

Placefulness: A philosophical walk at Diogenes Village, Medimurje, Croatia

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Abstract: This paper will describe the development of the method, report the results of a philosophical walk at Diogenes Village (Medimurje) and offers an explanation for the philosophical nature of walking: “placefulness”. Harteloh’s method for philosophical walks developed from a free search for a (“your”) place in nature to a structured Socratic exercise. The walk at Diogenes village was demonstrating the method. Citations of philosophers from eastern or western tradition were handed out (randomly) to participants. They were asked to come up with a concept (neologism or combining words allowed) suiting both the citation and a place they encountered during the walk. After conceptualization, the conceptualizer is questioned by the other participants and asked to choose one of the questions, not to be answered but to walk with during the rest of the walk. The conceptualization and questioning mark the walk as Socratic exercise. The citations guarantee the philosophical content of the concepts formed. The person is the connecting element between place and concept. In their order of appearance the concepts form a kind of story expressing the morale of the walk for the group. In accordance with the nature of Diogenes’ philosophy, the concepts formed during this particular walk were not read as a rational meaning theory, but as a kind of poem.

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“Placefulness” - a modification of mindfulness - is a conceptualizing of the philosophical walk as such. It is the place that triggers the conceptualization, filling the mind of the participant for the present moment by a concept expressing personal or situational wisdom.

Key-words: philosophical walk; philosophical practice; Diogenes Village; placefulness; International Conference on Philosophical Practice - ICPP;

Introduction

The International Conference on Philosophical Practice (ICPP) is a two-yearly meeting of philosophical practitioners from all over the world. It is an exchange of information and experience by lectures and workshops transcending countries and cultures. The first ICPP was held in Vancouver, Canada (1994), and after that in European countries, the United States, South-America, Russia and Asia. This summer, the 18th ICPP was in Zagreb, Croatia. It was concluded with a philosophical walk in Diogenes Village, a cluster of buildings near Medimurje, situated on the edge of a valley, suitable for courses or groups on retreat. The walk was demonstrating a method for philosophical practice. In this paper, we will describe the development of this method, report the philosophical walk conducted at Diogenes Village and offer an explanation for the philosophical nature of walking: “placefulness”. The paper is partly based on an interview of Chiaki Tokui with Peter Harteloh about the origin and development of his philosophical walks and on an explanation of the idea behind Diogenes Village by Luka Janeš. The paper is not a theoretical treatise, but a case report aiming to inform readers about a happening at the 18th ICPP.

Philosophical walks

A source of a philosophical walk should be philosophical. This seems obvious, but raises a very difficult question: What is philosophical? Easy answer is to refer to the history of philosophy as it is taught at

universities. The first philosophical walk is encountered in the “Phaedrus” of Plato (2005), which is the only dialogue of Plato situated outside the city of Athens. Socrates takes his partner out for a walk in the countryside and they are looking for a place to philosophize. The dialogue implies there are places more suitable for philosophizing than others, so we have to look for them, interpret them (why is it a good place for philosophizing?), interact with the place and use it for facilitating the arising concepts and thoughts. And, as Plato is considered one of the founding fathers of Western philosophy, a walk in line with the idea expressed in his dialogue “Phaedrus” can rely on a firm philosophical ground.

We can also refer to philosophers walking. For instance, Nietzsche walking up and down the Swiss mountains musing about existence, Kant every morning on the same time on the same route in the city of Königsberg (Germany) developing a system of thoughts, Aristotle in the Greek Agora while teaching, Heidegger in the black wood (Germany) while thinking about thinking and Nishida Kitaro mirroring nature on the philosopher’s path (Kyoto, Japan). Walking seems to be a neglected part of philosophy. If you look at the works of the philosophers mentioned, you see them mirroring the style of walking. Take for example Kant walking very regularly every morning, same route, same time, and the very strict, rigid structure of his work, versus Nietzsche storming the mountains and urging character of his treatises. The works of a philosopher seems to match the style of walking. That was an idea behind Harteloh’s walks: to highlight a process of philosophizing that we do not see, that is not present in its outcome (books, papers), and is actually a philosophical practice. In philosophical practice, we focus on philosophizing (Achenbach, 2010), therefore we should walk.

