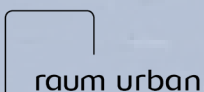


# Everyday Life, Difference and Intersectionality

Annual Reader 2023

Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space

Faculty of Architecture and Planning, TU Wien



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# PREFACE

Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Sabine Knierbein, Associate Professor for Urban Culture and Public Space  
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Urban research on the everyday lives of urban dwellers must address the growing complexities of navigating multiple crises amidst persistent political and economic polarization. Understanding these challenges requires analysing social inequalities shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, age, class background, ethnicity, and education. This approach, referred to as intersectional urban research methodology, emphasizes how these factors shape access to opportunities in the city, including participation in decision-making processes like voting and the design of urban spaces. However, urban dwellers facing such inequalities do not passively accept their circumstances. Through protest, art, and activism, they actively negotiate their positions and reshape urban spaces to better meet their needs. These dynamics are reflected in the urban fabric, where social inequalities become visible in everyday interactions, the design of public spaces, and the ways these spaces are used or claimed. This reader is the product of a collective effort to apply intersectional urban studies concepts and qualitative research methods to explore spaces in Graz. The seminar, "Everyday Life, Difference and Intersectional Urban Research," centred on a research field trip to Graz during October and November 2023, with introductory and concluding sessions in Vienna. By choosing an excursion as the primary learning format, the seminar created an immersive workshop environment. Students and lecturers, supported by local experts, investigated the socio-historical development of public spaces, urban culture, and urban planning through excursions, workshops, and exploratory research. Students selected research topics based on three overarching themes: urban cultures, public space, and urban development. This structure fostered a productive and intellectually rich collaboration between students and lecturers, culminating in this reader.

Research within the field of urban cultures examined the challenges and possibilities of contem-

porary self-organized spaces in Graz, such as the "Freiraumfest," a week-long festival connecting autonomous spaces and exploring their future potential. Other projects analysed LGBTQ+ safe spaces, focusing on their design, the sense of safety they provide, and the broader urban environment. Additionally, the barriers faced by international students in Graz were highlighted, shedding light on how these urban dwellers navigate marginalization and exclusion in their everyday lives.

Investigations into urban development addressed the housing situation in Graz, uncovering disparities between central neighbourhoods along the River Mur and more segregated housing estates on the city's western periphery. The research explored residents' perceptions of these divisions, providing critical insights into how spatial inequalities are experienced and contested.

The theme of public space was explored through a study of the Gries area in Graz, focusing on the ethnic and social composition of its residents. This research examined access to quality public spaces, which is especially critical for low-income migrant communities, revealing how these spaces support or hinder social inclusion and community-building. The seminar's structure provided a robust framework for analysing the interactions between social structures and urban environments. By focusing on the everyday experiences and embodied interactions of urban dwellers, the research illuminated how social inequalities are negotiated and reproduced within urban spaces. These projects demonstrate the potential of intersectional methodologies to reveal the positionalities involved in the ongoing struggles over equitable urban futures.

This reader reflects the combined efforts and insights of everyone involved in the seminar's research projects. Their commitment have enriched this work, ensuring it offers a valuable resource for understanding the challenges and possibilities of creating inclusive and equitable urban futures.





# ABOUT THE COURSE

Lena Kalmbach

The seminar “Everyday Life, Difference and Intersectionality in Urban Studies” at the Technical University of Vienna, which took mainly part on an excursion in Graz, deals with different levels of social differences and inequalities in urban spaces. There are different kinds of unequal opportunities for people in urban spaces, in the form of different levels of occupancy, opportunities to participate in urban development processes, presence or absence in urban spaces, or choices about where to live. Disadvantages and discrimination based on socioeconomic factors such as origin, race, religion, sex, gender, etc. are often present in urban spaces and people who have to face them have less use and benefit from the city and worse living and housing situations. These issues and problems are the subject of intersectional urban studies. Intersectionality is defined by socio-economic factors that create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

But how does this relate to spatial planning? Intersectionality, or more precisely different forms of inequality, deprivation and discrimination, takes place in urban spaces. They can be seen in people's everyday lives, in their routines and habits, but also in the architecture and design of public spaces and how they are used. There are ways to resist these inequalities in forms of protest, artistic and activist practices, as well as alternative and socially innovative forms of use.

In this seminar we explored more about difference and Intersectionality and how it is closely connected to people's everyday life. In addition to the analytical basis of the research, we engaged in a practical exercise in Graz using an ethnographic research approach, and triangulating interviews with observations. In five groups of two to three students we identified our own research topic and formulated our own research questions, carried out the research and wrote a scientific essay to present

and discuss our final results with the rest of the students. As a collective of students, we created this reader assembling all the research papers as a final result of our seminar.

As you can see in this reader, the topics of everyday life, difference and Intersectionality are more complex than you might think at first.

# TELLING ABOUT GRAZ

Aglaé Dumez, Emma Neuner, Miguel Ureña Pliego

During the excursion, we received valuable insights from experts in Graz. Our first encounter was with Hermann Götz, a professor at Kunstuniversität Graz and the coordinator of the UNESCO project "European Capital of Culture" in 2003. We explored the city, from Lendtplatz to Stadtpark, passing through Schlossberg. Professor Götz shared details about the project's architecture, the Kunsthaus, the transformation of the Lendplatz neighbourhood over the past decade and the social divide between the left and right banks of the Mur River. This turned out to be a topic throughout all the lenses we looked at the city. Anke Strüver, a geography professor at Uni Graz, sharpened our perception and provided inside knowledge about platform economies. She as well highlighted the distinction between "workers" on the eastern side and "clients" on the western side.

Our meeting with Vice-mayor Judith Schwentner and the city planning administrator provided an opportunity to inquire about the city council's perspectives on various topics, although they left us with more questions than answers. Following our meeting with local artist Daniela Brasil, focusing on Austria's colonial history and offering us different accesses to perceive the world and to gain knowledge, we visited the Exhibition "Protest". Here, we learned how protests, on all the political spectra influenced Graz's society and led to transformative changes. Aglaée Degros, the head of the Städtebau Institute at TU Graz, generously allowed us to use her office for our essays and ideas, offering valuable contacts and information on Graz's public spaces.

On Wednesday we visited the Triestersiedlung to discuss social housing with "Graz Wohnen". We observed the ongoing changes and the use of space by the residents. It is debatable how participation is actually practised and applied, i.e. revitalising the housing stock, but Graz is once again addressing

the need for affordable housing, which is reflected in the shrinking waiting list for social housing.

At the Kunsthaus, Matthias Mitteregger initiated a discussion on transportation, focusing on ecological and green transport. As an architect turned policy advisor, Mitteregger provided unique insights and offered a radical counter-position to the status-quo. Our last stop was at the office of Elisabeth Fiedler, the director of the Institute for Art in Public Space. She gave us an overview of the themes that artists in Styria are expressing publicly, giving examples of interventions and recent publications. We express our gratitude to all the experts for enriching our understanding of Graz and providing valuable inputs for our project. This week of discovering and walking in Graz was very helpful to understand the planning issues of the city and the way it impacts people from different backgrounds. It was especially good, thanks to the group of students that we are, that got along quite well.



Foto: Augarten, Ronja Gelf, 2023

# TEACHING INTENTIONS

Sabine Knierbein, Richard Pfeifer

An important aspect and ambition of our seminar was the general concern with the appropriation and social encounter in public space or, conversely, the lack of it. By scrutinizing the ways in which individuals and communities claim public space within individual research projects, students were able to gain insights into power dynamics, social hierarchies, and the negotiation of space as a shared but also conflictual resource that is both mediator and outcome of social processes and its entanglements with the physical urban environment. As for the actual setting namely Graz, our first intuition was to go somewhere else, to visit and explore a different city than Vienna, following the ethnographic impulse to gain distance, curiosity and, ideally, a touch of estrangement. Beyond the actual location, the ambition was not to have a strict framing as offered by a common research question, but to cluster research projects around larger thematic fields such as public space, urban development or urban cultures, which would then be re-linked and brought into dialogue. In this way, we aimed at creating a body of knowledge that would shed light on the complex interplay between social inequality and the spatial dynamics that lie at the heart of ongoing urban change in Graz. While the students were offered leeway in their empirical research interests, the conceptual ground was more directive.

As the seminar engaged with the post-disciplinary field of urban studies by examining social inequality in relation to different positionalities, lecturers conveyed and furthered a relational understanding of urban space. Choosing such a theoretical point of departure has supported a thorough analysis of materialities, spatial practices, shared meanings, and societal discourses, be they official policies written in municipal reports or those encountered in the streets of Graz.

As regards the proposed research methodology and to also give enough support to the individual research teams' urban explorations, we opted for a focused urban ethnography approach. Such approaches to urban ethnography are ideal for a relatively short period of time, but need to be complemented by prior theoretical studies and rich expertise within the chosen thematic.



# THE THREE TOPICS AND INPUT FROM LOCAL EXPERTS

Sabine Knierbein, Richard Pfeifer

The selected thematic areas, which served as the overarching framework for individual research projects, also guided the integration of contextual and expert knowledge within the methodological framework of focused ethnography. Contributions from Prof. Dr. Aglaée Degros, Mag. Hermann Götz, and Prof. Dr. Anke Strüver enriched the understanding of urban culture, while Dr. Daniela Brasil and Dr. Elisabeth Fiedler provided critical reflections on the dynamics of public space. The vice mayor of Graz, Mag. Judith Schwentner, along with DI Bernhard Inninger from the City Planning Department and DI Dr. Mathias Mitteregger, contributed valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges of urban development in Graz. We extend our gratitude to these experts, as well as to the TU Wien Institute of Spatial Planning, for their invaluable guidance and support.

Beyond the practical aim of ensuring well-structured research projects, the thematic focus also sought to address the interwoven scales of urban experience. At the macro level, the projects explored urban development within the context of strategic discourses, reflecting on past and present trajectories of the city. At the meso level, attention was given to formal and informal institutional dynamics, particularly in relation to migration, ethnic diversity, and social integration, which are integral to urban policy-making. At the micro level, the focus turned to the everyday interactions occurring in public spaces, where routines, aspirations, and tensions are continuously shaped by the actions of urban inhabitants. Rather than isolating these scales, the research emphasizes their interdependence, demonstrating how spatial expressions of social inequality are embedded across the geographies of everyday life.

To close, we would like to thank the students for their empirical and theoretical contributions, as well as for their collaborative efforts in producing

the reader. Special thanks go to Aglaée Degros and her team for their intellectual and logistical support during the field trip, as well as to Prof. DI Dr. Thomas Dillinger, Dean of Studies, for making this endeavour possible. The financial contributions provided were instrumental in ensuring that the excursion provided a socially inclusive, immersive, and hands-on learning experience for all participants.

# URBAN DEVELOPMENT

## INTRODUCTION

Sabine Bauer

The heritage of liberal planning in Graz is clearly visible and tangible in the urban space and spatially reflects the city's major challenges on a societal, social and ecological level.

For example, urban sprawl on the outskirts of the city manifests itself in almost uncontrolled (single-family house) developments. This implies an enormous consumption of land and resources. At the same time, the rapid growth of peri-urban areas is an expression of a phenomenon that Pierre Veltz in "Fractures sociales, Fractures territoriales?" describes as a centrifugal effect. The term refers to a process in which rising housing prices force parts of the population to move further and further to the outskirts of the city.

In this context, it is also to be mentioned, that despite an oversupply of existing housing, there is a shortage of affordable apartments for low-income earners in Graz. This trend, which is due to real estate speculation, is causing a considerable amount of vacancies in Graz.

As another example, the car-oriented organization and design of public spaces underpins the status quo mobility system. The mobility turnaround that is absolutely necessary from an ecological point of view - making active and collective forms of mobility more attractive and strengthen them - is also an increase in low-cost and accessible mobility solutions. Furthermore, the reorganization and use of traffic space as public space offers enormous opportunities for spatial justice and social inclusion.

All these ecological and social challenges make a paradigm shift in urban development essential.

A shift, that is based on a holistic, cross-sectoral and networked understanding of space as well as a close connection between the built environment and living systems and an increased appreciation of public space. Achieving this requires an integrated planning approach that is often hindered by rigid and outdated administrative structures that strictly separate competencies and responsibilities.

# URBAN DEVELOPMENT & SEGREGATION IN GRAZ

## THE CASE OF TRIESTERSIEDLUNG

Aglaé Dumez, Ronja Gelf

### Introduction

The social and housing situation in Graz is tense. There are conflicts between the inner city district, divided by the Mur River, as well as segregation in larger housing estates and a widening gap between the city centre and the periphery. With our research, we are investigating how people in Graz perceive the city in differently worlded urban realities

and what urban developments or endeavours there are to work on strengthening meaningful interaction and exchange, or whether there are also developments that exacerbate and worsen the situation. Private and publicly subsidised housing play an important role here.

During our sociological exploration in Graz, our focus centred on the pronounced urban division facilitated by the Mur River. A critical aspect of our inquiry was to understand the existing social disparities between the eastern and western parts of the city. Our objective was twofold: to gauge the residents' perceptions of these social differences and to discuss municipal interventions to bring about change. Drawing on insights from experts whom we engaged with during our excursion and the empirical data acquired through a field research, this paper seeks to unpack the intricate relationship between urban geography, social stratification, and municipal policies. By focusing on the Triestersiedlung, which is a very revealing neighbourhood in this context, we were able to have an insightful case about the city's urban development strategy and how it affects dwellers of this particular district.

Conceptualising socio-spatial disparities in relation to "physical barriers" (Roberto & Korver-Glenn, 2021) in cities underscores the profound impact that urban geography can exert on social dynamics, community interactions, and overall urban development. Physical barriers, ranging from natural features like rivers and mountains to man-made

structures such as highways and walls, serve not only as literal dividers but also as symbolic representations of social separation. These barriers influence patterns of movement, accessibility, and the spatial distribution of resources, contributing to the formation of distinct neighbourhoods and communities. The theory posits that these physical barriers can shape social identities, by fostering a sense of belonging and shared experiences within delimited spaces. Furthermore, they may perpetuate or exacerbate social inequalities by delineating areas of affluence and disadvantage. Considering physical barriers in cities is also crucial for urban planners, policymakers, and scholars as they seek to address the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological implications of these divisions, with the ultimate goal of promoting more inclusive, connected, and equitable urban environments. (Roberto & Korver-Glenn, 2021, p. 277–307).

Using pre-established interview guidelines, we conducted a qualitative survey among residents of Graz. We interviewed people of different age, gender, origin, place of residence and class. The interviews took place at seven different locations and neighbourhoods in the city. We asked for the awareness of social differences. These interviews gave us a good impression of the diversity of people's perspectives and showed that difference does not mean the same thing for everyone and that the aspects for well-being in the city depend on multiple factors. For most people, however, a clear social divide was noticeable between the inner and peripheral neighbourhoods and Intersectionality offered a good analytical framework to understand its implication on the mobilities within the city.

In order to give our research a thematic and spatial focus, we decided to work on the development and the people in the Triestersiedlung to identify particular issues related to the differently worlded realities. This essay shall allow us to point towards



how socio-cultural difference and inequality are actualised in the context of the housing estate.

### Historical context

Around the 12th century, most settlement of Graz was located on the eastern side of the Mur and stopped before today's Jakominiplatz. There was a moat that acted like a barrier between the inner city and the rest, while on the western side there were just a few houses.

In the mid-19th century, the city's population grew rapidly due to industrial development and the arrival of workers, all on the west side of the Mur. During this period, the main railway station was also built west of the Mur, reinforcing the demographic trend and expanding the settlement structure.

