Appropriation of Public Spaces in Transition
During an intensive week-long programme at the beginning of July 2014, 33 master and PhD students, as well as practitioners from the fields of urban studies, joined the lectures on theory and methods provided by 13 academics from the United States, Germany, France and Austria.

The first Vienna Summer School in Urban Studies 2014, organised by the University of Vienna and The Graduate Centre at City University New York, focused on public spaces as explicit physical urban places shaped by structural and architectural functions. Our understanding of urban public spaces is based on the assumption that they are constantly changing and that their meanings, identities and functions are being permanently renegotiated by the actors involved in those processes. Significant divergences in the general idea of public space – and of its quality and quantity – may lead to the dissatisfaction of all actors involved: Municipalities, which must respond to the complex needs of civic society as articulated in media and public debate and in the context of budget constraints; investors, who are often unaware of the need for high quality public spaces or how quality is defined by residents and visitors; architects and spatial planners, who focus predominately on the physical environment and can be prone to undervaluing the social dimension of public spaces; heterogeneous urban societies, whose needs and habits are highly fragmented and difficult to communicate in a well-balanced fashion; and marginalised groups, whose experience is often one of exclusion, instead of low-threshold accessibility and possibilities for participation when faced with con-
sumption-oriented public spaces. The differing expectations and needs on the one side and diverse constraints on the other make public spaces highly contested territories.

The fields of action to be considered when analysing urban public spaces range from the impact of global trends – such as neoliberalism – on new urban policies, to everyday appropriations at the local level. The relationship between macro trends and micro scale actions manifests itself in ongoing transition processes, located in urban public spaces which are both spaces of difference and arenas of interaction where existing power relationships are challenged.

During the summer school, participants drew from their experiences, for instance, at Taksim Square in Istanbul or the Maidan in Kiev. However, less overtly political examples of the appropriation of public spaces can be shown in the Viennese context too. They may refer to places of memory and the exclusion of certain group memories from public spaces or places of interim use. For instance, Susana Zapke from Konservatorium Wien City of Vienna University, highlighted during her lecture “Vienna as the City of Music” the militarisation and instrumentalisation of public spaces in Vienna during the early 20th century. Or, Joseph Heathcott from The New School in New York City, provided examples of informal renegotiations of public spaces, for example Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong during Sunday picnics.

The interconnections between theoretical input, methods and fieldwork provided the foundation for lively discussions, individual reflections and joint group work. In six different groups, the participants had the chance to reflect on the qualities and functions of urban public spaces and their daily appropriations in Viennese case study areas. Using different methods of data collection, inquiry and communication they also questioned their own appropriation practices and their
position as researchers and activists, as well as consumers and producers of public spaces. The results of this work are presented in this brochure which invites the reader to participate in narratives of public spaces.

This brochure not only documents the enormous richness of the debates during the Vienna Summer School in Urban Studies. It is also a thank you to every single person who contributed to this unique programme. Particular thanks go to the highly engaged participants from all over the world and our committed academic colleagues. We would also like to thank the University of Vienna, the Department of Geography and Regional Research, the Faculty of Earth Sciences, Geography and Astronomy, the Students’ and Faculty’s Council for providing us with space and assistance with a variety of organisational matters. We would like to thank our colleagues at the department for their hands-on assistance and patience for special requests. Also, thanks to all our colleagues at universities and research institutions all over the world who spread the word about our summer school. Our generous sponsors Sonnenstor, allineed and EZA made long and hot working days easier for all participants. Last, but not least, we thank the Vienna Science and Technology Fund (WWTF) who made the summer school possible, kicked off future collaborations and provided the starting point for a series of Vienna Summer School in Urban Studies.

We look forward to welcoming you at the Vienna Summer School in Urban Studies in summer 2015!
THE PROJECTS
This mini-project examines trams and cafés in Vienna, exploring how these two spaces are lived through people’s everyday life. Both spaces are fluid: people negotiate their practices vis-à-vis trams and cafés in multiple ways and experience those spaces as a ceaseless gradation between the public and the private. At first glance, trams and cafés are not open spaces, yet the boundary between the interior and the exterior is not so clear. Cafés in fashionable areas usually blend themselves into the streets, allowing the sedentary customers to melt into the ever changing street scenes. The trams are certainly physical containers, but as they traverse the city passengers get on and off, connecting trams with the stops, food stalls, their destinations and making the city landscape one of constant flux. Space extends and intertwines. People invent their own enclaves in trams and cafés: reading, waiting, talking, working or watching.

