



Spatial aspects of de-radicalisation processes in Vienna

D9.1 City Report

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Miriam Haselbacher, Ursula Reeger, Josefa Stiegler

INSTITUTE FOR URBAN AND REGIONAL RESEARCH,

AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at: ursula.reeger@oeaw.ac.at

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About the Project

D.Rad is a comparative study of radicalisation and polarisation in Europe and beyond. It aims at identifying the actors, networks, and wider social contexts that drive radicalisation, particularly among young people in urban and peri-urban areas. D.Rad conceptualises this through the I-GAP spectrum (injustice-grievance-alienation-polarisation), with the goal of moving towards the measurable evaluation of de-radicalisation programmes. Our intention is to identify the building blocks of radicalisation, which include the person's sense of being victimised, of being thwarted or lacking agency in established legal and political structures, and of coming under the influence of 'us vs them' identity formulations.

D.Rad benefits from an exceptional breadth of backgrounds. The project spans national contexts including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Finland, Slovenia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Israel, Turkey, Georgia, Austria, and several minority nationalisms. It bridges academic disciplines ranging from political science and cultural studies to social psychology and artificial intelligence. Dissemination methods include D.Rad LABs, D.Rad hubs, policy papers, academic workshops, visual outputs, and digital galleries. As such, D.Rad establishes a rigorous foundation in order to test practical interventions geared towards prevention, inclusion, and de-radicalisation.

With the possibility of capturing the trajectories of 17 nations and several minority nations, the project provides unique evidence base for the comparative analysis of law and policy as nation states adapt to new security challenges. The process of mapping these varieties and their link to national contexts is crucial in uncovering the strengths and weaknesses of existing interventions. Furthermore, D.Rad accounts for the problem that processes of radicalisation often occur in circumstances that escape the control and scrutiny of traditional national frameworks of justice.

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Executive Summary

This report focuses on spatial aspects of de-radicalisation processes in Vienna. It provides an overview of the spatial characteristics of the city of Vienna and identifies both best-practice measures of inclusionary local public spaces and examples of contested spaces. In an in-depth case study, we illustrate the perspectives of young people as well practitioners that are working on or in public space to see how they perceive public urban spaces in the city and how spatial aspects and inclusion/exclusion in public space influence processes of (de)radicalisation. For the in-depth case study, we applied an innovative participatory toolkit and organised two interactive workshops (D.Rad LAB I and II) where we captured the voices of those who work in and on public space and those who use it.

The analysis of the empirical material outlines the manifold views and approaches of those different user groups. Future engagement in public space should aim at improving public services by incorporating user perspectives, learning from successful examples, enhancing flexibility in crisis management capabilities, simplifying administrative structures, engaging with youth, and addressing the provision of climate-adaption measures. Especially for young people with a low socio-economic status, public space can be a place of retreat where they engage with other city dwellers. Urban planning as well as projects targeting public spaces will thus have to aim at counteracting and preventing the marginalisation of specific groups and redefine urban spaces as an important tool in building social cohesion.

1. Introduction

This report focuses on public spaces in Vienna to analyse how spatial aspects, marginalisation, and inclusion/exclusion in public space influence processes of (de)radicalisation. It forms part of the project D.Rad, which aims at identifying drivers of radicalisation in order to formulate comprehensive de-radicalisation measures. In this part of the project, we focus on the spatial dimension of (de-)radicalisation as we argue that public space is a central element of understanding the “social glue” of cohesive societies. This report thus conceptualises urban public spaces as spheres of encounter that play a key role in the negotiation of belonging.

Vienna is a highly interesting case for several reasons. First, it has a unique (administrative) position within Austria as it is both the capital city and a federal state. It also is the only metropolis¹ in the country. This means, i. a., that the density of services and organisations is disproportionately high in Vienna compared to other parts of Austria. Second, the city is growing at a quick pace. Since 2005, the city's population has increased by 300,000 inhabitants and will soon reach the mark of two million. Consequently, the pressure on and the demand for public spaces have also increased. Third, having been under Social Democratic Rule since WWII, Vienna's cityscape has been profoundly shaped by Social Democratic policies and politics, not least due to the social housing scheme. Hence, the city's administrative structure and political landscape differ from the rest of Austria, which is traditionally characterised by conservative politics.

For this report, we conducted expert interviews and carried out an in-depth case study, for which we engaged in participatory observations and organised two interactive workshops (D.Rad LAB I and LAB II). Based on the literature on the city of Vienna as well as practical insights from our interview partners (being active in the fields of, e.g., social work or urban planning), we have identified contested urban spaces as well as best-practice areas. For our case study, we chose *Reumannplatz* and its surrounding neighbourhood, located in the 10th district of Vienna. In the following chapters, we provide an overview of the methods and data of the report before we describe the spatial characteristics of the city of Vienna, covering the topics “socio-spatial characteristics” as well as “governance” and describe contested areas as well as best-practice measures. In chapter four, we concentrate on *Reumannplatz* to study spatial aspects of (de-)radicalisation in depth and conclude the report with the formulation of policy recommendations and concluding remarks.

2. Methodology

We understand public spaces as relationally constructed social spaces, where negotiation processes take place on a daily basis (Lefebvre, 1974; Mehta, 2022). In order to grasp these dynamics empirically, we have combined various qualitative methods of spatial research (De-Lyser et al., 2010; Heinrich et al., 2021; Wintzer, 2018). This allows us to collect narrations of individual and practice-based perceptions of these spaces through interviews and participatory workshops on the one hand, and to observe and experience these spaces through participant observations on the other.

¹ On 1/1/2023, Vienna had 1.98 million inhabitants, whereas the second largest city of Austria, Graz, had 298,000 inhabitants (Statistics Austria).

In terms of methodology², we pursued a stepwise approach, starting out from a literature review on Vienna. This was followed by seven qualitative expert interviews, in which we enquired about key actors and public space in Vienna, about the city's approach towards urban planning, as well as spatial aspects of (de)radicalisation. For previous reports, we had conducted interviews with persons who have explicitly focussed on issues of (de)radicalisation in their work. For this report, however, we aimed at interview partners who are working *on* or *in* public space (for an overview, see Appendix A). The interviews formed the basis for the chapter on the city context and the identification of best-practice examples and contested areas, as each participant was asked to name three of each and to justify their choices.

