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Exploring lost spaces: Integrating place, arts, and adult education

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the potential evolution of education when integrated with place, addressing socio-ecological degeneration. Special attention is given to art education, which not only views places as learning locations but also recognizes the material and relational aspects of a place's ecology as having epistemic value. The inquiry into art education practices delves beyond art-based methods and draws on the rich tradition of place-based practices. To illustrate the contribution of art education to sustainability, the study examines the collaborative project 'Full Line, Broken Line: The Future of Liminal Landscapes' in Serbia, focusing on disrupted landscapes near Belgrade. This insight into how investigation and learning about a locality can elicit memories and interpretations through the lens of absence demonstrates the importance of the interaction of temporal and spatial dimensions when learning about what is lost and the possibility for renewal.

Keywords: spatial turn, place, art education, adult learning, art science project

Introduction

Place is a necessary precondition for being and acting. In its broadest sense, it represents a fundamental and inevitable component of existence. 'To exist at all as a (material or mental) object or as (an experienced or observed) event is to have a place - to be implaced however minimally or imperfectly or temporarily' (Casey, 2018, p. 13). However, it has been somewhat neglected in the study of adult education, unlike the temporal dimension, which is predominately used for understanding development and learning within the main discourse on education. Many educational programmes are designed according to a clearly defined time frame, and the concepts of adult education and learning are often shaped, seemingly emancipatory, by temporal metaphors (e.g., lifelong learning, the document 'It's Never Too Late to Learn,' 'It's Always a Good Time,' and so on). Spatial universality and temporal differentiation are expressed in the contemporary context of

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globalization, where the influence of international organizations further intensifies this tendency. For example, by introducing achievement assessment programs, the spatial category gains comparative application, particularly evident in international rankings and comparisons of long-term progress and efficiency of educational systems. As educational imagination is mostly conditioned and coloured by temporality, I am interested in exploring the directions in which education can evolve when integrated with the place and addresses socio-ecological degeneration. By doing so, special attention is dedicated to art education, which boasts a rich tradition of delving into place-based practices, as seen in the works of artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Richard Long, and Ana Mendieta. Furthermore, in art education practices that explore specific landscapes and sites, places are usually not merely regarded as learning locations; the material and relational aspects of a place's ecology hold epistemic value, serving as a source for creation and learning. This involves appreciating complexity, unlocking opportunities, cultivating creativity, and prompting intentional engagement, rather than encouraging particular behaviors or specific forms of learning (Formenti et al., 2019).

Art education practices encompass far more than reliance on art-based methods. Suzi Gablik is a visual artist and art critic famous for her criticism of the modernist view on purposeless art. In her seminal work on connective aesthetics, Gablik (1995) considers that art that creates specialized objects to be contemplated and enjoyed is socially impotent. Such art, she believes, is an active participant in maintaining capitalist ideology and consumerist attitude. 'Among artists, there is a greater critical awareness of the social role of art and a rejection of modernism's bogus ideology of neutrality' (Gablik, 1995, p. 75). This awareness of contemporary artists and the emergence of public and community art opened a space for practices that entail the intersection of arts, education, and social engagement. Contemporary art-making can be a learning process in itself, or a curriculum strategy (Eça et al., 2017) that generates knowledge as an inherent part of an open-ended process of creation and community engagement.

Decuypere et al. (2019) have cautioned against relying on preconceived learning outcomes in adult education as a simplistic and linear solution to complex contemporary challenges that may lead to an educational environment characterized by eco-totalitarianism, fostering compliance rather than critical thinking among learners. Swillens et al. (2021) criticized the instrumental approach to sustainability in education that focuses on acquiring a specific set of knowledge and skills that originates in the assumption that the future is predictable and that 'experts know how people should be prepared in order to realize a sustainable world' (Swillens et al., 2021, p. 2). Without a specific learning outcome in mind, the production of knowledge, characterized by its high contextualization and material nature, is an inherent part of art education practice embedded in place. As rightly put by Rene Susa (2019), who shares her view on aesthetic interventions as a part of the RELA issue dedicated to Adult Education and the Aesthetic Experience, they open a crack in the ways we see and sense ourselves in the world. But even more than that, art education incorporates embodied making, capable of evoking, what Relph (1976) refers to as a profound sense of 'insideness of place' (p. 49).

To demonstrate the unique role of art education, and the distinct contributions of such interdisciplinary approaches in advancing sustainability, I will provide an example from the collaboration between art and science in Serbia's 'Full Line, Broken Line: The Future of Liminal Landscapes.' This project examines two disrupted landscapes near Belgrade – surface coal mines and mountains altered by quarries. For the purpose of this investigation, I focused specifically on the coal mines. According to the authors of the project (Putnik et al., 2023), this site 'opened up to them,' and they also organize walks there as part of their artistic intervention. To establish theoretical clarity for a deeper

understanding of place and learning, the next chapters will provide a very brief and incomplete summary of the implications of the spatial turn on the thinking of adult education. Although the spatial turn occurred several decades ago, it is crucial to highlight its significance for educational thought, considering that this work aims to understand place within its epistemic framework, not merely as a location for learning. This perspective emphasizes the dynamic relationship between space, knowledge production, and educational practices, advocating for a deeper exploration of how spatial contexts shape learning experiences.

