

# From Festivalisation of Public Space to the Right to Public Space: Deconstructing Social Infrastructure as a Conceptual Framework for the Town Hall Square in Vienna

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## 1 ABSTRACT

In our globalised, interconnected and increasingly competitive world, the importance of public space is often highlighted. This article aims at connecting public space to the concept of social infrastructure to point to the underlying and indispensable nature of public space. It builds on the assumption that public space is the physical manifestation of the interconnection between global urban processes and local tendencies where dynamics of festivalisation and restricted access are on the rise.

The town hall square in Vienna and its seasonal use for different festivals and events serves as the empirical case. The square, situated in the centre of the city, shows powerful dynamics within the production of public space and gives interesting insights into the prevalent global and local tendencies of urban politics.

A two-step approach towards the deconstruction of social infrastructure for the conception of public space is adopted. Using the notion of social infrastructure permits to connect public space as a product – as a physical place and organisational structure, which allows people to interact – to its process – its interpretative context, where meaning and value are assigned through the material context. The notion of the right to the city is applied to formulate an alternative approach to the right to public space. This constitutes a multi-dimensional approach, which is necessary to grasp the multiplicity of perspectives and complexity of issues manifesting themselves in public space.

The aim of the paper is to understand how representational public space is used and which role the understanding of the right to the city plays in reclaiming public space as a form of social infrastructure.

Keywords: public space, social infrastructure, festivalization, right to the city

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Many scholars have lamented the decline of public space, even doubting that public space still exists in many Western cities (Graham & Marvin 2001, Madanipour 2005, Sorkin 1992). One of the dynamics observed in public space is its increasing festivalisation and commercialisation (Häußermann & Siebel 1993, 2004, Siebel 1994). Since the 1990s an increasing festivalisation of public space can be observed in most Western cities. This new interest in the managing and marketing of public space stems mainly from an allegedly growing global competition between cities. “As cities act as firms in competition, the city’s public authorities perform their duties as the managers of these firms, seeking to develop their product, which is the city’s environment, and promote it in the global marketplace. As buildings are often developed and owned by the private sector, the public sector focuses on the urban infrastructure and the public realm.” (Madanipour 2005, p. 13) This interlocking of urban infrastructure and public realm manifests itself in public space, which is increasingly marketed through major international sport and cultural events. Cities “engage in a marketing exercise that aims to transform their old image into a new one, or maintain their vibrant image in the global imagination.” (Madanipour 2005, p. 13)

In consequence, many scholars regard this trend as an end to traditional public space or even doubt the existence of public space. “Have we reached, then, the ‘end of public space’? asks Don Mitchell. ‘Have we created a society that expects and desires only private interactions, private communications, and private politics, that reserves public spaces solely for commodified recreation and spectacle?’ (1995, p. 110; cited in: Graham & Marvin 2001, p. 233). As Sorkin (1992) argues, the new space “is a global space, where economic phenomena cross over to society and culture.” (cited in: Carmona et al. 2008, p. 48) He argues, that this heavily managed and secured public space is a mere simulation of a city, only linked to its past through pseudo-historic symbols (Carmona et al. 2008).

Understanding public space through the concept of social infrastructure may provide useful insights into these phenomena. Infrastructure as the “infra” to society ensures its fundamental functioning as long-lasting

personal, material or institutional structures (Libbe et al. 2010). With these considerations in mind, we claim that the notion of social infrastructure is a useful concept for re-politicising public space. Emerged from socio-democratic traditions, social infrastructure provides an analytical framework, which, linked to the concept of the right to the city, makes reframing and reclaiming public space possible through the right to public space.