Regarding the in-depth case study, we started with background research and collected literature as well as newspaper reports. Parallelly, we carried out multiple participatory observations, taking pictures as well as field notes and memos (Clark et al., 2009) while paying particular attention to power relations (Hore et al., 2020). From March to June 2023, members of the research team visited *Reumannplatz* and its surroundings a total of seven times. These visits took place at different hours of the day as well as during the week and at the weekend to capture various types and intensities of usage.

At the heart of the case study were two interactive workshops: D.Rad LAB I, with practitioners, and D.Rad LAB II with the D.Rad Youth. For the LABs, the work package leads developed a participatory toolkit that consisted of a set of game cards which steered the group discussions (for examples see Appendix B). The cards were translated by the research team and adapted slightly to each city context and case study. For LAB I, we had two decks of cards; one on spatial aspects of *Reumannplatz* and its surroundings and the other on actors and processes. For LAB II, we added a third deck focussing on inclusion and exclusion, which covered questions that were used across all work packages involved with D.Rad Youth. In addition, each deck included open cards as well as challenge and solution cards. LAB I took place on 27 March 2023. All six participants had professional and/or experience-based knowledge of *Reumannplatz* (among them social workers, urban planners, members of a local NGO, and a local politician). LAB II took place on 22 June 2023. Here, we collaborated with a school located at *Reumannplatz* and spoke with seven students aged 18 to 19 years.

After transcribing the recordings of the interviews and the LABs, we carried out a thematic analysis of the textual material (see Boyatzis, 1999; Braun and Clarke, 2016; 2022). All quotes used in the report were furthermore anonymised and, if necessary, pseudomised.

3. Spatial characteristics and city context

Previous reports in the D.Rad project on the case of Austria/Vienna had already highlighted that public spaces (especially certain parks) as well as semi-public spaces (predominantly certain mosques and associations) have played a key role in radicalisation processes (see Haselbacher et al., 2021a; 2021b). For this report, we zoom in on the relationship between public spaces, social cohesion, and belonging and assess the ways in which public spaces

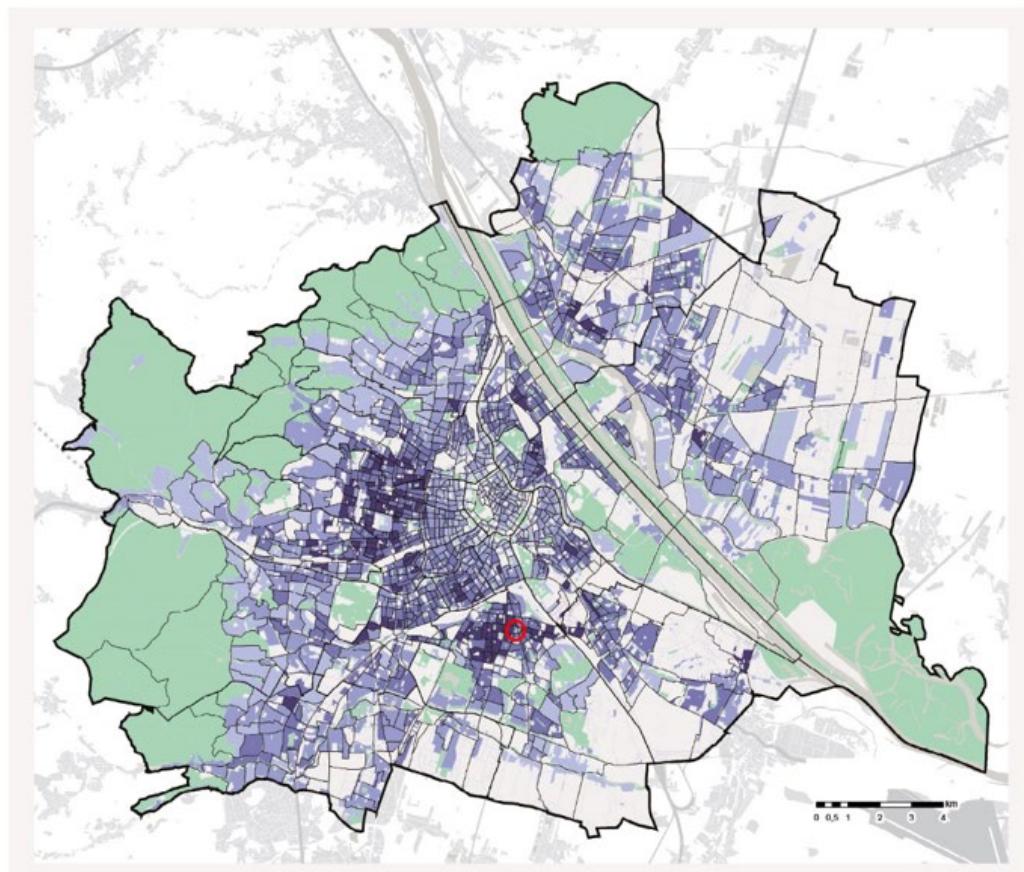
² The methodology for WP 9 of the D.Rad-project was jointly designed by the WP leads from Helsinki University and the Institute for Urban and Regional Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. It was applied by all partners involved in this WP in the following cities: Vienna, Pristina, Helsinki, Florence, Tbilisi, and London. All partners were asked to adjust interview guidelines and the game cards used in the LABs to the city context.

may counteract processes of alienation and polarisation. In this chapter, we give a general overview of the spatial characteristics of the city of Vienna based on the literature review and the expert interviews and pay special attention to recent developments and lines of conflict in public urban spaces.

3.1 Socio-spatial characteristics and public space

Vienna is a growing and truly super-diverse city (Vertovec, 2007). It has a rich tradition of migration, which results in an ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically heterogeneous urban population (Lehner et al., 2021). Between 2005 and 2022, the population grew by 300,000 persons (from 1.6 million to 1.9 million). Depending on the definition applied, the share of immigrants in the city ranges from 30.8% (citizenship) to 36.7% (country of birth) and combining both dimensions, to 42.6% in 2022.³ Given this vivid population developments, the city is confronted with a growing demand and pressure on the housing market, in social services, in schools and – last but not least – in public space.

Figure 1: Potential pressure of use in open spaces in Vienna on the basis of census tracts, 2019



Source: City of Vienna, Integration and Diversity Department and Department of Urban Development and Planning, edited by Ursula Reeger.

