Anthony K. H. (1985) reinforcing the fact that young people consider shopping centres as "natural places", where they can gather to have a good time.

Besides the "occupation of place", the young people's use of space within the building illustrates the expression of teenagers' self-identity. In their research, Abbott-Chapmann J. and Robertson M. (2001) studied the relationship of Australian teenagers with recreational spaces and activities in a socio-spatial context. The researchers attempted to reveal the role of recreational-socializing spaces in the formation of young people's identity. The everyday social relationships were examined in the research (leisure time activities) and the spatial realizations related to them, drawing conclusions from the use of space affecting self- and group interpretation. After carrying out the field research in malls, it became obvious that teenagers used different parts of the space according to their activities. When they just watched people going by or "hung around", they turned up in crowded parts of the space such as restaurants, landings, but if they wished to be together, they preferred more private places.

In addition, young people considered security as a distinguishing feature in the case of recreational spaces. Problematic places of conflicts refused by them were closely related to negative people and they regarded the "characteristic" of the place as negative. Therefore, the categories affecting the experience of space and identity, acceptance and refusal were created by young people themselves. The use of space became the tool of individual and group identification, playing an important role in the formation of sense of belonging (Abbott-Chapmann J., Robertson M., 2001; Robertson M., Rikkinen H., 2000).

METHODOLOGY

In a former youth research carried out in the second half of the 2000s, with no claim of being exhaustive, we concerned the examination of the young people' socio-spatial processes. Although the presentation of the above-mentioned part of the research is not enough for the empirical justification of the theories and approaches recorded in the present study, yet I am convinced that for the sake of statuesqueness and demonstration, the practical "illustration" of these theories is indispensable. During the field research, we analyzed 19, approximately two-hour long anonym interviews in the

following shopping centres of Budapest: WestEnd City Center, Mammut Shopping Center, Pólus Center, and Duna Plaza. Students as subjects for the interviews were selected in 11 secondary schools of Budapest (the school sample, regional sample, and representative sample based on school types). In the chosen schools we asked students who attended in the company of his/her friends shopping malls regularly (at least twice a week) in his/her leisure time and who were willing to have an informal conversation on this topic. We selected ten volunteers from the 11 schools accompanying them to the malls at an appointed time. Following an approximately one or two hour-long observation, we recorded the interviews and, based on the experience observed, we selected the so-called "leaders" from the volunteers who were ready to give an interview.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A FIELD RESEARCH

The examination based on the structured interview scheme attempted, among others, to reveal the relations between the use of space and community identity according to the following structure:

- The presentation of attitudes and habits linked to the use of space:

"What do the subjects for the interviews generally do in malls?" Are shopping centres the place for the satisfaction of consumer needs or/and community spaces? (regularity, individual/community activity, 'usual/festive' features), space units used in the shopping centres, the collection of negative and positive experiences, emotional ties related to malls, etc.

When analyzing our observations, it became obvious that young people consider malls as places incorporating a complex function. Most of them notice that shopping malls provide a wide range of goods, namely "everything is available at the same place" within the buildings. Besides consumption and shopping, the dimension of spending their free time was also present in the answers. According to the general interpretation of the interviewees, shopping centres are more than facilities established for consumer-commercial purposes since adolescents consider them as venues of community and leisure time programs as well. Two students underlined the *social atmosphere* of malls as follows:

"[…] well, there are a lot of extras, different entertaining programs, possibilities; I mean not only the cinema, but, for example, in Árkád there are regular exhibitions or programs for children to make people spend as much time as possible in the company of others […]".

"Atmosphere is better in shopping centres. There are people I spend my time with […] people go to malls just to take a look around, make friends and all kinds of things like that".

In the case of young people, the complex realization of presence-communication is determined by a demand of a broad spectrum as well as needs and expectations (Ankerl G., 1991; Lukovich T., 1997; Augé M., 1995). Our interviewees visit shopping centres to gather with friends as in their case social needs prevail. Consequently, malls are developing into gathering places for friends, namely social spaces where young people have the opportunity to maintain friendship.

"I like to be there because my friends are also there and I like staying with them. I don't like going to places like that alone, I prefer company. 'Cause in a company we can have fun and fool around [….]".

Moreover, the social needs of young people are reflected when they are choosing partners. Most of the interviewees mentioned that the vital-bustling atmosphere of shopping centres provides optional opportunities for making relationships. Although relationships of that kind – in conformity with the needs of partnership of the given age – are mainly superficial giving significant importance to appearance, they are essential from the aspect of socialization of relationships. In malls, adolescents can test gender roles (making eyes, chatting up, making pass at girls, initiation of conversations) that can be reflected in the formation of future relationships.

