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Re-Inventing the Urban  
- The Role of Creativity, Performativity,  
and Arts-Based Research Approaches  
to Explore the Multifaceted Nature  
of Urban Spaces

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## Re-Inventing the Urban – The Role of Creativity, Performativity, and Arts-Based Research Approaches to Explore the Multifaceted Nature of Urban Spaces

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### Abstract

In the long and ongoing process of planetary urbanization, urbanity has appeared as a ubiquitous topic in disciplines ranging from sociology, urban studies, and economics, to literature, design, and contemporary art. As the chosen environment for most of today's cultural, economic, and academic elites, urban space constitutes an ever-present backdrop for unfolding posthumanity. How to live together in today's cities, how to confront challenges together, and how to think about urbanization as a global phenomenon, have become pressing and ongoing questions that stir the curiosity of researchers, artists, politicians, and contemporary urbanites alike. In the face of multiple crises, we are confronted with the cascading effects of climate change, intercontinental migration as well as political and economic uncertainty. Meanwhile, urban centers with their cultural capital, innovative potential, and economic power appear as ideal places to look for inspiration, change, or maybe even revolution. As an approach that takes the ubiquity of the urban into account, the concept of planetary urbanization tries to describe urban existence as interwoven in international networks of production, consumption, and sociocultural interaction that span the entire globe. Hence, the urban is understood as an all-encompassing concept, which holds the potential to change the world and how we experience it.

### 1. On Ubiquity, Urbanity, and the Performance of Urban Spaces

According to Brenner and Schmid (2021) the world's entire population is part of planetary processes of urbanization. Economic collaboration and socio-spatial integration emanating from our current centers of socio-cultural activity, which are oftentimes found in cities, reach into the furthest parts of our planet to make everyone part of a societal development process spanning the entire globe. The "right to the city" proclaimed by Lefebvre (1968) now involves all of the world's citizens in globalizing processes of collective evolution in social, cultural, and economic dimensions. As a consequence – and this can be seen as a downside of planetary urbanization – we are all expected – or some would say forced – to take part in production processes transcending borders and involving multiple countries. Consequently, planetary urbanization demands of its citizens to be part not only of economic integration, but also to collectively fight social struggles on behalf of all the world's citizens. Struggles for social, cultural, and ecological issues, therefore, are also fought on global scales

and are oftentimes directed against extractivist economics and excessive neoliberalism that increasingly threatens life on the planet (Fremeaux & Jordan, 2024). The "right to the city" involves many aspects of urban life and includes reaping the benefits of social, cultural, and economic integration but also fighting for a safe, just, and equitable existence for all species.

At the same time, cities, as the historical centres of planetary processes of urbanization, can still be seen as the inflection points of societal development and technological innovation, even though spatialized strategies of government and economic integration are traversing city limits and national borders alike. The performativity of spaces becomes particularly apparent in urban centres where a seamless choreography of activities ensures the functioning of urban cohabitation (Wolfrum & Brandis, 2015). High population density and a concentration of governmental, economic, and media organizations ensure that contemporary cities remain the epicentres of a globalizing society. The performance of space as a

collective endeavour becomes most apparent in these densely populated spaces where social practices, spatial performance, and the production of space go hand in hand (Lefebvre, 1991). Urban space with its economic, cultural, and social activity can be understood as a collective performance that spawns urban physical structures as much as social ties and individual life trajectories, thereby creating the “atmosphere” (Fischer-Lichte, 2015, p. 37) of cities as much as their “intrinsic logic” (Löw, 2012). In order to materialize, spaces must be performed, in order to give social realities meaning, they must result in action, in order to create new utopia, alternative realities must be imagined. Hence, no space without performance – the medium of expression is up to us. We can, thus, conclude that different expressions of spaces – physical, mental, social or otherwise – are the result of performances that can take the form of individual action but usually form part of a collectively choreographed performance of society expressed through and in space.

## 2. Research as Spatial Performance

Research on urban spaces, urban planning, architecture, the arts, and cultural activities in cities can, consequently, also be understood as part of this collective performance giving form to various aspects of the urban in different media. The performance of space provides the basis for creating various spatialized dimensions of human existence and for transforming our understanding of space by witnessing others’ performances and their effects. Hence, the effects of spatial performance go beyond the physical and create ephemeral spaces of perception, embodied meaning, or aesthetic expression to be read and understood in research, in the arts, and beyond. Consequently, we come to see space as a multifaceted medium that can be used to express and to understand various aspects of the human condition – from social interaction, to individual sensemaking, to collective reasoning. This way, space is a tool to make sense of human realities and to investigate their reflection in physical surroundings. In urban studies and beyond, research on different forms of spatial performance and their effects on physical spaces constitutes a common denominator of research on space and spatial transformation. If we furthermore understand space as a multidimensional construct that involves social,

individual, structural, and cognitive aspects at the same time, we can ask for research methodologies that are able to address this breadth of spatial data and to express them in a research context.