Note: The darker the blue, the higher the pressure of usage; green: green areas such as woods and parks. To assess the potential pressure of use, accessible green spaces were set in relation to the number of residents. In addition, the unemployment rate and the proportion of welfare recipients were taken into account. The red dot marks our case-study area, *Reumannplatz*.

³ Numbers from <https://www.wien.gv.at/statistik/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsstand/> for 2020.

Pressure on public space was mentioned unanimously in all interviews and was discussed in connection with the pandemic, population growth and, most recently, the inflation due to the war in Ukraine. These multiple crises have also increased the number of people living in poverty and those at risk of poverty, a fact accompanied by homelessness and the increasing presence of marginalised people in public spaces.

Figure 1 depicts this pressure on public spaces in Vienna's census tracts. What we see is an uneven distribution of green spaces with large belts in the outskirts of Vienna and close to better-off areas, and only small green areas in the city centre and the densely built-up residential areas from the *Gründerzeit*⁴, that are characterised by a high share of immigrants (Stadt Wien, 2020). Although about half of Vienna consists of some form of green space, an exceptionally high share in international comparison, not everybody has quick and easy access to such areas suitable for everyday use. While people with sufficient financial resources tend to be more mobile and can also resort to commercial spaces, others often have to rely on the park around the corner. Figure 2 displays a typical open space within an area of the *Gründerzeit*, where open spaces were obtained by leaving a building block in the grid scheme vacant.

Figure 2: Humboldtpark in the 10th district, example for a green space from the *Gründerzeit* era



Picture and copyright: Ursula Reeger.

An interviewee described how pressure in these densely built-up areas increases in summer and that different interests frequently collide:

“Many people use the park at the same time, often people meet until late in the evening. In the surrounding areas, the apartments are often small, they then use

⁴ During the *Gründerzeit* (“Founders’ Period”) in the second half of the 19th century, the city saw an enormous growth in population and construction due to an economic boom and industrialisation. More than 40,000 buildings with 300,000 flats were built in Vienna during that time. The majority of flats today belong to the private rental sector, where most immigrants live due to its immediate accessibility (Kohlbacher and Reeger, 2020).

public space as an extended living room. So there is not enough space for everyone and different opinions about how to use public space collide" (EI_Vienna_2).

This was reinforced during the pandemic, as another interview partner pointed out:

"We simply notice a massive increase in the pressure of usage, it's simply that more people depend on public space, (...) on the one hand we have the demographic component, we have the component of multiple crises (...) . We also have target groups who have not used public space so far and then during the pandemic suddenly moved their home office to the park and drank prosecco but somehow did not quite understand why there might be a homeless person sitting there drinking a can of beer on the bench next to them. So we also have displacement mechanisms that have also become a topic in this context" (EI_Vienna_1).

A recent study on the current situation and future orientation of just urban planning in Vienna (Heindl, 2022) lists the following topics as fields of tension with reference to public spaces: ownership, commercialisation, traffic and street space, green spaces and climate, quality and design, participation and exclusion. These topics were also reflected in our interviews, in which displacement mechanisms were mentioned repeatedly. Several experts pointed out that public space should be available for those who are particularly dependent on it, especially vulnerable persons or those affected by poverty.

In practice, some policies are in tension with this approach of public space being a space for vulnerable and/or marginalised people. There is an ongoing conflict between policy makers (on district level but also on the city level), administrative bodies, and practitioners regarding measures and approaches. In particular, there is a field of tension between security measures, e.g., suppressive measures or surveillance, and soft measures, e.g., social work. For example, the aspect of the public use of harmful substances, including alcohol, was addressed with the instalment of safety zones and place bans. This resulted in displacement mechanisms, where those consuming such substances chose to move to other localities. Interview partners have critically noted that the politicisation of such conflicts in everyday urban life counteracts long-term solutions.

3.2 Governance of public space in Vienna

Regarding the governance of public space in Vienna, there is a multitude of actors in the city administration and in organisations working at the local level, who focus on topics related to public spaces. Its financial resources and complex administrative apparatus outline its commitment to providing the population with attractive public spaces. However, as our interview partners pointed out, this can also become an obstacle that slows down processes and complicates them. No fewer than 23 municipal departments (MA = *Magistratsabteilung*) are involved in the planning, maintenance and supervision of public spaces. Particularly noteworthy are MA 18 (Urban Development and Urban Planning), MA 19 (Architecture and Urban Design), MA 21 (District Planning and Land Use), MA 42 (Vienna City Gardens), and MA 13 (Education and Youth). The municipal department MA 18 – Urban Development and Urban Planning – was responsible for designing the City Development Plan 2025 (MA 18, 2014). The plan acknowledges the relationship between public space and social cohesion, stating "how open spaces are designed, how they function, and how they meet the diverse needs of urban dwellers significantly influences the quality and atmosphere of urban coexistence" (MA 18, 2014).

The implementation of many measures in public space is often bundled at the district level, which is why the municipal departments and the districts need to cooperate closely. In addition, there is a number of other relevant actors connected to the city of Vienna, such as the Area Renewal Offices (*Gebietsbetreuung*), or the Local Agenda (participation processes often related to public space). Furthermore, there are several other actors, such as the police, businesspeople, NGOs, local initiatives, and residents that negotiate the distribution of spaces. Interestingly, on the district level, different forms of cooperation were developed to bring these actors together, which is why there is no unified approach in Vienna.

The City of Vienna offers a dense network of social-work services in public space, ranging from youth work and conflict management to measures addressing addiction (alcohol, drugs) and homelessness. Some of them explicitly aim at mediating conflicts in urban space. For example, district authorities can engage 'Fairplay Teams' to attend to certain areas/parks during the daytime. Furthermore, during the pandemic, so-called awareness teams were operative at night to supervise partygoers in public space. Some of the organisations working in public space have started independently as grassroot initiatives while others were developed by municipal departments. However, today, almost all of the organisations are either directly incorporated into the administrative units of the city or are funded by the city and collaborate closely in its structures. While the direct affiliation with the City of Vienna enables these organisations to deposit and lobby their own interests more directly, the influence of politics is also greater, as one interviewee critically remarked.

