

**SPACES Conference Vienna**  
**The Artist as Activist in Public Space: Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine.**  
**30.-31.10.2014, Kunstraum Niederösterreich**  
Moderation: Angelika Fitz

**CONFERENCE MINUTES**

Done by Oikodrom/Michael Anranter, Alexandra Überbacher<sup>1</sup>

October 30th, 2014

**15:30-19:00: Panel 1 – Public Art and Activism in Eastern Central Europe**

Presentations by

Nini Palavandishvili, GeoAir, Tbilisi

Taguhi Torosyan, Utopiana.am, Yerevan

Kateryna Botanova, Centre for Contemporary Art

Vladimir Us, Oberliht Association, Chisinau

Respondents:

Torange Khonsari, Public Works, London

Tihomir Viderman, Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, TU Wien

**Presentation by Nini Palandishvili**

***undergo. the parallels:*** GeoAIR has always had its interest in public spaces, in the environment we are part of, we operate in and which determines our actions. Thus our participation in SPACES was also logical in a way as all GeoAIR curatorial projects and actions are directing towards rethinking and regaining public space through participatory approach as we truly believe that public space should be shaped as a result of direct engagement of citizens according to their needs.

During the '90s in most post-Soviet republics the beginning of Perestroika was a major challenge for society and public spaces. Whole system collapsed, Industrial/Institutional infrastructure lost its primary function, some got totally abandoned, and some got privatised and changed their function.

Pedestrian underground passages are quite exemplary of the processes taking place in that transition period after fall of the Soviet Union until current situation. Constructed in 70ies, once symbol for progress and technology achievement, those passages got almost dysfunctional in 90ise, due to overall economic crisis and consequently permanent electricity cuts people were avoiding using dark scary underground spaces,

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<sup>1</sup> These minutes are based on written protocol and audio recordings and have been counterchecked with the conference speakers and respondents.



gradually they turned into places for alternative unofficial economy and still they are in process of transformation, currently in more gentrified commercial clean zones.

Taking on these in account, it was interesting for us to work on spaces which are symptomatic for the political and economic turnover; so we decided to take underground passages as point of departure for our SPACES project.

It is worth of mentioning, that already in the '80s artists were using those pedestrian underground passages for their artistic work and as a place for display, we can not say that their work was derived from that specific area, but going out of institutionalized spaces, moreover that they were heavily marked by soviet ideology was attractive for them. In our project it was characteristic that all projects were developed and created specifically for those spaces and referring to social, political, economical issues related to them. Besides artistic projects side events such as guided tours, workshops, public talks were held directly in those passages.

**Workshops about abandoned spaces:** Besides main big project such as *undergo.the parallels* GeoAIR within SPACES three-year project organised several smaller projects and diverse activities such as workshops with professionals and students, mapping of cultural operators in Georgia, Vacant spaces in Tbilisi, Mosaics of Soviet Period in Tbilisi, and Soviet Modernist architecture.

Within VCCE (Vacant Central Eastern Europe) project/workshop we did two artistic interventions, one in a small park to turn it into more friendly space for neighbourhood and second in former bus station, which is surrounded by car repair centres.

**Mosaics in the public space:** Mosaics were very popular during Soviet period and there are still quite many examples present in the city public space. Most of them are in quite bad shape and what makes it more dramatic that due to privatization processes, they are endangered of disappearance. Our aim by this mapping and planned guide/publication is to introduce the mosaics to the general public, remind locals about them and show the legacy of our recent past. We hope that by emphasizing their value, we will be able to increase general public's interest in preserving the mosaics. It is rather important to document them, put together and analyze the material, as understanding the history is the only way of its objective perception and assessment. The destruction of related images will lead to its improper interpretation. Besides, we believe that no matter how "bad" the Soviet system was, it is part of our history and demolition of associated forms and images cannot erase it. Its proper comprehension would be more effective and appropriate, rather than ignoring it. It should also be mentioned that by preserving architecture, forms and artworks associated with the Soviet period, we are not aiming for the propaganda of Soviet ideology, but rather to comprehend, understand and appreciate their artistic value.

### **Presentation by Taguhi Torosyan**

**Public Space in Armenia:** Talking about context and conditions of doing arts in Armenia's public space needs to contextualize the public space as a social space for ideology. The manifestation of ideology and people's power were a major characteristic

in the Soviet era. Public spaces were built in order to do both: represent and organize power. The lack of intimacy in the open space was great to experience official manifestations, dances, festivals was a result of monumental architecture of large empty spaces.

