Embodied practice and relational public space. Bridging critical social practice, planning and design through education

Knierbein, Sabine and Tornaghi, Chiara[1]

[1]A1 Ass. Prof. for Urban Culture and Public Space, Department of Spatial Planning, Faculty of Architecture and Planning (TU Wien, Austria), knierbein@skuor.tuwien.ac.at

Keywords: public space, counter planning, critical pedagogy

0. Abstract

Traditional approaches to understand space tend to view public space mainly as a shell or container, focussing on its morphological structures and functional uses. That way, its ever-changing meanings, contested or challenged uses have been largely ignored, as well as the contextual and ongoing dynamics between social actors, their cultures, and struggles. The key role of space in enabling spatial opportunities for social action, the fluidity of its social meaning and the changing degree of "publicness" of a space remain unexplored fields of academic inquiry and professional practice. This paper offers a different understanding of public spaces in the city. Its objective is to (re)introduce the embodied experiences in public life into the teaching curricula of those academic disciplines which deal with public space and the built environment (architecture, planning, urban design, the social sciences, etc.).

Relational theories of public spaces have been frequently discussed over the last decade, with differences in their way of addressing the relations between city materialities and social practice. The paper gives an insight into a recently evolving stream of relational pedagogy of public space, where theory of space is informed by perspectives and abstractions taken from human action constitiuting space, and related bodily encounters. Taking the example of the unexplored potentials of embodied cultures in public space, this presentation seeks to bridge theoretical approaches in urban studies and an introduction to performative tools in planning and architecture with the objective to highlight the everyday patterns and rhythms as starting point for theory building.

1. Relational conceptions of public space

This paper discusses relational perspectives on public space in order to present a way forward in dealing with new challenges in architecture and planning education. Developing a pedagogical approach based on urban life and difference in public space is a crucial and a much needed challenge in an increasingly complex and accelerated urbanised world. Considering the ramifi-cations of spatial practice and strategic interventions on urban everyday life, this is a key task for the education of urban professionals. Alternative (relational) ways of envisioning space are particularly needed in architecture and planning schools in order to reflect critically on the crucial role of academics and to amend historical patterns in the production of space.

While urban collectives and urban movements might not always reach the point of becoming ‘critical counter publics’ (Fraser, 1990), there are many ways in which theory and practice can be informed by the effervescence of daily life, and by the way people both engage with and signify

[1] This paper summarizes and adds on to the findings of the book: Tornaghi, C. and Knierbein, S., 2015. Public space and relational perspectives – New challenges for architecture and planning. New York/London: Routledge.

space. To some extent current debates on public space are aware of multiple emerging social dynamics that spontaneously evoke new patterns of public life or challenge existing ones. Contributions such as "Loose Space" (Franck and Stevens, 2006) or "Insurgent Public Spaces" (Hou, 2010) stress the power and innovation emerging from grassroots practices. Madanipour (2010) also feels that 'the complexity of the urban design, development and management processes (…), and of the configuration of urban societies in which they are located, makes it impossible to find simple answers' (p.237). In "Public Space and the Challenges of Urban Transformation in Europe", Madanipour, Knierbein and Degros (2014) emphasize the challenges faced by municipalities and urban populations in different European cities in terms of policies and programmes, and analyse the multiple roles of public space as a catalyst for urban change. An entire section is dedicated to public space in everyday urban life, revealing its multifarious potential for accommodating the changing patterns of everyday urban routines. This can be linked to Stevens' (2007, p.7) view that "urban experience and social needs are more than mere conceptual abstractions; they can be understood by looking at everyday life on the streets, at its specific and diverse qualities, (…) and in particular at the complex tensions which arise between different needs, different meanings and different users in spaces." Public space is understood as those places where public life unfolds (Madanipour, 2010). Public life relates to the (dis)enchantments of urban encounters, in which there are many and diverse ways of 'how people rub along, or don't, in the public spaces of a city' (Watson, 2006, p.2). However, the built arrangements (that is, their physical shape) of public space can only be interpreted as a snapshot of complex socio-historic processes of space production.

Philosophers, social scientists and other professionals have long tried to understand the workings of the relationships between society and urban space (see Schmid, 2005, p.194 for an introduction to absolute and relational space, and its philosophical history). In the course of these debates, so-called positivist conceptions of space have been challenged by relational conceptions of space. The first group of positivist approaches tend to consider space as existing more or less independently of human existence. Absolute conceptions of space are criticised as 'bedrock' concepts because they 'shift only slightly and move only slowly, despite increasing criticism of their usefulness and appropriateness' (Graham and Healey, 1999, p.625, citing King, 1996). The second group, concerning relational conceptions of space, tries to grasp the built space we perceive and touch as something that has grown over time and is constantly changing, as an outcome of the specific mutual relations between people and places, and their contexts. Here, we consider the material quality of the city as one aspect of such socio-historic processes. We look at space, fi rstly, as constantly generated by people – individuals or social groups – and, secondly, as indirectly affecting the everyday life of people, and in turn being transformed by changing everyday life patterns and thus by social dynamics. To put it simply, relational space approaches involve concepts that define 'lived spaces' as phenomena that can only be explained by their social, political and cultural context and by the relations between people and objects, both at a given moment in time and in the course of history.