The advisory group "Social Work in Public Space" was founded in 2007 to coordinate all the measures related to public spaces. It includes members of various municipal departments as well as key stakeholders from the field. Together with researchers, these stakeholders developed a mission statement for social work in public space. This mission statement depicts a rather inclusionary understanding of public spaces, as it states:

"The City of Vienna understands public space as a social space with political significance, which is structured by social power relations. (...) The City of Vienna opposes any form of discrimination in and displacement from public space."⁵

This attitude also came to the fore during the interviews as an interview partner working at a municipal department mentioned they prefer not to talk about "problems" but "phenomena of a metropolis" and that an overriding goal of their work is to strengthen the urban competence of all residents (EI_Vienna_3). Nevertheless, practical economic interests often counteract this approach and there is continuous negotiation between different interests, conceptions, and understandings.

3.3 Description of three best-practice areas and three contested areas

Identifying contested and best-practice public spaces has proven to be a difficult task, since interview partners were reluctant to mark public spaces as either best-practice or contested. It is thus important to note that the following examples must not be understood as a dichotomy in the sense of "good" and "bad" spaces but that reality, as so often is the case, presents itself as rather complex. Consequently, a certain public space might have been classified as contested by one expert, while another identified it as best practice, or a place might be labelled as contested and best-practice at the same time. Time plays an important role, as most places

⁵ <https://www.wien.gv.at/gesellschaft/soziale-arbeit/mission-statement.html>

have changed significantly over the past 20 years. Therefore, we will present public spaces highlight the complexity of some of the current issues and debates exemplarily, and that have elements of both – contestation and best practice. All examples are located in densely built-up and densely populated *Gründerzeit* areas and are characterised by a rather high pressure of use.

3.3.1. Best-practice areas

For our interview partners, best-practice areas were urban spaces where the displacement of certain groups was successfully avoided and where various groups co-exist, as one interview partner described it: "So how do you ensure that coexistence and togetherness is possible?" (EI_Vienna_4). Another interviewee highlighted the importance of the active involvement of user groups in planning procedures (EI_Vienna_3). In the following, we present three public places that have been identified by experts as best-practice and which illustrate how negotiation and participation processes take place in the city.

Yppenplatz is located in the 16th district of Vienna and is connected to the longest street food market in Vienna. It consists of a square with several seating opportunities as well as a playground, a public toilet, and sports facilities and it is surrounded by the market and several cafes and bistros. It is a very vivid and popular public space that is used by different groups, a fact which is highlighted as a best-practice example for superdiversity by some. However, the space is also contested and simultaneously serves as an example of gentrification. There are frequent tensions due to the diverging interests of different user groups, noise, and waste. Consequently, several actors are present to mediate and supervise these conflicts.

The **Wanda-Lanzer-Park** (4th district) is a typical example of a park in a densely built-up area with old residential buildings, where a part of a street block was left vacant. The possibilities here were thus rather limited. Interview partners mentioned this park as a best-practice example regarding the participation of citizens. They described the cooperation between different actors as very good while involving a diverse set of actors. The City of Vienna is often criticised for leaving only marginal decision-making competencies to citizens in urban participation processes. Consequently, solutions and best-practice examples are often rather small-scale, for which the *Wanda-Lanzer-Park* is a good example. Here, the redesign resulted in more greenery, including opportunities for urban gardening for residents, a new playground, and a new lighting concept. However, the ground is still sealed and there is a lack of shading and trees.

Located in the 11th district of Vienna, the **Herderpark** is one of the biggest parks of the district. It contains several activity zones, including playgrounds, a youth sports facility, a dog zone, and a children's outdoor pool, which is free of charge. The park is surrounded by municipal residential buildings and is an example of social-democratic urban planning. It was cited by interview partners as best-practice because young people were explicitly included in the participation processes, which is not always the case. In the case of the *Herderpark*, a calisthenics facility was built at the request of young people. Staff members of Fairplayteam 11 (youth work) were in charge of polling the wishes of youth regarding the park and participants had the possibility to vote online on certain equipment.

3.3.2. Contested areas

In the case of "contested" public spaces, interview partners named public spaces that were politicised and were thus discussed as problematic in the media and in politics. Most problems

occur when different user groups with different demands and interests meet in public spaces. The question “who owns the city?” is mirrored here as “who owns this place?”. Conflicts are often fought out along the lines of “us versus them”, with “them” being migrants in many cases, but also marginalised individuals and groups such as beggars, homeless persons, alcoholics and drug addicts, or young people in general.

The most controversially debated areas in Vienna are usually transportation hubs. At **Prater-stern** (2nd district), two underground transportation lines intersect, local trains stop, and it is surrounded by the largest traffic circle of Vienna. It is located near the Prater, Vienna’s amusement park that is connected to one of the largest recreational areas in the city. The place has long been associated with drugs and crime and has had a long history of renewal projects. However, the contestation did not stop and the public perception that this place was unsafe and uncomfortable remained, which resulted in an alcohol ban.⁶ Negotiation processes are still ongoing: In 2020, a new police station was opened and in 2022, parts of the public square leading to the train station were redesigned.

Keplerplatz is one of the most recent examples of urban contestation. It is located in the 10th district next to a pedestrian zone, one of the most important shopping streets in that part of Vienna. **Keplerplatz** has become one of the main drug hotspots during the pandemic. At first, the city tried to deal with this through several ‘soft’ measures. In April 2023, however, a protection zone was established by decree.⁷ Such a zone allows the police to turn away people who pose certain dangers and prohibits them from entering the area. In the case of **Keplerplatz**, the zone comprises an area holding a kindergarten, a school, and an afternoon care centre, a children’s playground, and a soccer cage. According to our interview partners, the problem has not been solved, but was shifted to other parks. Drug use and dealing in the area has mostly been associated with young people who are often illegalised and who came as refugees, which is why youth work can hardly offer anything to them as they have no access to the labour market, education, or support services.

Franz-Jonas Platz has characteristics similar to the other two places, although concrete measures have not yet been taken yet. The square is located in the 21st district, at the most important transportation hub north of the Danube. The much used underground line 6 ends here and it is also a stop for local trains. The square was already contested in the past, as it was a popular meeting point of Neo-Nazi groups in the 1990s. Most recently, however, it was alcoholism, drug abuse, and the presence of marginalised groups that have caught the attention of policy makers. Currently, a planning agency is doing a socio-spatial analysis towards improving the place as it shall be redesigned over the next few years into a contemporary, climate-adapted square.⁸ The interview partners who mentioned **Franz-Jonas Platz** saw much potential to enhance social work but also difficulties regarding the actor constellations.