Under the ruling of Nikita Khrushchev the organization of public places was realigned. Instead of monumentalising, places for the community were designed and artists had the opportunity to choose between the people and the propaganda machine. It became possible to choose between being politicized or not, grey area was limited. First contemporary art took place in the rural and less observed areas. Place for progressive arts in the urban realm was little and dissidents unwanted.

Later, during Perestroika another shift happened when art critics were introduced into discussion. Artists moved to the public space without a specific agenda and the third floor movement gained significance. They passed criticism on the union of artists and integrated media and topics that were previously forbidden by state authorities. All of their activities were based on political creed and differed in content from soviet modernism and state authorities. Since national independence existentialism, but also influences from esoteric trends, became more important for Armenian arts scene.

***Civic activism in Armenia:*** In 2008 public protests created the situation of a mini-maidan. 11 people were killed by snipers and opposition was heavily affected. It was the last big democratic interference in Armenia. While activists tried to fight, the government reacted quickly and activism was suppressed. Furthermore cultural funding was cut down harshly in way that it arts in the public space do not allow new ideas and innovation in arts in order to serve the state agenda.

In opposition to statues, monuments and installations performance as an artistic tool, as well as activism may take place on the ample squares. At the point where usage is limited, the places provided by a city are used but not owned by artist or activist. Notions of ownership should therefore be replaced by successful search for abandoned trash places.

**Presentation by Kateryna Botanova:**

***SPACES of Peace and Confrontation:*** Today it is no longer possible to talk about art in Ukraine without taking into consideration military interventions at Kyiv Maidan and beyond. The military interventions affected the perception of arts in the public space and erased the romantic approach describing art as a tool that may stop the army and has power to change the world. The canon of arts in the public space is very banal. It can be an image of change represented by the question what art can and can not do! In international conference some already talk about the failure of arts: Maidan was initiated by artists and activist but then people were killed in Kyiv and beyond. But should arts really be considered a weapon? If this is the vision, art probably fails as it is better to show different scenarios and visions.

In 2012 we started with the implementation of projects, talking the first time with artists about the meaning of public space in the Ukraine. But people didn't want to share



anything and so the question became difficult: How do we have to deal with the public space? How do we start noticing what is around us? What are public spaces as a place for communication?

**ARCHITECTURE of Common:** This is a project of building and establishing a new cultural centre in Kyiv. It asks for any chance to have this cultural centre in the city but also challenges visionaries with the question of content. Should city authorities accept private investments for architecture and culture? How should a new cultural centre in the middle of the city be filled with content and vitality? But what happens if the government refuses offers that are offered by Oligarchs in the middle of armoured conflicts.

In the course of discussion it turned out that Soviet memory is still important.

Some other projects carried out by Alevtina Kakhidze aimed at raising awareness of the already existing environment. As an example she picked some pots with flowers, researched the name of weeds in the basin and tried to increase their prominence.

Visions for decentralization, equality, and independence in the cultural field aimed at moving towards a sustainable development for the country in all artistic interventions. The idea of common space was later picked up again by the project **Holiday on the Block** in an area inhabited by underprivileged mothers with children. We spend time gardening together with the kids in order to create a community garden. First kids started helping Alevtina, later also their parents joined.

For any kind of future projects on arts in public space the most important questions are whether we can use art as a tool, which are places for arts and how we need to continue after experiences at Maidan. Finally, SPACES developed a strategy paper for the cultural development of the city for the next years. Similar papers have never been handed over to authorities in the Ukrainian capital.

### **Presentation by Vladimir US**

In his presentation Vladimir Us spoke about the activities organized by the Oberliht Association in the frame of SPACES project, highlighting a number of artistic interventions which took place outside of traditional cultural institutions (Chisinau Civic Center series). These projects drew together artists, architects, sociologists, activists and other participants expressing interest in the transformations undergone by the public space in Chisinau, the goal being that of creating, through such cultural interventions, a truly public space. This effort became possible via self-education and self-organization as well as through the development of a new cultural and digital infrastructure which is better suited to the needs of independent cultural entities in Moldavia, offering an alternative to the institutional environment and proposing new ways of engaging with the public.



### **Input by Torange Khonsari**

**Collective memory and resilience:** What do we mean by space? It's nothing, but everything at the same time. Do we mean a place, a home, an institution? What is public? Is something public because it is freely accessible?