Why is such an exploration necessary within architecture and planning? The modernist approach in these disciplines tended to view public space mainly as a shell or container, focusing on its physical and material structures, and functions. It ignored its ever-changing meaning, contested uses, social conflicts, and more generally the fact that public space is an outcome of contextual and on-going dynamics between social actors, their cultures and power relations. Today, absolute space concepts are still prevalent (as in the aforementioned bedrock concepts) in theory and practice, and tend to reduce public space to a conceptual container (without life and human experience). Such narrow concepts of space are influenced by perceived geometries that can be quantified by measuring and counting. The criticism directed at their proponents emphasises that architects,

planners and colleagues from related fields of the spatial arts run risk of disregarding social circumstances, political alternatives and cultural values when intervening in public space. Such a positivist, technocratic understanding of public space does not help in the search for a broadly accepted social path of urban change; indeed it contributes to the tightening of structural conflicts.

Since 1974, this contradictory situation has been explained as partly caused by the segmented and segmenting approaches to analysis and conceptualisation of modernist space among (and within) academic disciplines, but particularly in architecture and planning (Lefebvre, 2009; Stanek, 2008). The challenge is to find ways of dealing with the neglected human aspects in those disciplines that cast spatial visions into steel and stone, and provide the associated instruments for implementation. It promises a stimulating contest at the interface of theory and practice in cities, where interests in designing material change usually collide and confront interests wishing to produce scientific insights. These collisions and confrontations are immanent in capitalist urban planning and design, which treats space as an abstract two- or three-dimensional object to be sliced into workable pieces (Stanek, 2008). These pieces are then tailored by specialised disciplines, that is, by transport planners, landscape architects, light and urban furniture designers, regional planners, urban designers, architects, and the like.

This division of labour in shaping space leads to the alienation and marginalisation of citizens and critical scholars in ordinary practices: place is ripped out of its social and cultural meaning and origin. Since professionals in these specialised spatial arts' disciplines have been taught to understand themselves as neutral technical experts rather than as agents responsible for the spatial aspects of social change (a wider perspective in engaging with space), they hardly touch on the political or epistemological ramifications of their actions (a narrow perspective in engaging with space). These segmented and compartmentalised conceptions of space are constantly (re)produced and prevent a necessary understanding of spatial complexity and the political consequences and social impacts of strategic spatial interventions for urban societies. Above all, they lead to the incapacitation of local dwellers with everyday knowledge and experience of the values and symbolism inscribed within historically grown public space. Today, four decades after Lefebvre's critique, these discrepancies are still prevalent. As Lehtovuori (2010, p.4) states, 'space is conceived of as something separate both, from the meaning people give to it and the actual uses and practices taking place in space'. He considers this to be 'the main problem in architecture and planning's space-conception'. Academic division of labour and life-worldly alienation separate both politics and science from more accurate accounts of the complex nature of socially produced public space. The key role of public space in determining the structures of opportunity for social action, the fluidity of its social meaning and its changing public nature remain neglected fields in the academic education of future planners and architects.

Despite contributions that have provided conceptual tools to counter this trend, for example the latest evolutions of structure-agency debates, in the form of strategic relational approaches (Jessop, 2001; Jessop, Brenner and Jones, 2008), relational understanding of space and place (Graham and Healey, 1999; Tonkiss, 2005; Healey, 2006) and, more recently, neo-structuralist epistemologies of space quality (Moulaert et al., 2013), their degree of abstraction, and lack of relationship to the specific settings of everyday life and spatial practice often prevent them from being of use to a wider group of academics. This applies even more to practitioners who shape the built environment and design the institutional architectures that could enhance social processes. This 'rich texture of relational-space-theorising' does not (yet) lead to substantial change in planning and architectural practice as 'practitioners understand public (…) space predominantly as a visual (…) stage-set, not as a socially rich entity or realm, even less a process' (Lehtovuori, 2010, pp.4-5).

A way needs to be paved to frame space simultaneously by its built and social qualities, and the relationships between them. In applying relational conceptions of space to planning and design education, there must be a strong emphasis on spatial practice to serve as a transdisciplinary catalyst for sustaining social change in spatial terms. Simply put, relational conceptions of space help the understanding of material and immaterial aspects of different urban development phenomena by focusing on social processes, as well as on their cultural and political contexts and inequalities. But why would trained architects and planners fi nd it useful to approach space relationally? As Harvey (2004, p.5) explains: 'There are certain topics, such as the political role of collective memories in urban processes, that can only be approached this way. I cannot box political and collective memories in some absolute space (clearly situate them on a grid or a map).'

On the other hand, the complexity and the abstract nature of relational conceptions of space are still greatly criticised in architecture and planning (Lehtovuori, 2010, p.18), and 'the relational terrain is an extremely challenging and difficult terrain upon which to work' (Harvey, 2004, p.4). Architecture, urban design and planning schools are inherently divided communities, encompassing advocates of positivist approaches as well as proponents of relational conceptions of space. The latter are usually assigned an overly theoretical, abstract and inapplicable impetus, whereas the former are often stigmatised as prescriptive, descriptive, and socially indifferent. Following Harvey (2004, p.6), rather than interpreting relational perspectives as merely contrasting absolute conceptions of space, we seek to understand them through a wider approach to (socially produced) public space which allows for self-reflexivity, criticism, proactive recognition of the marginalised, and the relevance of the everyday in all its social and material manifestations. It is in academic education in architecture and planning that absolute conceptions of space and different counter conceptions collide on a daily basis. It is here, where a dialectical relational approach seeks to overcome thinking in such dichotomies, that there is promise of new insights and innovative results. These efforts might contribute to enrich and revise academic curricula in architecture and planning will provide a useful way of enhancing interaction and collective reflection between academic institutions, governmental departments and planning practice, and within them.