⁶ https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Gemeinderecht/GEMRE_WI_90101_I460_000_2018/GEMRE_WI_90101_I460_000_2018.pdf

⁷ https://www.polizei.gv.at/lpd_docs/2252.pdf

⁸ At the time of publication of this report, the socio-spatial analysis has not been published yet but more information on the background of this project can be found here: <https://www.sonjagruber.at/projekte/243-sozialraumanalyse-zum-franz-jonas-platz-dem-floridsdorfer-bahnhof-2022.html>.

4. In-depth analysis of the case study *Reumannplatz*

A public space that came up in several interviews and that has been subject of controversial public and political debates was *Reumannplatz*, which we chose for our case study. In the following, we will explain the rationale behind this choice and describe this space and the area it is located in, before we give insights into the empirical results from D.Rad LABs I and II.

Reumannplatz is a public space in the inner part of the 10th district (*Favoriten*), the most densely populated district in Vienna, with more than 200,000 inhabitants. Created in 1872 during the Founders' Period, *Reumannplatz* has a distinct quarter-circle form, breaking the otherwise prevailing grid development in this area. Most of the surrounding buildings date back to the 19th century and belong to the private rental housing market, which is why it is an immediately accessible option for newcomers in Vienna. During the 1970s, *Reumannplatz* was modernised when the terminal station of the underground line U1 was built and the connecting *Favoritenstraße* was turned into a pedestrian zone. The situation changed in 2017, when the U1 was extended and the tram rails crossing *Reumannplatz* were removed. Consequently, a general redesign of the place started to unfold.

We took the redesign of the space as a starting point for our analysis as we were interested in its consequences and outcomes. Before the redesign of the space, a functional and socio-spatial analysis had been done. We used this analysis as an important basis for our case study (see Gruber and Jauschneg, 2016). The process was organised by the city but was based on active citizen participation. An expert interviewee described the mix of bottom-up and top-down measures applied here:

“There were various citizens’ initiatives that were against the redesign or against the things that were reported in the media. In the media, the Chamber of Commerce and businesspeople discussed the idea of creating more consumer spaces at *Reumannplatz*. The citizen initiative opposed this. There was also a youth girls’ group that pushed for a girls’ stage and a girls’ room. So, it was not only top-down but also bottom-up” (EI_Vienna_2).

We engaged in participatory observations, visiting *Reumannplatz* and its surroundings a total of seven times, taking field notes and memos. The square is quite large and divided into several areas by flowerbeds as can be seen in figure 3. This results in different corners that are structurally separated from each other, but still open and visible as the greenery and design of the flower beds make the square appear very open. There are many different groups of people who spend time there, but also many people who only cross it changing transportation. There is an above-average number of seats, including the edges of the flowerbeds and long rows of classical benches (without restrictions to keep people from sleeping on them). This corresponds with one of the main recommendations of the socio-spatial analysis, namely that there should be sufficient partial spaces and niches, as this enables the undisturbed simultaneity of different uses and user groups (Gruber and Jauschneg, 2016, 74). The most important areas are: The area in front of the public bath *Amalienbad*, the children’s playground, the girls’ stage, the northern part, which merges into the pedestrian zone and shopping street *Favoritenstraße*, the southern part, where the bus stations are, and the middle, where the underground entrance and snack bars are located. The buildings surrounding the square are also home to a number of shops and local businesses, including an ice cream parlour known throughout Vienna, in front of which there are long queues in summer, which also characterise the image of *Reumannplatz*.

Figure 3: *Reumannplatz* after the redesign



Source: Architektengruppe U-Bahn. <https://www.la21wien.at/blog-detail-la21/reumannplatz-neu-1300.html>

There are several reasons why we chose to carry *Reumannplatz*:

- It is situated in one of the most densely populated districts of Vienna, with a high share of immigrants and newly arrived people⁹, low household income rates and education levels (see Molina et. al., 2022), but also large urban development projects.
- The square has undergone several development phases and was redesigned only recently. It was transformed from being one of the most problematic areas to being an important meeting point after the redesign, when traffic calmed down and conflicts decreased. We were particularly interested to see which tensions prevail and how some

⁹ In the areas adjacent to *Reumannplatz*, these groups constitute around 60 percent of the population according to the population register.

fields of tension such as the topic of commercialisation vs. consumption-free areas or security/securitisation are negotiated.

- c) A multitude of actors are involved with *Reumannplatz*. These include the stakeholders that contributed to the process of redesign (various departments of the city administration, researchers, social workers, area support and management, neighbourhood centres, citizens and business owners). Furthermore, several actors are present on *Reumannplatz* on a daily basis (youth workers, social workers, local initiatives, citizens, business owners). As one of the themes in LAB I focused on “actors and processes”, we were particularly interested in their interactions.
- d) In politics and the media, *Reumannplatz* and the inner part of *Favoriten* in general have been characterised as “hotspots of radicalisation and extremism”. Several political organisations or groups have used *Reumannplatz* and its surroundings for their gatherings, some of which have resulted in violent conflicts.
- e) *Reumannplatz* has frequently been politicised. As a result, video surveillance measures were introduced at *Reumannplatz* in May 2021 in reaction to discursive security negotiations. The police are hoping that this will have a preventive effect. The cameras are mounted on light poles and can be swivelled, so that the entire *Reumannplatz* and parts of the surrounding alleys can be seen.

4.1 Summary of LAB I

For the first LAB, we invited practitioners who are associated with *Reumannplatz* due to their work and field of expertise. Six persons from the fields of urban planning, youth and social work, and local politics participated. We divided the participants into two groups. Each group received an identical deck of cards and recorded their discussions.

The two groups displayed rather different dynamics. Whereas the participants in one group expressed their criticism over the status quo quite straightforwardly and also questioned administrative structures and political decision-making at the city level, the other group was rather cautious with such open critique. Yet, both groups criticised decision-making processes for their bureaucratic, overly complicated structures. Needs and wishes of residents thus seldom find their way into planning, unless such wishes had already been budgeted and calculated in advance. One group also generally criticised the budget allocation in Vienna, as it disadvantages large and socio-economically weak districts such as *Favoriten*, which have a lower per capita budget (see also Andel et al., 2016). Money is generally an issue in the financing of large-scale, long-term infrastructural projects but also where social services and social work, as well as supposedly small projects, like the planting of a tree, are concerned. All participants expressed the need for more funding and resources and all saw the need for additional positions in the areas of education and youth work.

