Cecile Sandten (Ed.)

Making the City: Transformative Processes in (Post)Industrial Urban Spaces

Evelyne Keitel, Cecile Sandten (Eds.)

CHAT
Chemnitzer Anglistik/Amerikanistik Today

Volume 12

Cecile Sandten (Ed.)

Making the City:

Transformative Processes in (Post)Industrial Urban Spaces

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Making the City: Transformative Processes in (Post)Industrial Urban Spaces
Cecile Sandten (Ed.). -
Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2025
(CHAT ; Volume 12)
ISBN 978-3-98940-064-1

Gefördert durch
DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
IN THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE
CHEMNITZ

INDUSTRIE MUSEUM CHEMNITZ

CHEMNITZ EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2025

Cover illustration: untitled, Cecile Sandten, 2023, acrylic on paper, 27 x 30 cm

Cover design: Brigitta Disseldorf

ISBN 978-3-98940-064-1

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier
Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier
Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier
Tel.: (0651) 41503
Internet: https://www.wvttrier.de
E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

Contents

Introduction – Making the City: Transformative Processes in (Post)Industrial Urban Spaces

Cecile Sandten

1. Introduction

The Industrial Revolution, which approximately started in England in 1770 and spread to other European cities and innovation hubs before finally taking root in the United States and the British Empire's colonies in the middle of the nineteenth century, was marked by "*progress, expansion, and mobility*" (Frawley 2008: 403; italics in oirginal). As Robert C. Allen writes,

> The steam engine, the cotton spinning machinery, and the manufacture of iron with coal and coke deserve their renown, for invention on this scale was unprecedented, and it inaugurated an era of industrial expansion and further technological innovation that changed the world. (Allen 2009: 1)

Societies underwent profound cultural and economic transformations that impinged on all facets of human life, particularly on city dwellers toiling long hours dictated by the clock. In the new urban centres, both in Western and Eastern Europe as well as in North America, coal and steel factories with gigantic chimneys and industrial machinery were erected that seemed to reach for the sky. Manchester, Łódź, Plzeň, Duisburg/Essen, Milan, Katowice, Lille, Delmenhorst, Chemnitz, or Pittsburgh and later Detroit, and many more soon became the epitomes of a rapid and all-encompassing process of industrialisation, modernisation, change and – albeit differentially allocated – economic wealth. With the start of mass production, the need for unskilled labour was so great that not only the poor non-trained workers but also their children were commonly exploited for labour in factories in industrialised cities and centres.

At the same time, the age of industrialisation was also invested with enormous hope and optimism, what Allen (2009: 7) terms the "cultural evolution," and "a scientific attitude [which] had to replace superstition for technological progress" (ibid.: 8). It was an era that seemed to also promise that the myth of upward social mobility would indeed come true, with immigrants often playing an important role in the shaping and making of the industrial city and its culture. However, when the fires of the steel industry eventually, and metaphorically speaking, burned out, it became obvious that the incipient structural changes had inevitably set new challenges for the industrial cities and regions.

The conference "Making the City: Transformative Processes in (Post)Industrial Urban Spaces," – the foundation for this edited volume – which was convened from 29 June – 1 July 2023 at the Chemnitz University of Technology, was most

appropriately opened in the Assembly Hall (Aula) of the Vocational School Centre for Technology I, Industrial School in Chemnitz. When we were looking for venues that might not only allow us to be located in the Chemnitz' city centre, but also fit in with the conference topic, the Industrial School came to mind as an appropriate venue. The school was built from 1924–28 and designed by Friedrich Wagner-Poltrock. Despite its castle-like appearance, it is a rationally constructed school building. At the time it was built, it was considered the largest vocational school in Germany. This fact also tells us a lot about Chemnitz as a centre of industrialisation at that particular time. Most fittingly, in the upper floor hall the painting "Der Schaffende Mensch" (the creative man) by Chemnitz painter Gustav Schaffer (1881–1937) is displayed. It was crafted in 1928 and also epitomised for us the topic of the conference, "Making the City." The painting depicts several men from different professions: prominently on the left side, nude male labourers work at a steel melting furnace; many other men can be seen at work in the building sector and there is one man who obviously is in the process of planning. The mural displayed at the front of the school's auditorium was reinstalled in 2014, after a long absence and its subsequent restoration.

Having briefly introduced the school as well as the painting, it is, perhaps, also necessary to take a short look at Chemnitz itself, since it was the venue of our conference: A Modern City – once named "City of Modernity," and, perhaps, more precisely a (post)industrial, (post)socialist urban space in constant transformation. Chemnitz, an industrial city, then known as the "Rußstadt" (soot city) or the "Manchester of Saxony," or "the Saxon Manchester" also witnessed this dramatic turn of history, its inhabitants confronting significant social, cultural, and economic changes during the industrial period and after.

Located in the heart of Saxony, Chemnitz is the northern gateway to the Ore Mountains. As the name of the "Ore Mountains" already suggests, ore mining was one of the principal industries from the twelfth century onwards, with a strong focus on ore and silver mining – and a large immigration of workers from northern Italy. The city's multifaceted architecture reflects its more than 800-year-old history. During the nineteenth century, Chemnitz was a flourishing and prosperous centre of the textile industry, apart from the automobile, locomotive and mechanical engineering industries. It thus became known as the "Manchester of Saxony" and, by the late 1920s, had 350,000 inhabitants, developing into the third-richest city of Germany at that time (cf. Chemnitz Kulturhauptstadt Europas 2025, Chronik, 2024).

The devastating air raids during World War II left most of the city in ashes, so that post-war reconstruction during GDR times consisted of both low- and high-rise prefabricated housing known as 'Plattenbau.' In addition, for ideological reasons, the city's name, Chemnitz, was changed to Karl-Marx-Stadt (1953–1991). The 7.10-metre-high Karl-Marx monument by Lev Kerbel, built in 1971 – the second-largest bust of a head in the world, nicknamed 'Nischel' (a Saxon word for head) –