In 1892, the urban planning efforts further emphasised this separation. The workers and the industry on the western side, while the bourgeoisie, most of the public utilities and the political centre were on the eastern side. After the World War II and initial growth, the city began to shrink until Austria's entry into the EU, since when a lot of urban development has been done, focusing on the disinvested areas. More recent efforts, especially in the realm of Culture aimed reduce the socio-spatial differences (Graz Museum, exhibition on the history of Graz).

In 2003, Graz was named European Capital of Culture, allowing the city to organise cultural events throughout the year. During this time, the city also built the "Kunsthhaus" which became the museum for contemporary art or the artificial island in the river Mur.

This affected the area around Lendplatz, which used to be the "poor working people's district" with many nightclubs and sex workers. But after the construction of the Kunsthhaus in 2003, this part of the city changed and became a more cultural place (Interview, Hermann Götz).

One symbolic aspect that relates to the everyday representation of the two river banks attaches to their postal code. For the east bank it's 8010 and for the left it's 8020. A female interviewee in a park told us: "For example, when you go to buy something and the cashier asks you for your postcode, if

it's 8020, you'll immediately look at her and know that she knows. There are a lot of preconceptions about the 8020, it's a bit ingrained in people's minds."

### Social housing development in Graz - Who builds for whom?

As a fast-growing city, Graz has created a significant amount of new housing between 2015 and 2020, including many large-scale projects totalling 18,131 apartments. However, interest seems to be attracted primarily by private and institutional investors. This raises the question of whether the needs of residents or rather the interests of investors are at the forefront of new housing development in Graz. In order to establish clear guidelines for the future development of the city and its housing, the city of Graz commissioned an evaluation study in 2022. The results of this study confirm the impression that, since 2015, the proportion of owner-occupied flats in total new housing construction has been twice as high as in other provincial capitals of Austria, while the proportion of affordable housing is declining. In particular, municipal and subsidised housing for people on low incomes is inadequate compared to other provincial capitals.



Fig. 1: Advertising banner at Karlsruher Straße



Initially, the increase in rents was offset by more favourable energy prices. However, in the current economic climate in Europe, this advantage is no longer available due to rising energy costs. This also jeopardises the affordability of housing in Graz, especially for low-income population groups (Knap-Rieger et al., 2022).

During our research, we came across a recent housing project that we consider to be insightful: At Karlauer Straße 35 & Rankengasse 16, in the 8020 district, 95 privately financed owner-occupied flats are being developed by GWS. While the housing situation faced in the area would ask for more options, such as affordable, ideally publicly subsidised housing, profit-oriented housing construction is being built. Almost as intriguing is the advertising banner, which is displayed on the fallow land and which clearly addresses a more affluent public. "Who builds 'klasse' ('great' but also 'standing') flats here" reads more like "who builds class flats here". The semantic content refers to a white, heteronormative and arguably patriarchal representation of society. This does not correspond at all to the image we got of the people living in the neighbourhood when we met them on the streets or on the way to their flats.

Referring to the urban development challenges the Deputy Mayor Judith Schwentner outlines the measures the city plans to take to tackle the current problems. In particular, the plan to extend the development of planning obligations is seen as positive. Furthermore, the improvement of the quality of open spaces in housing estates and the continuous decline in the size of flats are mentioned as priorities that should be given greater attention. Participatory neighbourhood planning is mentioned, as regards the actual involvement of the population, is also a particular concern of the Deputy Mayor. This approach has already been successfully introduced in the Jakomini district (Schwentner, interview).

The report of Stoppacher (2022, p. 106-114) on the social situation in Graz lists some of the improvements that experts would like to see in the context of the social integration of disadvantaged and/or lower-income groups in the city: "An urban concept

for affordable housing with accelerated municipal housing construction and a land and property reserve that only makes acceptable rents possible if their value does not have to be 'factored' into the rent", a strengthening of the district centres as a bridge to the participation of citizens through which joint activities can be organised, concrete and socially trained contact persons who are on site in the large housing estates and provide support and mediation, as well as offers for young people and children in the larger housing estates, more "inviting, safe, clean, consumption-free" public-specific open spaces, meeting places and affordable offers, or even a social gradation of prices from energy providers (ibid).

### **Difference doesn't mean the same for everyone**

During the qualitative research process that we carried out ten interviews with people on the right and left banks of the city centre and in a peripheral area.

We found that all the interviewees were well aware that there are social differences between the two sides of the Mur. However, their perception of these inequalities varied from person to person. While one person we met in the Smart City neighbourhood shared his humanist ideas with us by saying "All people are equal, there is no difference between the right bank and the left bank, we all live on the same planet", others told us about the different postcodes, which can be a stigma. The vast majority of interviewees said they were aware that the population on the east bank was disadvantaged. "I see people drinking and taking drugs in Triestersiedlung. The people on the other side look richer", said a female employee of a bakery. Despite the fact that perceptions of differences vary from person to person, we were able to verify that these differences are widely perceived and still present.

Such perception however were not followed by political engagement against inequalities. A girl on a bakery terrace : "if I knew that there was an action taken somewhere, maybe I would participate, but I know nothing and I don't know where to look" . Plus, the workers that don't have any time

to think about how their neighbourhood could be a better place because they oscillate between work and looking after their household and their children. It's clear that political engagement depends on a person's daily commitments, the availability of information and the ability to plan ahead.

One of the women we interviewed told us: "I don't have any friends, I just come home from work and take care of my children. On the week-end, when I go outside, it's just to do the groceries." This shows how some non-privileged working class and mostly female-read dwellers, have multiple caring responsibilities on top of their regular employment which both are critical hurdles to political participation.

### **Zooming-in: The Triestersiedlung then and now**

Close to the industrial area of Graz, the Triestersiedlung was one of the first workers' settlements in the 19th and 20th centuries. Born out of the pressing need to address precarious housing conditions, the initial development of the neighbourhood aimed to provide affordable and communal living space for the city's workforce. In the 1930s, the construction of social housing projects began, marking a significant milestone in Graz's efforts to meeting the housing needs of its residents. This effort continued after the Second World War (Degrot & Riff, 2018, p. 67).

Situated along the bustling Triester Strasse, a major commercial road, the neighbourhood has evolved into a culturally diverse residential estate. The juxtaposition of historical housing developments with the contemporary challenges faced by its residents reflects the dynamic nature of Triestersiedlung. While the neighbourhood has become known for its diversity due to immigration, it also grapples with issues of poverty. With about 9000 people living there and 25 % of them being non-Austrian nationals, this neighbourhood is one of the most diversified. Today, Triestersiedlung stands as a testament to the multifaceted history of social housing in Graz. In the last 10 years, however, the atmosphere has started to change.

During an excursion at the Triestersiedlung lead by civil servants currently managing the ongoing mod-

ernisation work, the subject of stigma came up. Richard Pfeifer, our lecturer, recalled that "when I was maybe 16 years old, the neighbourhood was portrayed as dangerous. It is also interesting that I was there several times and walked past, always a little impressed by the prison called 'Karlau', which is nearby and part of the popular culture in Styria, not even knowing that this was the Triestersiedlung. I never felt in danger...". We see this as a sign that the Triestersiedlung and its cultural representation offers misleading perceptions and has also been renegotiated as shown in recent public interest such as in the context of the Steirischer Herbst festival suggest such a representational change.

During our visit to Triestersiedlung, we saw some shared gardens, where a vegetable patch was being tended. It's initiatives like these that make a neighbourhood socially rich, especially when a lot of residents are workers that don't have a lot of time to participate in the neighbourhood's social life.

Over the last 10 years, the Triestersiedlung neighbourhood in Graz has changed significantly. The estate, which was built in the 1960s, was neglected for a long time and characterised by social problems linked to poverty. In recent years, however, the city of Graz has stepped up measures to improve the situation and also strengthened municipal housing again. For the municipal housing company "Graz Wohnen", the Triestersiedlung is the most important social housing project in Graz. One of the most important changes in the Triestersiedlung was the renovation and modernisation of the residential buildings. Many of the older buildings are being renovated to offer residents a better standard of living. In terms of civic participation, residents have organised urban gardening activities and recently the city of Graz has established a "Stadtteilzentrum" to foster and promote such bottom-up initiatives in the area.

As regards the built environment since 2021, many of the housing buildings have been upgraded. This includes improving energy efficiency by applying thermal insulation to the roof and outer shell, replacing wooden windows with triple-glazed plastic insulated windows, installing modern heating

systems, adding balconies to improve the quality of living and renovating bathrooms and kitchens. Measures were also taken to improve the outdoor spaces in the Triestersiedlung: New green spaces were created, trees were planted, playgrounds were renovated, and communal areas were set up to encourage residents to live together. The parking spaces, which were previously located directly in front of the street-side edges of the buildings, are gradually being moved to the residential streets across all properties, creating a green strip between the pavement and the house wall. Such measures increase the feeling of safety and security, especially on the lower floors and generally imply a better usability of apartments and of the outdoors.

### **Triestersiedlung keeps and locks people in place - Talking Intersectionality, Habitus and Segregation**

Segregation and inequality are inherent issues in the Triestersiedlung. Social segregation refers to the spatial separation of people based on social differences such as income, education or ethnicity. Because it is never just one factor, we apply an intersectional understanding to such social outcomes. Such a perspective focuses on the interaction and interdependence of a variety of factors and the associated experiences of discrimination in the production of inequality.

There is clear social segregation in the Triestersiedlung, as people with low incomes and migrant backgrounds are concentrated here and segregation leads to a deepening of social inequalities, as certain resources and opportunities are unequally distributed over the urban space.

Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory helps to analyse the social situation in the Triestersiedlung and to operationalise Intersectionality. Based on his interest in the embodied reproduction of social hierarchies or "class", Bourdieu argues that individual conduct and social structures are closely linked. Habitus is the internalised patterns of thought and behaviour of persons shaped by different forms of capital; financial, cultural social and is most experienced outside of the habitual social space where the "feel" for the game is weak. The Habitus influ-

ences how people perceive their environment, how they behave in it and what decisions they make. Certainly habitus relates to social segregation and Intersectionality. In the Triestersiedlung for example, due to their socio-cultural and economic background, residents develop certain behaviours and attitudes that influence their chances of social mobility. Habitus can also lead to certain social practices and norms becoming spatially entrenched which could lead to further reproduction of social inequalities, as certain behaviours and attitudes may influence access to resources and opportunities (Wensel, 2017, p. 7-10).

A resident, 54 years old, born in Graz and living in the Triestersiedlung for 43 years, reports that she only leaves the estate or her neighbourhood four to five times a year. She works in a pub-like café that sells drinks, snacks and cigarettes. A few people sit at bistro tables with benches in front of it and drink beer. Her everyday life, her work, her friends, everything takes place in the large housing estate. She did not complain and thinks it's normal. When we asked her whether she perceived a social difference in the inner districts of Graz, she said that she associated the eastern city centre as more affluence and students, while she associated the western part more with immigrants and welfare recipients. She did not make a moral judgement of the mentioned groups.

The great thing about the café is that it's a social place, but it's reserved for a very specific demographic, not through signs, but informally and implicitly, as evidenced by the lack of young people. The strong presence of alcohol consumption - and the need for disposable income - reduces the opportunities for other residents and staff to use it for leisure or socialising. For instance, many of the migrant residents of the Triestersiedlung say they often face multiple forms of discrimination.

We meet another resident who works in the bakery in Triestersiedlung. She moved here from Iran six years ago with her husband and children. She told us that since then she had only been to the city centre or across the river Mur three times. When we asked her where her friends in the neighbourhood lived, she said that she had no friends here.

When she's not working, she looks after the house and the children and does all the care work. When she does leave the flat, it is only to come to work or to go shopping at the weekend, albeit in a shopping centre close to the estate. From her point of view, there is a big difference between her everyday environment there and the city centre, especially in the eastern part. She sees many addicts in her neighbourhood, using drugs such as alcohol or cocaine and heroin. Her role as the sole caretaker of the household and children reflects a traditional gender role, placing the burden of care work primarily on her and limiting her ability to engage in other activities or build a social network. As a migrant from Iran, she also faces significant language and cultural barriers, which hinder her ability to navigate her new environment and establish relationships, as evidenced by her statement that she has no friends in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the socio-economic challenges of living in a deprived area characterized by issues such as addiction and substance abuse create an unsafe and unpleasant environment, amplifying her feelings of isolation.



Fig. 2: Café "Klub Nebenan" in Triestersiedlung  
Such multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage arising from her gender identity, ethnicity,

legal and socio-economic situation hinder her ability to participate fully in society and negatively impact her well-being.

Besides of migrant women, many elderly people live on the estate. It is not uncommon for elderly people to die in their homes and only be found weeks later because they are so isolated. One very important social project that addresses this thematic issue in the Triestersiedlung is the „50+ Treff“, which is organised on Facebook.

The weekly social meeting in the Triestersiedlung offers residents aged 50 and over a varied programme. The regular meetings enable participants to make and maintain social contacts, which is very important for the ageing residents of the estate. The socialising over coffee, tea or juices and the occasional cake creates a pleasant atmosphere and a place where participants can relax and chat with each other. The event begins with a cosy chat, which gives participants the opportunity to get to know each other and make connections. This is followed by the actual programme, which offers various activities and entertainment options. On the first Tuesday of the month, suggestions are collected for the following month and all visitors are given the opportunity to participate in the programme planning. This not only encourages the active involvement of participants, but also allows the programme to be tailored to their needs.

Such meetings are of great importance for older people in the Triestersiedlung, as they offer them the opportunity to overcome social isolation and improve their well-being. By taking part in joint activities, they can gain new experiences, have fun and develop their interests and skills. In addition, these meetings promote good neighbourliness and strengthen the sense of community in the Triestersiedlung, as seen on the Stadtteilzentrum Triester website.

These cases show that from a more superficial resource or habitus point of view we could see how similarities between residents reproduce distance but also engender social interaction. An intersectional lens allows us to look further into the complexities of the i.e. migrant or aged woman's

everyday experiences of everyday in- and exclusion within that otherwise superimposed similarity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the intersectional challenges faced by residents in Triestersiedlung, including gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, highlight the need for comprehensive welfare support systems and community initiatives. The experiences of the immigrant resident from Iran and the observations of the demographic composition of the neighbourhood underscore the importance of addressing social isolation, limited mobility, and access to resources.

The interplay of social, economic, and historical factors that shape the experiences of Triestersiedlung's residents is complex. The observations regarding perceived differences and political engagement highlight the challenges faced by non-privileged workers, particularly women, in balancing work, household responsibilities, and social engagement.

By recognizing and addressing intersectional challenges faced by residents, such as gender roles, language barriers, and socio-economic disparities, communities can foster inclusive environments where all individuals have equal opportunities for social participation in urban life and well-being. Perceptions of socio-spatial disparities we encountered in interview-related data are thus rooted in complex forms of inclusion and exclusion, in addition to stigma.

Collaboration between local authorities, community organisations, and residents themselves is crucial in developing policies and initiatives that promote social cohesion and support networks.

The 50+ Treff project, just as an example, serves as a model for creating age-friendly environments that value the experiences and contributions of older residents. By investing in similar initiatives for other marginalised groups that prioritise social connections and community engagement, Triestersiedlung can become a place where all residents thrive together.

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## Figures

Figure 1: Ronja Gelf, 2023

Figure 2: Ronja Gelf, 2023



# PUBLIC SPACE

## INTRODUCTION

Daniela Brasil

### **The Emperor's New Clothes: or the night that the anthropophagic octopus takes over the Freiheitplatz**

*We\**—A Border Experience was a cultural project initiated by Schauspielhaus Graz in 2021, focusing on European frontier politics. Within this context, I was given the task of proposing a performative intervention in the Freiheitsplatz (Freedom Square) for an event called *Day of the Open City*. This central and relevant public space in the city of Graz is where the Theatre is located. However, this particular Freedom Square hosts a 6m-high bronze statue of a man holding a sceptre, protected by iron chains: Emperor Franz I (1768–1835). What does his presence there mean? Searching for hidden narratives that heroic monuments symbolically impose into public spaces, I found this: Franz was the father of Maria Leopoldine of Austria (1797–1826), a young woman whom he married to the King of Portugal's son in the capital city of Portugal's biggest colony—Rio de Janeiro. 5 years after her arrival, precisely on the 7th of September of 1822, the “Brazilian independence” was “proclaimed” and Leopoldine became the first Empress of Brazil. “Make marriage, not war” seemed to be Mr. Franz's colonial politics.