Spatial turn and adult education research

In the intellectual discussions of the 1970s and 1980s, a significant shift known as the spatial turn emerged, elevating the significance of location and space in scholarly analysis. The seminal work of American geographer and philosopher Edward Sodža, 'Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory,' published in the late 1980s, played a pivotal role in championing the spatial turn. It laid the groundwork for subsequent research, acknowledging space and place as intricate interpretive categories demanding to be carefully analyzed to better understand various aspects of social dynamics. Critical human geography reinvigorated spatial perspectives within contemporary social theory, challenging the prevailing authority of time and history as the unquestionable interpreters of social existence and the architects of emancipatory political consciousness (Sodža, 2013). The spatial turn revitalized thinking about place and space, transforming them from abstract categories into significant factors in interpreting social relationships. This spatialization of critical thought was not merely a superficial replacement for previous temporal approaches but, among other things, highlighted geographical inequality and provided one of the more productive critical perspectives. This inequality has been interpreted for more than two centuries as the delayed diffusion of development (such as capitalist modernity) into undeveloped, traditional, still incompletely modernized parts of the world. Here, the primary vision was Eurocentric, linking modernization everywhere to the historical dynamics of European industrial capitalism (Sodža, 2013). The criterion of linear temporality was applied to the analysis of social development. For example, this trend is observable in programs such as the aforementioned PISA and PIAAC achievement assessment programs, where the educational systems of countries are evaluated based on how far they have progressed in development, without sufficiently considering the context of each country or the complexity of international influences. Instead of being considered horizontally, educational systems are compared solely through the prism of time and progress.

Although spatial references in adult education research are becoming more explicit, place is rarely considered as a source or content of knowledge. It is still seen as a learning venue within the framework of formal or nonformal education. In the introductory chapter of the book 'Adult Education and Space: Theoretical Perspectives – Professional Practice – Frameworks of Learning' (Erwachsenenbildung und Raum Theoretische Perspektiven – professionelles Handeln – Rahmungen des Lernens), the editors (Kraus et al., 2015) identified space as a neglected interpretative category but also emphasized a pronounced and enduring interest in this topic, particularly in relation to where adult learning takes place. Undoubtedly, locations for adult learning have been an important topic in the tradition of adult education and the establishment of the practice. In adult education research, spatial relationships have mostly been implicit, examining the significance of individual spatial dimensions for research questions without explicit theoretical considerations of the concept of space. Attention has been given to their didactic function

and finding characteristics of spaces that stimulate learning. However, more recently, building on the work of Low, symbolic-institutional, material-infrastructural, and social-interactional aspects intertwine, emphasizing the relationality of this concept (Low, 2001, as cited in Mania et al., 2015). The complex nature of informal adult education and community education has become a source of research interest, especially regarding how space and its meanings shape the educational experience.

Before presenting the relevant art education interventions, I will offer a brief insight into the phenomenological exploration of place and learning, emphasizing the importance of the lived experience and body engagement in creating meaningful connections. Dwelling is not merely about physical locality; it involves continuous, embodied, and relational processes of life-making. Although there is a rich body of literature exploring various adult education practices that link to the concept of public pedagogy (Hannum & Rhodes, 2018; Biesta, 2012; Sandlin et al., 2011; Popović et al., 2018; Popović et al., 2020) that address social and political dimension of space and learning, the phenomenological understanding of place provides an adequate framework to explore the process of learning from and through place as it delves into the intimate, embodied, and experiential aspects. Authors such as Edward Casey (2018) and E.V. Relph (1976) offer comprehensive and well-established perspectives on engagement with place, which can foster more relational and experiential dimensions of education. Their work connects the lived experience of place with the creation of attachment and a sense of belonging, emphasizing the importance of personal and emotional connections to one's environment in the learning process, which is highly relevant for tending to lost places.

The dynamic interplay of place, belonging, and art education: A phenomenological perspective