Infrastructure has recently reappeared in academic debates as a pressing issue for current challenges in urban development and planning. Especially technical infrastructures are seen as critical elements of the networked urban fabric (Graham & Marvin 2001). Dodson (2017) for instance points to an “infrastructure turn” and Steele and Legacy (2017) argue, that we live in an age of infrastructure today. However, the acknowledgement of the value technical infrastructure has for society, has largely been neglected for social infrastructure. The most well-known infrastructure theory stems from Jochimsen (1966), where he defines infrastructure as the material, institutional and personal assets, facilities and conditions as a whole, which are the “infra” to all economic processes. He refers to technical as well as non-technical components and economic actors – such as individuals, households, institutions, municipalities or states – including their interactions and external conditions. In this sense, Jochimsen aligns with Smith (1997), who emphasises the fundamental character of infrastructure for economic activities. However, Nijkamp (1986) also focuses on the fundamental character of infrastructure for all societal activities. In general, infrastructure can be defined as a public good, which satisfies common needs (Libbe et al. 2010). Infrastructure as a precondition for economy and society is interdependent with these systems as they are influenced by infrastructure development but conversely determine planning, implementation and financing of infrastructure through economic and societal decisions. Hence, infrastructure systems are complex socio-technical and socio-economic systems with technical, economic and institutional subsystems, which are difficult to separate from each other. The two most common strands of infrastructure theory are the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) by Pinch and Bijker (1987) and the theory of Large Technical Systems (LTS) by Hughes (1987). However, the complex issues of social infrastructures and the way they are interlinked with the social production and reconfiguration of urban space, tends to be ignored in urban studies and related disciplines. Common definitions of social infrastructures reduce them to community facilities, such as education, health care, public administration and security, cultural institutions or recreational, open and play areas (Libbe et al. 2010, Zapf 2005). Often, social infrastructure is defined as point infrastructure in contrast to networked infrastructure (Libbe et al. 2010).

Cities and urban infrastructures are increasingly managed and marketed for the purpose of an allegedly growing global competition between cities. Within these dynamics a new movement has emerged – the right to the city (Harvey 2008, Holm 2011, Lefebvre 1968, Marcuse 2010). This paper attempts to make use of the concept of the right to the city and move towards a right to public space. The notion of social infrastructure, this paper argues, provides a good lens for reclaiming public space as an indispensable structure underlying our society and our cities. The paper is structured in two sections. First, public space is connected to the notion of social infrastructure and placed within the context of ongoing discussions about the right to the city. Second, the proposed framework is applied to a case study of the town hall square in Vienna. The case study showcases the applicability of social infrastructure as a conceptual framework for analysing public space and highlights how the right to the city can be applied to move towards a right to public space.

### **3 PUBLIC SPACE AS CONTESTED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

#### **3.1 Conceptually framing public space through the notion of social infrastructure**

As we already discussed, infrastructure – technical as well as social infrastructure – can be understood as the underlying structure of economy and society. In analogy to this understanding, public space can be understood as the substructure of the social functioning of cities. Both, social infrastructure and public space, are easily overlooked and their importance as essential structures of society and cities neglected. They are both often taken for granted and only in times of scarcity recognised for what they really are: indispensable structures for our everyday lives. “A city [...] is not merely a collection of private territories; without open access public spaces, its economy and society cannot function.” (Madanipour 2005, p. 12)

Social infrastructure is rooted in social policy, which developed in the first half of the 20th century as a result of industrialisation and associated social inequalities (Libbe et al. 2010). Social infrastructure is therefore a

symbol of specific normative collective values and cultural meanings of a specific time. For example, the right to education and the right to health developed as constitutive features of modern welfare states in the first half of the 20th century (Libbe et al. 2010). As social inequality is on the rise again, the right to public space can be employed as a new collective normative value which builds on the notion of social infrastructure as a public good. City administrations as providers of public infrastructures and public services hold an important coordinative function. However, as current trends show, public space as social infrastructure is often instrumentalised as a strategy in local competition with interests of private companies rather than the public dominating the focus of urban development. From the multifunctional public spaces such as the celebrated cases of ancient agora and forum or the medieval market and church squares, which accommodated economic, political, religious and social functions, the current dynamics of public spaces in Europe shift towards changing each of these functions in nature or relocating them to other sites. Thus, “it seems that leisure is the only major function left for many public spaces that once were used to witnessing historically significant events.” (Madanipour 2005, p. 11)

Following these conceptions, public space functions a product of the physical place and organizational structure that allows people to interact, whether it be for economic, political, cultural or social reasons. Klinenberg (2018) in this sense refers to public space as a form of social infrastructure, linking it to the physical structures enabling interactions between people. This understanding correlates with Madanipour (2005), who argues, that the physical environment of public space needs functional and symbolic interpretations by people: “shapes and proportions of building and spaces and reference to the individuals and the society that created and used these objects and spaces” (p. 7). Hence, public space, is a socio-spatial phenomenon of social infrastructure, through which relationships between people are often mediated (Madanipour 2005).