The *Day of the Open City* was on the 10th of September 2022, the 200-year commemoration of Brazilian independence. As there are no coincidences, the performance became an act of “un-commemoration”. The performative intervention<sup>1</sup> was a letter and a gift of the Emperor New Clothes: an “Anthropophagic<sup>2</sup> Octopus”, a creature that did not undress, but devoured him. The letter mentioned the implication of Austria in colonial history, including the Slave Trade during the 19th century. Besides the Vienna Congress of 1815, Leopoldine and her husband Pedro were among the biggest owners of enslaved African people worldwide. It was as late as 1888 that their granddaughter Isabel

signed the abolition law in Brazil as the last country in the Americas. How does this story match with the freedom the square seems to reclaim?

The figures that inspired the “Anthropophagic Octopus” dress were the Caboclo de Lança from the Maracatu<sup>3</sup> festivity: a colorful, dancing warrior, a representation of Ogum, or the Orixá<sup>4</sup> of war and iron, who stands for justice. These symbols of Afro-diasporic cultures in Brazil reveal stories of resistance over centuries of colonialism, forms of intangible heritage that have always countered the narratives of oppressive, white supremacist, patriarchal power and their inert, cold monuments. These symbols, embody, stage, and invoke the spirit of those whose freedom lies within, in their irreverence and joyful presence, the freedom that cannot be plundered when the drums play.

*Ógún yè!*

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup>performed by Maracatu master Edgar Abreu and actor Sebastian Pass, developed with the support of dramaturge Nina Gühlstorff and historian Christian Cwick.

<sup>2</sup>*Antropofagia* was an artistic movement initiated in 1922 in Brazil, aiming to symbolically “devour” European colonial culture.

<sup>3</sup>Maracatu is a festivity and tradition created by the Black populations of the region of Pernambuco, one of the earlier sugar plantations region of Brazil. It is celebrated and performed during Carnival.

<sup>4</sup>Orixá / Órissà – Gods and goddesses from Yoruba ethnicity; entities worshipped *Candomblé\**— the Afro-diasporic syncretic religion that is also the matrix of spiritual, corporeal and intellectual resistance of Black and Afro-descendant populations in Brazil.



"The emperor new clothes" intervention in the Freiheitsplatz, Lex Karrey, 2022

# PUBLIC SPACES IN THE PROCESS OF LOW INCOME MIGRANTS INTEGRATION

Agathe Leroy, Sevda Varli, Guillaum Pagniez

## Introduction

Purpose of our research is to find an answer to the questions of "How public spaces affect the co-living of different social groups in Graz and what is the role of public spaces in the integration of low-income migrants?". The research is based on the hypothesis that unused public spaces in Graz have a negative impact on differently marginalised social groups, and that if these spaces are regenerated according to their (potential) functions, they will positively contribute to a mutually beneficial coexistence of different groups.

## 1. The method and the first results of the research

The research was conducted in Graz, Austria's second largest city, which is characterized by its multicultural identity. Within the boundaries of the city, an area was defined on the basis of an above-average number of people of non-Austrian nationality. An area with a high risk of segregation and isolation, with a tendency to form communities based on ethnicity, especially due to the high concentration of demographic groups with similarly weak social and economic backgrounds. It is such areas that usually are prioritized for social welfare integration policies (Graz Museum Sackstraße).



Fig. 1: Griesplatz, Oeverseepark and Rösselmühlpark

The data used for the analysis were obtained from primary sources, through methods such as participant and scientific observation and interviews, and from secondary sources. In the course of fieldwork, 12 people were interviewed over a period of 5 days from October 16th to October 20th. Of these twelve participants, five were Austrian, six were Turkish and one had an African background. Due to our research topic and approach, the number of respondents was determined in such a way that the demographic composition is presented on the basis of a theoretical and therefore non-probabilistic sample.

## Researching three Public Spaces

In the research area, three public spaces stand out as playing an important role. These are Rösselmühlpark, Oeverseepark and Griesplatz (see figure 1).

### Rösselmühlpark

Rösselmühlpark stands out as a transit and circulation space that is mostly passed by. Some of the interviewees think that the reason for the park's loss of function as a meeting and gathering place and its transformation into a transit space is its size, location and decay. According to one of the Turkish interviewees, " This park is on the road and there is not much activity to do, and I don't want to use it when I see that people don't live there. I'm new to Graz, but I speak German, so I talk to people. But for example, there are many foreign people like me here, but they don't speak the language, so they don't talk to each other. For example, Augartenpark and Stadtpark are not like that, people respect each other and many people spend time there. Young and old, everyone is together doing what they want and no one interferes with what anyone is doing. " According to another Turkish interviewee, " Everyone respects each other here, no one can directly do violence to anyone, especially women,



but the fact that this park is deserted especially at night and there are people using drugs makes it feel dangerous. It is perceived as unsafe, especially for women."

### **Oeverseepark**

This park is frequently used by residents for leisure activities. In the interviews, it was observed that people prefer to use this park because they find it beautiful, peaceful and sometimes lively with activities. An Austrian interviewee said that "I usually go to Oeverseepark in the summer, it is beautiful and peaceful for me.", while another Austrian interviewee said that "I go every day to walk my dog. I like this park. Sometimes I even see various events being organized." While all of the interviewees have a positive view of Oeverseepark, the striking point of difference is the frequency of use. It is seen that some people use this public space seasonally, while others use it almost everyday. A female interviewee with Austrian background said: "As a woman, I feel safe in Oeverseepark. It is also more beautiful than Rösselmühlpark." She compared Rösselmühlpark with Oeverseepark with a similar opinion to the Austrian woman.

### **Griesplatz**

Griesplatz is a square surrounded by a large number of international restaurants, a central point for public transport, with a triangular shape mostly used for crossings. An Austrian interviewee said; "There are too many buses in this area and it feels jammed and unsafe." In similar words, another Austrian interviewee said that "It is not only me but everyone complains about the traffic and noise and it is not safe for women, especially at night."

### **The Impact of Public Spaces on Co-Living**

Public spaces, where social interaction is most intense, are also an indicator of the quality of urban life as they reflect the identity and social dynamism of cities. In the interviews, the opinions of low-income migrant social groups on the co-existence of different cultures in Graz and the gathering effect of public spaces vary in relation to the purpose, time and demographic characteristics of their

arrival in Graz. Of the six Turks interviewed, three came to Graz illegally between one year and less than one year ago and three came legally through family reunification 10-15 years ago. Turks who have come to Graz regularly meet with locals in public spaces for leisure activities. They see the coexistence of people from different backgrounds as part of cultural diversity and see themselves as agents of that diversity. One of the interviewees, a Turkish restaurant owner who came to Graz 12 years ago through family reunification said that "We usually get together with my neighbours. Sometimes we go to the park, sometimes we meet in the park and chat. I also invite them to my house as guests and we have dinner together. I learned German when I came here in the past, so I have no problem speaking with local people. We get along well here, everyone is respectful to each other." This interview quote highlights language skills as an important resource in living together and interacting with people from different cultures publicly. On the other hand, migrants without asylum status or visa, although respectful of people from different cultural backgrounds, seemingly prefer proximity to people like themselves. One of the interviewees, a Turkish market worker who came to Graz without a permanent residence permit one year ago, said that "I don't know much English and German, we usually meet with Turks who already have other shops here. We work all the time so we don't have much time but when I go to the park I see that there are many people from different cultures here. Everyone respects each other, no one interferes with anyone. Couples walk hand in hand in the park, people walk their dogs, young people sing songs and sit with their friends and no one is bothered. In fact, one day I was sitting on a bench in the park and I was listening to the groups singing from a distance, it was very nice and if I could talk to them I would go to them. Everyone sees the differences but no one is disturbed by this situation and I am happy with this situation." The person who came to Graz illegally similarly pointed out that language proficiency is important for living together and that public spaces are a place where different social classes and cultures come together and socialize. Another important point is that low-income groups spend most of their time at work and do not use public spaces sufficiently

for leisure activities. The interviewee from Africa explained that she worked in a logistics company for more than twelve hours a day, and therefore didn't have time to use public spaces. Social class and job type therefore constitute a barrier to the use of public space. While public space is one of the most important places for working-class migrants to interact socially, one Austrian woman we spoke to who lives near Griesplatz told us that she had the impression that 'they don't want to integrate' into society.

## **2. The impact of public policies on migrant integration**

### **Introduction**

Graz, Austria's second largest city after Vienna, is - for that reason, a place in many migrant integration experiences. In this section, we'll look at the public policies in place to promote the integration of migrants in the city of Graz and Austria more generally. The assumption is that a foreigner who is well integrated into the city and the urban environment will be more likely to frequent public spaces.

### **Legal framework for migrant integration**

Due to EU-citizenship we will reduce this section to the integration of third-country nationals (non-European or Swiss nationals) which is governed by laws designed to help migrants adapt to their host country. These include the law on the right of residence for foreigners (Article 9, paragraph 3, articles 51, 53 et 53a Niederlassungs- und Aufenthaltsgesetz (NAG)). This law governs the entry, residence, and settlement of foreigners, including migrants, in Austria. It contains conditions concerning visas, residence permits, and the rights and duties of foreigners in Austria.

There is also the Asylum Act (2005 - Asylgesetz 2005), which deals with the procedures and rights of asylum seekers in Austria seeking international protection.

The Austrian Nationality Act (1985) defines the conditions under which foreigners can acquire Austrian nationality, for migrants who have been resident in Austria for a certain period.

The Integration Act (2017) deals specifically with measures and requirements for the integration of migrants in Austria. It can contain information on language learning, education, access to the job market, civic participation, etc..

And finally the Equal Treatment Act and related legal frameworks aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for migrants in society (2019), which prohibits discrimination based on origin, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc. with the overall aim to guarantee equality of opportunity for all. Austria is known for its comparatively strict migration laws, making legal migration and residency a challenging process for third-country nationals.

### **Association and help for integration in Graz**

In order to integrate into Austrian society, these laws are supported by the provision of a range of aids, which brings us back into to the City of Graz. The local Integration Service, supports a number of projects and institutions that work towards a better coexistence in Graz and against discrimination. These include ARGE - Youth against Violence and Racism, ETC Graz, the Peace Office and Omega. Migrants are offered language courses to help them learn German. These offers certainly facilitate their integration in terms of communication and enables participation in non-ethnicity bound networks and publics.

Similar to language education is a priority in integration policies. Migrant children have the right to go to school in Austria, and special programs are set up to help pupils with a poor command of the German language. Education is an essential means of preparing migrants for active participation in Austrian society. However, integration is not limited to language learning and education. Migrants are encouraged to participate in civic life as active members of society. EU citizens have the right to vote in local elections, and initiatives aim to promote inter-cultural understanding. Projects and stated programs aim to raise local awareness of cultural diversity and encourage mutual respect between cultural groups. The aim is to reduce prejudice and discrimination. As some of the testimonials from Griesplatz have highlighted, there is a great deal of animosity between different groups

from different cultures. Finally, access to the labour market is an essential element of economic integration. Residence permits encourages and depending on their income obliges migrants to find work and contribute to the Austrian economy.

### **Limits of the Austrian approach**

Vocational training and employment initiatives have been introduced to facilitate integration. In practice, however, the effectiveness of these laws in terms of the outcomes required for the integration of migrants seems questionable. The report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (2021) highlights the shortcomings of the Austrian system for integrating migrants. It points to possible improvements to make this integration easier and more effective.

The report shows that the number of places available in learning centres is insufficient compared to the number of migrants. This poses several problems. Firstly, the quality of teaching is compromised and the people who attend these courses do not come out with the required level of the German language. Third-country nationals are required to prove that they have an 'A1' level of German (from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) when applying for a residence permit. Secondly, some people don't have access to these courses due to a lack of available places. This is a major obstacle to the integration process, and one that we encountered in our research - a large proportion of the people we wanted to interview were unable to respond because they spoke neither German nor English. This situation can exacerbate inequalities due to differences in labour market opportunities. The report (ibid) also mentions a high unemployment rate among migrants as a result of the language barrier.

There are also other legal inequalities that are linked to the nationality of migrants. EU citizens have more rights than nationals of "third countries" (outside the European Union). EU citizens can, for example, take part in local council elections, whereas third-country nationals do not have this right. It's important to stress that differences of this kind can create a feeling of exclusion and disinterest for these people.

To conclude this section, it is important to remember that the public policies put in place in theory are not necessarily respected in practice.

### **3. The importance of public spaces in the integration of migrants**

In the urban context, public spaces play a key role in creating social ties and building inter-cultural relationships. They can be material places such as parks, squares, shopping streets, markets, community gardens, schools, places of worship, or virtual spaces such as online social networks and discussion forums. As such, they provide a fertile ground for informal interaction between different communities, which can foster mutual understanding, tolerance and cultural learning. Public spaces therefore play an essential role in the integration process, as they are places of encounter, inter-cultural interaction, cultural exchange and social bonding.

#### **The Contact Hypothesis and potential means for Reducing Prejudice**

Inter-cultural interaction in public spaces fosters greater tolerance for cultural differences. Originally proposed by Gordon Allport (1954), the intergroup contact hypothesis posits that contact between members of different groups can be beneficial if it occurs in situations characterized by four conditions:

- Equal status: the equal status between group members during interaction;
- Cooperation: cooperation between members of groups;
- Common goals: the pursuit of common goals (which can be achieved through cooperation)
- Institutional and societal support: the institutional and social support expressed by the societies in which the members are integrated (favourable socio-political climate).

In 2006, Thomas F. Pettigrew and Linda R. Tropp published a meta-analysis of intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), confirming the hypothesis of contact and its effectiveness in improving intergroup relations and demonstrating that contact is particularly effective both in situations structured

according to Allport's four conditions and in unstructured situations that do not, or only partially, meet the requirements of the stated conditions. Thus, even in situations that are not marked by Allport's optimal conditions, social contact can result in a reduction in bias.

Positive intergroup contact is thought to lead to a reduction in affective reactions, i.e. the perceived threat that other groups can evoke (Blascovich et al., 2001). Similarly, such contact has been found to change the way faces are neurologically processed, helping to increase the perception of similarity between faces from different groups (Walker et al., 2008). Contact therefore has a real and tangible effect on the reduction of prejudice, both explicitly and implicitly. The role of contact, which can take place in public spaces, among other things, in reducing prejudice is therefore clearly explicit.

### **Public spaces as a place of exchange**

In addition, public spaces are places where symbolic sharing can occur naturally. Migrants often have the opportunity to introduce their culture to the local population through festivals, ethnic cuisines, handicrafts and other cultural activities. These cultural exchanges promote mutual enrichment and strengthen the social fabric. Research conducted by researchers on the subject, such as the one on the Fez Festival (Azzaoui, 2019) has shown how cultural festivals organized in public spaces can serve as platforms for cultural exchange and inter-cultural dialogue.

Public spaces also cater for the creation of social networks between migrants and local residents. Parks, playgrounds, markets, and other meeting places provide opportunities for individuals to build relationships, whether friendly or professional. These social networks can be particularly valuable for migrants seeking employment, housing, or community support. Social networks established in public spaces can greatly facilitate migrants' access to important resources and help them in their integration process.