A relational approach to public space can be an influential sphere of life in which to enact an alternative, and socio-environmentally just, coexistence of living beings, and that built environment professionals have a crucial role to play in making this happen. In a world where cultural, political and social hegemonies tend to influence public perception and 'where the story of city life as mixing and mingling is replaced by a story of antagonism, fear and exclusion' (Watson, 2006, p.1), we see a powerful tool in a socially grounded and radically different architectural and planning practice to counteract processes of neoliberal spatialisation (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Closely linked to the above is the belief that public space is a crossroads where different knowledge fields overlap and connections can be made among them. It is therefore particularly important in establishing spatial practices to enhance lived space qualities, to develop trans-disciplinary dialogues – that is to say collaboration between academics (and academic inquiry) and non-academics (wide ranging forms of knowing) – in the endeavour to rethink the role of education in the field of public space.

In addition to academic approaches advocating a relational praxis, a plethora of grassroots and activist practices have emerged in the form of insurgent planning spheres, which implicitly involve relational approaches to space, without their potential being necessarily recognised by institutionalised planners and designers and their institutions. By learning from these emerging, spontaneous, critical and insurgent practices, and by experimenting with innovative pedagogical tools inspired by them, we seek to address and bridge the gap between relational approaches to space and relational spatial practices.

2. Educational Reflections on Relational Practice and Critical Pedagogy

Public space is created wherever learning is possible between various disciplines, between different communities and expertise fi elds – particularly those relating to everyday life. The following educational challenges echoe a practice-oriented trend that has gained momentum in the last decade and expands the notion of planning and designing beyond architects, designers and planners to include inhabitants of the city. Tonkiss (2014, p.2 and p.11) has recently emphasised a 'critical understanding of design in terms of both formal processes and informal (or less formal) practices'. Relating the concept of 'ordinary urbanism' (Amin and Graham, 1997) to public space research, she takes into account diverse forms of agency and activism within the processes of city-making. Similarly, there are various conceptualisations that value spontaneous and radical practices, which aim at reconciling aspects of planning, design and everyday life, for example: 'everyday urbanism', (Chase et al., 2008), 'guerrilla urbanism' (Hou, 2010) or 'insurgent planning' (Sandercock, 1998; Miraftab, 2009). Most of them deal with insurgencies and their geographies as a response to neoliberal tendencies through inclusive practices (Miraftab, 2009, p.32). These relevant contributions tackle public space as a core arena of participation, action and reflection.

Other than this general theoretical turn towards practice-oriented and inclusive approaches to city-making, the immense potential of learning from everyday life is neither acknowledged nor explicitly and sufficiently reflected upon in those disciplines that shape the built environment: existing insights have hardly ever been translated into practice, and have even been negated, ignored or circumvented by educators. This has produced noteworthy conflicts and tensions between urban populations and urban planning and design institutions in Europe and beyond (see Stuttgart protests in 2011; Occupy Gezi Movement in 2013). Planning and design professionals have not made systematic efforts to overcome the evident weaknesses of their formalised procedures, nor have relational thinkers succeeded in translating abstract theory into educational principles in order to raise future professional awareness in favour of inclusive social practices. In elaborating specific relational perspectives for planning education, this contribution substantiates the view that critical reflection and critical action need to develop out of mutual dialogue between those involved in practical interventions and those busy gaining scientific insights about its nature.

2.1 Learning and designing: Creating spatial conditions for relational learning

In public space, learning and designing can mutually enrich each other on a practical level: pedagogical approaches to design that include ludic elements of play can trigger fantasy and help in learning with less fear of failure. Playful interventions leave room for student experiences and values, and – when undertaken in direct contact and interaction with urban dwellers and space users – can help establish empathy between (future) urban professionals and 'the public'. Such pedagogical approaches are based on a number of innovations: they provide access to alternative places of learning; use irritation to provoke attention; seek opportunities to renegotiate spatial interests; work with repetition to enhance learning effects and leave room for (self) emancipatory action. These experiences correspond to ideas of education that see learning as an immersion process in the complexity of the daily life of local communities, i.e., as relational learning.

There are already a number of educational practices that transcend the boundaries of abstract space, partly under the influence of the educational turn in those professional areas dealing with the material qualities of public space (for example, public art). Alongside the benefit to students, urban professionals and teachers can become informed about (relational) theories of learning and related objectives of spatial emancipation and justice, and thus can establish a transfer between concepts in

education and pedagogy, and urban design and planning approaches. Scientific insights so gained about the minutiae of everyday life are grounded in local social practice, yet can enhance understanding of issues that are relevant for urban societies generally. Knowledge generated from relational practices is not just 'embedded', but first and foremost 'embodied' (Madanipour, 2013, p.378). Learning is understood as being both embedded and embodied in social relations; it emerges out of the interplay between individual motivation and collective stimulus, (for example, interactions between tutors and learners, learners and learners, public and learners). Pedagogically, this means supporting situations of co-participation, studying the proper social and spatial contexts of learning and helping learners engage in social practice that would foster socially innovative outcomes in a certain place. Place-based learning is coined as situated learning.