In our lived experiences, places are not static entities; rather, they are constantly emerging or becoming. Philosopher and phenomenologist Edward Casey (2018) suggests that place is more than just a physical location and question the long tradition of considering place as a sheer container. Following the phenomenological thought of Heidegger and Marley Ponty, he argues that the place is an outcome of bodily engagement. "The body is at once the subject of place and its animator; it is the agent who is not just aware of the place it takes up but also able to alter it in ways that suit its staying there longer (Casey, 2018, p. 21). According to Casey (2018) the sense of belonging, of being in place, is constituted by moving around and settling. Relph (1976) refers to places with which we form attachments as fields of care. These places are often not arbitrary but purposefully created. In this act of creation, a sense of belonging takes root, and attachment becomes an investment, manifesting itself as a commitment to the place. By attaching meaning to places, learning evolves into a dynamic interplay of knowing and being known and emerges from a profound engagement with the surroundings. Art education practices can enable these senseful interactions with places, fostering what Edward Relph (1976) terms 'insideness of place' (p. 49) that encapsulates a sense of belonging and identification with the place. Artistic practices, employing a variety of mediums, have a capacity to deepen the connection with a specific place. Narratives and imagination become vessels for the exploration of meanings but also strengthen a sense of belonging to a particular community and place. Casey (2005) has written extensively on art as a means to reveal place, arguing that artistic practices can sharpen our perception of landscapes and provide new insights into what was once overlooked or hidden. 'To map out in a positive and productive sense means to undertake a voyage into the dark side of matter, into its potentialities – a voyage into what is not yet the case. It is to chart out one's course over

uncertain waters' (Casey, 2005, p. 191).The artistic exploration of a landscape ventures into a realm of possibilities, exemplified by works such as 'Full Line Broken Line,' which suggests that liminal landscapes should be viewed for their potential rather than through the lens of loss. The intersection of the possible domain of artistic work and bodily engagement with materiality can foster a sense of attachment and hope.

Thus, what the phenomenologists such as Casey (2018) and Relph (1976) are pointing at is that belonging is not a passive feeling that develops by being in one place but it is a critical and creative engagement with an aliveness of a community. However, the sense of belonging to a place has been diminished by the 'undermining of place for both individuals and cultures, and the casual replacement of the diverse and significant places of the world with anonymous spaces and exchangeable environments' (Relph 1976, p. 143). There is a sense of consumption rather than creation, contributing to a feeling of placelessness (Relph, 1976) and dislocation. The erosion of specific qualities of the place, due to globalization, modernization, and emphasis on functionality and effectiveness, has been continuously decreasing the agency of individuals to meaningfully engage with the places they occupy in their everyday life. Furthermore, the European Union has actively promoted the development of a unique European identity through education and mobility. Although it has created profound opportunities for learning and living, the constant demand for the flow of the workforce provokes the citizens to constantly answer the question of belonging and make decisions on their future location. The enormous problem of housing, demands constant readiness for relocation, potentially hindering a conscious effort to establish a sense of belonging. Amidst these complex trends, citizens are warned about potential catastrophic scenarios related to ecological changes, urging them to either take action or come to terms with the inevitability of environmental transformations. While acknowledging multilayered and complex dimensions of belonging, especially in the context of inequality, injustice, and exclusion (Vandenabeele et al., 2023), we, as researchers and adult educators, must grapple with a crucial question: Is it possible to cultivate fields of care and take meaningful action without attachment to physical locations?. How can adult education foster 'insideness of place'? As already indicated, art education practices can be a catalyst for a rich and meaningful dialogue between individuals and the places they inhabit, promoting a sense of rootedness and interconnectedness.

Reclaiming knowledge through place

To clarify the connection between the previous discussion and the case I intend to explore, it is essential to focus on the kind of knowledge that can emerge when people establish a meaningful connection with a specific place. This is particularly relevant to the artistic intervention I aim to discuss. The debate on place and space has served us in locating educational practices that perceive place as sources of knowledge by exploring local knowledge and practices. An informed understanding of a place considers various strategies of inhabitation, as well as the openness and capacity to listen to the collective memory keepers within the community, who preserve memories of harmful ecological practices, as well as traditions of self-sustainability (Bowers, 2008). Thus, on one hand, it is a practice that critically examines global power structures, but it finds its foundation in the specific relationships of a particular place, which unveils and offers various ways of knowing and living.

As mentioned by Cresswell (2014), a place has a particular epistemic value as it builds our understanding of the world we inhabit. However, we do not rely much on the knowledge that arises from a particular environment but employ universal and

disembodied truths on the specific locality, usually to modify its purposes. Recently, there have been significant contributions that embrace the materiality of and non-human relations of a place and advocate for a humbler approach to educational practices and such educational interventions often originate from the domain of art education. Contemporary artists have been engaging with land art, eco-art, public and community art, among other practices, drawing attention and prompting the public to reconsider its connection to places. Artists operating beyond conventional settings have utilized artistic approaches that align more with social activism and community work than with creating and disseminating art objects. By departing from traditional venues, these artists integrated their practices with the specificity of locations and individuals, drawing on community knowledge, memories and rituals. They rely on poetic language to explore affective dimensions and work with imagination to explore possibilities of actions (Da Silva, 2016).

These nuanced efforts can foster a sense of belonging and attachment, which is crucial for meaningful engagement with a place. The sense of belonging and connection to a place can be fostered through creative placemaking. This approach, seen as a tool for participatory action that relies on art and culture to revitalize spaces and imbue them with new meanings (Heard et al., 2023). Art is a unique epistemic modality that is not merely an expression of the personal or a reflection of the existing, but a practice that actively generates new knowledge, even though this knowledge is not factually expressed through words or numbers. It represents a framework within which new interpretations and reinterpretations of existing forms and meanings are created, integrating thought and action into an indivisible whole rather than opposing them (Maksimović, in press).