Indeed people mostly mind their own business. Nonetheless, the imposed and/or voluntary physical proximity and intimacy between strangers disrupts and complicates the privacy of those practices. What’s more, both are spaces subject to constant flows of people, objects, sounds, conversations, information, ideas, etc. It is in the presence of strangers and such flows – which together allude to unpredictability – that we are able to locate the potential publicness of trams and cafés. They are sites that bring people together, allowing social interaction, generating differences and assembling identities; they do not easily fall into a static categorisation of public or private space.

“Both are spaces subject to constant flows of people, objects, sounds, conversations, information, ideas...”
Challenge to reimagine!

Uncovering hidden public spaces

Mariia Gryshchenko, Anna Kajosaari, Elina Kränzle, Jenni Kuoppa, Julian Messenzehl

Public space is where public life and everyday practices occur. Thus, it is not defined by certain physical or organisational features, rather it can be uncovered in various places which are now hidden, empty or considered “urban wasteland”. Based on from this idea, we wanted to encourage the public to rethink public spaces and challenge them to leave their own imprint on the city – even if only for a fleeting moment.

We chose two locations for the execution of the project – a traffic island on the hectic Schwarzenbergplatz in the Inner City (1st district), and a quiet neighbourhood intersection in Rudolfsheim-Fünfhaus (15th district). We interviewed passers-by about their perceptions of those spaces and alternative uses for them. Finally, the interviewees were asked to pose for the camera and momentarily claim the space with a flag stating their vision for the potential future of the space. These performative acts of bodily occupying the space were then used to create a photo essay. This kind of participatory exploration can offer rich material for researching and planning public spaces. The wishes expressed for the places were multiple and diverse. Nevertheless, the key issue in our project was not just to collect individual ideas but to encourage people to rethink the prevailing circumstances and perhaps awake in them a desire to change them. Many passers-by were interested in our experiment and temporary interactions emerged. Thus, the act of posing with the flag did not only represent the wishes, but it also made place public for a moment and embodied the claims for the place.

The methodology of momentary place-making could be used in research and planning processes or in artistic interventions. As such, it could trigger a real transformation of the urban environment and the culture of shaping our cities.

“I occupy this space for a garden”
“I occupy this space for a skatepark”

“I occupy this space for anarchy”
Time and Space  
=  
Places and Occasion

Tamara Brajvoić, Michael Dieminger,  
Eline Hansen, Lukas Schaup,  
Marta Slawińska, Martin Zettel

Using the medium of film we attempted to reveal how people's social practices in space create places of meaning through experience. Equally, we wanted to explore how film can be used as a more tangible methodological tool for ethnographic research.

Our approach was an open-ended process of gathering data and developing a methodology, with one continually informing the other. We captured specific moments of those using the space in order to illustrate how people create place through their everyday actions. In doing so we became not only aware of our own roles as observers and participants at Praterstern, but also of how our selection of moments produced a new place within the realm of film. In this respect the group work not only produced a short film, but also a process of developing a narrative for Praterstern. In undertaking this exercise we were continually reshaping our understanding of the place and our own relationship to it.

However, to quote Lefebvre, “the urban is yet to happen”; we did not want the process to end with the making of the film. We sought to capture people without essentialising them or placing value on the activities they perform so that the viewer can bring their own meaning to the space and make up their own minds about what the space means to them.

The video was screened at the exhibition “outstanding artist award für experimentelle Tendenzen in der Architektur 2014” at the “Architektur Zentrum Wien” in Vienna.
„The urban is yet to happen.“
What is the interaction between the material and the ideational concepts of memory as portrayed in the city’s public places? Do public spaces contain public memories and who manages those narratives? What purposes are served by manifesting history as a material remnant? Is memory an intangible “asset” of the city?

