

MENTAL MAPS IN THE IRONWORKERS' COLONY IN MISKOLC-DIÓSGYŐR

JUDIT DOBÁK

The research on the ironworkers' colony of Diósgyőr has extended greatly in the last couple of years. The area itself is generally regarded as the depressed district of Miskolc, where the petering out of iron-ore mining, the diminution of coal mining, outdated technologies, the global crises of iron and steel production and the decline of construction industry are added together. Such symptoms as the closing of plants, unemployment, migration from the area, the fleeing capital, and deterioration of the infrastructure characterize the colony. With the fall of Communism in 1989 also the judgment of the workers, of their institutions have changed both in the formal and informal sectors. The transformed, dynamic economic structures can hardly deal with the „old-fashioned rusty ruins” of the region.

In my research I am focusing on the social and cultural traditions of those living in the colony, on the patterns of carrying on with the traditions and on their mental maps through which they orient themselves in the transformed system. With its closed physical structure, the colony is a perfect field site to analyze such regularities.

After the Austrian-Hungarian deed of settlement in 1867, plans for a nationwide railway system were set up, and the need for a new national factory in which the railway tracks can be produced, was urgent. By choosing the site the decision makers had practical concerns: it had to be a place that is situated along the planned railway lines, the site should not be vulnerable to a military offense and the iron ore and brown coal had to be easily accessible. The decision was made: the new factory was to be established on the marshland between Miskolc and Diósgyőr. Here all the materials needed for building the factory were available, the commodities were provided by the coal mines of the nearby Pereces, Ormópuszta and Múcsony.

Working with iron ore had had a tradition in the region: in South Gömör, in the villages of Abaúj-Torna county and in the northern valley of the Bódva river many people had earned their living from working with iron ore. The so called „tót-furnaces” were operated by families and were used to produce smaller agricultural tools.

The rate of the progress is shown by the increasing number of workers: in 1870 the factory employed 300, while in 1900 6,119 workers.¹ The conditions of

¹ Kováts, Gy.: *A diósgyőr-vasgyári művelődés története, 1884-1919* (Miskolc 1990) p. 31.

living were improved, partly because of the extended migration to the area. Because of the continuous employment and the relatively high wages, workers arrived from all over the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, from Poland and Romania.

In the evolved situation it was necessary to build a larger housing estate for the workers, the formation of which started parallel with the building of the factory. In 1878, when the production of railway tracks started, the colony experienced a rapid expansion. 48 semi-detached houses were built on the left bank of the Szinva river. From this time on, ten to twenty houses were added to the colony yearly.

There was a larger construction in 1892, when 72 semi-detached houses were built at the same time. Until 1908 the expansion of the colony took place on the left side of the river. In 1909, after numerous petitions, the Ministry of Finance permitted the construction of 100 quartered flats (100 houses, 400 flats, the so-called: hundredhouse), and the colony spread to the right bank of the Szinva and reached its present size. Between 1910 and 1914, 22 flats were built for officials. In 1919 seven new houses were built on the vacant properties. Between 1936 and 1942 houses made up of twin flats and four buildings with 28 flats for functionaries were built.

The flats had with little gardens and they were built in the so-called cottage-system: „The colony was built around 1882. It follows the German model, it was designed to be self-sufficient. Here, there was nothing. Then came the factory, the furnaces and they had to build houses for the workers. So this colony was established when the factory was built, following the German model.”²

The colony was designed to be totally self-sufficient. „There was a mill behind the Konzum. It was self-sufficient to the highest degree. The grocery did not have to buy flour, but wheat and there, behind the present bunker, at that place stood the mill. Then there was a slaughterhouse of which nothing can be seen any longer, then there was the bakery, behind the bakery the slaughterhouse, then further up the slaughterhouse, up at the guest-house there are those buildings, there was a sweetshop at that time, there was the processing factory... food-supply was managed by a Konzum Book, every worker had a Konzum Book, they could do the shopping with it in the Konzum. They put in a card saying what they needed, then the shopkeepers at the Konzum wrote in the Book how much the goods cost. So the workers didn't actually have to pay for the food and goods, they just got them for a kind of credit and on the 30th of every month the workers handed in their books at their workplace and everything was paid directly by the factory. Back at that time it was not called a pay-roll check, but a char-recorder, they counted it out nicely and people ate on trust. Not because they were poor! Simply because in this way they did not have to worry about things like „I have the money now, so I should

² Excerpt from an interview.

immediately go and get some sugar!" They bought food in large quantities. they bought 20 kg of lard, 20 kg of sugar, so on a daily level we only bought bread and sparkling water. We went shopping once a month, and this is another characteristic thing of those times, that everybody had a four-wheeled cart, a little cart and they pulled it there nicely, loaded it with food for a month, and lived on it... There even was a baking house at the end of the street. So, women baked their own bread..."³