### **Integration into public spaces as a spatial, social and political dimension**

Integration in public spaces can be defined as the

ability of all individuals and social groups to feel accepted, respected and recognised in the everyday spaces of the city. It therefore has a spatial dimension, but also a social and political dimension. Integration in public spaces is based on three fundamental principles: access, mobility and safety. Access means that public spaces should be open to all, without discrimination or exclusion. Therefore, there should be no physical, economic, cultural or symbolic barriers that prevent some users from taking full advantage of the services and activities offered by public spaces. Mobility means that public spaces need to be connected to each other but also to other parts of the city, in a way that makes it easier for users to move around and interact. This means promoting soft modes of transport such as walking, cycling or public transport and reducing the role of cars in the city. For this it is possible to create cycle paths, pedestrian areas, green spaces, public squares, etc..

Finally, safety means that public spaces must be places where users feel safe from violence, aggression, incivility or harassment. This means preventing conflict, building trust and promoting dialogue and mediation between the different actors in the public space. Due to the social construction dimension of noise and safety, it is therefore necessary to involve residents, associations, shopkeepers and security guards in such considerations.

### **Reflecting about integration in public space**

It is our view that to maximise the impact of public spaces on migrant integration, it is essential to take into account several key factors, including:

- Inclusive urban planning: Urban planners and local authorities need to design public spaces that encourage diversity and inter-cultural interaction. This can include their support of multicultural neighbourhoods and the preservation of cultural spaces.
- Promotion of inter-cultural events: Municipalities can organize festivals, cultural events and inter-cultural initiatives in public spaces to foster meeting and exchange between communities.
- Tolerance and diversity training: Educational programs in local schools and institutions can raise awareness of tolerance, diversity, and in-

ter-cultural understanding, which strengthens the acceptance of differences in public spaces.

- Consultation with communities: Local authorities should consult with migrant communities and local residents to understand their needs and concerns about public spaces. This will help design spaces that meet everyone's needs.
- Universal accessibility: Infrastructure in public spaces should be designed to be accessible to all, including people with limited mobility and people of all ages.

However, integration into public spaces is not a given, but a dynamic and complex process, which must face many challenges, including:

- Fragmentation and spatial segregation, which create fragmented public spaces, reserved for certain social groups, and which limit the possibilities of encounter and mixing between users.
- The privatisation and commercialisation of public spaces, which leads to the loss of their common, free and open character and favours the logic of consumption and competition to the detriment of the logic of sharing and cooperation.
- The surveillance and standardization of public spaces, which impose excessive rules and controls, and which reduce the freedom and spontaneity of users.
- The degradation and pollution of public spaces, which affect their attractiveness, comfort and which affect the health and well-being of users.

### **The involvement of users in the reflection of public spaces**

First, it is necessary to involve users in the definition, production and management of public spaces, considering them as actors in their own right and not as mere consumers. It is also necessary to value culture and art as vectors of expression, communication, awareness and emancipation in public spaces, making them visible, accessible and participatory.

Thus, integration into public spaces presupposes a collaborative, inclusive and creative approach,

which brings together the various actors of the public space, in particular users, urban planning professionals, artists and cultural actors.

In practice, however, this does not always have the desired effect. The city of Vantaa in the Helsinki Metropolitan Region is the most diverse city in Finland, with 16.6% of its inhabitants speaking a language other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami as their mother tongue and local authorities and other organisations have developed new ways to support migrants' well-being and integration into local neighbourhoods. The legal obligation to involve residents in urban planning has, in principle, been fulfilled through the organisation of urban planning seminars, workshops for residents and online surveys. In practice, however, residents with a migrant background were under-represented in these forums and did not always have the opportunity to respond in a language other than Finnish or Swedish. (Hansen, 2019)

### **What we'd like to suggest for the Gries district**

Looking at these principles in the public spaces of the Gries' district, we suggest that it could benefit from such public space improvements. Griesplatz is the heart of the neighbourhood, yet it is not a place of encounter and integration, but rather of air pollution. The nodal point of Graz's public transport is a low point in the wider topographic basin of Graz. The square is completely paved and is one of the places in Graz with the worst air quality. These problems have a direct impact on the health of residents and do not allow for the social encounter that could result from the use of public spaces in the neighbourhood. Its potential role as an inclusive space is therefore undermined by a lack of environmental quality. Similarly, the safety mentioned earlier as one of the three criteria favourable to social integration in public spaces is not perceived by residents, who prefer public spaces in other parts of the city. However, a lack of knowledge, time and resources on the part of Gries residents means that their public spaces can be perceived as inaccessible, too far away or intended for 'someone else'. In Gries, many migrants often need to access other neighbourhoods for services, events, and quality public spaces perceived as safe. This can present additional challenges to integration, as differences

in access to such spaces may limit opportunities for social interaction and community engagement. The good practice example of Vantaa (Finland) could be a positive inspiration, showing that municipalities can actively build trusting relationships by coming to spaces run by migrant communities, who found it more welcoming than having to go to a distant municipal office: 'They came to us and we let them because we trust them.' (Hansen, 2019). This example shows that the fact that public services are located in a place that migrants consider to be 'home' creates a sense of co-ownership and balances the hierarchy between 'hosts' and 'guests'.

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# URBAN CULTURE

## INTRODUCTION

Hermann Götz

The Schlossberg sits in the middle of Graz. Once a large rock with imposing fortifications, today it is a green hill on which a clock tower, the official landmark of Graz, is enthroned. When Graz was European Capital of Culture in 2003, the artist Markus Wilfling gave it a materialized shadow, read by many as a "shadow of the past"<sup>1</sup>, because Graz has an inglorious Nazi history as "Stadt der Volkserhebung"<sup>2</sup>.

The Schlossberg offers a good view over the historic roofscape with its red plain tiles, from which the blue bubble of the Kunsthaus by Peter Cook and Colin Fournier rises to the right of the Mur: a "Friendly Alien". The view also reveals how the city is divided into two halves by its river: For a long time it was a good one (the left) and a bad one (the right).

The decision to build the new Kunsthaus directly on the right bank of the Mur next to the then devastated Eisernes Haus during the Capital of Culture year changed a lot. The unusual design of a seemingly floating blue bubble was intended to give Graz a Bilbao effect. It has not remained without effect, at least for the immediate surroundings. Graz's Mariahilferstrasse, where the Capital of Culture headquarters were located in 2003, has developed from a red-light district into a "hip" urban zone with alternative restaurants and design boutiques.

The Capital of Culture strategy of upgrading the districts on the right bank of the Mur was also accompanied by the idea of "bringing the river itself back into the city". As a central impulse for this, an artificial island designed by New York artist and architect Vito Acconci was placed in the Mur, which was to function as a kind of hinge connected to both banks. In the course of the construction work on and in the Mur, the first promenades close to the shore and a "city beach" were designed.

Further to the west, urban development can also be seen that goes back to the Capital of Culture year, but here it is developed top down. A smart city project is being created on brownfield land on the site to the rear of the station. The first "smart" building here was a concert hall designed in 2003 from a factory hall of the AVL company: the Helmut-List-Halle<sup>3</sup>.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> After the end of the Capital of Culture year, the object was purchased by the neighbouring municipality of Seiersberg, where it now adorns the local shopping centre, giving it a completely new metaphorical meaning.

<sup>2</sup> In February 1938, even before the annexation of Austria to the National Socialist German Reich in March of the same year, the swastika flag was hung on Graz City Hall. For this, the city was awarded the honorary Nazi title of "Stadt der Volkserhebung" ("City of National Uprising").

<sup>3</sup> Helmut List is the AVL heir, CEO and founder of the concert hall.



# INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN GRAZ

Emma Ariaudo, Lena Kalmbach

## 1. Everyday Life Of International Students In Graz

### Why

During our excursion in Graz, we received inputs on different aspects of the everyday life of international students. These were: the urban cultures, the development and history of the city's expansion, or the public spaces and the people who use them. We noticed that the city of Graz is full of students who frequent its universities. We looked further and found out that Graz is home to more than 60,000 students. During the excursion, one of us had the chance to stay in a shared flat with an international student from Bosnia who has been living in Graz for four years. As international students living in Vienna on our Erasmus programme, we wondered what it would be like to study abroad in a smaller city like Graz. Adopting an intersectional and qualitative approach, we asked what kind of barriers and marginalisation an international student would face when studying at TU Graz. Could it be the different language? The personal financial situation? The need to work? The lack of social integration? To find an affordable housing? Starting from these initial questions, we embarked on our research.

### How

Our research was part of a five-day field excursion, during which we also had the opportunity to actively meet different experts from different fields: Spatial planning, mobility, art, performance, politics and housing. Each of them showed us different aspects of life and spaces in the mosaic of everyday life in Graz. Our next step was to focus on a specific topic that we found compelling and that could be related to urban development, public space or urban culture. We decided to focus on international students living in Graz and started our qualitative research. We used participant observation and various interview techniques. We went to university events, we spent time in the drawing studios of the Institute of Architecture, we tried to talk to and interview some of the international students about their everyday lives, transcribed them and used them for our research to find common themes and identify areas of marginalisation.

### Where

Our field sites were the TU Graz and its surroundings, more specifically the Institute of Urbanism and Architecture. Important research sites were the drawing studios, which are student-run spaces for study and design. We visited student cafés and observed the external public spaces in front of the buildings.



Fig. 1: Example for a drawing studio

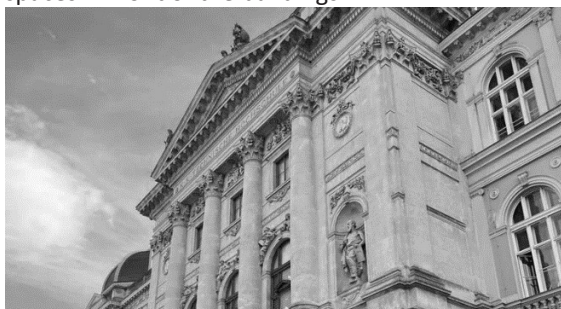


Fig. 2: Institute of Urbanism and Architecture

## Who

The group we focus on are international students who are living in Graz during their Erasmus period or who have been living in Graz for several years. We managed to meet international students from the European Union (Cyprus, Sweden) and from outside the European Union (Albania, Bosnia, Syria, USA) and we noticed the different backgrounds and situations they had to face being inside or outside the EU: such as student visa or higher university fees. What they all had in common was their willingness to study abroad in Graz in order to find better living and working opportunities that their countries couldn't offer, even if they had to face several obstacles and barriers.

## 2. Barriers and Marginalization

Although international students in Graz have better opportunities, there are specific barriers that they have encountered and continue to face. These are mentioned and explained in the following chapter.

### Language barrier

In order to study at TU Graz, non-native speakers of German must be able to prove that they have a C1 certificate, which is a very high level, especially if they have not learned the language before (Graz University of Technology 3, n.d.). The interviewees had little experience with the German language (e.g. at school, cartoon channel, A1 course in Syria), so learning the language for studying in Graz was very challenging. Various language courses are offered by non-profit organisations such as "Deutsch in Graz". They can also be found on the official website of TU Graz (Graz University of Technology, 2022).

However, the Austrian dialect also posed a major problem at TU Graz. In some cases, the spoken dialect was quite distant from what they originally had learnt in the language classes, schools, etc. "I couldn't say anything at the time that I knew the language even though I had a certificate. The language that I learnt and language that was spoken was very different (...), that was kind of a cultural shock. I was kind of struggling with it for the first years and I'm still struggling right now", said the

Bosnian architecture student about her beginnings in Graz. This is in line with a study of international students at the University of Toledo (USA), where it was not just about the language barrier per se, but also "including knowledge of slang. (...) Some respondents felt that this spoken language improvement programme could be done through formal language training programmes, while others preferred a more informal approach" (Sherry, Chui and Thomas, 2010, p. 37). Therefore, in addition to formal language courses, informal exchanges need to be offered in order to communicate better and deal with dialects better. Therefore, in addition to formal language courses, informal exchanges need to be offered in order to communicate better and deal with dialects better. Despite living in a German-speaking country, all interview partners reported that they mainly spoke English at the beginning and that this worked well in most areas of life. The architecture student from Syria for example explained that she only spoke English for the first 1.5 years (Erasmus with an open selection of courses) and changed to only speaking German after a few years - when she started working. "My comfort zone was challenged outside", mentioned the Syrian student. Particularly in the master studies most of the courses are in English to place TU Graz as an international university in Europe, reported the project assistant of the Institute of Urban Studies at TU Graz. Outside the university, her "student job" (waitress in a café) and her international friends, the Syrian interviewee was forced to speak German properly for the first time. "In my everyday life I still use English most of the time, so I have a lot of international friends (...)", she said after living in Graz for eight years. In addition to the actual language problems, the Bosnian architecture student also told us about her mental barrier to speak German. According to her, it was a long process to accept speaking German with an accent. She also had the feeling that she initially closed many doors because she thought it would be easier to socialize with people from her own country or with English speakers. However, she has since realized that the language is no longer that important for making contact with others, in English and in German.

To summarize, language courses, working alongside traditional student jobs, contact with German

speakers and university environment theoretically provide opportunities to learn German. However, the Austrian dialect, the possibility of speaking only English at university and the mental language barrier are major hurdles that make it preferable to speak English rather than German, " (...). Language skills are very important for academic and social adjustment of international students" (Sherry, Chui and Thomas 2010: p. 34). The university has a role to play in providing support in addition to the classic formal language courses, for example in the form of workshops, writing seminars, informal conversations or the formation of mother-tongue international groups. (Akanwa 2015: pp. 276 ff.)

## Financial barrier and working

One of the biggest obstacles of studying abroad is the financial situation. Most of the interviewed students reported a great deal of financial support, without which studying abroad would have been difficult. The financial barrier in particular is closely linked to the other barriers and/or areas of life; working, studying and language. For example, the need to learn the German language through courses involves a financial cost. A language course run by the non-profit organization "Deutsch in Graz", which is recommended by TU Graz, offers a four-week intensive course for at least 565 Euros and an eight-week intensive course for 1050 Euros. It is also possible to take an eight-week evening course, which costs at least 300 Euros. However, for both courses, depending on previous knowledge, it is necessary to travel abroad 4-8 weeks in advance, where accommodation and living expenses must be paid for in addition to the course (Deutsch in Graz, n.d.). The student from Bosnia also decided to go to Graz, which is smaller than Vienna, also because it is cheaper. Three of the interviewed students decided to live in a student dorm when they first arrived in Graz in order to save money, and only later opted to live in a shared flat. An important aspect of the financial barrier is the difference between EU and non-EU citizenship. A student from Syria and a student from Albania, both from non-EU countries, shared their personal

experiences. A student from an EU country has to pay a student fee of only 22.70 euros, while a student from a non-EU country has to pay 726.72 euros. You had to pay "Not only for the courses, also for uni (...). At least there is that possibility, if you reach 12 ETCS every semester you can get the money back. (...) and with working next to studying it is (...) tough. And for all the foreigners that I know here studying architecture it's been the same because each of them tries to do the same courses. Who wants to pay that much?" (student from Albania). So there is the possibility for non-EU foreign students to get a reimbursement of tuition fees. This possibility only exists for countries from South-Eastern Europe and the criteria for this are the completion of at least 12 credits (proof of performance), adherence to the planned duration of study with two tolerance semesters and studying at the TU Graz. In addition, there is the administrative effort of applying for the refund (TU Graz 2, n.d.). However, as the quote from our Albanian interviewee makes clear, these requirements seem difficult to meet in combination with work and the language barrier. In addition to financial support from parents, there is the possibility of a scholarship. One student from Cyprus, who is spending his six-month stay abroad in Graz, is eligible for Erasmus funding, but he also reported a long delay in payment, which made his financial situation in Graz more difficult at the beginning of his exchange period. An international student from Syria, who first completed her Erasmus in Graz and has been studying regularly in Graz for 8 years, also received funding for 20 months due to a special scholarship surplus for Syrian students, before she financed herself by working. Similarly, in a 2010 study of international students at the University of Toledo in the USA, students "suggested that there should be more scholarships for international students or additional financial aid". (Sherry, Chui and Thomas, 2010, p. 40). "Even scholarships and state financial support are often unable to compensate for social inequalities", said the project assistant of the Institute of Urban Studies about the financial barrier.

