



Translating “event-specific site” to “transferrable site-specifics”; to facilitate understanding and open for appropriate urban landscape changes.

(this text is not a finished paper, but more to be seen as a synopsis for an article to come)

Intro: Ancient myths, baroque music, pastoral landscape and urban transformation areas playing together, create new representations of urban landscapes.

In the project “MeetingplaceMusicTheatreLandscape” we have been enacting co-created events as meeting places for not only the participants with different (and common) aims and skills, but also for material from different time periods with different ideals and ideas on music, theatre and landscape. The contextual and conceptual mix, from a content point of view, has been tremendously and ungraspably rich. *How has all this been expressed in instant performance?* This is one of all possible research questions to the experiences, reflections and documentations, collected during the project, in workshops, labs and seminars. A question from another direction is: *What does it mean to shape a common culture?*, (around meeting places and events, coming with different habits of mind, used to different discourses)

The third question, which is the one I will focus on, coming from the realm of landscape architecture, is: *How can you mediate the site of event, in order to understand the significance of space, material, movements and life, in relation to the play, the performance, what actually happens?*

From an urban planning point of view, this study can contribute to an understanding of site not only referring to some “bits of information preceding a new development”, but rather some information-in-becoming, creating a contemporary understanding of the site as a spatial-temporal-active complex in flux. This text aspires to work on two levels; the “event-specific site” (the landscape as it was experienced at a certain time and situation) and a “transferrable site-specific” (a representation of this landscape for other reading situations, e. g. a planning office or a public plan exhibition). The possible effect of such a representation (compared to the more general and routinized maps, plans and drawings) is to strengthen the idea of an urban transformation area, not as a ‘tabula rasa’, but as a living entity; not only a container with memories but owning potential of creations.

Urban landscape; as bodily experiences and sociomateriality

The point of departure draws upon the book “Tillvaroväven” (in English “The weft of existence”) by Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand. He discovered early on the need for synthesis of knowledge for the solving of global challenges to come, and he understood “the landscape” as a good basis for synthetic thinking. In his landscape studies (on-going for half a century) his observations led to some quite unique (or seldom pointed out) conclusions; one of them being the significance of “avfjärmandet”, one of H:s invented words, to describe the tendency to ‘cut away’ large parts of your view field in your everyday urban landscape. (The word “avfjärma” is hard to translate into English; ‘estranging’ or ‘alienate’ are quite close but

do not mean the same. It is not a question of to make (consciously) the surroundings strange, but to just not notice them.) This ‘de-notification’ (which is the English word for “avfjärande” I will use here) does usually just mean reduction of energy used. In your well-known everyday neighborhoods your surroundings have become something embodied, you can walk around without using your thoughts to orientate or be aware of hazards, you can use them for planning your day tomorrow, thinking of a concert you visited yesterday or to solve mathematical problems, as you wish. It could well be that the senses avoid sending already processed landscape information to the brain, this not said to involve any biological explanations, but to keep to *bodily experiences*, which are always connected to a certain autobiography (which can never be “disciplined”, but a mixture of experiences, thoughts, memories, preconditions and social relations and positions). The Norwegian sociologist Dag Østerberg suggests feelings of surroundings on a more aggregated level than single sensations, such as “loads” and “unloadings”, where load is a kind of “experience of facticity” and unloading a kind of “experience of freedom”. This conceptual dichotomy can be of value in an interdisciplinary transgressive collaboration, since it is used (in just slightly different words) in quite some different contexts; such as building statics and dance training!

The concepts can be considered both as bodily experiences and as the conditions for these bodily experiences. “Facticity” can be understood as the borders of “freedom”, all the things that delimit the possibilities to act (including materialities such as solid walls or deep water, but also social retrenchments, lack of knowledge, shortage of money etc.). Østerberg writes: “A free, successful act doesn’t note the body’s facticity, which is simply transgressed. The unsuccessful or forced act, on the contrary notes the facticity – as with sickness, fatigue, hard labor or suppression.” (Østerberg 2000, p 30).