A major term in the debate for public space is **civic**. Civic is the social and political arena of public space! According to Hannah Arendt civic places are platform for action and places to be heard, where civil society can speak. In the western context where multiple diverse societies live together, it becomes more difficult to make generic definitions of public and values embedded in civic life and place. Understanding the specifics is important to gives us the means to act. Activism as a term came from Germany to bridge a gap between anarchism and social reform movement of the early 1920s. As a position between these 2 I believe activism needs time to make a lasting change. Temporary interventions which may sit more within anarchist traditions become political commentary or trigger revolt towards a mobilized group. If we create a host through which arts can slowly build up trust and create a commitment with the community, this can support a mobilized group of people in a more powerful way.

**London worker's house:** Including social infrastructure, clubs, civic activities the worker's houses created an environment where local communities came together. During the seventies they decided to replace plenty of worker's houses and replace those buildings by new ones. Unfortunately British working class declined after post-Fordism and houses were no longer erected for workers, but for socially deprived, jobless people. It all started to decline from this moment: Crime, illegal drugs, etc. As a consequence the local city government decided to eradicate the building already in the 90's. But what does erasure mean?

Destroying the building showed that it isn't possible to erase interrelations. Only a small part survived, and not the local landlords but economic elite adopted the space. Today the place is still abandoned and isolation became a challenging issue for the whole street. A group supported by Torange Khonsari adopted one of these places in order to use it as an expansion and founded the **Committee of lost memories café**. People could hang out in the place and started to talk about landmarks using the café as a platform. So they brought life and community back to the café.

### **Input by Tihomir Viderman**

All of us have different notions and use different terminology pertaining to public space. People may use public space in many different ways and charge it with diverse demands for collecting and mobilizing memories. Keeping in mind the qualities of imaginary activism in the public space we also need to be aware that requirements of individuals and groups may differ drastically from one another. Therefore we need to be self-reflective about our discursive and material actions and avoid the creation of an image where all people seem to claim public space for similar reasons. Many pictures communicated in the presentations on activism in public space tend to be generic or polished representations of a globalized discourse on both public space and actions claiming it. Thereby they forget to remember that practices in that public space should



always include local publics in a meaningful way. This means that we as artists, activists and urban planners need to avoid the usage of images and visions of specific events as a mere tool for empowering our goals. We cannot claim that we know the needs or understand everyday life practices of all citizens, our idea of collective memories might not be the right one for other peoples' claims.

## **Discussion**

**Torange Khonsari:** We're not living in a vacuum and have certain drivers that drive the society. Many of these projects show that people are willing to shape their public space and engage in a way that you hang out. But you really shouldn't want something special as an initiator. People need to build up trust and then you can implement projects. We're just beginning to touch each other but we need to engage instead doing nothing.

**Heidi Dumreicher:** All people have different desires and needs so we cannot answer what other people probably want. But the dichotomy of these two worlds is not only a gap, but also a chance.

**Torange Khonsari:** Networks create the power structure – so today it can come from the basis.

**Taguhi Torosyan:** Networks give us opportunities but as an artist or actor you're still on your own.

**AUDIENCE:** Public always means inclusion and exclusion. Re-considering the public space as an ultimate place is simply impossible. When I think how space is constituted by things, representation, and else... then the question to ask is how reception and perception of public sphere is at question.

**Torange Khonsari:** I suppose place is related to locality so there is no absolute definition or handbook how to use the public space. What are immediate dynamics in terms of economic systems, what is about social relations? All of them include exchanges and networks of relationships.

I think public space and civic engagement require time and are still fragile. In terms of ownership and value the creation of physicality becomes very difficult. For me it's all about experimentation in order to find new ways we don't know yet.

*Angelika Fitz: There are a lot of terms that are needed to be discussed. One term I'd like to discuss tomorrow is the term community, but it would take to much time now. Thanks for the input and also for the critical answers given by our respondents. We'll now move forward to the last item on the today's agenda: the film we're showing is "the plundering" by Oliver Ressler and deals with state privatization in Georgia.*

## **19:00-20:30: Film Screening, Discussion – *The Plundering* by Oliver Ressler**

### **Discussion**

**AUDIENCE:** What should the state do with those buildings which are public – what solution is possible?

**Oliver Ressler:** I am not interested to think about solutions of how to keep and maintain abandoned buildings isolated from a larger socio-political context of representative democracy and neoliberal capitalism. This is where we have to put our energy: to find alternative ways of organizing, to build democratic structures from below, and to develop an economy that serves the majority of people instead of only a few corporations and oligarchs.

**Nini Palandishvili:** What private owner should take into consideration is to listen to real “owners” of the space. In case of Deserters’ Market vendors, which previously were inside, went outside and cannot afford counter rent prices raised as a result of renovation. The new clean space actually is not accepted and only few customers visit the newly created market hall. The library instead is an example of positively resulted communication between authorities and civil society. Group of architects, urbanists, interested people managed to convince interested investors to leave the library with its primary function and not turn into commercial structure.