Action-orientated pedagogy has been used as an opportunity to activate a more horizontal and experiential way of learning: students learn outside the traditional classroom, from peers, from citizens, and in dialogue with teachers. Understanding planning and designing as practices of learning means going beyond an individual and unilateral understanding of the phenomena of social change, and offers a step forward towards collectively co-produced knowledge that is experience-based, materially embodied and multilaterally embedded in social relations.

2.2 Emerging and embedding: Acknowledging spaces of emergence and spontaneity

The collective pedagogical experiment in the making of public space means systematically exploring unplanned side paths and fostering student capacity to engage with the unexpected. Lived space becomes an open and experimental seminar room in which to teach these skills as students can try to test conceived planning strategies and defined design goals. Based on self-organisation, collegiality and open dialogue at eye level, pathways of self-organisation can be explored within the 'messy' environment of lived urban space. In this way, rather than thinking of teachers/lecturers as those directing students through educational activities, the social richness of public space can be acknowledged and explored at its fullest. Here, students learn to combine the achievement of procedural goals with a general openness towards substantial changes in strategies and goals during the process, while considering the range of possibilities of building or not building. Such an approach, based on the particularities of place, will not produce generalisable solutions, but rather situated strategies geared to respecting the peculiarities of specific people and places, and the precise social practices from which they emerge and on which they impact.

Learning about social relations can be fostered by employing dialectical learning fields that go beyond project demarcations. This means adopting a working practice that values and is embedded in locally existing socio-historic contexts, and that introduces perspective from the margin. In such peripheral contexts, there is the opportunity to experience the richness of spontaneous human interaction, such as often happens before or after process-oriented practices like street theatre events. Integrative and interactive public life situations can be valuable learning experiences. Embedding these (marginal, peripheral) lived space perspectives into urban professional curricula makes spontaneity and improvisation a normal part of the learning experience. In so doing, the peripheries produced by these demarcations can be turned into productive fields of learning from the margins. Yet a full transfer of these educational insights into practice has yet to be made: urban professionals are asked to leave the expert's pedestal and accept the evident limits of any skilful intervention in lived space. By reinterpreting these limitations as a potential, practitioners might be able to envision procedural goals, to deal spontaneously with emerging spaces and to work constructively with the clashes between collective and individual interests.

By recognising the ever-changing nature of public space, open-ended processes embrace the variety, novelty and surprise that the 'banality of mundane' or ordinary everyday life entails, and makes space for these practices to hold a legitimate place in planning and design practice. On a more abstract level, the study of changing spatial practices offers an understanding of public space as a core field for conceptual innovation based on insurgent practices. Instead of zooming out into meta-disciplinary accounts, researchers may look to both empirically informed and theoretically abstracted forms of cross- and transdisciplinary knowledge, gained via public space, and connected to the insurgent materialities of spaces of emerging (counter) publics.

2.3 Opening and sharing: Learning about new forms of inclusiveness from the open source movement

Public space is increasingly recognised as a place of open source-knowledge production where cultures of sharing may be conveyed. Many contemporary ideas for establishing and self-organising urban collectives and public movements, which try to unravel structural power relations or related controversies, have been adopted from the open source movement. Elsewhere, game prototypes are 'tested' through multiple user-feedback loops where public users are systematically invited to criticise and contribute at all stages of development, thus becoming the real developers themselves. Such endeavours acknowledge that public space is as endlessly completed as it is fully incomplete: incomplete because it is generated by unpredictable patterns of unknown and constantly changing user communities, which both interact with and constitute the open source movement.

Game designers can only draw near-ideal solutions; so do architects and planners. By linking emancipatory practices of open source-based game design to spatial planning skills, students are encouraged to focus on the imaginary, inventive, immersive and subversive features of any spatial intervention.. By contrast to new ways of global learning (such as MOOCS) and despite their advantages in reaching many people in different world regions, face-to-face learning in local public space is much more open to questioning, amending and reforming structural access to knowledge production, even though public space is anything but free from structural power relations. Since public space is saturated with power dynamics, it is where the constant development of new ways of thinking and new ideas, inspired by the creativeness of the open source movement, can be brought to light. Therefore, the material and embodied facets of power relations can be more openly and radically addressed, challenged and changed in place-based education.

We believe that from an engaged relationship with open source principles students can critically rethink the traditional positions of place-makers and instigate collective communication and action via public encounters, collective collaboration and face-to-face communication. In this sense, publics and collectives are considered as makers, producers and owners, rather than as spectators, consumers or passive users. Moving a step in this direction means promoting an open culture in public space education per se. It can be worth transferring knowledge about digital practices, based on open culture as a core principle, to non-digital public space as it helps experimentation with new dimensions of inclusiveness in mutually entangled urban and digital commons. Yet the open character of user-centred approaches in digital public space does not automatically lead to shaping urban public spaces in a more inclusive and just way. Rather, it is the professional habitus of the urban professional, his/her ethical disposition and epistemic finesse that helps to develop a professional 'position' for public space.