The most complicated answer is a theory, i.e. a philosophical theory underlying a walk makes it a *philosophical* walk. Walking is a practice connecting the mind with the body, the rhythm of the pace stimulating a particular kind of thinking, i.e. philosophizing. The philosophizing is connected with posture, the physical position of the moving body in time-space. When studying the difference between Eastern and Western philosophy, we can notice a different attitude towards posture, the way people sit or stand in order to philosophize. Posture is often an explicit part of Eastern philosophy – yoga or Zen and other meditational exercises – while not being present in Western philosophy.

It is part of the process producing different kind of philosophies. So in order to bring back the importance of posture in philosophizing, Harteloh started to walk. The walk connects body and mind, captures the rhythm of thinking and is expressed in a philosophy suiting the style of the particular philosopher.

Developing a philosophical walk

Peter Harteloh (from Holland) conducted his first philosophical walks at the International School of Philosophy (ISVW), a place situated in the middle of the Netherlands in a rural environment of woods and heather. His walks developed from a free search for meaningful places (“finding *your* place”) in nature to a structured Socratic exercise. After the instruction (“find your place”), Harteloh read the first part of Plato’s Phaedrus to prime the mind of the participants, before leaving the classroom and walking out into the heather rather freely, keeping silent during the walk, reading Stoic texts on nature at predetermined places and returning to the classroom to discuss the experience of the participants to end up in an investigation of experience as such. In due course more and more structure was added to this kind of walking. Participants were asked to choose their (“your”) spot on which they stopped and the participant could explain his/her relationship with the particular spot. As in this way the conceptualization could become very personal or psychological (participants recalled for example emotional life events), Harteloh started to use philosophical quotations to guard the philosophical character of the walk. Quotes are chosen according to the particular group. For a group of philosophers, citations from Eastern and Western philosophy throughout history are used. However, in a walk for a school, teachers, or managers, citations out of the history of philosophy about learning, teaching, managing, etc., are used so that quotes are adapted to the theme of the group walking. Participants are asked to look for a spot fitting the quote *and* the concept they read in it. For this, philosophical knowledge is not required. Academic interpretations are even to be avoided. The quote is interpreted in a personal way and the participant is looking for his/her spot. Actually, the person mediates between concept and place. In order to maintain the philosophizing during the walk after conceptualization, Harteloh introduced the questioning. Other participants were allowed to

question the participant on the spot chosen in a Socratic way, i.e. non-judgmental or just curious, but trying to understand the conceptualizing person. One question ("the best question") is chosen by the conceptualizer on the spot, not to be answered, but for meditation during the remaining part of the walk. So, first the participant walks with the quote and its concept, and after conceptualizing at the spot suiting the quote and the concept, the participant walks with a question until the end of the walk. Thus, the walk developed into a Socratic exercise (Harteloh, 2013; 2015; 2021; Harteloh & Mochizuki, 2009). The conceptualizing and questioning mark the Socratic character of the walk. The quotes handed out guard the philosophical content, deepen the thoughts and make the walk a philosophical experience. The facilitator guards the Socratic character of the questions during the questioning. The regressive abstraction concluding the Socratic Method as developed by Nelson (1922) and Heckman is replaced by a narrative construction. After finishing the walk, Harteloh asks the participants to work on a common story, a narrative capturing (all) the concepts produced during the walk. The story is a metaphor with meaning for the particular group at the particular place. Such a metaphor is a desirable conclusion of philosophical exercises we conduct in philosophical practice, a lesson to remember and take home.