There was unanimity among participants that the redesign of *Reumannplatz* has turned out well and that the place has several positive features for the inclusion of marginalised populations. *Reumannplatz* offers space for unhoused people, drug-dependent or drug-addicted persons without them being displaced by repressive measures – at least to a much lesser extent than in other places. Furthermore, the lighting concept and the resting facilities at the square have been improved and traffic was successfully calmed. Video surveillance, on the other hand, was criticised for being a populist, repressive measure. Finally, regarding the design of the space, the absence of public toilets, also in other parks nearby, was criticised.

The representation of *Reumannplatz* in the media and politics is mostly negative; it is framed as a “social hotspot” or even as a “no-go area”. Not only did participants perceive this framing as inaccurate and exaggerated, but one person also pointed out that young people who live nearby or regularly spend time in the area realise and internalise the stigmatising reporting. However, the *Reumannplatz* is also perceived as an iconic place and, in a sense, the district’s landmark.

Due to the design of the square with various corners and niches, it is possible that different groups co-exist largely conflict-free. Different user groups were perceived by the participants as rather closed, separated communities that do not interact with each other. Young people, however, often take to other parks in the vicinity, whereby the preferences and dynamics are constantly changing. Consequently, different organisations working in or on public space are in constant exchange via various district-level forums. The cooperation among actors and stakeholders in *Favoriten* was highlighted as very good and as exemplary for Vienna.

Social workers identified two groups that are difficult to reach: Girls and (young) women are barely present at the *Reumannplatz* (with the exception of the playground, where they care for younger children). There is also a lack of offers for young men from a migrant background who are socio-economically marginalised, including, amongst others, young (illegalised) refugees from Syria and Afghanistan. Moreover, drug use and selling by young people has become a problem in recent years, particularly at the adjoining *Keplerplatz*, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter. While drug use is indeed a pressing issue pointed out by the experts, it can hardly be separated from the stigmatisation of racialised young men whose presence in public spaces is undesired and perceived as disturbing (see, e.g., Scheibelhofer 2007, 2018).

Finally, the participants highlighted current phenomena and pressing issues. The central topic was inflation and poverty, with the latter being particularly visible, as people who are affected by homelessness, but also people in very cramped living conditions are increasingly frequenting public spaces, with accompanying phenomena such as public alcohol consumption, littering, but also noise pollution. The two groups proposed differing solutions to the challenges under discussion. In addition to simplified administrative structures and more (financial) resources, political demands were formulated to create offers especially for groups that are currently excluded from all social safety nets. In addition, group discussants expressed the desire for more and genuine participation, and some even went so far as to call for expropriation in the case of vacant housing in order to put an end to speculation on the housing market.

4.2 Summary of LAB II

The recruitment of participants for LAB II proved to be an extremely difficult endeavour, which we had not anticipated after LAB I. For LAB II, we were looking for young adults, aged between 18 and 26 years, who either live near *Reumannplatz* or who work or study there and thus regularly frequent the space. Eventually, seven students, six girls and one boy, from a secondary vocational school near *Reumannplatz* declared their interest to participate. The LAB took place in their classroom at the end of June. The setup was similar to LAB I: We divided the participants into two groups who both had a deck of cards with the questions. Interestingly, in this group discussion, we mostly captured the perspective of young women, a group that was portrayed as the absentees in public space by the participants from LAB I.

Participants stated unanimously that the square was not accessible for girls and (young) women because of catcalling and the presence of (large) groups of mostly men and “shady characters” (referring to drug and alcohol-dependent people or people who seem to have nothing to do). The expressed feelings of insecurity were not only subjective but were also tied to concrete unpleasant and worrying experiences. Particularly during winter, when it turns dark by late afternoon, and in the evening, the students didn't feel safe. Here, participants expressed the wish for better lighting, especially in some corners of the square. However, while the darkness of winter was perceived as particularly unpleasant, in summer the presence of groups of men who can hardly be avoided and whom one had to pass every day was perceived as equally disturbing.

In both groups, participants viewed *Reumannplatz* mostly as part of their way to school and not as a space where they would like to spend their free time or meet friends, even when they lived in the vicinity. For lunch breaks or breaks in-between classes, the students prefer to stay at the school premises. For enjoying their leisure time and meeting friends, they mostly go to the city centre and inner districts or visit commercially used spaces, such as cafes or cinemas, where they feel more secure. However, the students were aware that not all people have the opportunity to use commercially viable spaces and critically reflected on the function and the necessity of accessible public spaces.

Some participants also stated that the stereotypical representations of the area in the media were true. Nevertheless, the participants also argued that this framing was displeasing and that they often got negative comments from friends or family for going to school there. Such prejudices caused them not to want to be associated with the place, albeit that the negative framing was perceived as exaggerated and partially untrue. Furthermore, both groups found that there was a lack of cleanliness, a lack of covered areas as shelters from rain, and a lack of green spaces. More than one participant suggested a higher police presence and establishing a police station directly at *Reumannplatz* in order to deal with the perceived security deficits.

Despite all criticism, the participants of LAB II saw the redesign of *Reumannplatz* as a huge improvement. However, the need for further climate adaption and green spaces received much more attention than in LAB I and was mentioned in one of the groups at each question discussed. In order to feel comfortable in a public space, the participants wanted to feel safe and secure and to have green niches that provide shadow and cover from rain. Furthermore, they expressed the wish for seating opportunities and niches where they would be unhindered by other user groups.

4.3 Synthesis of the case study

The participants had quite different focusses and perceptions in LAB I and LAB II. Whereas in LAB I, social workers had praised the fact that mechanisms of displacement are less grave compared to other public spaces in Vienna, the participants of LAB II unanimously identified *Reumannplatz* as unsafe for young girls and women. Female participants placed emphasis on their perceived feeling of insecurity because of the high presence of groups of men. This leads to the conclusion that access to urban public space and, consequently, urban planning in general needs to be approached with an intersectional perspective (see, e.g., Day 2001; Listerborn 2016). In other words, while *Reumannplatz* offers space for some marginalised groups, women and girls tend not to stay long, with the exception of women who visit the

playgrounds with children during the day. During our participant observations, we also noticed the absence of this demographic.

