

Murals of Budapest in the age of creative cities

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Abstract

*The concepts of creative city and creative economy along with the cultural city development were born in the 1970s, when traditionally industrial centers had started to decline. From the 1990s on there has been a constant discussion of Western European and North American cities' post-fordist culture and technology based transformation. Since the appearance of Richard Florida's book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, the concept of creative city has become a fashionable and often used terminology, and in this sense there is wide acceptance of a social and economic arrangement that is based on the so-called creative class, which tends to settle down in cities open to creativity. Florida's theory was taken over by Hungarian professional and academic circles without much criticism, and creative city is still a beloved expression and approach while discussing Budapest's strategic vision.*

In this writing I analyze why street art, as a thoughtful expression of creativity, artist's freedom and reflection of urban life, is still not sufficiently emphasized and remains in the periphery of the post-socialist Hungarian capital.

Keywords: street art, creative city, Budapest

Creativity as social field and cultural medium

The creative creation as a form of art may become part of academic and scientific debate and can be derived from the conceptual scope of creativity.

The creative idea is not only a sudden click of a brilliant mind, but can be seen as a result of the culmination of hard and determined work for many years. According to Csíkszentmihályi, creativity is a process by which a symbolic province in our culture is changed (Csíkszentmihályi, 2008). Expert knowledge of a specific field is indispensable in order to change things that requires thousands of hours of concentration in learning and experiencing, which is a finite resource. We can invent new things and experiment with others if we have already got beyond the necessities for survival skills.

Creativity in itself is a broadly interpreted attribute and appears as a basic characteristic of human being, as a

value-creating economic activity, as the basis of cultural and artistic activity in the system of creative industries. Creativity cannot exist without social recognition and creative space (Csíkszentmihályi, 2008). As John Howkins refers, anyone who creates something new can be determined as a creative person (Howkins, 2002). This statement needs to be supplemented by Csíkszentmihályi's explanation: whether it is a creation, work or service of an individual performance, becomes creative when the social field (field) and the cultural medium (domain) receive it. The scope of the expert social field – influential institutions and / or individuals – determines which ideas can be included in the cultural medium. This means the individual must be immersed in the symbolic province of the cultural medium and has to fill it with some new content, which can pass through the field of social experts. So the creativity means a joint product in respect of individual's performance and the actors of the cultural medium (Csíkszentmihályi, 2008). And what happens if this circle of experts is missing?

Murals of Budapest – in the downtown but still periphery

The creative concept behind Színes Város¹ Group, Hungary's first movement dealing with firewalls and color public spaces, is derived from the basic idea of Victor Vasarely. His Colorful City idea was released in 1983, which posits that art needs to be shown on streets and public spaces, thus visitors have the chance to meet art elsewhere than fine art galleries (Vasarely, 1983).

The problem that is posed in the movement of Színes Város Group is that the city where we live is in many ways gray and alienating. The public spaces are neglected, thus it is hard to love and protect them. In the long run this can lead to degradation and depreciation and as a simple consequence the space might lose its community function.

Since 2008 Színes Város have organized more than 20,000 square meters paintings on wall surfaces, concentrated mostly in Budapest area. A festival called Színes Város is organized every summer since 2014, where not only

Hungarian, but international artists are invited to paint firewalls of the downtown area according to a given thematic. The aim of the festival is to attract tourists and make the gray areas more joyful.

Although the increasing number of colored firewalls and the growing attention of press, Tourism Institution and City Council of Budapest, there is still a long way to go to develop a wide infrastructure, public consciousness and attention as well as scientific discussion of urban art movements in Hungary. In order to understand the background some of the reasons are collected:

- Missing of collected database and documentation of Hungarian street artists and their works.
- Poor availability of literature in Hungarian language as well as international.



Fig. 1 - Street view with a mural of Breakone (HU), Színes Város Festival Budapest, 2015.
Photo credit: András Farkas/Színes Város

1 - Színes Város means colorful city.



Fig. 2 - Street view with a mural of AkaCorleone (PT), Színes Város Festival Budapest, 2015.
Photo credit: András Farkas/Színes Város

- Apart from permanent strategic and financial support of the City Council of downtown's 7th district, there is a lack of central and comprehensive governmental strategy and proper authority and control regarding public spaces.
- Difficulties of sponsorship: the more commissioned a project, the more the artistic freedom is reduced, political and critical statement is completely missing of a painting.
- Articles of street art activities are random, there is no proper medium which relevantly and permanently deals with the issue of public space.
- Expert circle and scientific debate has not developed yet.
- Difficulties of licensing the ownership of a mural, bureaucracy.
- Lack of available walls in the downtown. There are many murals in the periphery of Budapest, but they are hardly

visible. In this case the size of the city matters, the access of the murals located in suburban areas is difficult.

- Politically determined and not transparent conditions, corruption, "punitive" treatment of critical thinking as a local problem.

Conclusion

Despite the increasing interest of smaller entities towards painted firewalls and public spaces, as long as street art as a type of art, urban expression and creative activity don't play a role in the strategic plan of Budapest at higher governmental level, the discussion of social, expert and scientific circles will not start. There are movements of artists, architects, urbanists, who are determined to make the city more creative, the tradition of post-socialism as a political attitude suppresses the tentacles of critical thinking. In this ambient a transparent and clear path of arranging paintings on huge size of murals is barely favorable.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Péter Flór of Színes Város Group for sharing ideas and thoughts.

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