However, in the case of the proposed artistic practice, placemaking has already occurred through the deterioration of the landscape due to mining. The process of placemaking begins anew through embodied engagement. Formenti et al. (2019) underline the significance of aesthetic experience in adult education, emphasizing its relationality, embodiment, vulnerability, and uncertainty that stand in contrast to hegemonic discourses that prioritize rationality and reflexivity. To illustrate this argument, I will give an example from art education practices that offer perspectives for differentiated knowledge production by interweaving the physical, biological, and anthroposociological spheres. Considering that there has been huge potential in creative and bold endeavors that respond to the question of how to live together, there is a lack of aesthetic practices that explore our connection to places, the ones we are creating together, or even to lost places. I will go deeper into an exploration of the practice that investigates the liminality of places that are lost due to mining and exploitation of resources, ‘a qualitative epistemological opening to expand our understanding of complexities in a subject-object relationship’ (Da Silva, 2016, p. 111).

Détournement: Why psychogeography shouldn’t be a catch-all for walking practices

Integrating walking into art education practices does not always align with a psychogeographic approach. While this might seem like a detour from the main focus of this paper, exploring the relationship between psychogeography and walking practices is a compelling discussion and might offer some interesting insights and propose questions to adult educaton researchers. . Building on the discussion of psychogeography and its role in adult education, it’s important to address how the use of this term in educational contexts can sometimes overlook its radical roots. Psychogeography, originally developed as a method of city mapping and experiential exploration by the Situationist

International, was deeply intertwined with avant-garde Marxist political and artistic movements. These groups were not merely interested in exploring urban spaces but aimed to radically transform everyday life and challenge existing social and economic power structures.

As we explore the potential of psychogeography in adult education, it is crucial to recognize that this concept was not intended to be a generic term for learning through walking. Instead, it carried with it a specific political agenda aimed at revolutionizing life through the creation of new situations and behaviors, as highlighted in the *Report on the Construction of Situations* (Debord, 1957). The Situationists envisioned their tactics, such as dérive (drifting) and détournement (diversion), as part of a broader effort to challenge bourgeois society and its values, aiming for a radical transformation of everyday life. However, as Swyngedouw (2002) has noted, the original revolutionary force of these ideas has been somewhat diluted in their educational translation. What was once a politically charged and transformative practice has often become a depoliticized and aestheticized tool in contemporary settings.

This tactic has been recognized by educational researchers who propose it as a learning methodology, a specific form of walking with educational outcomes. Biesta and Cowell (2012) see it as a means to enhance civic learning that supports pluralism and democracy; Bassett (2004) describes psychogeography as an aesthetic practice and a critical tool, Sthele (2008) as a teaching tool; Kim (2021) explores the pedagogical effects of this practice, arguing that it is used to create a more democratic city. However, we might question whether it strays from its original conceptual frameworks, and political aspirations from which it originated. The educational practice involving psychogeographic interventions lacks clarity in its political goals, as well as the playful transformation of space aimed at liberating it from conventional social forms and meanings that shape pleasures and everyday life. The playfulness, essential for disrupting the imposed bourgeois seriousness of life situations, moral values, and the functionality of urban spaces, seems to be missing in educational interventions, which often reduce the practice to a critical examination of the economic, political, and social factors shaping a particular place, or to storytelling and documenting impressions (Maksimović, in press).

In light of this, I argue that the exploration conducted by the artistic group I worked with, while engaging with the concepts of place and space, did not embrace the radical intentions of psychogeography as envisioned by the Situationists. The group's work, while valuable in its own right, did not aim to create new situations or radically transform everyday life in the way that the Situationists intended. Instead, it focused on engagement with place, which, though meaningful, do not align with the original revolutionary aims of psychogeography.

This distinction is crucial as we consider the kind of knowledge that can be generated when people build a connection with a specific place. In the case of the artistic intervention I intend to discuss, the focus is not on radical social transformation but rather on the creation of new interpretations and connections to place through the integration of arts and science. This approach, while different from the Situationist agenda, still offers valuable insights into how we can engage with and understand the spaces we inhabit, fostering new forms of knowledge and community engagement.

Stories of lost places: Art science project in Serbia

In the following chapter, the topic of this paper will be further explicated by providing the account of the *Full Line, Broken Line: The Future of Liminal Landscapes* (Puna crta prekinuta crta: Budućnost liminalnih predela), an artistic research project implemented

within the art+science programme of the Center for the Promotion of Science. It was initiated and created by the collaborative team of Milena Putnik, Nemanja Lađić, Suzana Gavrilović, and Milovan Milenković, landscape architects, visual artists, and university professors at the Faculty of Forestry, University of Belgrade, Serbia, to explore the convergence of politics, economy and power, and to encourage citizens to critically examine the dynamics that shape their environments. The project highlights the tensions arising from the necessity for resources and the substantial human impact on the landscape. Themes of being within or outside of a place, the concepts of placelessness and dislocation due to enormous exploitation, and the exploration of lost places and possibility for their regeneration are integral aspects of the work.