Diogenes Village

Peter Harteloh was grabbed instantly by the idea of Luka Janeš, the organizing host of the 18th ICPP, to conduct a philosophical walk at Diogenes Village. Diogenes the cynic (423-413 B.C.E.) can be considered one of the most practical philosophers ever. He became famous for his unconventional behavior that challenged societal norms, such as living in a jar and public masturbation. He wrote no books or theoretical treatises, nor did he lecture to groups, but he put philosophy into practice by living according to his ideas (Roubineau, 2023). This is a hall mark of philosophical practice (Hadot, 1995). Therefore, a philosophical walk suits the philosopher and the place it was named after. It is a way to live philosophical concepts at least for the time walking. Luka Janeš met the idea of a Diogenes Village in 2017. It was connected with his biography. While attending a doctoral study in philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies of the University of Zagreb, Luka's mentor

Hrvoje Jurić forwarded an email arrived to the address of the Croatian Bioethical Society, with an interesting content and a phenomenological very gripping vision in it. At that time, its direct meaning and intentional marker were not yet completely clear to Luka, but he was quite fascinated by the very name "Diogenes Village", behind which the visionary philopractic project of Zlatko Bacinger, a museum worker and journalist from Međimurje, was hiding. Zlatko believed that philosophers, practitioners or bioethicists might like his vision which has been developing for almost twenty years and which he intended to realize in the near future. He wanted to arrange a living, physical natural space of freedom for philosophical thought in the picturesque surroundings and nature of Frkanovac, a small town near Čakovec, located an hour and a half drive from Zagreb with an imagined emphasis on the conceptual mix and transgression of hedonistic elements of spa facilities and accommodations decorated with various philosophical creative motifs, aphorisms and signposts. Diogenes of Sinope was envisioned as the main symbolic character of this original project, a village in a valley scattered with philosophical paths and paths that lead along a nearby stream in the grove. Some of them climb hills, some cross symbolic bridges, but all in the direction of wisdom and the elevation of an individual's life energy by staying in this natural oasis of philosophical practice. The continuation of the correspondence followed and in the context of this article – it strives for the leading footsteps of Peter Harteloh's philosophical walk, along the winding green roads and bridges of Diogenes Village.

Zlatko Bacinger thinks that Diogenes' ancient, yet timeless thought is exactly what his Village story reflects. Zlatko believes man has distanced himself from nature – both in the context of natural, inhuman wilderness, and his own primordial human nature. Under the pressure and the screams of technology and various ideologies, he has lost his orientation and harmony, he has lost the ability to stop, calm down and breath. Zlatko believes that man needs a short, concentrated weekend away from the city's hustle and bustle into a concentrated philosophical-meditative oasis of hedonism and thus created Diogenes Village. A coincident brought Diogenes Village at Luka's path again after the first email correspondence remained resting for years. Since 2016, Luka Janeš has been involved, at the invitation of the event host – the lovely Andreja Cerić – in the facilitation of philosophical cafes in Zagreb. A series of events held every

Saturday in the very heart of Zagreb, of which all of involved can be very proud. And above all, to the fact that after decades of domination of sectarian-sacral Marxoid philosophizing behind “academic towers, cabinets and circles” of the Croatian ground, weekend public manifestations of philosophical breathing took place at Saturday meetings within public spaces of Zagreb downtown.

Luka Janeš underlines back than philosophy truly began to breathe publicly in Croatia, almost in “natural” matter, almost cosmo-mechanically and where exceptionally interesting, significant people with an inherently emphasized philo-practical approach gathered. Arriving from a truly diverse spectrum of disciplines, domains and existentialities/desires, in discussions traveling on various intellectual appetites. Among the people concerned, in the summer of 2023 continuation of the philo-cafe cycle in Zagreb, already at the twilight of the Covid social measures, a man with a well-known name and an even more well-known project – Zlatko Bacinger and his “Diogenes Village” was present. Which, according to his enthusiastic words, is in the phase of their imminent official opening, after developing the idea for more than 20 years. This physical meeting with the idea revived the old electronically exchange and was a next step in realizing it. For realization another coincidence was in place. Exactly during that period, more precisely in June 2023, at the 17th ICPP Timisoara 2023, Zagreb was voted as the location of the next ICPP meeting, with Luka Janeš as the proud president of the symposium organizing committee. There was no doubt – Luka sent Zlatko an invitation to open Diogenes Village as part of the official program of the meeting. Realizing that this was the best possible opportunity. Logosly fateful, one would say, without exaggeration and coercion placed in the frame of the phrase “now or never!!” Regarding the logos-causal momentum, for the opening of the Diogenes Village, Luka considered there is truly no more significant and appropriate person to do a philosophical walk than Peter Harteloh from Holland.