While policy makers seem to be aware of the problem of the absence of young girls and women in public urban spaces, the locally found solution in the form of the *Reumädchenbühne* (girls' stage) seems to work only partially. It has served to raise awareness of the topic of girls in public space and was used by several actors to jointly organise events. However, particularly the participants of LAB II questioned the project, as the stage is seldomly used and they wouldn't like to expose themselves on a stage. Instead, they would favour green and secure spaces, where they could sit quietly with a group of friends without being bothered by others. *Reumädchenbühne*, however, was initiated to – quite literally – place girls and female teenagers centre stage, which does not seem to correspond with the wish of young girls for protected places of retreat. We thus argue that claiming public space cannot be achieved in a top-down manner and that such visible interventions in public space are not sufficient to actually redistribute these spaces.

The LABs also made the different focus and perspectives of the participants very clear. While the nearby *Sonnwendviertel*, a large and prestigious urban renewal and development project of the City of Vienna, was seen critically as a form of gentrification by participants from LAB I, the participants from LAB II saw it as a great enhancement to the area. The participants of LAB I had specific target groups in mind and emphasised that public space should be available to vulnerable and marginalised groups in particular. The participants of LAB II, on the other hand, based their observations almost exclusively on their own lives and personal experiences. This highlights an area of tension that builds on the previous point about the need for intersectional analyses: If public spaces provide space for marginalised groups in particular, this can lead to the displacement of other groups. These power mechanisms and dynamics must therefore be taken into account when redesigning or analysing public spaces. Very often, it is girls and women who withdraw from public spaces. At the same time, it is important that public space remains available to people who are particularly dependent on it. Thus, concepts are needed to create safe spaces for young women and especially for women who are affected by marginalisation but are shied away from using certain spaces due to the presence of male groups and the male gaze. Besides gender-sensitive approaches in urban planning, we also see the need for gender-sensitive educational work in public space that is explicitly aimed at changing the views of men.

Finally, the results of LAB I and LAB II illustrate the redesign of *Reumannplatz* as a best-practice example. This concerns the concrete outcome of the planning procedure but also the cooperation among actors at district level. All participants from both LABs perceived the outcome of the redesign as positive and as an improvement. However, several suggestions were made for further improvement. In particular, climate adaptation will be a major issue in the near future. For example, the front part of the square, which merges into the pedestrian zone, as well as the pedestrian zone itself, are currently a sealed "asphalt desert" with hardly any shadow. Comprehensive short-, medium- and long-term concepts are needed to ensure sufficient public space offering a positive experience for all population groups.

5. Analysis and policy recommendations

Based on the insights from our empirical research, we have formulated policy recommendations as a basis for future urban-planning and redesigning procedures. We also included suggestions towards making public spaces more inclusive and accessible.

- *Inclusion of Multiple-User Perspectives and Intersectional Approaches into Planning Processes*

When planning or redesigning public spaces, policy makers should envision not only the needs of current users but also those of potential users. This ensures a comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs and preferences of different groups. Ideally, different user groups should be included in the decision-making processes, either directly or through the perspective of organisations that lobby for their interests. Additionally, it is important to identify and prioritise individuals who depend on public space, such as those with limited (economic) resources or specific vulnerabilities. Based on the results of the two LABs, we suggest that such approaches must be based on intersectional perspectives.

- *Crisis Management and Innovation:*

The past years have been years of multiple crises, which have also influenced discourses on public space. In order to deal with crises effectively, mechanisms should be prepared to swiftly create and implement new services and measures. Policy makers should establish flexible structures that allow for the rapid deployment of resources and the adaptation of services according to suddenly emerging needs. Collaborations with relevant stakeholders on local levels, such as civil-society initiatives, local entrepreneurs, or social workers, can facilitate innovative solutions that are based on multiple perspectives and local needs during times of crisis.

- *Simplification of Administrative Structures:*

Especially for the City of Vienna, simplifying administrative structures is crucial for improving planning procedures and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of urban renewal processes. Whereas there is a variety of networking structures, the various administrative units of the City of Vienna seem to lack an institutionalised form of exchange. Rather, each of these units focuses on their particular task and field of expertise. Youth work could thus benefit from a better understanding of the planning perspective, and vice versa, so that solutions could be developed together. Furthermore, decision-making processes must be simplified, so that these processes are not unnecessarily delayed due to complicated bureaucratic structures, and to provide some leeway for participation processes.

- *Climate Adaption and More Green Spaces:*

To address the growing challenges posed by climate change and to promote the wellbeing of residents as well as people working in public space, the city administration should prioritise climate-adaptation measures and significantly expand green spaces throughout the city. Policy makers should develop comprehensive strategies and allocate resources to enhance the city's resilience to climate-related risks, and provide for shadowed and naturally cooled-down spaces where people can retreat from their (possibly overheated) homes. This should go hand in hand with a new traffic concept for the city based on traffic calming, which increases the quality of stay in public space and leads to a redistribution of people, away from spaces dedicated to motorised traffic, to parks and recreational areas.

- *Encourage Youth Engagement:*

Rather than making decisions about the youth without their input, policy makers should actively engage and listen to young people and encourage them to get involved in planning procedures. We argue for the creation of platforms that involve young people in the design and implementation of planning and urban-renewal policies. Such an approach may empower young people, foster their sense of belonging, and ideally lead to the creation of public spaces that reflect upon their needs and realities.

- *Funding, Infrastructures, and Public Toilet Facilities:*

One of the main findings of the report was the lack of public toilet facilities in public spaces. The provision of accessible and well-maintained public toilet facilities in the whole city would make it possible to spend time in public spaces without having to rely on commercial spaces, and it also is a measure towards greater cleanliness. Furthermore, more infrastructural investment in public spaces is needed, whereby all districts should have equal access to resources.

6. Conclusion

In this report, we have given insights into the case of Vienna, focussing on terms, policy concepts, and strategies to develop public spaces as spaces of de-radicalisation that aim to counteract the marginalisation of individuals and groups, thoroughly enquiring after the role of public spaces for creating and maintaining inclusionary societies. Vienna, as a fast growing and increasingly diverse city, is a good example of how a metropolis is facing and coping with several challenges both on the city level and locally, among them population growth, climate change, and growing poverty due to a pronounced rise in prices since the beginning of 2022. These developments have led to the increasing pressure of use in public space, as our empirical data proved. Moreover, public space is not evenly distributed, but there are large areas in the densely built-up parts of the city that lack easily accessible recreational areas.