The perspective of Østerberg’s he labels as “sociomaterial”. The sociomaterial perspective points at the life of a human being as a material existence in material surroundings (thereby also simultaneously part of the surroundings of all other human beings). This is partly (even if often reminding of) a labelling in opposition against the prevailing “socio-spatial” perspective (e. g. narratives on how space is part of and mediate social relations and processes), uniting sociologists and cultural geographers (with famous protagonists like Henri Lefebvre, Anthony Giddens, David Harvey and Edward Soja) but attacked from i. a. Manuel Castells, who calls the socio-spatial turn a “space-fetishism”. For a landscape architect, a streak of space-fetishism is probably inevitable. Maybe even Castells would agree on the engagement in space is a basic necessity for an architect. With Østerberg’s words one could say that space-fetishism (or engagement in spatial diversity, variation and change, to put it less pejorative) is even a precondition for the experience of “a free act”.

I have very superficial knowledge of the peculiarities of actors, performance artists and musicians, but merely as a hypothesis, let us assume that these actors of different kinds have different experiences, wishes and demands on space (musician/acoustics, dancer/spaciousness could work as simplified examples).

Collaborative events; as has been experienced in the ERASMUS Strategic Partnership project “Meetingplace Music Theatre Landscape”; enacted by scholars and practitioners within

landscape architecture (LA) and performance arts (PA); can open up a new room for knowledge building, in using actual landscapes (with their history, facticities, materialities, ethics and aesthetics) with different attitudes and demands. While the PA has imbued, into the used site, their specific acts, creating different experiences and memories for all participants, the LA has been able to make visible features and characteristics of the sites used; as materiality and space, but also in their context, historically and in contemporary economy and politics. From the LA point of view, this “making visible” (not be mixed up with the verb “visualize”!) could directly feed into LA theory, pointing at the PA collaborators contributing with new meanings to landscape conceptualizations.

From landscape conceptualizations to urban planning participation

On a meta-level, these kinds of landscape conceptualizations can feed into the discourses on urban transition, urban planning and urban transformation. Within planning theory, “communicative planning” and “participatory planning” has been dominating concepts for several decades, but with little problematization of what is actually communicated in such planning situations. Seldom (or never) are the materialities, spatialities, embodied experiences and enactments shown or discussed in the formation of visions, perspectives and arguments around citizen participation. It is mostly taken for granted that the communication between planners and citizens is an ideological and an organizational problem; not problematizing either the language (that we have different meanings when we use the same words) or the conceptualizations (different even from the same facticity) we make out of the same actual situations which are discussed.

In this void of concrete meanings related to urban landscape change (be it in planning processes or in actual building activities) the collaboration between LA and PA has shown some opportunities, related to the appearance of surroundings. As Hägerstrand argues (see p 1), our brains seem to ‘cut out’ most of our well-known surroundings on a daily basis. The enactments taking place in ‘artistic landscape events’ give life to (and make visible and sensible) these everyday surroundings, or – in the case of an event taking place in more uniquely characteristic surroundings – give hints of relationships between performative relationships between actors and landscape, possible to generalize or to transfer to other situations. For LA in urban planning this could mean to contribute to participative situations by ‘charging’ the sites and situations discussed with meanings which according to Hägerstrand’s arguments are not always actualized or conceptualized by the citizens.

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From an urban planning perspective, there is still a need of increased citizenship and participation in decisions and development proposals concerning one’s on environment. Many rely on methods for gathering “big data”, using social media. This is however only a possible way for very simplified questions and decisions. Collaboration-in-becoming, creative conversations and urban-lab-situations take time, but they offer a great deal more outcome, in terms of increased awareness and actual arguments, agreements and proposals.

The opportunities mentioned above, are not yet tested in real-life planning situations (evidently enough, since they are constructed as results of this project) and the ‘translations’ between the urban laboratory and e. g. a planning process are more complicated than has been outlined above. However, the abilities needed for this translation, is per se built up during the laboratory collaborations, since the communication between LA and PA necessarily is an act of translation between vocabularies. The multi-disciplinary creative conversation have (very much due to the need for constant re-formulations, questionings, re-contextualizations and re-iterations) to a large extent served as “revealers of potentials” within a site; which have turned the sites (not randomly but mostly intuitively chosen) used into “event-specific sites”, revealing their richness and adding to their richness, during the performative collaborative laboratories. From these sites (no more just geographically or historically categorized, but enriched by con-acting in performances) can potentially be transferred, to other situations (such as planning processes) some site-specifics revealing *relations* between units in broader is transgressed exactly in the way is avoids units, features and actors per se, but always enact relations and connections within the network.

The generalizations possible to make from this project are, by these transgressions, opening up for a more multiple interpretation of sites, which is something so far, to a large extent, lacking in “participatory planning processes”.

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