**Markian Prokopovych:** Are all interviewees activists?

**Oliver Ressler:** I guess in the film most of the interviewees have an academic background: some are students, some professors; the woman at the beginning is working for a NGO dealing with water issues, two people are journalists. According to my experiences the resistance against privatization in Tbilisi is merely formed by well-informed and educated people from the middle class, not working class people. In my films I am not interested to include the business owners or politicians to give them a say. I give space to people who have no representation on public TV, who fight the dominant system and have inspiring ideas for organizing society differently along democratic lines.

**Richard S. Levine:** In the west the neoliberal elite has a lot of balancing forces and even so it is doing a horrible thing. None of these legal cultural structures prevent that excesses. In the west when a company does well then they have not caused evil. But in countries that develop quickly they just haven't the structures that hold administrative back.

**Nataša Bodrožić:** When talking about neoliberalism, we have to talk about what it really means. By the term **neoliberalism** we usually understand specific economical system (it is related to economic liberalization policies, such as privatization, open markets and deregulation which has in the last decades created tremendous economic and social inequalities worldwide and buried the social state). However, what we have to bear in mind is that neoliberalism does not just work through economy- it also produces specific



knowledge which supports those economical processes and legitimizes them (this means very much that it creates institutionalized knowledge produced in educational institutions, schools, universities and especially in the media). The ideological framework simply works as it works- it follows political economy.

Because of the harsh period in Soviet history related to authoritarian regimes (and the misuse of the communist theory and practice in the USSR) the new nationalist elites that emerged after the fall of communism supported by the dominant economical neoliberalism, created a specific ideological framework in the majority of the post-Socialist countries; we can call it the “post-Communist discourse” (the term and theory is coined by Boris Buden, theoretician and philosopher). Speaking of „post-Communist discourse“, Buden introduces the term ‘normalization’ as its important component. In short the term ‘normalization’ refers to the adaptation of ex- Communist countries to the prevailing, hegemonic standard of liberal- democracy and the capitalist system. One result of this ‘normalization’ is a one sided approach to the recent history of the former socialist countries. It basically produces normalized knowledge which does not allow any sort of dialectics or questioning of the ideological basis that produces it. It buries the knowledge/memory of the citizens who lived in socialist countries and had for example free education system, free health system, free apartments etc. It creates a sort of „collective amnesia“.

In short, this means that any other alternative discourses (which would be more socially oriented) are not really legitimate today and thus- by condemning socialism as a political system that is alien to the human kind (and as an argument having example of USSR), **it prevents the new democratic left to emerge in those countries**, the left that would gather wide coalition of citizens who would also question the problematic privatizations of the 1990s or authoritarian regimes of today or politically irresponsible political elites (and their policies) currently ruling in post-Soviet countries- who would question and challenge those currently in power.

**Richard S. Levine:** An oversimplification is that space and activism are a combination that makes activism powerful. The difference is not a widely perceived alternative – it's all positive and it wasn't the intention of SPACES to develop a political alternative in post-Soviet countries. But the question is that if we are activists, then we have to come up with economic and other real alternatives to the system.

**Oliver Ressler** It is a wrong approach to look for *an* alternative. I think we can only look for *alternatives* – we have to think about alternative in plural! There is a multiplicity of alternatives already going on in the here and now: In recent years occupied factories under worker control emerged all across Europe, a phenomenon we previously only could find in some Latin American countries. We have square and occupy movements where citizens involve in decision-making processes without the need of representatives to do decisions on their behalf. We have alternative forms of self-government networks in rural Mexico and elsewhere. And so on, and so on...

So we have already a lot of alternatives in this world, and we can observe that those in power are fighting them in order to make those alternatives appear weak, not



functioning, and not effective. As the states with a more leftist oriented administration in Latin America are being fought politically and economically by the US and the European Union. But there are alternatives and we must not ignore them.

**Richard S. Levine:** I get nervous when people talk about slow activism. All of these things happened fast enough. They are not made by bad people – but when good people do bad things... Is there individualist activism?

**Torange Khonsari:** The way we do activism needs to be reflected. It has an aggressive thing, it has certain power, but it is not about slow or fast, but it has to be scaled.