> The authors[1] delve into the dynamics and visual impact of exploitation. The work provokes questions about the interconnectedness of the local ecological issues with the global economy and political regime in Serbia. This dramatic transformation has rendered these landscapes as border zones, where the previous state is entirely overwritten by human intervention, and a newfound stability remains elusive. These exploited areas will need to undergo a restoration process. Liminality, encompassing uncertainty and apprehension, also presents a positive aspect: it facilitates a reconsideration of fundamental goals and values that form the basis for future choices. Given the anticipated surge in mining activities outlined in the proposed spatial plan for the Republic of Serbia until 2035, such landscapes may become increasingly prevalent. (Putnik et al., 2023).

In addition to viewing the exhibition and reviewing the project proposal, I engaged in discussions with the two authors of the work, Milena (an artist and a university professor at the Faculty of Forestry, Landscape Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia) and Suzana (a scientist and a university professor at the Faculty of Forestry, Landscape Architecture, University of Belgrade, Serbia). These interactions aimed at acquiring a knowledge of the artistic processes – unique lived and learning experiences for the authors. I also examined the relevant websites, documents, and media releases related to the subject, with the intention of offering contextual information to the reader that can facilitate a more profound understanding of the issues tackled by the project. The locations selected by the authors carry an important temporal dimension, as their utilization and management depended very much on socio-political context in the former Yugoslavia and Serbia. During the Yugoslav era, state policies and economic priorities drove large-scale industrial projects, while subsequent political and economic shifts in Serbia further altered the landscape, reflecting broader socio-political changes and conflicts. In the aftermath of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Serbia experienced a turbulent period and Kolubara became emblematic of the challenges associated with privatization and corruption.

This work is an eco-visualization, a collaborative transdisciplinary practice that integrates visual art, technology, and landscape architecture to render ecological issues visible. The project advocates for ecological responsibility by engaging with a specific location, whose visual elements contribute to understanding exploitation and extensive destruction. The intensive exploitation of coal and the occupation of large areas for the purpose of mining, result in the relocation of watercourses, infrastructure systems, and parts of settlements, as well as the displacement of the population from vulnerable communities (Basarić & Prnjat, 2013). The barren landscape also elicits a sense of loss and grief, prompting a call for restorative actions. However, these places are remote, lacking a sense of belonging or attachment. The artists and researchers have chosen two case studies, both of which have enormous importance for the Serbian economy and society. The first case study the Kolubara Mining Basin extends over a vast area beyond the territory of Belgrade, represents the largest coal mine in the Balkans (Putnik et al.,

2023) and covers an area of approximately 50 square kilometers (Basarić & Prnjat, 2013). Given that it serves as the primary coal supplier for *Elektroprivreda Srbije*, it holds a crucial role in ensuring the country's energy independence. However, in 2021, a group of scientists (Mesarović, 2023) affiliated with the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts published a significant document titled 'The Development of the Electric Power Industry in the Republic of Serbia by 2050':

> Contrary to the common belief of energy self-sufficiency with (currently) relatively low import dependence, Serbia is an energy-poor country. Despite having hydro potential, biomass, solar, and wind resources, the primary domestic foundation of Serbia's energy comes from low-caloric coal (lignite), whose reserves are gradually depleting. Meanwhile, a significant portion of oil and gas consumption must be covered through imports. (Mesarović, 2023, p. 21)

Approximately 50% of Serbia's electricity is generated from lignite sourced from Kolubara, contributing to around 20 billion kW hours of electricity annually (Elektroprivreda Srbije [EPS], n.d.). Moreover, the utilization of these resources was deemed beneficial for all citizens, especially considering that until April 2023, it functioned as a public enterprise, dedicated to delivering services and managing resources in the public interest. This year, it underwent the transformation into a joint-stock company. It is also worth mentioning that Kolubara played a crucial role in the October 5th changes in 2000, which marked a significant political shift in Serbia leading to the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević's regime (Barlovac, 2010). During that time, workers shut down heavy machinery and halted coal excavation, which was crucial for the production of electrical energy (Borović, 2011).

Exploring collaborative Insights: reflections on art Education and the epistemic value of place

In the forthcoming chapter, I will present excerpts from the interview with Suzana and Milena, accompanied by my reflections on the nature of their collaboration, the authors' learning experiences during the investigation of the places, and the organized walk – an art education experience aimed at a broader audience. For the continuation of this study, insights derived from participants in the walk will provide additional illumination on the epistemic value of the walk as a distinctive educational experience. Nevertheless, for the focus of this paper, emphasizing the presentation of the work itself takes precedence.