As the financial and work spheres are closely related, these two topics are combined in this chapter. All international students reported that they

were working or had worked before: for reasons of independence, to gain work experience and to earn money. It also helped the Syrian student, for example, to get more in touch with the locals and to speak more German. "My comfort zone was (...) challenged outside [the university]". It was noticeable that all interviewees started working after a few years, rather than right from the beginning. The Albanian architecture student explains this with a higher administrative burden for non-EU students, but also with the language aspect. "I really wanted to work from the beginning, but because we need some extra documents, all the employers rejected my interest in working right away. That's why it was so difficult. (...) Also because of the language, but I wouldn't say my language was that bad". The Syrian architecture student also talked about her early experiences of working in classic "student jobs like coffee shops and (...) shopping centres", where she first worked in McDonald's or at the university, where English was more accepted. It was only after a few years that all three international students reported that they had started to work in an architecture office to gain experience. With regard to the focus on international architecture students, one student from Cyprus explained to us the reason why architecture is such an expensive course. In addition to the normal costs of a regular degree course, there are also costs for materials (e.g. watercolours, models), excursions, etc..

### **Social and integration barrier**

„A welcoming University and community environment is therefore one of the key factors in the mental health of international students" (Sherry, Chui and Thomas, 2009, p. 34) in terms of their academic and integration needs. This chapter focuses on the arrival in Graz but also on the current situation of the international students. How are international students integrated after several years?

When talking about barriers, all interviewees mentioned the difficulties they faced when first arriving in Graz. While three of the interviewees talked more about their integration in a social environment, one Albanian student referred to a more specific incident regarding her integration at

the university. "Before the university started, my high school diploma wasn't recognized in Austria and (...) I needed to pass eight exams (...) to enter the uni. Can you imagine not knowing the language and then not only studying, but also in the meantime passing exams in math, physics and other subjects?" When she arrived in Graz, she first had to pass eight oral exams in German, which meant a lot of time on top of her studies and included a big language barrier. She described her start as "terrible".

All interviewees reported socialising through shared university spaces, as this was where they spent most of their time. "(...) In the first semester I was 24/7 in the university. (...) Everything in the university.", remembers a Bosnian architecture student of her first semester. The university environment hence is an important place to socialise and bond with other students.

Two of the students interviewed also spoke of a "cultural shock", not only the Austrian accent, which is difficult to understand, but also the willingness of Austrians and locals to interact with international students. The architecture teachers also have the feeling that "the Austrian students do not mix very much with them". The Cypriot student wondered whether the locals think it is not worthwhile to talk to Erasmus students because they do not stay long. Another possible explanation offered by the Albanian student is that they don't feel comfortable communicating in another language: "Not that I have many Austrian friends. For foreigners I find it a bit difficult to get into groups of Austrian youths and to be part of them. Also because of the language (...) maybe it's uncomfortable for them to accept foreigners or they just don't have the nerves to deal with the language differences".

As there is an already mentioned issue with connecting with locals, the interviewed students mostly make friends with other international students. Also the Bosnian student "connected with people of (...) [her] country. It is unavoidable." After listening to the different experiences of arrival, it was clear that international students had different ways of dealing with their situation. Some of them were able to speak English most of the time. Some – especially the long-term international students – felt more comfortable with the language and their

own living environment. Even though all students faced these barriers at the beginning, all of them said it was getting better after some time. After feeling more comfortable with the German and English languages, she "now (...) somehow connects with everybody. It doesn't make a difference", she explained about the development of her language skills. The Syrian student "still uses English the most. So (...) [she has] a lot of international friends with whom she spends her time until the end of her Masters. Talking to the director of the Institute of Urban Studies and the project assistant, they mentioned their efforts to "try to bring together internationals and locals in a student context, exactly for reasons of connection (...) but (...) are limited to a certain point".

In the long term, there is also the possibility of becoming a citizen in order to be fully integrated. The Syrian student told us how she obtained her citizenship after seven years and what conditions she had to fulfil. In the interview, she only mentioned the most important ones, which are also published on the website of the Federal Ministry of Finance: You have to prove "at least 10 years of legal and uninterrupted residence in Austria, of which at least 5 years with a residence permit (...); irreproachable integrity" (Federal Ministry of Finance, 2023), i.e. no criminal record, the ability to support oneself, e.g. by having sufficient financial means through work and knowledge of the German language, as well as knowledge of the political system and history of Austria. (ibid)

## Studying and study places

A major point next to housing, working and leisure time is studying. As three of the interviewees explicitly mentioned in relation to their studies, there is a need for significant temporal investment in the study of architecture and, consequently a need for university spaces. Architecture "is very time intensive, so not a lot of time for big things", a student from Cyprus said after one month in Graz. Also the student from Syria admitted that largely her "comfort zone was challenged outside" the university because the everyday life of the students from architecture takes mostly part inside the university. Another architecture student interviewed empha-

sised this great need for study space. Interviewees also mentioned the library, the art studios and the university as places to work and socialise.

One of the topics we addressed was about the situation of the drawing studios, which make up a large part of the university's facilities. They were understood to be spaces for cooperation, communication and events. A student from Cyprus thinks that the studios are "the shared spaces where you see all the people with more experience and even ask for help", so you have the chance to benefit from an exchange in the studios. For architecture students there are eight different drawing studios which are self-managed (Graz University of Technology 1, n.d.) "I know that in the 60s they were occupied by the students because they wanted more space and the university wasn't giving them space", explained the Syrian architecture student about the reason for the self-managed structure. Some of the drawing studios have a specific spot assignment system, managed by the collective. Every semester, if there are free spots left, a refill system goes on to assign them. But how do you really get in?

The Syrian student about getting a spot in a design studio: "And since then [the 60's] they were self-organised and so the students who are like kind of inhabiting the space they every semester kind of make a party (...) and make people more interested in the spaces and then they kind of do a specific good-to-get-to-know-them and then they kind of choose based on what places are available". She also mentioned "that there has been a long discussion here, (...) about how inclusive these places are." Is there exclusion just because you are an international student and you come from a different country?

Although the student from Syria spoke about the current debate about the inclusivity of this system and the proposal for a new, possibly integrated, system for obtaining a studio place called 'the refill', the international students interviewed all shared positive experiences of being accepted into a drawing studio. Not only did the interview with the student from Cyprus – who arrived a month earlier – took place in a drawing studio, also the rest of the interviewees received a spot. So the Albanian student told us that she "got in the first



time that [she] applied", although she didn't really use it very often. The students there are very open to include other students with whom they share the space. "Once you come here you do feel welcome (...) and they always say who just wants to come can come", said the student from Syria in the interview, while sitting in her own drawing studio spot. So although there is a big discussion going on about the privilege of these places in the drawing studios, all the interviewees had good experiences of getting a spot in a drawing studio. In conclusion, the question if "there is a kind of privileged treatment and marginalization?" is still open.



Fig. 3: Café in the surrounding of university

### Differences between EU- and non-EU-country nationals

After the interview with the Syrian architecture student, a difference between the situation of international students from EU and non-EU countries was clearly visible. The barriers for non-EU-country students are more present. As mentioned before, the students from non-EU-countries have to pay higher tuition fees (726 Euros instead of 22 Euros). It is possible to get a refund, but you must meet certain conditions. In addition to this fact, there is a higher administration process for students from non-European countries, for example in preparing the VISA and getting the refund. The Albanian student also explained the increased effort in her working life: "(...) we need some extra documents". Also the Syrian student said it was really difficult to find work - for example during holidays - because the work approval took such a long time. Belonging or not belonging to an EU country makes a differ-

ence in the daily life of international students and can be seen as an important barrier.

### 3. Intersectionality

When analysing the different interviews, it is clear that there are strong links between the different types of barriers identified. Intersectionality can be found in these points of connection. Below we have decided to schematise the different themes of barriers that we found in our research and try to explain the connections between them.

1. Starting from the language barrier, which is strictly connected to the financial one, considering the high amount of economic resources needed to learn the German language in private or in university courses as we mentioned before.
2. The language barrier is also directly connected to the housing situation, living in a shared flat or in a dorm can be useful to have better contact and opportunity to learn German from locals or German-speaking people.
3. The housing aspect is strictly related to the financial aspect. Students often have to find the cheapest accommodation. Choice of housing is also important for social and integration aspects. It can help creating social relations and get in contact with other students (internationals/locals) but also with people outside of the university.
4. The opportunity to study, in particular architecture, is related to the financial aspect, considering the costs of materials, fees and tools needed for the courses. Studying and working which, as mentioned before, some international students do at the same time, can create a time conflict. The time needed to complete a degree may be much longer because of the need to work to support yourself financially. The university is an important place to connect and meet.
5. Some of the international students have the need to work while studying to financially sustain themselves.

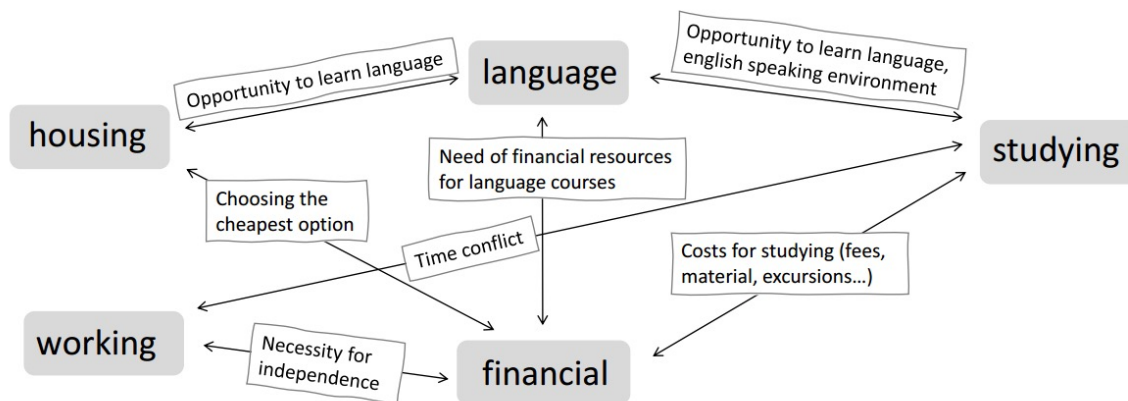


Fig. 4: Connections between life areas

Our qualitative research shows that the barriers and marginalization observed are closely linked to a number of different aspects of social inequality. Intersectionality allows us to analyse and examine the intersection of the various barriers we have identified: language, financial, housing, social dynamics, study environment, citizenship, which allows us to discuss the different positionalities among students.

### Reflections

To reflect the seminar of Everyday Life, Differences and Intersectionality we found out a lot in our first qualitative research approach. So, what did we learn?

In comparison to other projects, it was a completely other approach facing people's everyday life, trying to understand their different ways of living and experiences in a more self-reflexive way, engaging with our bias. Being an objective actor while talking so private with people was a difficult but also interesting experience for us.

Being used to analysing space and culture in a macro and quantitative way in our previous courses, it was interesting to have a micro approach, giving also meaning to the hidden aspects of everyday life.

Although we enjoyed the hands-on approach in Graz and immersing ourselves in the daily lives of international students, we quickly realised that qualitative research needs time to get in touch with people and gain their trust. We quickly felt the limitations of exploratory research and anticipated more opportunities for field research in Graz.

Because it was a completely different approach, we left our comfort zone in different ways and situations. Methodologically, finding and conducting interviews and analysing the results is harder than it seems at first. It requires good preparation, social skills and patience. Especially at the beginning, it is difficult to understand a new city without any previous knowledge. It is even harder to understand the everyday life of people who have lived there for several years, the places they visit or the people they interact with. And linguistically, because getting input, conducting interviews, analysing and above all writing an essay in academic English was a language barrier we had to face ourselves.

### Conclusion

At the end of the research, it was clear that there was a hierarchy among the integration barriers found in the everyday life of international students. Coming from a non-EU country contributes to creating more barriers to integration by having to deal with more financial, work and administrative issues. In conclusion, it can be said that being a non-EU citizen contributes to the creation of more second-order barriers in the everyday life of international students.

In researching theory and reading literature on the experiences of international students in relation to different forms of discrimination (Lee 2006), it was assumed that barriers would be found in relation to sex, gender or nationality. Although no explicit forms of discrimination were mentioned by the interviewees, there are structural issues. We believe that such research needs to considerably build trust in order to gain in quality. The university

environment is an important factor in structuring opportunities for integration. Therefore, institutions have an important role to play in facilitating the integration and connection of international students by creating spaces, events and encounters. In conclusion, this study could be seen as a starting point for exploring the TU Graz's offers for student integration. And if not enough, to increase them and to design a possible pilot project to better connect and facilitate the integration of international students living in Graz.

### Our Personal Experiences And Reflections

**Emma:** *"I did my university studies in my hometown: Rome, in Italy. After Covid, I felt the necessity to experience another living and studying environment out of my family house comfort zone. I decided to do an exchange semester in Vienna in summer 2022 and again now in 2023.*

*The working offer situation in Rome is quite saturated and difficult so, since I was young, my parents suggested and supported the idea of going to study and stay abroad. Thanks to my parents' economic and affective support, I had the privilege to do two Erasmus exchanges in Vienna.*

*My everyday life changed a lot. All of a sudden, I was in a country where I couldn't understand the main language and my only way of expression was English. The language was and still is a big barrier to socialize with people and the culture I'm living in. But how to learn German without spending so much money? The average amount for a German course in Vienna is 400 Euros for 8 weeks and I can't afford it with my Erasmus money only. I found myself in this dilemma: asking for more financial support from my parents? This is why, while we were in Graz, my curiosity focused on how international students deal with these kind of economic and integration issues. Facing these barriers, I felt privileged considering I can rely on my parents' presence and maintenance, but what if somebody has a different background?"*

**Lena:** *"After finishing school, I stayed in Germany to study and moved to another town which was just one hour apart from my home. Studying, housing and the people in my everyday life changed but in some way, I lived so close to my home, my friends and my family, therefore I didn't feel completely*

*alone. I decided to do my Erasmus in Vienna, firstly to gain experiences and secondly to see if I want to live and work in Vienna in the future.*

*For the first time I was thrown into a completely unknown environment with a new city, new home, new people and new studies. Although we received the Erasmus funding, the money was not enough to cover the five months in Vienna. I had the privilege of having the opportunity of being financially supported by my parents. But what would have it been like if my parents hadn't been able to help me? Could I have studied in Vienna? And next to the financial aspect, although I speak German and shouldn't have any problem with the language, German is not Austrian. I also have difficulties understanding Austrian dialect some times. I also have difficulties getting in touch with locals. I also feel that it is another culture which I have to get used to. I also feel the social and language barriers."*

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### Figures

Figure 1: Emma Ariaudo, 2023

Figure 2: Emma Ariaudo, 2023

Figure 3: Emma Ariaudo, 2023

Figure 4: Emma Ariaudo, Lena Kalmbach, 2023

# EXPLORING SAFE SPACES FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY IN GRAZ

Theresa Korn, Gréta Semancová, Miguel Ureña Pliegot

## 1. Introduction

When we first arrived in Graz, one of the group got a lot of messages on Grindr, a location-based gay dating app he used. He felt like a “novelty” in the city and did not expect this to happen in a city of 283.869 inhabitants and more than 60.000 students, which should have a significant percentage of LGBTQI+ population. From conversations with people on the app it felt like Graz was more a rural village than the second largest city in Austria as LGBTQI+ people seemed to be quite hidden. Gay bars were discreet and catered to older gay men. It was difficult to find LGBTQI+ flags on the street. LGBTQI+ people seem to be quite invisible in Graz. We wanted to know why.