2.4 Activating and appropriating: Developing positionality while learning about politics of (public) space and time

In formal planning, practitioners often find it hard to react to the dynamics of social change, the pressures of migratory waves and the rhythms of everyday life. Everyday practices in public space may fluctuate between tranquillity and peace as well as between moments of open dissent, ambivalent behaviours and situations of spatial insurgence. Yet it is in public space where the conflictive nature of structural inequality and injustice results in local disputes. Our suggestion is that urban professionals can take inspiration from the work of activists and artists engaged in a plethora of forms of everyday urbanism, insurgent planning, and the creation of alternative counter publics. As non-state and non-profit actors, NGOs and activists are key to establishing transparency and to introducing socio-political dimensions into inclusive processes of city making. Student exposure to this range of experiences in public space can sharpen observational skills as well as place them in contingent situations where they will need to develop their own positionality.

Positionality refers to consciousness and willingness to take part in professional practice, starting with the mere act of considering planning and design not just as a neutral, apolitical or technological skill, but rather as a field where agents behave according to their own ideas, values and beliefs. Acknowledging their situated and embodied specificities means understanding their position and the distance that needs to be ‘covered’ to address, negotiate and bridge these differences. This acknowledgment can only happen when professional practices are informed by a socio-political mission aimed at enabling a diversity of values and at fostering inclusive and non-discriminatory processes. This change in perspective inevitably challenges students to abandon a supposedly neutral position from which to observe urban life and to conceive alternative plans for new urban spaces. On the same lines, a relational approach to public space needs to start with a critical appraisal of the institutionalised hegemonies, structures and systems of values (and interests) that tend to inhabit mainstream professional practices. This acknowledgement can take various forms: from supporting counter-movements or residual, marginalised practices and helping them to gain momentum, to more conceptual approaches that disentangle any forms of injustice and exclusion embedded in design and planning approaches.

On a theoretical level, the critique is that planners, architects and their related institutions often lack information about and tools to acknowledge civic claims and needs – some of them outspoken, others silent or oppressed – and the time(s) these demands seek to (politically) gain momentum. So far, canonised, orchestrated and strictly choreographed time lines for project life cycles are hardly ever synchronised with the diverse and changing patterns of collective time and public life. In that sense, the politics of public space needs to embrace both the spatiality and temporality of existing claims of spatial appropriation. This leads back to the initial consideration that social unrest sparked by urban design and planning interventions is a key conflict area from which all space related researchers can learn important lessons.

2.5 Overcoming othering and nesting: Reflecting and overcoming own biases and accepting difference in public space

Hegemonies over the (material, social, symbolical) use and (political) appropriation of public space do find their intellectual expression in planning and design classrooms as well as in the urban realm. Certain social groups in the marginalised (for example, ‘migrants’, ‘drug addicts’, ‘the urban poor’, ‘the homeless’). ‘Othering’ – understood as a set of discriminative practices usually realised between individuals and groups pertaining to the majority society – is considered as being inherently nested in structures of thinking in academic education concerning space. This is illustrated in cases where ethnic and religious diversity is openly and bureaucratically oppressed by planning authorities, or by city and state officials.

On a theoretical level, post-colonial studies have long paved educational pathways in order to critically reflect on and react to such practices as ‘othering’ (Said, 2012, pp.173-174). However, in planning and design education teachers are often unaware of, or do not sufficiently care about, the same social stigmas they frequently (re)produce. Any processes of building awareness on the potentials of difference and tolerance need to be systematically and structurally initiated in order to open up inward looking disciplines to meet the challenges of collectively co-shaping public spaces. Historically, urban life has been characterised by difference in many ways (religion, ethnicity, gender, language, etc.). Thinking relationally about public space carries the potential to foster an awareness of social difference and a tolerant, fair and supportive inclusion of marginalised voices and weak interests. The introduction of public space-oriented acts of performative, experiential or counter planning is likely to produce professional policies of social justice and critical practice that may travel through very different contexts and find expression in the symbolic and discursive as well the embodied and material dimensions of public space.

Limits to altruistic practices in planning and design become obvious once their proponents are accused of quixotic romanticism and utopian idealism. But how, in the end, can we not just seek but also achieve a lived space-based planning and design ethos, thus trying to enhance practices that refuse spatial strategies and interventions that (openly or silently) expel, scorn or discriminate against ‘others’? Planning and design, currently, is far from close to just and human practice, and there are fundamental reasons for this situation, which we need to disclose, denounce and oppose. A first step is to start from self awareness in public space, where students are asked to discover, enlarge and finally leave their own individual comfort zones, first by extending the individual to a group exploration and, secondly, by transferring this experience into the study of the existing urban life patterns of unknown social groups or political collectives and their spaces. In this way, students and teachers can learn about inner limitations (which we all carry), (relationally) understand how to deal with them and, most importantly, challenge them systematically.

2.6 Acting and reflecting: Collectively learning from the ethics of transdisciplinary exchange

With a plea for action-based research formats and a focus on the importance of practice for ‘emergent concepts’ we approach public space-related academic education as dialogical by nature. By combining social experiences and thought, planners and designers might learn from what the Brazilian educational scientist Paulo Freire, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, coined as a confluence of ‘action’ and ‘reflection’. Reflection, for Freire (1973), is the critical component of education, resulting in a ‘critical consciousness’ in which learners become actors – not observers – and authors of their own decisions. When teachers and learners fail to reflect upon their own spatial relations or critically evaluate the nature of the information presented to them, they run risk of becoming passive and superficial by accepting dehumanising rationalities and de-contextualised ideas. Thus, they allow themselves to be swayed by deceptive arguments and political polemics. Freire thus proposed combining action and reflection into praxis, an idea that links back to earlier Marxist thinking on social praxis as the starting point of any theoretical consideration.