The simple assignment of the labels of 'best-practice' versus 'contested' areas proves to be inappropriate. In a large city, there are constantly changing dynamics that need to be monitored and sometimes require quick (re)actions. Good practice is usually connected to a good collaboration between several actors and the perspective of different users being taken into account. Contestation of spaces occur where top-down political decisions are made, where repressive measures are applied, and where displacement takes place. Framing thereby plays an important role.

In conclusion, policy makers and all other parties involved in public space should aim to improve public services by incorporating user perspectives, learning from successful examples but also from failures, enhancing flexibility in crisis management capabilities, simplifying administrative structures, engaging with youth, and addressing the provision of public toilets as well as climate-adaption measures.

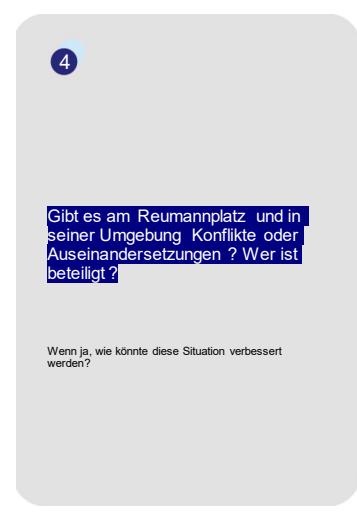
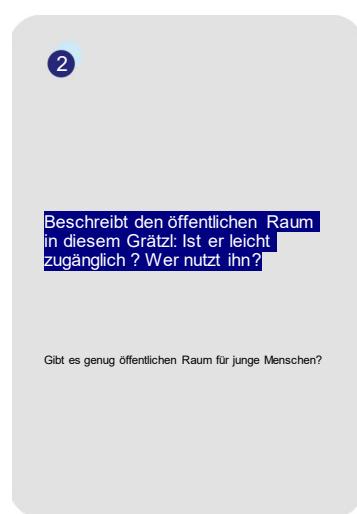
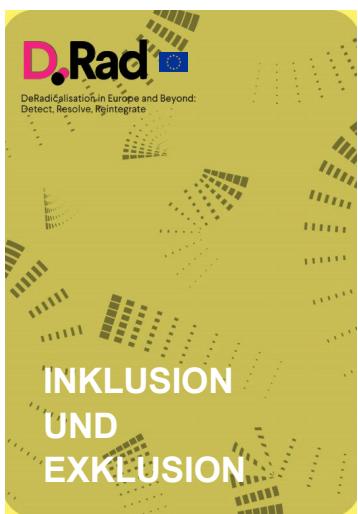
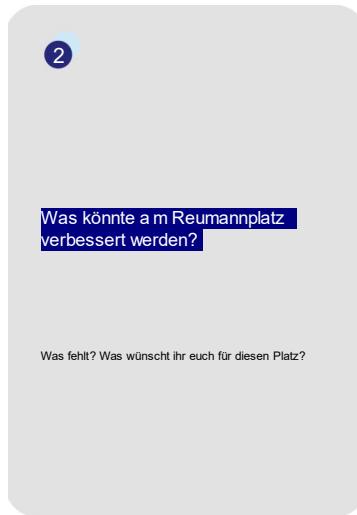
Appendix A

List of Interviews

No.	Area of expertise	Area of employment	Interview conducted
EI_Vienna_1	Public space + Addiction Prevention	Addiction and Drug Coordination	01/12/2022
EI_Vienna_2	Public Space + Urban Planning	Area Renewal Office	16/12/2022
EI_Vienna_3	Social Cohesion in Public Space	Administrative Office Architecture and Urban Planning (City of Vienna)	19/12/2022
EI_Vienna_4	Urban Planning	Administrative Office Architecture and Urban Planning (City of Vienna)	10/01/2023
EI_Vienna_5	Social Work and Public Space	Research; University of Applied Science	27/1/2023
EI_Vienna_6	Social Work (Youth Work)	Association of Viennese Youth Centres	30/01/2023
EI_Vienna_7	Social Work in Public Space + Radicalisation	Association of Viennese Youth Centres	14/4/2023

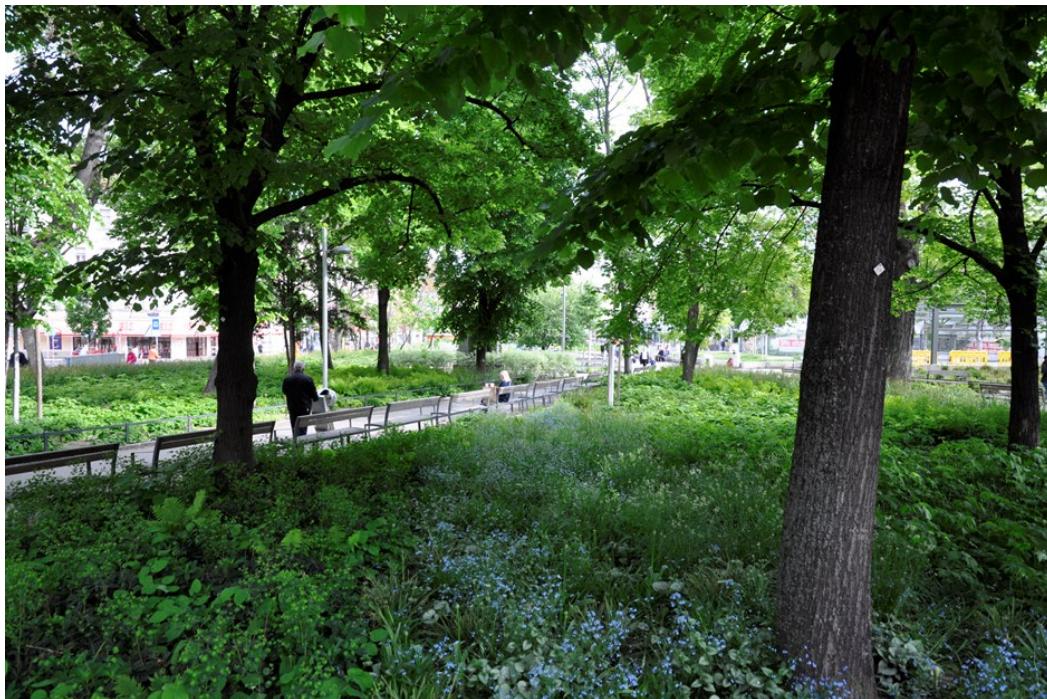
Appendix B

Examples of Game Cards



Appendix C

Impressions of Reumannplatz (copyright: Ursula Reeger)





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