We started our qualitative exploration by visiting key LGBTQI+ oriented spaces. Our initial visit to Stars, a bar with a classic vibe, provided us insights from a bartender, who emphasised that Graz is a safe place for gay men. We noted a potential generational divide. Later visit to feel free, a queer youth and community center, offered a contrasting atmosphere. Hosting a Drag Race Germany viewing party, the space exuded inclusivity and youthfulness.

We decided to look more into the topic to find out what it is like for LGBTQI+ people to live in Graz and how they are integrated into the city.

## 2. Background

In order to have some context on the topic here is a brief summary of some of the most prominent issues the LGBTQI+ community is facing nowadays in European countries.

As a result of the discrimination and fear that LGBTQI+ communities live with, their mental health is impacted. It has been widely expected that the LGBTQI+ people suffer more anxiety and depression disorders than cis heterosexuals, especially in

older generations (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020, pp. 308–315; Perez-Brumer et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2018; Salerno et al., 2020; Schuler et al., 2018). Bisexuals deal more frequently with anxiety (Ross et al., 2018) and suicide rates on trans teens are significantly higher than on the rest of the population (Perez-Brumer et al., 2015). The Covid-19 crisis affected negatively on the mental health of LGBTQI+ people as quarantine measures made them feel more isolated and, on some occasions, trapped in unsafe environments (Salerno et al., 2020).

Other intersectional studies have described multiple micro aggressions that the LGBTQI+ population faces regularly (Nadal et al., 2015) intersecting with other identities. While women of colour feel dehumanized, Asians feel invisible and desexualized, and men of colour are criminalized. Gender based stereotypes have a particular impact on the Muslim LGBTQI+ population.

LGBTQI+ people of colour suffer discrimination and stigma differently to whites as LGBTQI+ spaces can be unsafe for them if racial discrimination happens (Bowleg, 2013). This effect has been described as multiple minority stress and has a negative effect on health, especially mental health (McConnell et al., 2018).

Experiences of stigma and discrimination can lead to self-isolation among LGBTQI+ people to avoid further rejection in the future, increasing internal homophobia and decreasing connections to the LGBTQI+ community. Well-connected LGBTQI+ people can have access to resources and support thereby reducing their vulnerability to stigma (Hatzenbuehler, 2009; McConnell et al., 2018).

Particularly for gay men, an over-sexualised environment, especially with apps such as Grindr, creates a situation where sex is the only or fastest

option for connecting with the community, even more so in rural areas (Blackwell et al., 2015). This situation can lead to an increased feeling of isolation and a lack of social relations (Hatzenbuehler, 2009). Sex-related eating disorders (Calzo et al., 2017) or substance abuse (Schmidt et al., 2016; Schuler et al., 2018) are more common. Discrimination of feminine looking gay men happens is also common in those environments (Gerrard et al., 2023).

Regarding 'queer space', it should be mentioned that there is a strong migration of the LGBTQI+ population from rural areas to large, more progressive and safer cities (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Whitehead et al., 2016; Wienke & Hill, 2013). This is emptying rural areas of LGBTQI+ people, so that the LGBTQI+ community is not invisible, but in some cases non-existent.

## 2.1. Queer space

When defining "queer space", it must first be considered that space is created from a cis-heterosexual point of view (Binnie, 1997) and that queer people claimed space in cities facing a lot of repression and police violence (Binnie, 1997; Goh, 2018). Gay rights movements embraced capitalism and consumer culture, being included into neoliberal agendas and transforming traditional queer spaces in cities, excluding people with lower incomes (Goh, 2018). For this reason, many queer city centres in Europe and the USA cater to white affluent gay tourists, contributing to the gentrification of city centres and excluding locals, young people, people with low incomes, women and non-binary people (Burchiellaro, 2021; Doan & Higgins, 2011; Spruce, 2020).

## 2.2. Safe space

The concept of a 'safe space' was first introduced by the feminist movement as spaces exclusively for women and without sexual violence (The Roestone Collective, 2014), but the concept has evolved and broadened for other collectives such as the LGBTQI+ community. A space is 'unsafe' for people of a particular social group when they feel fear in that space. A safe space is an environment where individuals or groups are free from external threats or

harm, with measures in place to provide protection and support for those it is intended to serve. Thus, 'from' and 'for' are important concepts in defining a 'safe space' (The Roestone Collective, 2014). A separatist approach strictly controls people's access to the space, allowing only certain social groups to enter, such as women-only groups (Lewis et al., 2015) or men-only gay sex bars. Protection from outside fear is more effective, especially for more disadvantaged parts of the community such as women, trans and non-binary people (Safratmüller, 2012, p. 71; Walker & DeVito, 2020; Weiss, 2004), but intersectional identities such as LGBTQI+ PoC might be excluded (The Roestone Collective, 2014). An inclusive approach, such as queer art exhibitions or LGBTQI+ events for the whole community, cannot offer complete safety to all groups, but intersectional identities are better integrated, spaces are more open and easily accessible, and the space contributes to educating society as a whole (McCartan & Nash, 2023). Inclusive spaces are more vulnerable to power differentials and domination, as hetero-patriarchal power relations are often adopted within the LGBTQI+ community, such as the mentioned discrimination of feminine-looking men or the exclusion of transgender identities (Gerrard et al., 2023; Walker & DeVito, 2020; Weiss, 2004). It is important to note that, especially for the LGBTQI+ community, safe spaces can be located in unexpected places (Wexelbaum, 2016), in addition to bars or LGBTQI+ organisations, such as libraries, art exhibitions, etc.

Following the definition of (Hartal, 2017), a "safe space" should have the following characteristics:

- Safety from outside attacks
- Anonymity for participants, as some people's identities are unknown in certain contexts.
- Creation of an inclusive space, as the LGBTQI+ community is diverse and intersection with other identities must be considered (race, class, etc...).
- Separation for different identity groups may also be necessary to minimize unequal power relations and allow more private interaction among people from more disadvantaged groups within the LGBTQI+ community.
- Managing the unpredictability of participants' actions within the space is crucial, as individ-

uals need to feel in control of the situations occurring inside, since discrimination can also arise within the LGBTQI+ community.

### 3. Field study

#### 3.1. Methodology

This research explores the integration of LGBTQI+ safe spaces into the landscape of Graz, Austria, and examines their design for specific target groups, using a qualitative approach to unravel the various aspects of inclusivity, accessibility and community support. The research involves interviews with various actors, including staff of different LGBTQI+ locations, members of the LGBTQI+ community living in Graz, and representatives of institutions such as the Queer Referat of a local university and a local evangelical church. It was difficult to get sincere responses from participants when addressing certain issues, especially those related to non-normative sexuality. Conducting qualitative research with the LGBTQI+ population is particularly difficult as we are dealing with topics that are taboo in society (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 121). We, the researchers, are part of the LGBTQI+ community and had to be aware of our closeness to the topic in order to be as objective as possible. We did not consider events such as Graz Pride or the Tuntenball (CSD Graz, 2023; Tuntenball, 2023), which only take place once a year, as safe spaces, as they are not part of the daily life of the LGBTQI+ community.

#### 3.2. Research questions

To understand the current situation of the LGBTQI+ community in Graz, there are fundamental questions that need to be answered. What is a safe space apart from the definition in literature and where are the safer spaces in Graz? Understanding the nature of these spaces is fundamental to appreciating their importance in fostering community support. Mapping these spaces where one can find refuge in Graz becomes imperative for community members. From community centres to LGBTQI+ friendly establishments, identifying these spaces lays the groundwork for understanding the current situation of the community. In Graz, however, it is crucial to acknowledge that

safe spaces may sometimes cater to specific segments of the LGBTQI+ community. For which part of the community are these places?

Exploring the accessibility of these safe spaces becomes a crucial aspect to examine, unveiling potential obstacles encountered by community members. This examination encompasses factors such as geographical proximity and economic considerations, offering insights into the various challenges that may be encountered.

Examining how individuals feel connected or isolated provides insights into the quality of existing support structures and can tell us about the places where people feel connected to other community members. How connected or isolated do individuals feel with regard to the community?

*What is the situation like for the LGBTQI+ community in Graz to claim their space?*

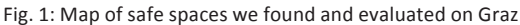
A critical examination of existing dynamics prompts us to question what needs to change. Whether dismantling systemic barriers, fostering greater inclusivity, or redefining the narrative around safe spaces, identifying areas for change is a key step toward building a more resilient and supportive community.

Within this comprehensive exploration, the experiences of LGBTQI+ women emerge as a unique and essential perspective. How safe spaces respond to their distinct needs and the challenges they face add layers to the narrative, enriching our understanding of the intersectionality of gender and sexual orientation for individuals within the community.

*What about LGBTQI+ women in Graz?*

As we navigate the intricate labyrinth of safe spaces within Graz's LGBTQI+ community, these research questions guide us towards a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. From tangible places to intangible threads of connection and isolation, this exploration seeks not only to reveal the existing landscape, but also seeks to lay the groundwork for a more inclusive, supportive and resilient community for all. What needs to change?





From the responses we received, together with information obtained through desktop research and comments posted on social media, we created a map showing queer spaces in the city of Graz (Fig. 1).

Women we interviewed expressed concern that most LGBTQI+ party venues are only for gay men. They expressed that the only place they feel really safe to party is at the Feel Free Community Centre when it is used as a bar. There are no events for

*"It's a shame that the last real queer party in Graz is being destroyed like this. The concept and the location are good in themselves, but you can't advertise a safe space for queer people if you have to have a dress code. Not everyone wants to be "kinky" or anything else. In addition, since it has been so heavily advertised, only one in ten guests feels queer anyway, apart from the fact that there are far too many guests anyway and the staff can't really manage it organizationally."*

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Fig. 3a: FAGtory club



Fig. 3b: Feel free community center



Fig. 3c: Stars bar

Schönaugasse in the centre of Graz has a number of gay bars such as the stars bar (Figure 3c). It is interesting to note that all the bars on this street are discreet and do not have any LGBTQI+ flags that can be seen from the outside, so it is difficult to notice that there is a gay bar. All the bars on this street are traditional and the clientele tends to be older gay men, making it part of an older generation of gay men's space in Graz.

The Feel Free Community Centre, run by the organisation RosaLila Pantherinen and funded by the local and city government, opened in 2023 and its main aim is to create a safe space for the younger LGBTQI+ generation to make up for the lack of spaces and events aimed for the younger LGBTQI+ population. During normal opening hours, only people under the age of 22 can enter, but everyone is welcome at the bar and during events. This was the only place where we found a fair number of women and transgender people.

Universities, the Rotor Art Centre, the organisation RosaLila Pantherinnen and the church group HuG are the only spaces outside the drinking and sex culture. Organized spaces can create barriers for outsiders that other spaces, like art exhibitions, do not.

According to the experts we interviewed, the overall situation for the community has improved significantly in recent years and the city has developed a satisfactory environment for the LGBTQI+ community. There is a climate of discussion, especially in relation to the mayor's office. There is a lack of representation of LGBTQI+ people in Graz in many areas, such as sports, LGBTQI+ monuments, street names, etc.

### 3.4. Evaluating accessibility

The quality of access to safer spaces varies according to factors such as location, economic status and cultural norms and rules. But here we need to distinguish between two perspectives. One is the openness that comes from the place itself, how it's designed, who owns it, what the purpose is and what the rules are for entering. The other is the ability of each individual to enter a particular place. Some people may find it easier to access certain spaces due to geographical proximity, financial resources or social acceptance, while others may face barriers that limit their participation. Some people don't feel comfortable spending money and don't have the time to travel to a particular place after work. It has to do with a lot of different factors in their lives. Do they have enough time after work to come to a particular event, can they afford to buy a particular outfit for a fetish party, how far do they live from a venue, do they have caring responsibilities, do they even know other people in the community? As mentioned earlier (section 2.1), LGBTQI+ people are more likely to experience mental health problems, which can make it difficult for them to attend social events.

The Intersectionality in identity formation within the LGBTQI+ community adds a layer of complexity to the needs for safe spaces. Individuals may seek out spaces that cater to multiple aspects of their identity, leading to the unintentional exclusion of those who do not share these intersecting identities, resulting in unequal access to these safe spaces.

The safer spaces found in Graz can have different

states of accessibility: access denied, limited access under certain circumstances, limited access based on age, gender, identity or sexual orientation, open to all but entering is not comfortable for everyone. Bars, the quintessential social hub, are ostensibly open to all, yet there is a subtle undercurrent of discomfort for certain segments of the LGBTQI+ community. While the doors are physically open, the atmosphere within does not always resonate with everyone, particularly those who do not identify as gay men. This highlights the nuanced nature of accessibility, where physical entry does not guarantee a sense of belonging or comfort. This is also a concern with the next venue. The FAGtory hosts fetish parties where access is denied if you wear the wrong outfit, but such access is also not comfortable for everyone (The FAGtory Club, 2023).

The feel free youth centre is primarily for younger people (feel free | Community Centre, 2023). Nevertheless, feel free hosts a number of regular events where older people are also welcome. This case shows that the primary designation of a space does not necessarily limit its inclusivity.

When exploring other safe spaces, the church emerges as an open space that welcomes everyone, despite the fact that it mainly addresses religious people ("HuG - Homosexuelle und Glaube", 2023). The Queer Referate Graz is open to students and specifically addresses their concerns at the university, such as discrimination (Queer Referate Graz, 2023).

The spectrum of inclusivity extends to LGBTQI+-friendly establishments such as beauty parlours and galleries, which radiate an open-door policy for all, transcending the boundaries of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Yet the question remains - are there more places in Graz that embody the essence of inclusivity, creating safe havens for every facet of the LGBTQI+ community? The search for such spaces continues, a journey towards fostering an environment where accessibility is not just physical, but resonates with a deep sense of belonging and comfort for all.

## 4. Discussion

Within the diverse fabric of Graz's LGBTQI+ com-

munity, an examination of its internal dynamics reveals distinct divisions based on age and gender. In particular, there's a notable concern expressed by young women who feel uncomfortable in spaces frequented by older gay men.

Our research reveals a predominantly male-dominated landscape, with LGBTQI+ bars and their ownership primarily claimed by men. This dominance extends to party contexts, where themes often revolve around sex and fetish, potentially excluding those seeking alternative forms of self-expression. The limited availability of spaces exclusively for transgender people adds another layer, raising concerns about the inclusivity of Graz's physical spaces.

Our observations suggest fragmentation within the community, particularly between older gay men and the younger generation, especially women.

One hypothesis is that this may be due to a correlation between societal structures rooted in capitalism and patriarchy, both of which have undermined women and consequently limited the presence of LGBTQI+ spaces for women or non-binary people in Graz. Capitalism's profit-driven orientation may prioritise the hetero-normative mainstream, leaving a void in inclusive spaces. Patriarchal norms, historically led by cisgender gay men, may contribute to the prevalence of male-owned establishments. The underrepresentation of women and non-binary people in ownership roles echo wider societal expectations, highlighting the need to challenge such norms and actively promote inclusivity in LGBTQI+ spaces.

A similar trend is evident when examining spaces for transgender people. While there are online platforms (@queeeerchameleon, 2023) that provide a sense of community, physical spaces exclusively for trans individuals are notably rare. The limited availability of events for this segment of the LGBTQI+ community raises concerns about the inclusivity of Graz's physical spaces.

Furthermore, an inquiry into consumption spaces, particularly bars, reveals a potential mismatch between existing provision and the preferences of those seeking diverse or non-alcoholic socialising options.