A small artefact can be the representation of much larger narratives. The cannonballs from the Turkish sieges of 1529 and 1683 in Vienna function as historical evidence and a material link to contested discourses around contemporary Turkish memories, immigration and national identity.

Just as silence can be as meaningful as sound, the absence of narrative or evidence can be a kind of “visual silence,” whether deliberate or a result of neglect. The few city wall visible in the 1st District of Vienna are mute – presented without explanatory text or plaques. Yet the carefully labelled model city wall at the Wien Museum Karlsplatz tells a tale of the heady days of the ‘Gründerzeit’ and the iconic neoclassical remaking of the city's centre. War also leaves places of absence, physical or mental. The green area at Morzinplatz, where the stone memorial for the victims of the Holocaust is and the temporary commemoration installation (“ZU SPÄT” by the artist Carola Dertnig, 2011) was, is often believed to be where the Gestapo HQ – the former Hotel Metropol – once stood; in fact this site is actually adjacent to it and was later replaced by Leopold Figl Hof. It therefore resonates with the cognitive silence in public space of “what happens when we forget to remember”.

We propose that narratives of history create a kind of “collective public space,” both material and imagined. Appropriations of public spaces are linked to the appropriation of memories. Appropriations in terms of commemorations may take non-monumental forms – for example, the medieval cobblestones or the “stumbling stones” (stolperstein) embedded in the city’s pavement. We ask if we can trigger curiosity about the city that once was and elicit dialogue through multi-sensory storytelling, instead of monologues on two-dimensional plaques.
As a group coming from different backgrounds, respectively a social/public designer, a social worker, an industrial/social designer and an artist, we share positive experiences with participation. However, throughout the last decades, in international research and practice, positive notions of “participation” have been increasingly shattered. Questions have been raised concerning who participates, where, when, how and what for? On a conceptual level, “participation” is considered to be politically loaded. The term runs the risk of becoming an ‘empty signifier’, especially when, through the exchange of “pretty pictures, the superficial act of “beautification” of public spaces according to the “common” rather than the “public” opinion is applauded.

In order to understand and implement participation in a more contextualized way, we wanted to go beyond presenting the results of participative strategies and address “participation” in all its complexity, as an iterative process of questioning, exploring new levels, making the invisible visible and the unexpected expected. Therefore, we decided to problematize our starting point, rather than to search for an ultimate solution, questioning the discourse on participation itself. In doing so, we appropriated the (virtual) public space by rewriting – as an experiment and as a critical statement – the definition of participation on Wikipedia based on the “democratically” generated opinion of our fellow summer school participants. Our experience of this intervention, our discussions and in response to the “Masterplan: Participation” of the Vienna municipality, we produced a short animated film as an input for, and a reflection of, the on-going discussion on participative practices.

“An appropriation in the public space”
How to identify the discourse on participation? Or: Participation is not mere communication.
Through a bodily intervention, our research set out to test the juridical and socially normative limits of human action in public space. Questioning the notion of public spaces as spaces for everyone, we viewed them as socially constructed sites that attract implicit rules on bodies and practices within them. Consequently, what could be understood as appropriate appropriations, and, equally, what could be understood as inappropriate ones? Did these limits depend on the public space in question?

Chosen as our site of intervention, the Ottakring neighborhood in west Vienna was previously home to predominantly low-income Turkish and ex-Yugoslavian immigrant groups, now experiencing an influx of middle-class residents. At the local market square, Yppenplatz, this transition is manifested visually through a sharp divide between these different urban realities. The southern side is dominated by a food and clothes market with vendors of immigrant background, while the northern side sees the establishment of new businesses catering for a more affluent clientele.

Through our visits to Yppenplatz, our senses themselves were appropriated by the seductive dynamics of this vibrant place, bringing attention to our site and people studied - what rights did we have to intervene within this setting? Urban interventions are exercises of power and should therefore be coupled with a sense of responsibility. Instead of imposing a provocative action, we decided to learn from Yppenplatz by gathering narratives from residents in exchange for our academic expertise in the urban field.
“Urban interventions are exercises of power and should therefore be coupled with a sense of responsibility.”
Participants

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