**October 31 2014**

**10:30 - 14.00: Panel 2 - The Artist as Citizen, All Art as a Political Act**

Alevtina Kakhidze, Artist, Kyiv

Sabine Knierbein, Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, TU Wien

Galila El Kadi, Urban Researcher, Cairo/ Paris

Vitalie Sprinceana, Researcher, Chisinau

Markian Prokopovych, Institut für Osteuropäische Geschichte, Universität Wien

*Angelika Fitz: Welcome from my side to the second day of the SPACES conference. I'd like to give you some keywords that have been dropped in the discussions do far. Yesterday we discussed what kind of places is used for public arts in the Eastern European countries. How is space and place used to manifest power and how could artists re-appropriate those places? What and how are abandoned SPACES used in the urban sphere? But we also discussed whether we have a romantic approach and if it would be more appropriate to think art as a constant failure? We also talked about different actions in-between temporality and permanency and searched for different strategies. We also talked about the civic component, about communities and we talked not only about space, but also about speed. What is the impact of time and why do we need to talk about slow activism and even slow arts? We also talked a lot about different kinds of collective memories in the context of the post-Soviet space, also in the terms of post-war memories. So today we're researching these topics with some more time and we will also think about the promises we are making to the civic society. This was mentioned also in the discussion about needs and desires we suppose to be experienced by others. Today we will start with a historic approach and Markian Prokopovych will guide us through arts and monumentality in the public space of Eastern and Central European cities.*

**Presentation by Markian Prokopovych**

Public spaces in post-Soviet cities are full of political symbolism today. Historical evidence provides us with examples of radical interventions in these public spaces, such as the destruction of monuments in the years following the collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918. Despite their superficial similarity to the destruction of Lenin monuments in the last decades in Eastern and Central Europe, such events point out at a rather different use of public space by the Monarchy's diverse ethnic and religious groups than the one we are familiar with today. In places such as the Old Town Square in Prague, old and new monuments coexisted side by side and the square was used by activists from opposing societal and political groups on different occasions. While some demonstrated loyalty to the Monarchy in front of the Marian Column, other collected in front of the monument to Jan Hus to express their national, anticlerical or other sentiments, yet rarely did they question the validity of the Monarchy itself. Within Habsburg history, the term used to describe such uses of public space is "reluctant coexistence", whereas given the discussion we have had until now at this conference, it would be relevant to

speak also of sustainable coexistence. In the immediate follow-up of the Monarchy's collapse, the Marian Column was destroyed by an angry mob and would never be erected again, thereby signifying a fundamental change in which public space would be used from now on.

Looking at such spectacular events with a critical eye, it is necessary to point out the limitations of historic uses of public space for contemporary audience. The access of different groups to the public space, as exemplified by the Old Town Square, is not simultaneous or synchronic as some groups are clearly more privileged in that they are provided with their own symbols, monuments and special occasions earlier than others. Additionally, gender, ethnic and religious limitations also play their role. Given the stability and adaptability of the administrative and power structures in the late Habsburg Monarchy, turn-of-the-century Central Europe was a much better environment for "slow activism" than East European cities of today.

## **Discussion**

**Torange Khonsari:** Transformation is much more radical today...

**Markian Prokopovych:** I agree. It is important to mention that from the middle of the nineteenth century until 1918 the region in focus experienced a long-term, slow and gradual transformation.

What the case of the Marian Column also illustrates is how the memory of some groups, which were influential in the city's history, can be so much less visible when the historic monuments that signified their presence in public space are not longer there.

## **Alevtina Kakhidze**

***People don't recognize space as public – then they started to use it:*** In the course of the SPACES project in Kyiv Alevtina Kakhidze created an arts project dealing with the art of communication with an audience in the public space.

*In order to enhance communication Alevtina presents two statements at Kunstraum Niederoesterreich. Both topics will be addressed, but according to the preference of the audience.*

*Q2: People in the Ukraine started to use space so much! Social protest started in November at the Maidan – there the public space was used.*

*Q1: People didn't recognize a buildings facade as part of the public space and rebuilt the balcony without sensibility towards the ensemble.*

As artist Alevtina creates a system of **innovation, conversation, gift and imagination.**

**Gifts:** Oligarchs decide to give gifts even though the city-dwellers do not want it. Therefore the term scarification needs to be introduced into the art discourse. As an

example she sacrifices her studio to artists in residence programmes and produces art exhibitions with international and regional artists. In the backyard of the studio screenings can be shown and the legally private space becomes a public space. From time to time Alevtina also sacrifices her own house and invites people in order to see a play: this is an example for anachronism.

**Imagination:** As an artist she considers herself also a teacher that tries to train the memory of people. According to her system imagination is linked to memory: if someone can't remember things than he or she wouldn't create places. Ideas for enhancing memory are mostly creating maps.