The colony's self-supporting systems, the workers' legal self-representative and self-aiding groups had developed early. Together with the estate public facilities had been built, too: a girl's school and a boy's school in 1887; a pharmacy and the consumers' cooperative building in 1890; the workers' restaurant in 1896. This was used by the workers to eat the lunch brought from home, for many of the workers lived in the nearby villages. In addition to this function, ceremonies, motion picture performances, balls and concerts were held there. The hospital was built in 1898, the dispensary for consumptive patients a bit later. In 1905 the school was extended. The colony was regarded as the best workers colony in 1900.⁴

The 19th century movements of factory workers entered the colony. All kinds of workers movement were prohibited, but the leaders of the factory knew that they had to offer something in exchange for the workers commitment. Beside giving benefits to those who did not take part in any movement they also tried to occupy the workers minds by organizing all kinds of entertainments.⁵ Choral societies, workers' theatre groups, library, cinema, and many recreation facilities had become available for manual workers. This institutionalized culture was part of the cohesion which, up to the present, had kept the collective memory of the colony alive.

Owning a territory is a sign of status, deriving from the simple fact that the availability of space, and especially „good” space, is limited.⁶ „Good” and „bad” spaces influence our behavior. Mental mapping is an interdisciplinary approach linked to cultural anthropology, psychology, geography and cartography.

Cognitive maps⁷ represent the mental image of the „real space”, the image of the city as it exists in the minds of its inhabitants. According to Kevin Lynch, who introduced the notion of mental map, the social classes have different images of the same city. It means that certain points of the city would have a central role in

³ Excerpt from an interview.

⁴ Olajos, Cs.: *A Diósgyőr-vasgyári kolónia* (Miskolc 1998) p. 14.

⁵ Kovács, Gy.: op. cit., p. 43.

⁶ Cséfalvay, Z.: *A modern társadalomföldrajz kézikönyve* (Budapest 1994) p.13.

⁷ According to some theories, the notion of cognitive/mental mapping differs in the different disciplines. Geography collects data on the space. Psychology focuses on the unconscious systems of meanings. Cf. „Mentális térkép szerkesztése”, in *Településkutatás*, ed. Letenyey, L. (Budapest 2002) p. 154.

their lives, while other parts would be completely unknown for them. The formulation of a cognitive map depends on the person's social class and on the institutions that are important in his/her life.⁸

Mental maps rarely overlap the cartographical maps. „Dense points” may differ from densely visited public places. Only through continuous conversation with people can all this be revealed, by recording the intersections on the level of the symbols, the poorer and wealthier areas, the vacancies or passive areas.

I asked my sources to tell and show me the places they visit daily, where they like to be and those which, for some reason, they avoid. Passive areas were outlined by the remaining (unmentioned) areas. The areas delineated by the sources overlapped.⁹ Five districts were formed within the colony, together with some „passive” space.¹⁰ This is how 5 sectors and a few passive areas have been formed within the colony. Then I asked them to mark the areas on a 0-10 scale, where 0 stands for the lowest, and 10 for the highest value. The place where they would fancy living, or which they visit gladly either to meet friends, relatives or to go for a walk, could be graded 10. 5 stands for the emotionally neutral places. I have had informants from almost every street of the colony; twenty-five families were selected. Most of the families are inactive, mainly they are pensioners or unemployed. Only three families had actively employed members, this is in line with the proportion of the colony's active inhabitants. On the diagram set up on the basis of the answers (Fig.1.) it is visible that the evaluation of the various areas differs a great deal. The area made up of the streets I-X has an infamous name in the colony. Most often it was given the names „*Numbered streets*” „*Gypsy colony*” „*Gypsyline*”, „*the estate*” The area received mostly 0-2 points for its value, so the average is a 2.32 points of value. The so-called „soviet houses” are found here, four one-room flats, the twin flats that were originally built for workers.¹¹ The flats of the numbered streets are for the most part without any convenience. On the basis of the interviews and recollections, these were given to immigrant workers or to the smaller families, „*for whom even that did it*”¹² The

⁸ Horváth, S.: *Urbanizáció és társadalmi integráció a hatvanas években*, Évkönyv X, 1956-os Intézet (Budapest 2002), p. 37.

⁹ The streets that were mentioned by my informants were drawn to one map and the most frequently mentioned areas were marked. I considered these as districts.

¹⁰ Mostly my informants evaluated the spaces in which they lived. Passive spaces were: the factory entrance, shops, institutional buildings, the hospital (!). Later on they told me that these spaces are important and used frequently, but they usually go their by some kinds of transportation and they use them on purpose. Not really the space itself, but its function matters.

¹¹ Olajos, Cs.: op. cit., p. 46.