Recent developments in Graz's LGBTQI+ community, such as visits by drag queen Pandora, the winner and Metamorkid Top 3 of the reality show Drag



Race Germany (Metamorkid, 2023; @thefactory-club, 2023), who were invited to the feel free community centre and the FAGtory club, indicate the potential for positive change. A stronger push for a better community image, reinforced by Austria's representation on Drag Race Germany, and the influence of the new progressive city-government provide a hopeful backdrop for shaping a more inclusive and supportive community environment in the future. The presence of the Drag Race contestants and the visibility they bring to the spaces may change the type of visitors attending the events, perhaps allowing women and transgender people to claim more space. It seems that the community and the spaces will change a lot in the next few years.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, our exploration of the LGBTQI+ community in Graz has revealed a nuanced landscape that reflects both progress and challenges. While the city boasts a variety of LGBTQI+ spaces, there are notable gaps and concerns that warrant attention.

The prevalence of male-centric spaces, especially in bars and clubs, raises questions about inclusivity for women, transgender and non-binary people. The experiences of LGBTQI+ women highlight the need for more diverse and inclusive events that address the concerns of those who feel uncomfortable or excluded in traditional spaces. The intersectionality of identities within the LGBTQI+ community, as well as the dominance of certain demographics, such as cisgender gay men, in ownership roles, pose challenges to creating truly inclusive environments.

The limited availability of spaces exclusively for transgender individuals and the lack of events catering for this segment underscore the importance of recognising and addressing the specific needs of different sub-groups within the LGBTQI+ community.

On a more positive note, recent developments such as the visits of drag queen contestants from Drag Race Germany to the feel free community centre and the FAGtory club suggest a potential shift

towards a more inclusive and diverse community. The influence of popular culture, the presence of LGBTQI+ organizations, and the changing political climate offer hope for a future where LGBTQI+ individuals in Graz can claim more space and visibility. Reflecting on the current state of the LGBTQI+ community in Graz, it is clear that continued efforts are needed to challenge existing norms, foster inclusivity and create safe spaces that cater to the diverse identities and needs within the community. By addressing these challenges, the community has the potential to evolve into a more supportive, connected and resilient network for all its members.

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# COOPERATING WITH EACH OTHER AND BE DANGEROUS TOGETHER?

Emma Neuner, Theresa Tengg

*“Common goods don’t simply exist, they are created.” – Silke Helfrich.*

## 1. Introduction and Self-Reflection

During our excursion in Graz, we stumbled over a poster in a nearby window: “Freiraumfest – nicht kommerziell und selbstorganisiert. Das Festival von unten” (transl.: Freiraumfest – non-commercial and self-organised. The grassroots festival), a festival organized by autonomous spaces taking place during our visit.



Fig. 1: Freiraumfest Poster

Our interest was most likely sparked by the fact that we are also involved in self-organised structures in Vienna. We were equipped with the knowledge that allowed us to enter such spaces without being disruptive. We know the codes of speech, the vocabulary that people use in their anti-discriminatory practice, the setting of plenaries, etc. Our appearance, in terms of clothing, is also compatible with leftist, activist groups in German-speaking countries. In Bourdieu's terms, we incorporate the habitus of this group - we have embodied knowledge and the feel for the game (Bourdieu 1977, 201).

While visiting some of the venues, attending a plenary and an event where activist groups introduced themselves, we noticed something that made us curious. It felt unusually easy to enter the spaces and feel part of them. However, we both are able-bodied white women, grew up in Austria with German as our first language, specifically an expression of Austrian German. Our political engagement in Vienna, and the embodied knowledge we have gained from it, is possible because of our financial backing by our parents and the job opportunities we have because of our legal status and the other factors described above. The knowledge needed in left autonomous spaces is strongly connected to academic discourses and political theory. Being a student gives us access and time to information, knowledge and groups to discuss these issues with.

Despite these privileges in Vienna, it still felt much more accessible in Graz. This could also be a result of the size of the city, which creates a general need for people to join in. In addition, the Freiraumfest made it feel easier to join, as there was a sense that people were expecting newcomers and explicitly inviting the public to join. Given this, we were interested in the reasons for the Freiraumfest, the challenges in organizing it, the expectations and the structures behind it.

The guiding questions for this research are:

- How is autonomous space produced in Graz, and what are the spaces of self-organisation in terms of participation in the Freiraumfest? How can the spaces be typologised?
- What are the strengths and obstacles of the self-organised groups of local citizens in terms of their cooperation, how does this question unfold around the Open Space Festival and who participates and leads the event?
- What conclusions can be drawn regarding co-operation and alliance of autonomous spaces? What are the challenges and chances?

## **2. Autonomous Spaces and the barriers of cooperation**

As a first step, we want to explore the discourse on self-organised, autonomous spaces and the concept of commons in relation to such spaces, focusing on spaces in Graz.

### **2.1. Definition of autonomous spaces**

To define what self-organized spaces are, we draw from the literature, definitions of the spaces themselves, and the Freiraumfest.

One definition we found informative is that of Narváez (2016, p. 158), for whom self-organized spaces are "spaces created by self-motivation in autonomous and community-based networks by citizens without state control."

This definition highlights the efforts of a community creating spaces from within, based on their own needs and wants. Additionally, the definition provided by the Freiraumfest itself is that the participating spaces are non-commercial and self-organized. The Freiraumfest states that Graz is home to a variety of open, non-commercial spaces. Graz's open spaces are intended to give people the opportunity to become culturally, artistically and politically involved in the city's events. Open spaces can also be a second home for communities. (Freiraumfest, 2023). Here the focus lies on creating spaces from within a community, as well as creating spaces beyond the logic of the market, which focuses on consumption and profit orientation.

To conclude these definitions, if we argue that autonomous spaces exist beyond state control and market structure, we would argue that the very existence of autonomous spaces is also an inherently political process.

These spaces give people within the community the means to engage and develop without the pressure to produce profit, and it provides infrastructure for (political) activism, while both are an act of activism. (Cba - Cultural Broadcasting Archive, 2023b)

### **2.2. Self-organized spaces as commons**

We argue that self-organized spaces, even if they are not accessible for everyone at anytime, are commons. Commons, as the two commons activists Andreas Exner and Brigitte Kratzwald (2021) state, are consisting of three elements: the material, the rooms and their materiality, the people who care, use, reproduce and preserve it and the rules that are applied by the people who do it. The combination of social relationships and practices, negotiated in a shared space are what commons are made of. (Dellenbaugh, 2015, S. 13). Commons are not spaces where no rules are applied, but rather spaces where these rules are developed and applied from within. (Dellenbaugh, 2015, S. 36). Commons work differently from capitalist logic because social relations are organized around cooperation instead of competition. They also focus on creating something themselves rather than relying on the state or politics to do it for them. (Raphael Kiczka, 2014, 124-125). A struggle for the commons and their reappropriation also entails a struggle against the separation of the spheres of production and reproduction, public and private, characteristic of bourgeois society. However, thinking in commons goes beyond production and reproduction by addressing the collective care of a particular resource. Thus, commons can offer a feminist emancipatory perspective that does not rely on integration into the sphere of wage labor and thus avoids accepting other forms of oppression. Commoning thus implies a profound transformation of our everyday lives and a reorganization of the social labor necessary for our reproduction. (Raphael Kiczka, 2014, p. 122).

### **3. Autonomous Spaces in Graz**

The aim of the next part of the essay is to describe and typologise the participating initiatives and to place them in the context of the Freiraumfest and the theoretical background. The spaces we refer to are the following: Schubertnest, Spektral, Traumwerk, Green Campus, Realraum, Roter Keil, Die Kometin, Schwarze Raupe, Sub, Ludovico and Radio Helsinki.

### 3.1. Methods

We used the method of participatory observation by attending events and visiting four sites to gain a deeper understanding. During these visits, we talked to people involved in the organisations, asked them to show us the spaces and explain how the day-to-day operations worked. At Sub, we were able to participate in a plenary session of the group's members, addressing pressing questions about the space itself as well as issues related to the Freiraumfest. At Schwarze Raupe we attended an event where autonomous, political, anti-authoritarian groups presented themselves and opened up for participation. The other two case studies were visits during opening hours when no event of the Freiraumfest was taking place. We then made sketches of the sites in their built form, but also in their social dimension - how and for what they are and have to be used. To analyze the spaces in general and the Freiraumfest in particular, we conducted online research and listened to a podcast and a radio show about the festival. We also conducted a semi-structured interview with two of the organizers of Freiraumfest via Zoom to further deepen our research and reflect on the information. Mayring's (1994, page 170f) content analysis method was used for the empirical analysis. The method involves a multi-step process that begins with the systematic categorization of text segments. First, we established a set of codes, namely relationships, form of organization, reasons for the Open Space Festival, initiation, challenges, outcome, lessons learned, potentials. We then scanned the interview transcript using these categories and extracted the important parts of the text.

We are aware that the data we obtained and the subsequent analysis is inter-subjective and tied to our identities. As German speakers who are used to plenary situations, struggles, etc. in similar spaces, we have advantages as well as biases that good research practice requires us to reflect on. Due to the tight schedule of the exploratory research, we did not have the time to build up trust or to get close to the people from whom we obtained information. For more sensitive information, especially regarding difficulties and negative aspects, as well as a deep and broad insight into all spaces, we would

have needed subsequent revisits or extended the excursion in Graz.

### 3.2. The Freiraumfest

The Freiraumfest is a self-organized festival that took place for the first time in Graz from October 15 to 21. It is organized by and hosted in 11 different open spaces in Graz. The Freiraumfest is also financially supported by the city of Graz and the student union of the Graz University of Technology (HTU Graz) and the University of Graz (ÖH Graz). Besides financial support, the Freiraumfest also collaborates with the community-owned online platforms [graz.social](https://graz.social) and [mur.at](https://mur.at).

Conceived and organised by autonomous spaces, it focuses on exhibiting these spaces to the public and demonstrating their role in the everyday life of the city through cultural, artistic or political practices. In doing so, it represents an emancipatory space for communities beyond the governmental or profit-oriented place based initiatives. (Freiraumfest, 2023)

### 3.3. Overview of autonomous spaces in Graz participating in the Freiraumfest

#### Schubertnest

**Established:** 2019, relocated 2023; developed by Students but open for everyone, especially socially and/or ecologically motivated and engaged individuals and groups working towards sustainable societal development; emphasis on self-organization and cooperation

**Purpose:** Infrastructure platform at the University of Graz, providing workspace and living rooms on campus

**Spaces:** Shared office, multifunctional room

**Organization:** Association, different working groups (AK) concerning different topics

**Funding:** University of Graz Austrian Student Union (ÖH) for room setup, European Solidarity Corps

**Additional Information:** Events are not allowed to have an affiliation with political parties, religious/authoritarian groups, or commercial interests; Booking hierarchy for Initiatives, then events related to the Austrian Student Union (ÖH) (Schubertnest, 2023)

#### Spektral

**Established:** Since 2005

**Purpose:** Freiraum project aiming to break down financial barriers and the usual divide between active participants and consumers

**Spaces:** Redistributor, cultural café, kitchen, community office, workshop

**Organization:** Association with introductory workshops for non-members; Active members + Team members

**Funding:** Voluntary donations, grants (Spektral, 2023)



### Traumwerk

**Established:** Since 2009 (Initially part of Spektral, then became a separate association)

**Purpose:** Public workshop; specific workshops concerning metal, wood, print, etc.

**Spaces:** Workspace in the basement of Spektral

**Organization:** Association, Free usage

**Funding:** Material and monetary donations, grants (Traumwerk, 2023)

### Green Campus

**Established:** 2021

**Purpose:** Initiative from the Department for Society, Innovation, and Sustainability; Open garden; Participatory and sustainable development of the campus

**Spaces:** outdoor spaces for people, animals and insects; open living laboratory

**Organization:** Initiative by a department of the HTU Graz; in cooperation with locals

**Funding:** HTU Graz

**Additional Information:** Cooperation with HTU and TU Graz (HTU Graz, 2023)

### Realraum

**Established:** Since 2007

**Purpose:** Meeting place for crafting, experimenting, discussing the future, and more – a hackerspace for software, hardware, computers, electronics, molecular biology, and chemistry; catering towards technology and craft enthusiasts

**Spaces:** Main room for multiple uses, workshop for woodworking, Open BioLab (community lab for molecular biology and bio-hacking)

**Organization:** Association, meetings once per month, Members & “known faces” (before becoming a member)

**Funding:** Membership required for permanent autonomous use with a monthly fee (€30) (realraum, 2023)

### Roter Keil

**Established:** 2012, Relocated in 2022, Founded by graduates of HTBLVA Graz-Ortweinschule

**Purpose:** Space for artistic experimentation and creation, showroom; presenting art non-elitistically in the city

**Spaces:** rented and interim usage, 3 locations throughout Graz

**Organization:** Association, artistic positions are defined collectively through open discourse

**Funding:** Membership fees, donations, and subsidies (Roter Keil, 2023)

### Die Kometin

**Established:** November 2022

**Purpose:** open, community-supported space

**Spaces:** rented; space for workshops, events and different initiatives; Living room and working space, garden, kitchen

**Organization:** Association, with different types of members (full member, group member, starting member), regular meetings once per month; open meetings for people to join

**Funding:** full members pay a fee, the amount is discussed in a monthly meeting, there is an ideal amount, but if you are not able to pay there will be other solutions

**Additional Information:** against funding, because it does not fit with their view on self-organization; no party-political, commercial, religious/disempowering events (Die Kometin, 2023)

### Schwarze Raupe

**Established:** 2022, take-over of the spaces of the Schwarzes Radieschen (10 year old autonomous space) through a new collective

**Purpose:** space for (political) discussion, reading, learning, chilling; space for the radical left and political organisation

**Spaces:** rented (500€ per Month), one open space, small kitchen, Infoladen Graz

**Organization:** open for everyone, no association structure, open plenum once per month

**Funding:** donations (Schwarze Raupe, 2023)

### SUB

**Established:** 2001

**Purpose:** (political) space for parties, readings, discussions, workshops, etc.; “how do we want to organize in our society?”

**Spaces:** rented; two story house with a terrace, no bar (bring your own bottle concept); closed presentation to the street, some windows are blocked off

**Organization:** association, all events are for members only; open plenum every week where decisions are made collectively, no individual can speak for SUB

**Funding:** member fee (1€ when applying for membership) and donations for events (SUB, 2023)

### Ludovico

**Established:** 1989

**Purpose:** Promotion of play culture, playing and play education, Ludothek game rental, workshops, group games,

**Spaces:** Game Library, open space to play games; opening hours

**Organization:** Association, members, employees

**Funding:** through funding by the city and state Styria, game lending fee, or paid group services (Ludocivo, 2023)

### Radio Helsinki

**Established:** pirate radio 1992-1995, then first legal free radio in Austria

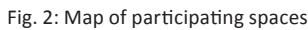
**Purpose:** free radio, adfree, grassroots reporting; workshops and internships for people interested in journalism

**Spaces:** opening hours on workdays; open space for staying; recording studio and office spaces, workshop spaces that can be used by different initiatives

**Organization:** part-time employees, based on voluntary work, democratic organisation: board + program council are voted on, there are general meetings held yearly

**Funding:** Public funding, membership fees, cooperations, donations and sponsoring

**Additional Information:** no programs allowed by political parties, religious groups, people in governmental positions (Radio Helsinki, 2023)



#### 4.1 Typology of the spaces

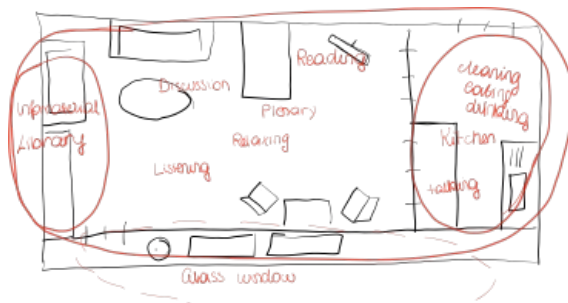


Fig. 4: Spatial organization Schwarze Raupe

### 4.3. Questions faced by autonomous spaces

Questions of organizing are inseparable from questions of hierarchy and power, because there is a constant negotiation about which rules apply, which voices are heard or unheard, and who has access and under what conditions. (Raphael Kiczka, 2014, p. 122). Commons are certainly not automatically just. They do not exist apart from discriminatory and capitalist structures. Many places, such as social/autonomous centres, that try to create such a just space often fail due to a lack of openness or the ability to really allow for it. This hinders the possibility of expanding and bringing together diverse individuals. Undoubtedly, these places are important and necessary as sanctuaries and spaces of freedom where processes of political socialisation, radicalisation and empowerment take place. However, many of these spaces have a strong identity-political core, often establishing clear boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that relate to cultural codes and resonate with a particular habitus, as mentioned in the introduction (Raphael Kiczka, 2014, p. 158). Bourdieu's concept of habitus describes the relationship between an individual's position in social space and their practices. It seeks to determine the scope of action for social actors by outlining the boundaries that shape their behaviours and dispositions. Habitus thus influences which actions are possible and which are barred, and is shaped by socialization processes that include values, moral beliefs, habits, attitudes, lifestyles, and bodily movements. (Dangschat, 2009, p. 318). Despite their small differences, we wanted to outline the importance of material boundaries of movement and participation in the city which we suggest relates to structural discrimination and inequality in the distribution of wealth.