A Walk at Diogenes Village

The walk was conducted on the final day of the 18th ICPP. Late afternoon, 14th June, participants arrived at Diogenes Village and enjoyed an informal congress dinner at standing tables, sitting in the grass or on

tree trunks. The discussion was lively. After that, Harteloh took the floor and explained the idea of philosophical walking to the group. Conceptualization, a basic philosophical competence (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996), is practiced. Participants are given quotes from philosophers and asked to formulate the underlying and find a place that fits both the quote and the concept it embodies. He stressed this is not about "official" academic interpretations, but about the thoughts that arise in the individual when considering the quote in relation to the environment. The allocation of the quote drawn from eastern or western philosophy is random. The place for conceptualization is the choice to be made. During the walk only one choice is allowed. The place has to fit the quote and the concept participants read in the quote. After choosing your spot, you will walk with a question posed by the other participants.

The golden rule is: we walk or we talk, i.e. we will walk in silence and stop at place of conceptualization to listen and question. Talking during the walk will disturb the process of thinking and relating to the environment. Participants will absorb the surroundings and connect citation, concept and place when the mind is filled by the surroundings.

Thus structured, the philosophical walk is like life itself, a process in time-space that encounters fate (the random allocation of a quote) and demands attention, choices, and understanding. It is an interplay between life and understanding; a life without understanding is empty, but so is understanding without life. We choose our place, a decision under conditions of uncertainty. A better place might emerge, but it might also not appear. We live with the decision and continue walking with a question chosen out of a questioning by other participants. The question is not answered publicly, but just for the particular participant to walk with as exercise to live with a question. The participants questioning have to realize their question will not be answered. Informative (What), opposing (But not) or psychological (Why) questions are of no use. The question has to be performativity in order to serve the conceptualizer during the rest of the walk.

The walk conducted at Diogenes Village is the demonstration of an idea. We will all walk and participants are invited to conceptualize when they feel so. Not all will be provided with a quote. Some will observe and question the conceptualizers. Others will get the opportunity to conceptualize. Thus, we start to walk.

Walking and thinking

We walk through the valley to a small path that leads us into the woods (picture 1). The grass is green and tall. The sun is high, and its warm rays create a pleasant feeling. The silence is impressive. After days of discussions and interactions at the congress, the group enjoys contemplation in nature.



Picture 1. A philosophical walk in silence

The first conceptualizations occur as we stand at the beginning of a path that leads us from the valley into a forest. We then make our way along a narrow path in a light forest. The path takes us over a bridge and leads to a steep climb. At the top, a deer appears, inspiring to new concepts. Conceptualizations at the same place show that a place can generate different ideas. Man, with his personal history, is the human link. The conceptualization is personalized, for example the bridge player, choosing a bridge to conceptualize and connect a philosophical wisdom with his being in a place. Or the deer we met was linked to a quote. We take our time. The walk takes longer than planned, but the participants don't mind, they enjoy the walk and do not want to finish it without conceptualization. But our time is coming to an end and indeed the final conceptualization is summarizing the walk in an Indian style. Via a circuit through the forest, we descend back to the valley and the place where we had enjoyed dinner for some concluding remarks.

The concepts in order of appearance and the corresponding quote:

1. Cronos: "A single conversation with a wise man is better than ten years of study" (Chinese Proverb).
2. Only: "Know Thyself" (Delphi Oracle to Socrates).

3. We-here: "Life without reflection is not worth living" (Socrates).
4. Unlearning: "Learning without thought is labor lost" (Confucius).
5. The Bridge: "A good teacher is like a candle, it consumes itself to light the way for others" (Mustafa Kemal Ataturk).
6. Being-becoming: "The obstacle is the path" (Zen).
7. Uncertainty of being: "One cannot step into the same river twice" (Heraclitus).
8. Prison-freedom: "Man is born free and yet he is everywhere in chains" (J-J Rousseau).
9. Deer: "To be is to be perceived (Esse est percipi)" (George Berkeley).
10. Abundance: "A life without philosophy is empty, a philosophy without life too" (Peter Harteloh).
11. The samsara-spiral: "When the way comes to an end, change. When you have changed, go on" (I Ching).