¹² Excerpt from an interview with a 64 years old men who worked as manual worker in the factory.

area is now inhabited by Gypsies, who are held to be responsible for the conflicts and degradation experienced. This sector is the most detached one, it was uniformly noted so by both the inhabitants of the numbered streets and the ones living in other sectors of the colony. The closed space-structure of the colony opens up to the town through this sector. If we mark the everyday routes on the map, we find that the inhabitants of sector 1 tend to do their daily tasks in the town, whereas the inhabitants of the other sectors use the space of the colony more often. This sector can be regarded as a negative focal point of the colony, which accelerates the continuous degradation.

Another unfavorably valued sector is a smaller suburb, the 5th sector: Pus[h]kin street, that part of Kabar street which neighbours the Ládi-estate, Bolyai and Örös street were graded 3.4 points in average. Although this area also is largely inhabited by Gypsies, it did not take on negative connotations, it did not turn into a „gypsyline”, and it is not as detached from the other sectors as the above mentioned sector 1 is. Unlike the later, it does not fall into the category of „I avoid it deliberately” According to my sources, immigrant workers lived here from the turn of the century: „Slovaks, Polish, Rumanians.” These had only one set of clothes, they didn't even have this kind of flats out there, where they had come from, they were glad to have even this kind of shelter above their heads. Nowadays too, immigrants live here, only they have come from closer, from the Avas.¹³ The basis of this classification lay in the quality of the performed work, not the status. These one-roomed wooden flats were placed at the outmost fringes of the colony. The tenants were at the lowest level in the workers' hierarchy, followed by the unskilled, but „native” ironworkers (meaning those who were born in the colony), and finally there were the skilled workers. There were ranks among the skilled workers too, the phrase: „fine skilled worker” often came up during the interviews. Their salary was higher and also „a fine skilled worker was called Sir. The worker, if someone for example was a smelter or a smith, went home, ate, drank, made children and went to bed. Work ate him up. Those who had a higher status cared about changing clothes and going to the choral society...”¹⁴ At present these people live in the second sector, delineated by Felső Szinva street, Topiczer János road, Lónyai Menyhért and Irma street. Now they are all pensioners and live in nicely arranged flats with all conveniences.

Among the facilities here we find the Old Factory Square with lots of shops, the tram runs down Lónyai street, and many other bus stops are located in the area. The buildings are mainly old twin houses built for officials and workers. Despite regarding it a „neat, orderly vicinity”, the area was graded only 4.12 points in the average. When asking for an explanation, I was told that the area is often

¹³ Excerpt from an interview.

¹⁴ Excerpt from an interview.

disturbed by people living in the fringes. They are begging and stealing from the gardens. „People are frightened here.”

The most positively valued third sector is the area formed by Kerpely Antal street, Glanczer Miksa road, Brick-works street and Gózon Lajos street. Buildings are mainly officers' houses of twin flats, and the multi-floored „Angel castle” with its many flats today serves as a welfare-centre. A Catholic parish is being developed presently in Kabar street. „This is the most distinguished area of the colony, it pleases my eye to look at those houses whenever I walk along there. It's so gentlemanly there. There are also larger gardens, some had servant's room in old times.”¹⁵

If we set up an axle at the average value of the points given on a 1-10 scale (at 4.2) examining to what degree do the „sympathy points” alter from it, we find that sectors 1, 2, and 5 are estimated more negatively, while sectors 3, 4 more positively than the average (Fig.2).

The most positively valued areas of the colony are those inhabited by the working-class aristocracy, engineers and functionaries of the active era. Sector 4, the area surrounding the Catholic Church received 6.24 points on the average. Today this area is inhabited by lower leaders and former skilled workers, pensioners now. The houses, gardens are tended, have all conveniences, and have kept the characteristic red brick building style.

The graveyard was marked as „visited area” only by two informants. By asking it I found out that most families go to the cemetery and that the „cemetery has several links to the history and culture of the colony”¹⁶ The hierarchy found in the streets can also be found in the cemetery. The „officials' graves” are separated, „but you have to be a nun at least to get a grave in the first row.”¹⁷

The Konzum (today „ABC” store), the Szaletli, the Riding-hall which was been pulled down, the Ice factory, the beach, the marketplace are all alive in the memories of the people. Their present value shows in the intensifying trend of the past few years to get hold of these places, set up shops or entertaining places in them and give them back their earlier – original – names. The younger generation knows these places „only” from stories heard from the „chroniclers of the colony.”¹⁸

The fact that the factory, the entrances of the different plants has only been marked by pensioned metalworkers is very telling. Sixteen informants gave it any importance, the inactive ones did not. Not even from the streets with a window on

¹⁵ Excerpt from an interview.

