

Radical dialectics, urban inequality and everyday resistance

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ABSTRACT

Cities of the Global North witness an increase in urban inequalities which is visible and can be analysed both through public space and housing research. With a combined dialectical focus on city publics and city dwellers, their spatial practices and patterns of acting space, urban researchers can try to understand patterns of increasing precarious living conditions, poverty and discrimination. They can detect exclusion of more vulnerable urban groups from shared spaces on the action level, and from policy programmes on the discursive level: What is silent and absent from public space (e.g. underrepresented groups, minorities or those who do not have a strong voice) can firstly be found and analysed with a look on private households (housing research). Secondly and vice versa, what remains in the homes and households seemingly understood as a private problem, can be brought to critical reflection and discussion in public space and can be articulated as a structural problem, rather than as private fate: When for instance urban dwellers face situations of becoming indebted due to financialization of housing policies, resulting mortgage-burdens and a missing labour income, many of these seemingly private problems remain behind the private curtain of shame and guilt. Once they start to be articulated in public space – an insurgent geography of the public sphere – an exchange between those affected by housing crisis and those offering support in solidarity may eventually lead to an emerging structural critique and contribute to a successive formation of a critical counter publics against exclusive housing policies, against the impacts of speculative capitalism and the resulting financialization of housing affairs. Combined housing and public space activism, to offer a core hypothesis for the talk, helps urban forms of resistance emerge that seek to defend human rights for decent housing against neoliberal urban policies which generative massive evictions and socially insensitive acts of displacement of more vulnerable urban groups (hypergentrification).

My lecture will thus start from the hypothesis that dialectical ways of enquiry need to be (re)established in order to analyse the absences and silences from public space in private space and the relations between them (and vice versa). In my keynote lecture, therefore, I would like to offer three ‘crossovers’ between the fields of public space and housing research (developed from former), approached from social anthropological perspectives on lived spaces in the field of critical urban studies:

1. Understanding Lived Space
2. Unravelling Urban Complexities
3. Radical dialectics. Everyday resistance combined.

The lecture will offer insights into these three lines of argumentation and case studies and will offer further stimuli to reconsider the need for groundbreaking research on the social and spatial relations between the public space and housing fields, related urban policies, and the ways, how urban professionals might (re)think the sectorial division of lived spaces into the public-private realms of the city. It is a plea to reanimate scholarly activism, understood as ‘resistance combined’.

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Urban Transformation in Europe” (2014, jointly with A. Madanipour and A. Degros), “Public Space and Relational Perspectives: New Challenges for Architecture and Planning (2015, jointly w. C. Tornaghi), City Unsilenced! Public Space and Urban Resistance in the Age of Shrinking Democracy (2017, forthcoming, jointly with J. Hou) and editor of “Public Space Unbound. Urban emancipation and the post-political condition” (planned for 2018, jointly with T. Viderman), all with Routledge (London/New York). Her contact email is: knierbein@skuur.tuwien.ac.at

Reinvention of discipline and participatory action research: locally-embedded learning aiming towards meaningful change.

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ABSTRACT

The unleashed mobility of capital and increased dynamic of production practices have changed both the role of urban land in the socio-economic relation as well as the way how architects and planners take part in its design and planning. Extraction of land rent has taken centre stage in international financial flows, fuelling inequality and injustice in lived spaces at local, national, supranational and global scales. As terms such as structural unemployment, privatization, foreclosure and eviction have become ubiquitous in public discourse, planners and designers have been confronted with a fundamental question of reinventing their positioning in regard to the city as the (social) place of difference. How can we profoundly reflect on our agency in constituting or curbing an egalitarian difference in contemporary cities?

This lecture will introduce participatory action research (PAR) as a radically new dimension to conventional disciplines involved in planning a city’s space. Seeing how it draws its roots from emancipatory education and critical pedagogy formulated by Freire (1996 [1970]), its potentials for planning and design primarily lie in re-defining the position of these disciplines in the politics of space. It seems that professionals’ toolkits are often rigidly demarcated by and restricted to their professional cultures. As a consequence, their actions, too, tend to remain a reinterpretation of old tools, rather than taking on the challenge of devising methodologies for enhancing embodied, intuitive and explorative learning about the making of social urban spaces not for but with people.

BIOGRAPHY

Tihomir Viderman is architect, planner and researcher. For a number of years he has been engaged in interdisciplinary research and teaching with the focus on culturally inclusive and emancipatory approaches to working with urban space drawing upon Participatory Action Research. He is currently affiliated as research assistant and PhD candidate with the Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space at the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, TU Wien. Contact: tihomir.viderman@skuur.tuwien.ac.at