The conceptualization led to different kind of concepts. There were verbs, nouns, neologisms, and names. They capture the meaning of the quote for the individual participant, inspired by the place. The link between concept and quote cannot be understood without contemplating the place. They capture the reflection during the walk ("Only", "We-here"), the content of a quote ("Unlearning", "Uncertainty of being", "Prison-freedom"), express the process the participants go through ("Cronos", "Abundance", "Being-becoming"), personal experiences ("Bridge"), responded to contingency (the deer we met in the wood and that was perceived in order to be), ending up in a moral ("Samsara-spiral"). Also different conceptualizations occurred at the same places (2, 3 and 6-8) showing the person as intermediate between the concept and place. Here we deviate from Plato. The relationship between place and concept is not eternally fixed, but the person and her history is in between. Conceptualization is a general human competence, a philosophical practice for the individual person. It was practiced in the freedom of Diogenes Village.

Narrative construction

After three days of meetings marked with the timetable completely filled with a number of presentations and workshops, the participants of

the philosophical walk returned from the woods with fresh, delightful, especially meaningful faces. With an emphasis on the leader or facilitator Peter, whose proud, red-cheerful face made it clear that the steps were purposeful and fruitful, and that Diogenes Village is opened in the proper fashion by the next step: a narrative abstraction, i.e. constructing a story containing the meaning of the walk for the particular group. Harteloh called it a narrative construction as counterpart of the regressive abstraction in the original (Neo) Socratic method (Nelson, 1922).

The group is asked to come up with a story using all the concepts that came up during the walk, leave no concept out (“leaving a concept out is leaving the person out”) and reach consensus about that story. For this the concepts are presented in order of appearance and they usually suggest a story. The story can be a theory, a metaphor or even a poem. It represents the meaning of the walk for the group at the particular place, i.e. no general theory but a lived experience. It is the moral of the exercise to be taken home. The construction of the story usually requires about one hour. As this time was not available, the exercise at Diogenes Village was concluded with a poem by putting all concepts formed into one free floating sentence: *Cronos shows itself only as we-here, unlearning to bridge the being becoming with an uncertainty of being as a prison of freedom, symbolized by a deer in abundance, reflecting the spiral of Samsara*. This association of concepts suits the character of Diogenes better than a formal Socratic evaluation of our experiences. Diogenes considered poetry a better outcome of philosophy than a theory (Roubineau, 2023).

In a recursive move Harteloh conceptualized the poem by “placefulness”. A concept coined in the work of the artist Odell. It is playing with the well-known concept mindfulness on the one hand and with the placelessness of current internet use with persons in virtual reality on the other hand: “Against the placelessness of an optimized life spent online, I want to argue for a new ‘placefulness’ that yields sensitivity and responsibility to the historical (what happened here) and the ecological (who and what lives, or lived, here)” (Odell, 2019). Placefulness is being in a particular place, conscious and intentional. It is a form of intentionality. It can be defined as: paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, to the places we are in. The walk at Diogenes Village expressed the intentional focus on being, but also the appearance of a deer or the personal life of a bridge player standing on a bridge were linked to a place

and a philosophical quote. The concluding of the 18th ICPP played a role in the first and last conceptualizations. Overall, the poem is an expression of wisdom carried by the participants of the 18th ICPP. The concepts in order of appearance merging to a sentence with meaning is a sign of their good corroboration, a kind of morale for and by practical philosophers at a meeting to exchange ideas. Thus, the demonstration of a philosophical walk was concluded. The sun set, the temperature dropped, and the bus took us back to Zagreb.

Conclusions

A philosophical walk is an exercise in living philosophy. While conceptualizing and questioning in relation to a place, participants philosophize in a way that resembles life as a process in time-space with contingency, uncertainty, existential choices, deliberated consequences, questions without an answer and metaphors expressing (collective) meaning. The philosophizing is facilitated by the rhythm of the walk as the works of great philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kant or Nishida show. The questioning and conceptualizing mark the walk as a Socratic exercise. Result is a philosophy in relation to the particular person and place, not a theoretical abstraction. Thus structured, a philosophical walk is a method of philosophical practice enabling participants to enjoy a general human competence: philosophizing.

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