At the start of the discussion, Suzana, the scientist, mentioned that participating in art-science projects gave her the freedom to take more risks in her research.

> It's not enough for me to do what I do every day; I needed to take an extra step. Trying something more challenging was a necessity. It's okay to experiment; nothing detrimental will happen to us. It may seem like a game, but in reality, the topic is very serious. Despite the gravity of the situation, it was manageable for me, thanks to the team.

The artistic practice was the exploration and learning process itself, as they did not have a predefined outcome, but as they stated: 'When we started, certain things began to unfold for us. We were very intuitive, much more so than scientific'. The following segments capture the impact of witnessing large stone blocks, highlighting the initial overwhelming impression, the contrast between distant observation and close proximity, and the emotional response to the size. By engaging with the place in an open-ended manner, the authors of the work could nurture an embodied and affective presence that contributed to

their insights in relation to the size of the place, oscillating between fascination and realization about the magnitude of the human impact.

> It was fascinating. I had never been to any mine. You're always passing by. Initially, all the emotions you know that it's not good, it's not right. But when you get there, at one point, you're fascinated, and you say, like, oh, I like this, can I really like this. You look at those stone blocks, and it really is not endless and enormous. You look and see that there is a little spot, but when you get there, you have some ambivalent emotions.

The visit to the Kolubara Basin and discussions with employees in the regeneration sector led to a penetrating awareness of the scale of human impact on the landscape. While there is an understanding of the displacement of places and changes in river courses, the landscape is something given and shapes human activities. As Suzana explains, it is the skeleton, something that cannot be changed. However, technological development has enabled an immeasurable and irreversible change in the landscape. What was considered stable due to human intervention has become ephemeral and variable. 'Most people don't engage with it; it's somewhere in the back of your mind. And then you see that there was a village, a large village, razed and erased for the needs of the mine. It's now just a matter of time before something else disappears tomorrow.' Education about sustainability often involves understanding ecological systems, the impact of human activities on the environment, and measures that can be taken to preserve the diversity of life on Earth. There is an awareness of a dramatic loss of species, and some artists, through their work, call on the public to grieve this loss. In her book 'The Age of Loneliness,' Laura Marris (2024) discusses absence-making and ecological loss within the catastrophic framework of the Anthropocene. However, this work is drawing attention to the loss of the landscape and long-term implications for the purpose of the coal extraction. Suzana explores the experience of dimension of the place:

> How much has humanity determined what will happen? We learn about these natural processes, and we know quite well what will happen. You go there, and he says, 'This was a plain 30 years ago; now it's a hill, a huge hill.' And you don't see that it's by human hands. In the city, it's okay for you. It's close to you. Yes, it's a large spatial scope, but you're used to it. But when you go to the mine, you just see, oh, there are no hills. For me, this is an insight into what we as humans have done. Often, we are not aware of the extent of these categories.

Milena also addresses the displacement of the residents:

> People were horrified, Vreoci was devastated. The residents were displaced, but the houses were not demolished. Social cases were relocated into them. And that village is like cursed; it's damaged, and someone is there. The atmosphere is very negative. The social framework truly shapes the landscape.

Kolubara has largely shaped the demographics of the surrounding areas. Settlements were displaced due to a change in land use, and the inhabitants were relocated. Milena and Suzana portrayed belonging as a multifaceted concept, influenced by occupational ties, economic factors, environmental challenges, and changing dynamics over time. There is a visible tension between the necessity for resources, particularly related to primary processing and infrastructure, and the adverse environmental impacts associated with these activities. 'And then here you say, "This is for us to have heating. Do we have an alternative?" It's a resource; why are we doing this now? You evacuate the village, no more village, the place is erased.' As I already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, and it was also highlighted by the authors, the population accepted this significant impact on

the environment because it was deemed to be in the public interest and provided social benefits.

> The newcomers are tied to the industry; all of them are linked to the mine, and they don't have a sense of belonging to the place. They feel allegiance to the company and money. They endure pollution, live in poor conditions, but the quality of their life is reflected in their salaries. They remain one of the largest collectives today. There is a breakdown in the sense of attachment to the place. There is no more sense of belonging. And that is also one of the reasons why that awareness must be raised again.

I initiated this article by questioning how the 'insidness of place,' which has clearly been disrupted by displacement and significant environmental degradation, can be nurtured. This place has become uninhabitable, consciously sacrificed for the betterment of the entire society. Narratives emphasizing the energy independence of the state cause the majority of the population to turn a blind eye to the negative effects of mining. The absence of emotional connection to this place results in a collective unawareness and, subsequently, a lack of initiative to address its issues. The goal of this artistic practice is to make visible, through visual materials, what is invisible to the majority of the population and to raise questions about the possibility of regenerating these liminal landscapes.