A transfer of Freire’s educational studies to public space education implies that opportunities for reflection should occur not only after but also before and during student interventions in public space. Students take note of their learning starting point, assess their progress in the midst of the class unit and critically evaluate their own learning, both at the end of each intervention and at some time later. In this way bridges between theory and praxis are already embedded in dialogical, reflexive, forms of teaching, which anticipate and prepare the students for trans-disciplinary practice. The training of future professionals to master trans-disciplinary practice can therefore

start from reframing university education as not only a social institution with a public mission (see the eighth educational challenge) but also as a place where social innovation and knowledge is gained in dialogue and joint working with local communities, and where inclusive methods and tools are taught that carry practical relevance for improving everyday life realities.

These findings bring relational public space close to constructivist pedagogy and emphasise the relational character of learning, where teachers start from what they have rather than what they expect. Such approaches acknowledge that learners bring unique prior knowledge and beliefs to a learning situation and that knowledge is constructed uniquely and individually, in multiple ways and through a variety of embedded tools and embodied practices. At the same time, experiences of collective learning in public space enable students to dialogise and negotiate between different and partly contradictory positions and knowledge fields (reflection), and to enter into processes of active exchange and mutual enabling (action). This dialectical approach helps overcome situations where practitioners get stuck in project based rationales (i.e. budget constraints) or where scholars gripe in theoretical debates without linking back to everyday life questions and challenges, losing connection with wider societal questions. While training in dialogical and dialectical practices does not prevent potential conflicts or contrasting views from emerging, it will undoubtedly help create a working climate of trust and tolerance.

2.7 Collaborating and countering: Dealing with heterogeneous interests and resulting conflicts

Tolerance and trust, however, are aspects that urban professionals hardly ever come across in their education; rather, they are trained to serve their (party politics, profit-oriented or just passive) clients and to provide them with singular or individual spatial benefits. What happens, however, if the commissioner, client or – maybe more pertinently – the ‘partner’ in developing public space is a collective that is self-organised and whose primary goals and strategies are driven by non-profit and non-governmental motives and beliefs? Collectives, similar to emergent publics, do not represent one clear and singular interest, but heterogeneous and partly conflictual values and beliefs. Their self-organisation is not usually top-down. By contrast, they often seek to use horizontal and networked forms of operation, sometimes alongside (contradictory) forms of hierarchical management. At other times and when organised in a more ambitious way, they favour consensual ways of decision making, by trying to mediate antagonistic views in long-term negotiation processes.

In a nutshell, urban collectives and urban publics are uneasy ‘partners’. Yet their role is as promising as it is demanding, since it allows stunning insights into the power of a plethora of social practices and concrete spatial claims. Results from planning and design processes that include collectives and publics as ‘partners’ range from social acceptance to cultural identification and ideally foster an activation of sleeping or silent resources such as social and cultural capital and local everyday knowledge. Yet such approaches need to be framed by (self)critical reflection on the risks of dogmatism, counter exclusion or exploitation, in order to make them suited to processes in which incremental objectives are jointly negotiated. Self-critical approaches in academic education facilitate the development of acts of critical practice. They allow and encourage the questions: ‘why plan, why design’?

In public space, conflicts offer moments of intense learning about real interests, new appropriations and crucial socio-political questions. They can also be understood as burgeoning seeds that open momentary political spaces and help emerging cultures and publics express their spatial and temporal needs. They might even serve to activate local competencies and resources for an

outcome yet unknown. Studying conflicts in relation to counter publics and their spatial expressions in particular neighbourhoods, and collaborating with activist groups and NGOs in order to overcome certain conflicts, requires not just ‘taking into account’ civil society perspectives and goals, but also implies these as the essential starting point. Counter planning, in this sense, helps focus on emerging counter publics. Their study enables constant testing and reframing of the educational standards of those disciplines where people are trained to intervene in lived spaces. However, the potential of counter publics is not yet sufficiently understood by urban professionals, with the result that counter publics and counter spaces still remain a hidden and uncharted academic domain in architecture and planning.

2.8 Theorising and changing: Learning from the everyday and reinterpreting education as inclusion, participation and action

Theorising from everyday life in public space makes for the last and maybe the most ambitious of the educational challenges addressed in this paper. As public space changes, educational landscapes change too. Where earlier modes of education have largely rested on rigid divisions between learners and teachers exerted in the mono-functional spaces of the classroom, where relations were based on the premise of one to the few, and stimuli were offered within a teacher-centric ‘push culture’, contemporary landscapes of learning converge around a non-linear sharing model based on the premise of many to the many. In this networked model, a more diverse ‘pull culture’ of learning is promoted as learner-centric, where investigative forms of learning span from individual towards the collective. Here, space is assigned key significance, as changing learning strategies and practices require a fundamentally different approach to understanding and appropriating space.