Traditionally, qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used to address questions of lived urbanity and to derive knowledge on the urban realm. In recent years, arts-based, artistic, and emerging methods increasingly complement the toolkit of the urban researcher by including aspects of the urban that remained hidden or inaccessible before (Schreier 2017). Arts-based and artistic methods can be employed to create deeper insights into lived experiences and urban lifeworlds, while providing the possibility for participation and the co-creation of knowledge (Barone & Eisner 2012). Emerging methods, on the other hand, include methods that rely on, e.g. new media, new technological tools, or new ways of framing urban realities, which can address recent societal, technological, or cultural developments and make them accessible to research. In general, the multifaceted nature of the urban necessitates creative approaches that can provide means and media to express various aspects of lived urbanity as encountered by its citizens (Haseman, 2006). Arts-based, artistic, and emerging methods, but also new concepts of the urban aiming to promote, e.g., non-extractivist, inclusive, or multi-species forms of cohabitation, contribute to a more comprehensive, more equitable, and more accessible understanding of what living in today’s urban spaces can mean or where it could lead. Consequently, new ways of researching, conceptualising, and expressing lived urbanity as a form of (trans-species) co-habitation and co-evolution (1) complement the toolkit of the urban researcher, (2) contribute to a wholesome understanding of the urban as a social and individual phenomenon, and (3) provide the means to think beyond the fringes of urban agglomerations and understand urbanization as a truly global phenomenon reaching beyond borders and national identities.

## 3. Contributions to This Journal Issue

The contributions to this journal issue on the topic of “re-inventing the urban”, hence, aim at finding new pathways to think, write, and perform research on urban spaces, therefore creating new understandings of urban spaces

and how they can be conceptualized in research. Each contribution, therefore, has a unique take on different aspects of urbanity and shows how they can be addressed in urban research. Consequently, this journal issues includes a breadth of topics and methodological approaches that are largely centred around the topics of care, multi-species co-existence, sustainable urban development, and the performance of urban spaces in social, cultural, and economic practices. Thereby multiple new and exciting dimensions of the urban are discovered that can change the way we understand lived urbanity and its expression in urban environments.

In the first article of this journal issue Vivien Breinbauer, Yvonne Franz, Miriam Lindsberger, Rivka Saltiel, and Anke Strüver explore how urban cultures of care can be experienced and mapped in urban settings, resulting in a Care Map visualizing practices, feelings, and spaces tied to (un)caring in an urban neighbourhood. They thereby highlight how care can be understood as a socio-spatial phenomenon foundational for urban everyday life. In the next article Laura Soyer, Gabriela Gan and Gerhard Schuster discuss insights and experiences from the Care-Tour 2023, where five public Dome Talks on the topic of caring and caring communities in Austria were organised. Various aspects of the topic of community care have been discussed in a public format providing inspiration for shaping the future of caring practices in Austria. Ningfei (Shannon) Xiao, Simon Twose, and Hannah Hopewell provide a Feminist Posthuman Autoethnographic perspective of relational becoming within a site-specific performance, addressing relational encounters in urban public spaces, including sensory mapping, feelings, intuition, and more-than-human beings. Combining multiple artistic and indigenous practices, the intricacies of (architectural and landscape) perception, the (historic) meanings of places, and relational understandings of spatial becoming are explored from a more-than-human perspective on urban spaces. Subsequently Vera Penz, Amanda Sperger and Ana Mumladze Detering present the Case of an Urban Bathing Revival in Vienna's Danube Canal by highlighting the activities of Schwimmverein Donaukanal – a Social Design initiative, which revives the one hundred years old tradition of urban swimming in the centre of Vienna. Here, the historic roots of urban swimming as well

as its meaning for contemporary life in the city are discussed in detail. In their text Christina Schraml and Martin Färber trace the process of inventing socially sustainable furniture designed according to circular economy principles and of integrating it in contemporary urban park designs in the city of Vienna. In addition, they elucidate how a circular approach to furniture construction can save costs, benefit the environment, and enrich the social infrastructure of cities. Gencay Çubuk explores the use of horizontal screens for devising an architectural model for rehabilitating the exterior spaces of street markets in order to increase social and economic sustainability. He compares several examples of international markets and highlights their potential for the usage of screens as a method for exterior space rehabilitation. Brigitte Vettori – social and cultural anthropologist and founder of the cultural and research organisation “space and place” – discusses three innovative urban projects in Vienna that create new social spaces and foster exchange and negotiation among diverse city dwellers. She demonstrates how art and culture can serve as powerful tools for urban transformation, challenging established social patterns and celebrating diversity, while empowering residents to actively shape their neighborhoods.



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