**Innovation:** At the Maidan square in Kyiv could be shown the quality of innovation that aims at making something better, more interesting, and more useful to people. As a preliminary point to the protests the Ukrainian government refused to sign an agreement with the European Union. Keeping this in mind activists and artists went down on the streets but then noticed that many people do not completely understand what the subject of the agreement was about. So people started cooking on the streets in order to support the protests and spread the content of the unsigned document. Talks with experts were organized and people had the opportunity to ask questions. This action had an innovative character for civic society.

**Conversation:** Conversation created in public space by artists is more popular and necessary shape in this type of places. Artist just has to know how those places work in order to provide a good quality level of communication there. They can discuss many and different topic by using those spaces.

### **Presentation by Galila El Kadi**

***The right to the city:*** Revolutions are in the history of nations and interactions impact on the society. In particular some forms of social practices from Tahrir square were later used also in other contexts. In all societies citizens are embedded in social groups that produce segregation. During the contestation of Tahrir square the centre of the circle became the centre of the protest were people started to first pronounce their desires. Protesters looked at the square as a place for freedom in expression and introduced art for expressing their needs. Other ways developed in the Arab spring became a venue not only for Egypt and transformed public space into a social and cultural place for exchanging. Sex and social class was no longer a hurdle for the public space and segregations were overcome.

*After* the Arab spring two questions became evident for the interrelation between people and place:

- How do places of anger relate to media?
- Why have there been situations where access was limited to those?

The Arab spring can be divided into three moments and three different protest movements:



- 1st – against Mubarak
- 2nd – against the military
- 3rd – against Mursi regime

Today nothing will be like before in Egypt. People continue to claim their right to the city and solidarities have been established between social movements and artists in a way that wasn't common for Egypt before.

### **Presentation by Vitalie Sprinceana**

Four cases of civic movements give an insight into place-related activism in Moldova.

Case 1: Unofficially labelled Europe square is part of a garden where some investors wanted to build a Pizzeria. After presentation of the project we started organizing workshops in order to fight against this Pizzeria. First our political opposition was expressed in the internet. Later protest actions took place at the spot where construction firms still continued. Finally they stopped building the Pizzeria and the activist had won and reclaimed the public space for a non-profit oriented us.

The significance of this place is in its further development as a platform for activists. However in Moldova, when you send a message towards the open space it is important to maintain control – when you raise a public issue then you enter another field. It's always important to be aware about not being mis-stigmatized as part of another interest group (economic).

Case 2: Project to build a huge large boulevard in the city including forty seats.

Case 3: The partially demolished *Rotonda* was restored by informal initiatives and extended the public space. Activists started organizing happenings on weekends and engaged in community works focusing on cleanliness. But why should we whitening the walls? Is cleaning the right approach? All participants wanted to restore, but they didn't really accept sub-urban cultures in the areas of their neighbourhood.

Case 4: Zaikins parks: For Workshops and concerts a small stage for happenings was built in the framework of a participatory project. Inhabitants then were invited to use this space according to their own requirements. First children joined our works on the project, later also their parents switched in and formed a community. This project showed us that sometimes it is important to get loud in order to get people out of their houses.

### **Response by Sabine Knierbein**

Some aspects that have already been mentioned during the discussion today are the nation state, its representation and its transformation. Representative politics and the opposition to politics is the idea of change in revolution. It can be observed that politics is coming back to the public space again and tries to create new narratives. But when



talking about the public space we need to consider that ***we try to make public opinion which is inherent to living in space.***

What about the weaker voices in the society? We reclaim that activism, such as graffiti's are arts and further forms establish in the urban context. On the other hand street arts are not necessarily arts. So there are plenty of possibilities to explore niches in order to make spaces more inclusive. Similar things happen to the idea of oppression: the issue of state control is something where brutality and peace in the streets can both resulting from oppression. Furthermore it has been observed that issues of new urban solidarity are not embedded in politics; but are significant in the local communities, neighbourhoods, and other grass-root organisations. The most important key for successful implementation community activities is humour.