Public space, in this respect, has been rediscovered as an arena where dialogue between the diverse epistemologies of the everyday can be created at the interface of theory and practice, as well as within these fields. Given this fertile potential, urban professionals need to overcome limiting approaches which combine or prioritise various positivist aspects belonging to multifunctional open space design. Following participatory action research principles, the core educational challenge here is to make students engage with practical notions such as investigating and developing relationships, yet in an open and non-determinist way. This means critically analysing the voices that both agree and disagree with their own vision, while also embracing those that challenge and contest them. Urban interventions in public space are therefore a very delicate issue for urban professionals, because the key skills they need to acquire are no longer goal-oriented and focused on structured action in an architectural or planned space. Rather, educational curricula need to focus on ethical aspects of building trust in, and becoming a medium for, communities and civil society, on acknowledgement of the limitations of their own professional role in the light of embodied knowledge, everyday life experience and political pressures.

3. Conclusion

3. 1 Changes from within the academia

By having explored educational reflections relating to relational public space we aim to put forward a radically different way of conceptualising, researching and teaching about public space, in the hope that this will impact on future practitioners’ roles in policy design and professional practice. While the type of change that we envision for the future of urban public space is much wider than the reach of this paper, we nonetheless believe that much social innovation can be foreseen through the reflexive practice of academics, academic-activists and academic-practitioners. At the same time, the educational focus developed within such a relational

perspective needs to consider the current capitalist institutional frame prevalent in academia itself. As Merrifield (2000, p.181) underlines, 'In our own daily practice, we deal more and more with abstract representations and codifications of society which are wrenched out of the lived experience of both ourselves and others outside the academy'. This contribution has aimed to show that counter scenarios are already lived, experienced and practised in public spaces, embracing both urban places outside in the city, and inside universities' seminar rooms and lecture halls.

Rather than being a mere theme in urban research, planning and design, investigating public space helps overcome and bridge practice-oriented approaches and theoretical accounts to explain the abstract patterns of space production. A consideration of the relational ethics of public spaces has a key role to play in establishing these connections in a socially just way. With the aim of expanding these approaches and contributing to a change in urban education via public space, a sequence of pedagogical implications, challenges and opportunities have been elaborated that illustrate research results from an exploratory and experimental teaching and research practice in Vienna. Building on the reflections, the following eight transversal perspectives can contribute towards facing the manifold educational challenges that are inherent in relational public spaces.

3. 1 Educational challenges

The fi rst educational challenge is to establish educational contexts, conditions and situations characterised by trust and respect and to start from the experiences that students bring into the learning process. That way, students are being made aware of the need to create spatial situations where they are able to respect people's local beliefs, routines and experiences, develop professional empathy and acknowledge the potential resources that urban dwellers might bring along. The emotional and practical aspects of the manifold relations implicated in these learning processes in public space need to be considered. The shift from co-learning to jointly changing the material arrangements of public space with urban dwellers requires the ability to acknowledge ethical, ontological and epistemic considerations implied in these forms of dialogic learning.

The second educational challenge is to engage with intuitive ways of learning based on the encounter with the unexpected and to acknowledge the patterns of social emergence as a core characteristic of public life. Appropriate tools and procedures that can capture the situated, context-specific and idiosyncratic nature of collective places and their social dynamics need to be developed. These tools both emerge from, and address, the context, problem and given situation, and ideally explore public space as relational space. Students will learn to link these dynamics back to the material dimension of public space, specifically to its emerging materialities, while they are encouraged to deal with the unpredictability and spontaneity of material claims and spatial appropriations.

The third educational challenge is to create a general openness to sharing different perspectives and ways of working within the daily life of the students. Public space, in this respect, can serve as an experimental arena where alternative ways of pooling resources for urban change can be envisioned, developed and practised as if real. Enabling alternative spatial appropriations that use public space as a common good beyond private fragmentations needs to start from the resources that lived space already offers. Welcoming attitudes to new perspectives (for example introducing public feedback loops) need to be cultivated as they offer a good opportunity for integrating new forms of inclusiveness.

The fourth educational challenge is to encourage students to take an informed stance and to develop a professional positionality towards their socio-political role as urban professionals by

developing their own ethically informed position. That way the politics of space and time of public space will be acknowledged as given ground for any professional action. Planning and design studios need to radically incorporate a new cronopolitical thinking, and its translations into practical project rationales, to enable the plethora of everyday life rhythms of space appropriations and re-appropriations to fully unfold. Both politics of space and politics of time are therefore central to relationally thinking of public space as lived space.

The fifth educational challenge is to train the ability to overcome individual, intimate and private comfort zones in order to develop professional skills of acknowledging, integrating and respecting social and cultural difference in urban space. This concerns the ethics of intervention in lived space as well as the ethics of the seminar room. A core educational aspect here is to focus on experiential learning in non-discriminatory situations where teachers include and appreciate as many different perspectives, languages and disciplinary frames as possible. Group formation for studio work can be organised along aspects of difference in order to stimulate self-experience and dialogue. On a theoretical level, postcolonial accounts of (public) space can help in revisiting current approaches, unravelling and opposing practices of 'othering'.

The sixth educational challenge is to combine argumentative debates linked to the public sphere (reflection) to the embodied interventions and public address in public space (action) in all pedagogic formats. On a practical level, this helps to develop experiential ways of public intervention and tools to induce processes of co-shaping public spaces. For students in these self-developed formats the analysis of the realised interventions is one core aspect: for this reason it is important that sufficient time is allocated for reflection before, during and after the participatory intervention in public space. Particular emphasis needs to be put on the de-briefing phase, when the ethical and epistemic implications of practical action can be unravelled, discussed and challenged, and the political character of any intervention in public space can be jointly exemplified.