¹⁶ Kunt, E.: *A temetők népművészete* (Budapest 1983), p. 7.

¹⁷ Excerpt from an interview.

¹⁸ R. Nagy, J.: *A kolónia krónikásai* (documentary film, 1998)

the DIGÉP.¹⁹ For these people the colony's value lay only in the living quarter, disconnected from the factory. Factory workers or former workers treat the factory and the colony as an organic whole, just as it had been designed at the time of its construction.

The current evaluation echoes the one typical of the last century. The streets and buildings strengthen the hierarchy. The houses previously owned by engineers, directors and officials are now inhabited by pensioners and small entrepreneurs.

People from the Avas district move to the underrated districts of the colony. Although each of these houses was built for one family, now three or four families live in them. According to the interviews the inhabitants here are not motivated to rebuild or renovate these houses. It is partially a problem arising from their unemployment and partially from the ethnic origin.

The interviewed people use different mental maps according to their particular personality, social status and habitation. The colony has never been a homogenous community, the social hierarchy expressed verbally and symbolically has always stratified the unity of the community. Nevertheless, the particular interviews contain many similarities. One such common point is that the existence or absence of job played a significant role in the qualification of the different sectors. Being employed is still a measure of human value in the colony. In a community where the glorification of work is so characteristic, facing an age of rising unemployment is very shocking indeed. It has questioned the basic values of their lives.

When the LKM (Lenin Metallurgical Works) and DIGÉP owned the territory and the houses, maintenance and renovation was carried out centrally. After purchasing them, everybody became responsible for his/her own property. The unified infrastructure of the colony thus changed. Many people installed water pipes, central heating and built bathrooms. There were (and still are) many who did not want or could not afford to do all these. The hierarchy that had been implicit and symbolic until then created ever wider distance between the „castes”

The community dispersed with the closing down of the collective programs and clubs. The intensified stratification affected schools as well. By opening their doors to anyone from the city, they did not serve anymore as the elementary and secondary schools of the colony.

Even the cemetery shows the signs of decline. The graveyard was a perfect mirror of the community. The inhabitants knew who is buried where, who was a leader, a worker, what kind of person he/she was. The elderly still know these things, and some families carry on these stories.

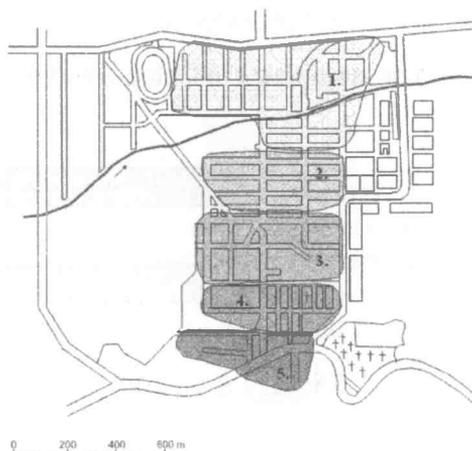
The process leads to a vicious circle if the prestige of the quarter

¹⁹ Diósgyőr Metalworks

diminishes, and the news of its crises gets around, companies and those inhabitants who can afford to move,²⁰ will leave the area. Thus the number of valuable flats and workplaces will also decrease, which will further devalue the area in the eyes of the outsiders. In order to prevent degradation, intervention, preferably indirect, is needed in this circle of compound feedbacks.

²⁰ Cséfalvay, Z.: *op. cit.*, p.76.

Fig. 1



1st district: „Numbered streets” (Vasgyári újtelep: 1.-10. str.), Mányoki Ádám str., Ballagi Károly str., Alsó Szinva str.

2nd district: Felső Szinva str., Topiczer J. str., Lónyai Menyhért str., Irma street

3rd district: Kerpely A. str., Mester str., Téglagyár str., Jászai M. str., Glanczer M. str., Pléh S. str., Gózon L. str., Kabar str.

4th district: Hamerák M. str., Magyar str., Sándor str., Tavasz str., Puskin str., Kristály str., Ó street, Gózon L. str., Kórház str.,

5th district: Puskin street – Kabar str. southern part, Bolyai str, Örös str.

Sympathy-scale of the districts:

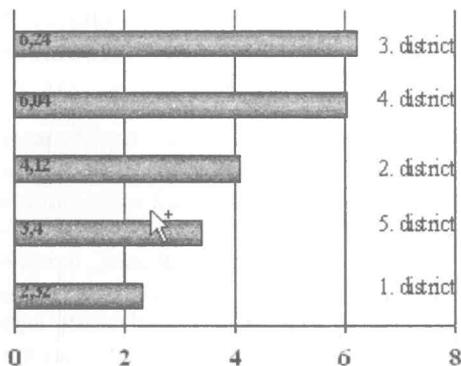


Fig. 2

The alteration from average of the sectors' point value