"I like the atmosphere and that there are people similar to us. Boys as well. It's difficult to make relationships in the street; it's not easy here either, but it can happen, so they are a little bit similar to us. Once we met some boys. We were making eyes at them; they came up to us, sat down on the bench asking if they could talk with us. We answered 'yes'. Then we were chatting with them for half an hour. Later they left. After all, we didn't want anything from them".

The formation of group identity of the young people attending shopping centres is significantly influenced by common experiences and memories. During the passive leisure time activities based on community experiences to entertain themselves, the interviewees gather according to the characteristics of their company. Each group has its own "rites" understood and practiced only by the relevant members. Similarly, the latent rules of spending free time of the group strengthen the cohesion of members as well as their separation from other groups.

"We snicker a lot. We go into the mall, walk around, then I drop some sentences and my girlfriend walking with me starts laughing her head off, then I start pushing her but just a little bit so she shouldn't fall over and we laugh at it and the people at large are laughing at us, and we have a great time".

"We often do it with two or three girls that we go into the most run-down shops to try on everything, Buffalo shoes and skirts long like this; we can spend even 3 hours doing that and taking photos of each other. So it is good if we don't have other things to do and we have to pop in for something and when we get bored we do that to turn on ourselves".

The formation of similar group cohesion can be observed in the case of more direct recreational activities that ensure the existence and continuity of the relevant group through constant repetition:

"But we do enjoy being together, because the company is familiar anywhere. We reserve two or three billiard tables for two or three hours in the malls and we are just there. We play billiards, have a good time and chat playing music on the juke-box. We pop in, etc, etc. I don't go to the shopping centre to do some shopping, no; I go there to enjoy myself. This is my only pastime on weekdays to go to the malls to play some billiards with my buddies".

Shopping centres provide space for the operational mechanism of age groups and relationships as well as the social interactions of adolescents significantly affecting the group identity experienced through leisure time activities. Independently of the "snickering, fooling around" passive way of spending free time or consumption, the use of entertaining services and the testing of gender roles, respectively, *the main point is to share experiences through which self-identity can develop in age groups that are important for the individuals* (Péley B., 2002). In this respect, malls function as anthropological "spaces".

In addition, I would like to refer to the findings of another research (still in progress) with the aim of demonstration. The examination of attitudes and habits related to the use of space characterized "Agora" Youth Research of 2013 held under my leadership. The big sample (N=4800) research in connection with the young people's use of space provided an opportunity for controlling spatial relations in a quantitative way. Similarly, as in our former researches, we asked adolescents to describe the so-called "good place" by spatial adjectives. For the majority of them the most important aspect was that the place should be free of charge (62 percent) and the modernity of the building. In addition, the place was thematically expected to provide some music (57 percent) and it should be spacious as well. Spatial characteristics and music were followed by the need for Wi-Fi service (46 percent) as an indispensable demand of a youthful place nowadays. The following elements were considered as the attributes of a good place only by a smaller group of adolescents: only one third of young people regarded it as an important issue that the place should be well-known by everyone as well as technically well-equipped (38 percent), and that it should be colourful (34 percent), club-like (28 percent), and elegant (27 percent). Traditional places were the least favoured ones by young people (8 percent).

CONCLUSION

Researchers have always been concerned by at least two spaces: the place they are studying (a region, a town) and the larger one, to which this place belongs and in which the influences and constraints that have consequences for the internal structure of local relations operate. The researcher is thus condemned to a methodological double vision: he or she must keep one of his eyes on the immediate place of observation, and the other one on the frontiers of its external influence. In the postmodern world, a part of this exterior is composed of non-places and a part of these non-places of

imagines. The frequenting of non-places today provides a historically unprecedented experience of solitary individuality and non-human mediation between the individual and the collectivity. The researchers of contemporary societies now find individual presence in the surrounding universe where he or she was used to finding general criteria that bestowed meaning on particular configurations and unique features. No social analysis can leave out the individual and no analysis of individuals can fail to consider the spaces through which they move. Despite the apparent contradiction of terms, a cultural geography of "places, non-places, half-places" is perhaps already needed. As a summary for the empirical research, we can state that although shopping centres have created an artificial world that may seem very sterile sometimes, they definitely develop into places when examined from the aspect of adolescents attending them. They play an active role in the formation and the mediation of identity, serving as places for social interactions, so they are determining in the community life of young people. Socio-spatial progresses of these kind observed in community spaces reflect the realization of social needs deriving from age and stage of life providing opportunities for the accomplished socialization of young people based on consumption, leisure time activities and social behaviour.

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