> This is also related to the morphology of the terrain because it's flat. You are not aware of how vast it is. When you pass through, it seems flat to you. This is the spatial analysis of visibility. Kolubara is a fairly flat terrain, so the excavation pit isn't very noticeable. The first time you pass through, you don't have a sense of how extensive it is. It's only when you start to engage, when you get to know it, that you realize it's much more than the spot you initially see. No, the mining isn't done there. It's dug here; this is destroyed; this used to be a village, but it isn't anymore. This is flat; they diverted the river here. The Kolubara River has been relocated three times.

Figure 1: Kolubara. Source: Marko Risović

One of the main activities in art education is an organized visit to Kolubara, including a walk through the recultivated areas in order to engage with the place. 'As part of a guided

group tour, visitors will explore the plant nursery and renewed forest, witness the spontaneously regenerated landscape of an abandoned mine, visit a relocated cemetery, and make a stop at the amphitheater overlooking the flowing waters of the Kolubara lake in the active mining area' (CPN, 2023).

> I did a walk, and it's such an ephemeral thing that you have to have a frame for it. I talked with the participants, and they really liked it. One girl told me, 'I was constantly traveling there the previous month, and I didn't know about it until I went on the walk.' The walk is staying in one place; it had that educational aspect. We also had a moment just to be in that place, to feel the scent.

Figure 2: The walk. Source: Marko Risović

One of the objectives of walking is to explore the potential for regeneration. Building on the previous narrative that highlighted the profound negative impact of human activities on the environment, strolling through the rejuvenated areas provides a sensorial experience with the potential for positive transformation. This specific art education practice serves as a relevant illustration of how sustainability education can instill a sense of hope by providing an opportunity for whole body learning. Eating an apple from rejuvenated orchard, has also a deep symbolic meaning of new beginnings and provides a profound metaphor for the cycle of life and growth. This deeply embodied experience does not produce knowledge about, but create haptic and lyrical relations with place that further builds sense of belonging and insidness of place.

> They gave us some apples, and that was the highlight for me. Those apples from the reforested area. You eat the apple and realize, this used to be a mine, and then someone managed to grow an orchard. It's symbolic. Food. Yes, now you are eating something that a person managed to uproot, to tidy up after themselves.

Figure 3: Plant nursery. Source: Marko Risović

Grounded in the Yugoslav concept of progress for the collective good, the whole interview captures a dual perspective – a poignant recognition of the loss of such a historical era and a stark confrontation with the adverse consequences of the actions and neglect of the process of rejuvenation after the '90s. The exploration of a specific locality reveals the layers of political systems that have influenced the land's management, evident in the lived experience of that place. We learn about the materiality and conditions of the landscape, observing its cycles closely tied to social structures and ideology.

> Yes, there's a wonderful plant nursery there, established thirty years ago, a forest nursery for reforestation needs. They stopped doing reforestation.

At the same time, there is a consistent reference to the imaginary space, such as Yugoslavia, which intertwines with the sensory experiences of the place. Not only are displaced settlements, agricultural assets, and forests lost, but in their loss, a lament for the eroded values of collectivism and social justice is also evident.

> The first mines date back to the 1950s, and you see it's not very large. Then, after about twenty years, everything accelerates and speeds up; now, with machines, you can do much more. In Venčac, the first quarry where they extracted marble blocks is small, even beautiful. But now, in just two years, they dig up more than in that entire previous period. Now they have technology. The demands are greater; construction is booming. As a society, we've gone crazy. In that sense, that progress no longer holds, but we remember the time when engineers were respected, solving problems, creating something for humanity.

The following text will remain intact, as its poetic expression transcends mere description and invites a reader into multisensorial exploration of an unused, but somewhat beautiful industrial landscape, capturing both the fascination and the incomprehensibility of the scene. This segment of the interview continues to highlight the enduring fascination with the Yugoslavian industrial heritage, while also underscoring the achievements made in science and technology that enhance the welfare of the population.

> When you come to that graveyard of old parts, some storage place, it's a pile of various components. You arrive and realize it's enormous, just a fraction of it, like a brake was there. You see that brake, and it's like half of this room. They have shovels. You look at them and step into it. It's like being on a ship; they are some auxiliary spare parts. I don't

> know if I've seen something larger. There is no movable thing on land larger than the excavator. It's enormously big. Everything there is fascinating, it's incomprehensible until you see it.
>
> You have a wall of coal in front of you, and you smell it, and you feel the warmth. You don't feel like you have to go another 300 meters to that wall. You can't grasp that size.
>
> It's because it's inhuman. You live in a city designed for humans. When you see a skyscraper, it fascinates you. it's normal for you to see a mountain range.
>
> There are those visibility limits, how far you can see details, where everything merges into each other.

How to tidy up the damage?