The seventh educational challenge is to start from a study of and collaboration with collective claims, counter publics and their acts of resistance and contestations when developing an idea about their role as urban professionals intervening in public space. This way, students learn to develop their own politics of action in contested areas of social interaction, as well as to recognise already existing activist tools, knowledge and practices. Consideration of conflicts as normal opportunities to learn about socio-political aspects of public space rather than as exceptional risks to the formal and often canonised (party) politics of public space, can be a key component for socially-just decision making, where the involvement of civil society actors is not considered as a risk to urban development processes, but as their enriching precondition.

A good way to start dealing with this eighth and concluding challenge is to declare universities as public spaces where not only rational discourses are framed and perpetuated, but also professional practice is reinterpreted in its original and embodied sense: re-rooting the notion of educational politics to 'the collective', the public in its earliest connotation. This means addressing public space not merely as a theme but rather as a vehicle for gaining knowledge based on epistemologies and ontologies of the everyday. It implies considering research and teaching not just as ways of generating data and conveying information, but as politically informed processes to embed inclusion, participation and action into the life of the scholar with the aim of generating socially innovative insights and relevant knowledge on public space as lived space. This means nothing less than shifting the focus of urban professionals back to the shaping of everyday places of public and collective concern.

4. References

- Amin, A. and Graham S., 1997. The Ordinary City. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 22, No. 4, pp.411-429.
- Brenner, N. and Theodore, N., 2002. Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism". Antipode, 34, pp.349-379.
- Chase, J., Crawford, M. and Kaliski, J., [1999] 2008. Everyday Urbanism. Expanded, New York, NY: Monacelli Press.
- Franck, K. and Stevens, Q. eds, 2006. Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Fraser, N., 1990. Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. Social Text, Duke University Press, pp. 25/26, 56-80.
- Freire, P., 1973. Education for Critical Consciousness, 3. New York, NY: Seabury Press.
- Graham, S. and Healey, P.,1999. Relational concepts of space and place: issues for planning theory and practice. European Planning Studies 7 (5), pp.623-646.
- Harvey, D., 2004. Space as a Key Word. Paper for Marx and Philosophy Conference, 29 May 2004, Institute of Education, London. [online] Available at: http://www.inter-accions.org/sites/default/files/space-as-key-word-david-harvey.pdf (last accessed 08/04/2013).
- Healey, P., 2006. Relational complexity and the imaginative power of strategic spatial planning. European Planning Studies, 14 (4), pp.525-546.
- Hou, J., 2010. Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jessop, B., 2001. Institutional (re)turns and the strategic-relational approach. Environment and Planning A, 33 (7), pp.1213-1235.
- Jessop, B., Brenner, N. and Jones, M., 2008. Theorizing sociospatial relations. Environment and Planning, D: Society and Space, 26 (3), pp.389-401.
- King, R., 1996. Emancipating Space: Geography, Architecture and Urban Design. London: Guilford.
- Lefebvre, H., [1974, trans. 1991] 2009. The Production of Space. Malden: Blackwell.
- Lehtovuori, P., 2010. Experience and Conflict. The Production of Urban Space. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Madanipour, A., 2010. Whose Public Space. London: Routledge.
- Madanipour, A., 2013. Researching space, transgressing epistemic boundaries. International Planning Studies, 18 (3-4), pp.372-388.
- Madanipour, A., Knierbein, S. and Degros, A., 2014. Public Space and the Challenges of Urban Transformation in Europe. London and New York, NY: Routledge.
- Merrifield, A., 2000. Henri Lefebvre: a socialist in space. In M. Crang and N. Thrift, eds. Thinking Space. London and New York, NY: Routledge, pp.167-182.
- Miraftab, F., 2009. Insurgent planning: situating radical planning in the global south. Planning Theory, 8, p.32.
- Moulaert, F., Van Dyck, B., Kha, A.Z. and Schreurs, J., 2013. Building a metaframework to 'address' spatial quality. International Planning Studies, 18 (3-4), pp.389-409.
- Said, E., 2012. Pedagogy of the Other: Edward Said, Postcolonial Theory and Strategies for Critique. New York: Peter Lang Publishers.
- Sandercock, L., 1998. Framing insurgent historiographies for planning. In: Sandercock, L., ed. Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.1-33.
- Schmid, C., 2005. Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft. Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes. München: Frank Steiner Verlag.
- Stanek, L., 2008. Space as concrete abstraction: Hegel, Marx, and Modern Urbanism in Henri Lefebvre. In K. Goonewardena, S. Kipfer, R. Milgrom and C. Schmid, eds. Space, Difference, Everyday Life. Reading Henri Lefebvre. London: Routledge, pp.62-79.
- Stevens, Q., 2007. The Ludic City. Exploring the Potential of Public Spaces. London, New York: Routledge.

- Tonkiss, F., 2005. Space, the City and Social Theory. Social Relations and Urban Forms. Chichester: Wiley.
- Tonkiss, F., 2014. Cities by Design. The Social Life of Urban Form. Cambridge: Polity.
- Watson, S., 2006. City Publics. The (Dis)Enchantments of Urban Encounters. London: Routledge.