In the case of self-organized spaces, this resolves into the question of access regulations, who can access when and under what conditions, combined with the financial pressure of paying rent. Some spaces use the paid membership model, which can be a barrier for people with low incomes. In this context, there is the question of funding, how to get it, and whether it is wanted or refused for reasons of independence. Sub and Schwarze Raupe do not accept funding for reasons of autonomy. There is also the aspect of trying to live against the capitalist logic of not having to produce anything in order to have the right to exist. Being outside the norm, the question of what form of organization to choose, how to avoid hierarchies or how to install them democratically, is and must be a permanent one. All the spaces function as an association and therefore legally have to have votes for the positions of association board, secretary, treasurer and others. This does not always mean that these hierarchies apply in practice. Especially in spaces with anarchist tendencies, signs of power imbalance are regularly questioned and discussed. Another issue is how to imply an anti-discriminatory practice while these structures are built into society and affect us. Questions of how decisions are made, how space is defined and narrated, how skills and knowledge are shared. The question of time and capacity to care for the space within individual challenges of personal availabilities, frustration and other aspects. In terms of the materiality of the spaces themselves, we observed challenges of space scarcity. This leads to questions and problems of visibility and noise by using the space in front of the entrances, as well as the urge to apply some kind of door policy or membership system, even if this is not desired per se.

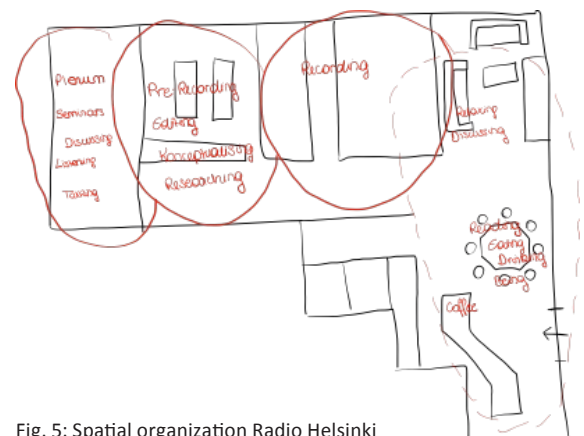


Fig. 5: Spatial organization Radio Helsinki



All of these aspects were drawn from discussions and conversations we had or witnessed during our visits, as well as from two radio broadcasts about the Freiraumfest and the interview we conducted with two of the festival's organizers. These discussions are also in line with our personal experiences of visiting autonomous spaces or being part of self-organized groups.

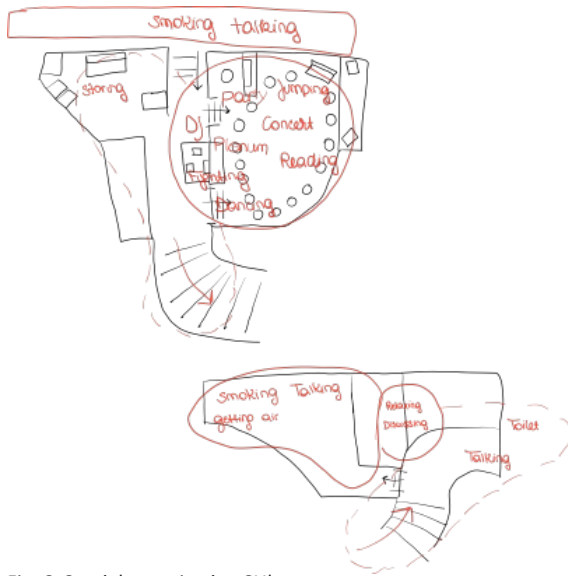


Fig. 6: Spatial organization SUB

#### 4.4 Questions the Freiraumfest faces

In addition, the Freiraumfest was faced with its own set of cross-space struggles and challenges. Through the interviews, we were able to identify several themes that influenced the organizational process of Freiraumfest.

We conducted ethnographic interviews with two organizers, Marcus and Andreas, who are both actively involved in the autonomous spaces in Graz - Marcus at Die Kometin and Andreas at Traumwerk. Involved in the initiation process of the Freiraumfest, both see themselves as part of the core organizing team. Both were involved in the initiation of the Freiraumfest and consider themselves part of its core organizing team. They emphasized that the planning process involved numerous individuals and spaces, highlighting that their perspectives could not fully represent all the spaces participating in the event.

Originally conceived by various activists from autonomous spaces in 2021, the initial concept of

the Freiraumfest was soon disrupted by the Covid pandemic. Two years later, the newly formed The Kometin sought to collaborate with established spaces, reigniting thoughts of the Freiraumfest. Marcus portrayed the revival as dependent on key individuals from the 2021 inauguration, stating, "Manuel immediately took out his phone and started texting people [...]". The formation of the festival relied heavily on relationships and an interconnected network spanning various autonomous spaces. The involvement of 11 spaces came about through "coincidence, chaos, and largely through acquaintanceships with individuals connected to other spaces."

Marcus and Andreas stated that the core team consisted of 6-7 individuals from 4 different autonomous spaces, maintaining consistency throughout the process. Establishing a collective code of conduct and a financing system for the festival, as well as other organizational decisions, through iterative meetings, albeit not devoid of challenges. Continuous communication, information transfer, and decision-making remained ongoing hurdles acknowledged during the reflective phases. The participating spaces "developed independently and had their own experiences". Encapsulating this diversity while working was a significant challenge, as not all participating spaces provided feedback on decisions in a timely manner. Time resources emerged as another pivotal factor; these spaces, as well as the people within them, have individual challenges making engagement in additional projects such as the festival a demanding commitment. Notably, it's imperative to acknowledge the privilege inherent in being able to allocate time to spaces. However, a system should be put in place to speed up the decision-making process for those involved in the core organization.

During the interview it became evident that several additional aspects need to be discussed within the organization. In terms of funding, among the 11 spaces involved, most rely on city funding, while some are explicitly opposed to this idea. Manuel raises a crucial question about "how much autonomy we can allow to be taken away by subsidies, and where is the limit for us too", particularly in the context of including spaces and initiatives rather than having a strictly professional festival. For

much of the planning phase, reliance on subsidies was not a central aspect, as "we already have the spaces," hinting at potential independence from subsidies. While Manuel and Andreas had different perspectives on this, they agreed that it's a topic worthy of further discussion.

Another focus of the upcoming festival is the definition of "Freiräume". Initially, these spaces were defined as physical, self-organized locations. However, there is a concern that some of the initiatives included in the festival don't quite fit into the established normative and material framework. Some initiatives that were not part of Freiraumfest may lack a physical space, but resonate more with the ethos and organizational structure of the participating autonomous spaces. This exploration could broaden the scope of the festival to include initiatives working politically through various means beyond physical spaces to provide things individuals may not have access to due to socio-economic factors.

Andreas and Manuel are positive about the outcome of the festival. The festival allowed people from different autonomous spaces to gain insight into what is happening in Graz, to build trust beyond their own circles, and to make new acquaintances and friends. The events attracted more diverse audiences, potentially sowing the seeds of the Freiraumfest concept among the general population. This diversity offers a lot of potential within this alliance.

The initiation process of Die Kometin provided access to resources and knowledge from different autonomous spaces, facilitating the creation of new spaces and empowering individuals to build commons within the city. Another potential could be a lower threshold within the network of different spaces: having similar codes of conduct or rules throughout the network of autonomous spaces in Graz would make it easier for the general population to move within the scene of Freiräume, as Manuel states: "How can we make it easier for people to understand this diversity and the similarities of this diversity and to be able to move within it? Easier accessibility could promote non-commercial lifestyles by steering people to use existing infrastructure instead of commercial spaces. Instead

of spending money in commercial spaces, people could "look where there is a kitchen for all and then [...] see that there is a small concert" and use this "infrastructure" instead.

The interview also highlights the potential for strengthening Graz's subculture. A unified voice could amplify the significance of individual autonomous spaces and enable their engagement in city politics, positioning them as integral components of the city alongside other actors.

## 5. Conclusion

In essence, the intricate dynamics of autonomous spaces and the Freiraumfest in Graz underscore an ongoing dialogue about inclusivity, financial sustainability, and the complex interplay of power structures. As autonomous spaces navigate questions of access, funding, and anti-discriminatory practices, Freiraumfest emerges as a collaborative endeavour. The organizational challenges of the festival reflect the inherent complexities of coordinating autonomous entities by highlighting the resilience and adaptability of these spaces. Crucial discussions about funding sources and the delicate balance between autonomy and subsidy reveal the evolving nature of Freiraumfest. The exploration of "Freiräume" adds another layer, questioning the festival's scope and inclusivity beyond physical spaces. This is also a result of the different levels of institutionalization vs. autonomy and the "product" the spaces want to offer, as already stated.

In the midst of these challenges, the Freiraumfest stands as a positive force that fosters insight, trust and community bonds. Its potential to strengthen Graz's subculture and empower individual spaces within the city's larger stance towards non-commercial, bottom-up spaces is likely to have a transformative impact beyond the festival itself. Ultimately, the narrative highlights not only the hurdles, but also the resilience and collective vision that define the vibrant landscape of autonomous spaces in Graz.

Because of the limited time in Graz and the scope of the seminar, it is not possible to provide enough data to make well-founded general statements. What we were able to provide is a substantiated

insight into the processes of self-organized spaces in Graz by looking at the Freiraumfest. Due to the limited resources of each individual involved in autonomous spaces and, consequently, the composition of the spaces, many difficulties arise. These are particularly strong in commons and self-organized spaces because they function in opposition to the status quo, which means that they are constantly challenged and in need of legitimation. It is therefore particularly challenging to build something together, even when the overall goal is quite similar. Regardless of the actual outcomes, we see a lot of potential in such alliances, especially in times of ongoing crisis, when it is important to work together rather than sharpen distinctions up to the point of changing the status quo of urban commons.

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## Figures

Figure 1: Theresa Tengg, 2023

Figure 2: Emma Neuner, 2023

Figure 3: Emma Neuner, 2023

Figure 4: Emma Neuner, Theresa Tengg, 2023

Figure 5: Emma Neuner, Theresa Tengg, 2023

Figure 6: Emma Neuner, Theresa Tengg, 2023



## CONCLUSION

Emma Ariaudo, Aglaé Dumez, Theresa Tengg, Miguel Ureña Pliego

The essays delve into the fundamental principle that cities should provide inclusive and suitable spaces for diverse groups, emphasizing the city's obligation to nurture a sense of belonging among its inhabitants. This necessitates the creation of public spaces that both acknowledge and reflect the plurality of urban cultures, ensuring equitable representation and inclusion. Central to the discussion is the call for urban development to adopt an intersectional approach, integrating social and cultural diversity into planning practices.

Drawing from research in Graz, the essays highlight how minority groups often feel compelled to claim specific spaces as a means of securing protection and fostering a sense of identity. This raises critical questions about how to balance municipal planning with the autonomous spatial claims of these groups. Defining and negotiating these boundaries is a pressing issue: How can democratic urban planning effectively address the heterogeneous needs of diverse populations?

A significant proposal emerges: shifting from top-down institutional frameworks to grassroots, community-driven initiatives, favoring representative associations that reflect lived experiences. This approach prioritizes social considerations in urban planning over purely economic imperatives. However, the challenge lies in operationalizing this shift and ensuring that institutional frameworks remain accessible to all, without inadvertently marginalizing some groups.

The accessibility of institutionalization is a key concern, alongside the need to critically assess its limitations and potential unintended consequences. Balancing institutional planning with the rights of minority groups to self-manage and claim urban spaces presents a complex dilemma. Questions arise about whether institutional mechanisms might unintentionally restrict certain groups' ability

to exercise autonomy in defining and managing their spatial needs.

In summary, the essays examine the intricate interplay between urban planning institutions and the autonomous initiatives of minority groups. They provoke reflection on the limitations of institutionalization, advocate for a transition towards grassroots representation, and challenge the balance between centralized urban planning and the autonomy of diverse groups in claiming and managing urban spaces.

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## EXCURSION

	<i>Sunday (RP)</i> 15.10.2023	<i>Monday (RP)</i> 16.10.2023	<i>Tuesday</i> (RP,SK) 17.10.2023	<i>Wednesday</i> (RP,SK) 18.10.2023	<i>Thursday</i> (RP) 19.10.2023
9:00 - 12:00		<b>Unit 3&amp;4</b> Theme: Urban culture Hermann Götz  Topic: Kulturhauptstadt 2003	<b>Unit 7 /</b> Rathaus Vize-Bürgerm. Schwentner Strate.planning  Unit 7+/ 10:45 Public space Daniela Brasil Thema: The Emperor's New Cloths  Unit 8 Graz Museum  Visit of the new exposition: "Protest"	<b>Unit 11 /</b> Triesterstrasse  Urban development and social housing / Project Triesterstr.  <b>Unit 12</b> Explorations - Project work	<b>Unit 15 /</b> Institut für Städtebau  Finalization & Presentation of 1st results  <b>Coffee break</b> (10:30-12:00)
		<i>Lunch break</i>	<i>Lunch break</i>	<i>Lunch break</i>	<b>Unit 16/</b> Starting at ca 12:30 – 14 : 00 Institut für Städtebau  Closing unit with debate  Individual return to Vienna
13:00 - 14:30	Individual arrival in Graz	<b>Unit 5:</b> Augartenpark  Input1: Space-focused ethnography –  Input2: Anke Strüver on platform & care	<b>Unit 9 / Inst f</b> Städtebau On site text presentations & group explorations  Input: Aglaée Degros (tbc) on public space	<b>Unit 13 TBA</b> Walkshop with Matthias Mitteregger  On site text presentations by students	
		<i>Coffee break</i>	<i>Coffee break</i>	<i>Coffee break</i>	
16:00 – 17:30	Ort: Hotel „Coming together“ from 17:30	<b>Unit 6 TBA</b> Explorations - Project work		<b>Unit 14 /</b> Explorations - Project work Input: Institut Kunst im öffentl. Raum	
18:00 - 19:30	<b>Unit2/ Hotel</b> Outlook & Input; urban development and social inequality		<b>Unit 10 /</b> Institute für Städtebau Theory: Everyday Life and Lived Space (SK)		

*Greyblue: Walkshop format, visiting of local actors, museums and interesting places.*

*Green: Project work*

*Yellow: Theoretical inputs*