The aim of this article is to outline contours of pedagogy that emerged from an art-science project deeply embedded into place, questioning the power regimes that produces lost places and offering insights into the possibility for regeneration and hope. By embracing multiple ways of knowing, the project represents an illustration of art education practices that engage with the materiality of place but also with its biography, reflecting how different ideologies have produced spaces and the narratives around them. Although I did not expect that the experiences of the involved artists and reserchers would take us to a possible exploration of the narratives related to the discontinuity of the Yugoslavian state, it was a valuable insight into how investigation and learning about a particular locality can elicit memories and interpretations of those memories through the lens of what is absent. It became an account that demonstrates the importance of the interaction of the temporal and spatial dimensions when learning about what is lost, and the possibility for renewal. The symbolic significance of transforming damaged land into fertile ground is evident. This act can be interpreted as a critique of the Kolubara operations and the neglect of regeneration needs. It reflects criticism of the harmful social, economic, and environmental impacts of the current regime. Additionally, it conveys a sense of yugonostalgia – a longing for a time when the country was perceived as capable of caring for its people, meeting their existential and social needs, and fostering peace, solidarity, and unity (Maksimović, 2017). By sharing the insights aroused from the visit to the place, it was inevitable for the project's authors to draw comparisons between what once was and what exists now, interpreting these changes through the lens of political and social discontinuity. In this context, the exploration of this specific and epistemically rich locale extends beyond merely acknowledging the negative impacts of human influence. It delves into the nature and magnitude of these effects concerning the dominant ideologies that have shaped the place, particularly considering the transformations accompanying the shift from socialism to what is now recognized as a hybrid regime in Serbia (see more Popović & Maksimović, 2024). Špirić (2017), in her comprehensive study on *Ecological Distribution Conflicts and Sustainability: Lessons from the post-socialist European semi-periphery*, emphasized the significance of environmental justice in the region. She pointed out that the most intense ecological distribution conflicts[2] (O'Connor & Martinez-Alier, 1998) occur during periods of transition and privatization marked by controversial projects and an increase in material and energy flows.

Not wanting to delve further into an overly complex and extensive discussion on the transition from socialist to capitalist society, as well as the relationship of political elites to resource exploitation and the environment, I would like to conclude that artistic educational practices, with their open approach to the topic, can shed light on the extent

of changes resulting from resource exploitation. Additionally, they can open questions about the economic and political factors that mediate these changes. Given that this project primarily explores the possibilities of regenerating and reviving lost spaces, the act of walking and the sensorial exploration of the landscape provide insights into the potential reclamation of these places. As mentioned earlier, focusing on real-world problems and their causes can sometimes evoke a sense of helplessness, undermining agency. In this context, artistic educational projects highlight existing problems. They also encourage citizens to understand the economic and political factors shaping the place within the framework of time and space, prompting them to confront losses and create space for regeneration.

Walking and simply being in a place can foster a sense of belonging. Additionally, the overarching theme of this project – exploring the possibilities of liminal landscapes – implicitly raises questions about the potential for action and regeneration in a society undergoing a decades-long liminal transition. The question of belonging extends beyond approaching exploited localities and abandoned villages; it encompasses values and a specific ontology, often rooted in what no longer exists. This presents an intriguing avenue for further research.

While the project doesn't directly address memories, its exploration of a specific locality inherently calls for remembrance, confrontation, and interpretation due to its strong temporal dimension. Thus, the place under investigation isn't solely the basins of Kolubara but also the imaginary and lost spaces of Yugoslavia, with their polyphonic and contradictory interpretations. These imaginary spaces aren't what Relph (1976) conceptualizes as concrete or abstract spaces; rather, they resemble Bachelard (1994) inner spaces[3] that have emerged from the imprint of geographical and social landscapes. The further explorations could examine the role of artistic and educational practices in facilitating processes of remembrance and confrontation. The research could focus on how these practices address and reinterpret historical traumas and lost spaces, and how they contribute to collective memory and identity formation. How these spaces, though not physically present, shape and are shaped by cultural and historical narratives?

In the context of walking as a well-established artistic and educational practice, the materiality of the present landscape seems to merge with these once-existent, now-lost spaces, reflecting a complex interplay of identity. By examining places like Kolubara, researchers can uncover how these ambiguities manifest, revealing layers of socio-political beliefs and situating them within the realms of the existing, the lost, and the possible. Future studies might investigate how this integration of material and imaginary spaces impacts our perceptions of identity and place.

Notes

1 Milena Putnik, Nemanja Lađić, Suzana Gavrilović, and Milovan Milenković.

2 The term Ecological Distribution Conflicts (EDCs) was coined by Martinez Alier and Martin O'Connor (1998) to describe social conflicts born from the unfair access to natural resources and the unjust burdens of pollution.

3 Gaston Bachelard, a French philosopher and phenomenologist, in his well-known book The Poetics of Space, explores the nonmaterial realm of the psyche and how it is intertwined with and shaped by our surroundings. Bachelard delves into how our inner world, or 'inner space,' is deeply influenced by the physical and social environments we inhabit. 'Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferen t space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination' (Bachelard, 1994, p. xxxvi).

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