**October 31 2014**

**14:30 - 19:00: Panel 3 - On Participatory Art Production in Urban Spaces**

Olga Shparaga, Art theorist, Minsk

Anton Lederer, <rotor>, Graz

Richard S. Levine, Centre for Sustainable Cities, Lexington

Can Gülcü, Wienwoche

Angela Ramirez, artist, Santiago de Chile

Michele Bee, Manifatture Knoss, Lecce

*Angelika Fitz: We will now talk about participation which is a topic we touched a couple of times already. For example Sabine Knierbein introduced some first ideas about this issue. The question is how participation works. It is only the loud voices in a community? What is meant by the term shy publics? These questions are part of the public life and impact on everyday situations.*

**Presentation by Olga Shparaga**

In Belarus one could observe three manners of spatial alienation: power-monopoly, soviet context and privatization. Minsk is the sun-city of dreams and gods economies. It is a place where collective memory regarding the communist utopia is situated. Behind the sun-side of the city ample sleeping districts arise and emphasize the Janus-headed idea of a Soviet city. Stalinist architecture is still present in cities of Belarus today but most of the buildings were privatized and restoration was increasingly replaced by erasure and intimation.

Another issue in the Belarus context is the authoritarian monopoly. Even non-political installations in the city centre are very difficult to be realized. As an example the artist Mikhail Gulin realized some projects in order to test the quality of public space in the city centre of Minsk. He was arrested. Later similar situations happened in Brest.

The example shows that artists in Belarus need to develop strategies that overcome these obstacles. Some make non-political but authorized graffiti's in micro-standpoints, some others developed micro-processual urban actions and move from the streets to old industrial buildings and initiate festivals. Major collectives engaging in the field of graffiti's are YPA, Cowek/Lida and Signal Magazin. They all do works on the historic context, but also about fantasy. Interestingly in the field of non-political arts and business were brought together in cooperation's that support a vivid art scene.

The second strategy is to move into abandoned industrial areas. Here more critical approaches are allowed towards major general contexts, such as the idea of cities in itself. In these places there are more and more public events taking place in this new spaces. There it is possible to discuss with social scientists but also with artists about recent challenges in the town.

The third way are short-term micro-interventions of very limited range. But even those interventions are difficult to be shown.

The fourth strategy has already been mentioned: festivals and conferences. Artists do research and share their knowledge by rethinking urban space and soviet heritage. Out from discussions new ideas for interventions can then be born.

In the city centre as an artist you organize discussion rounds, at the cities' edges you may intervene with the local society. In Belarus cities different from Minsk it is easier to intervene in the space because places are less overheated. There is a difference between arts interventions in the forest and in the urban space. With focus on the ecological devices festivals in the forest are less controlled because they are remote and don't take place in the public memorial space. Many people might argue that this is not really contemporary art in the public space, but it is a first strategy to bring population back into discussion. The task is to re-activate society, but not necessarily with regards to political life. In these way artists re-interpret their heritage, but leave behind the civic element. A couple of years ago politics was something made by the powerful but now awareness rises again, that everyday interventions are politics too. In Belarus it is possible to see how things are changing lastly. There is a grassroots movement and there are lot of things getting deeper and deeper into politics of free speech.

Lastly ***national museums*** increasingly showed arts also in the public space – but this is not critical, sometimes even national and ideological arts. Institutions supporting independent artists are rare. There is one centre for contemporary arts, but institutions understood that it is difficult to collaborate with artists of the independent scene.

### **Presentation by Anton Lederer**

Graz is 2.5 hours from Vienna and compared to the other cities very privileged. We've a long tradition of the public space, there haven't been any arresting in connection with art interventions since the 1960's.

Projects in the public space:

***"(No)monuments for labour and immigration"*** in a workers district and the project aims at putting attention on workers collaboration. In the concepts of the project it was relevant to understand inhabitants as experts of their public space – there are several aspects to talk about: to perform networking in the neighbourhood, to make use of local infrastructure, to overcome the gap between people and authorities and to campaign against politics of fear. The last point focuses on the popular perception of living in a dangerous sphere. Many people believe this shit.

***"Cultural techniques"*** some people have distinguished knowledge even in your neighbourhood. So we started to organize workshops for sharing this knowledge with other members of the community and learned that artistic practice is somehow also a cultural practice.

***"Mapping of the area"*** engaged young researchers with looking at the changes in the environment including future ambitions of a specific urban space.



The long term project "**Die Kunst des öffentlichen Handelns**" raised the question where the work of an art centre stops. And where responsibilities of the district management start? As an art association you can't be into everything due to capacity reasons. As an association we try to work with the notion of conflict. But quite often the perception of public space is dominated by this term. We are searching for ways to think more about potentials and possibilities than conflicts.

### **Presentation by Richard S. Levine**

The US is leader in the neoliberal force that destroys the world. And the plundering in Georgia showed the power of these forces. This all sounds so pessimistic, but we're talking about public space and arts. In an era with internet, social media, etc. we don't have to enter the person's physical space anymore for having a conversation.

On the other hand Americans are unhappy and put their bodies in a line, risking everything they have in the aim for freedom and change. But there are serious differences to the authoritarian regime. **In authoritarian states the public space is their space, and not the space of citizens.** However the concept of emotional co-ownership is infinite and includes contestation. When I think on Vienna then we have 100.000 places with different connotations. All these spaces have a unique quality.

Democratic participation in the public space can include artistic ideas. The funny thing about the public space is that one can look at performing people and at the same time enjoy the scenery of the container and the activity. As such they became popular already in the middle age and antiquity.

In Siena for example emotional co-ownership is also in the historic side of the city where almost everything is negotiable. Siena has its own special conditions, but in the earlier times the central square was outside the city for tax reasons. Then later the city was enlarged, a new municipal building was erected and the market removed. In the case of Siena it was the landscape to be the first artist. The art in this time was merely religious – but as Siena was one of three communes (free), so they had to experiment how to rule themselves in creating experimental representative democracy.

However –you always see a straight line in the cityscape it is obvious that someone thought about it. Always when you see a curved line someone reacts and creates a landscape of negotiation.

When something is made in common then you have to talk about how you rule it together. That's a major difference between people. Today no one goes to jail, talking from the American perspective, in a situation where people have privileges of personhood but none of the responsibility. When people act by themselves this doesn't mean that people are not acting together. Therefore I tried to show the forces of shaping Siena comprehensively as a sustainable city. Co-ownership defines us as co-owners and makes feel responsible for the city. So what is the view of the citizens?

### **Presentation by Angela Ramirez**

As an architect she performed an art project for the ministry of justice in Chile criticizes architecture that is producing symbols without value. The new building of the ministry of justice signified narcissus without taking into account the idea of history. So I created a reflecting water surface including a picture of the old justice palace. This new space should be a space for memory and history. "***Sine qua non***" was the name of the project – but this was a process of censorship because I had to name it in an adequate way. Due to this censorship artistic movements started cooperating and created a network and a guideline to good praxis's for behaviour in applied arts. This codex now should be implemented to the cultural guidelines in artists for Chile.

### **Responence by Can Gülcü**

The context of speakers is probably too different. The terms ***critical*** and ***political*** were mentioned quite often in this conference. The aim for escaping from control is different in many spaces, especially when we also include the economized space. I cannot talk about the public sphere as the idea of a piazza, but still it showed how important participation is. Participation relates to long-term processes and something that has to be developed carefully. Of course people are silenced in many ways, but the point is that cultural workers should accept that people sometimes don't want to be visible.

A problem in the topic of emotional co-ownership is that I can't see sustainability in the concept. But what could be sustainable then? Probably it is the processes before and not the actions themselves. Processes of negotiation might have these qualities.

We always talk about including people: We talk about top-down approaches, researching the poor - but isn't it more the artists trying to get back to the society? We try to re-locate ourselves in the civic society. <rotor> for example is a cultural space connecting people from all over Europe for many years. Being a cultural producer under these circumstances is a major point. But when we talk about political art then we should think at changing the ideas of the society. What art can do in this setting is to participate as a participator of the moments itself.



### **Presentation by Michele Bee**

Space is public when it is freely accessible and when everyone can change it. And then someone else can change it again, and again. Cultural and political mobilization is an important part of all urban re-structuring projects. But the problem is the monopoly of the state: if you see something wrong, then you cannot just repair it.

The use of places itself is never democratic. I just have to sit at a specific place. It is not a real problem to use it in the way you just want. But if someone is the owner then does he still obtain that right after a structure has been abandoned? This is the story of Manifatture Knos.

It's not against something – it's not resistance. So found a place and we wanted to take it for us. We told them – we will use this place for longer time. So we sold something inside and then rebuilt the place. Slowly we restructured this place, and we became more and more people that wanted to fill this place with content. Until today only some machines remained in the building in order to restore the history of the place.

In a second moment we felt obliged to go outside. So we continued to do projects with citizens. We shared our money in order to support these undertakings. Then we recognized that things are not only possible but sometimes problematic too. Contexts are different and participation is nothing that can be managed by a facility. Citizens have to do something on their own. How can we disappear as a facilitator? Actually we shouldn't be needed anymore. This has to be our goal.

We also learned to distinguish between different kinds of landscape. One landscape is natural; the second one is men-made. But if we work with the environment there is a third landscape. So nature in the moment was abandoned are the third landscape (Gilles Clément). However we shouldn't decide everything in order to give space to spontaneity.

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