This aligns with public space as a process of interpretation, where meaning and value are assigned through the material context (Searle 1995). Also Selle (2010) points to the fact, that public space cannot be built, but develops through societal appropriation and action. These appropriations and actions can follow different patterns, creating complex “power geometries” (Massey 1993). According to Graham and Marvin (2001), this results from highly uneven interconnections “with the full range of infrastructural means to overcome time and space barriers” (Graham & Marvin 2001, p. 196) between these places. For the authors, public space of many cities around the globe have been overpowered by “quasi-public spaces geared overwhelmingly to consumption and paid recreation by those who can afford it and who are deemed to warrant unfettered access.” (Graham & Marvin 2001, p. 232) The material context of consumption spaces has therefore assigned meaning and value to economic interests within public space in recent years.

Although cities – and therefore public places – have always been contested terrains for dominant power holders, who try to form “normative ecologies” of inclusion and exclusion (Graham & Marvin 2001), it seems that economic interests have increasingly taken over the ecology of public space in recent years. As Häußermann and Siebel (1993) argue, this correlates with the notion of “festivalisation” not just of public space, but also of politics itself. Thus, strategies of reclaiming public space for public interest as a form of social infrastructure make use of the concept of the right to the city, as the following section shows.

### 3.2 From the right to the city to the right to public space

Since Lefebvre postulated his „droit à la ville“ (Lefebvre 1968) in 1968 the concept of „right to the city“ has been subject to many discussions and trends. As Lefebvre focused on the right to participate in urban life, on places of exchange and comprehensive usage of these venues (Schmid 2011), other authors stressed the visionary approach of the right to the city as a means of a new, emancipated and fair urban development (Holm 2011). According to Harvey (2011) the right to the city must be seen as a collective right, functioning as collective body politics, a site within and from which progressive social movements might emanate; thus it represents more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. Following this understanding, the right to the city includes the right to use what the city has to offer and to participate in the creation or re-creation of those elements which it lacks (Buckingham 2010). Also Friedmann (1993) stated that cities might only be seen as real cities when their streets belong to the people. In a more detailed examination, one could analyse, to which kind of people the streets of “real cities” belong. For Lefebvre, the right to the city means the right to live in a society in which all persons are similarly free to fulfil their own desires and in which all are supported in doing so (Marcuse 2010). The city,

like democracy, should maximise individual freedom through a collective lifestyle that minimises inequalities (Borja 2010). Of course, there exists no singular homogenous human prototype to use as a basis to define what all people's needs are and, in turn, how they must be fulfilled through articulating their respective rights (Buckingham 2010).

Today, there is a tendency to break up the city and separate citizens from each other, whereas the city should, in fact, be characterised by the size of the population and the speed of the connections that make possible and multiply the interactions between many different people (Borja 2010). Whereas space is an essential condition of human activity, the social-spatial relationship emanates not from our intentions as much as from infinitely complex information and social codes (Jeanne 2016). Increasingly, we see the right to the city falling into the hands of private or quasi-private interests (Harvey 2008). Public places are not open to everybody anymore, but being interpreted as outdoor food courts, sport arenas or cultural leisure centres, only to citizens willing and able to make use of commercial offers or interested in consumer-oriented information and/or entertainment. The right to the city, as understood by Lefebvre, is a counter measure to the negative impact, that the capitalist economy has on cities, converting the city into a commodity serving only the interests of capital accumulation, such as privatisation of urban space, the commercial use of the city and the predominance of commercial areas (Mathivet 2010). Florida (2005) observes increasing attempts of cities to create attractive environments for working, living and leisure activities for only a very specific part of society, the Creative Class, although he is very uncritical of these trends, thereby incentivising politicians to capitalise on creative clusters, hence intensifying inequalities.

The phenomenon of attracting the Creative Class is also noticed in Vienna. Vienna has been ranked as the most liveable city by the Mercer studies for the last nine years and it offers undoubtedly certain qualities of recreational and cultural activities that are highly appreciated by its citizens. Nevertheless, many areas of public life within the historic city centre are mainly used by the so-called Bobos, the bourgeois Bohemian, meaning members of the upper class, living a bohemian, hipster life style. Still, public space and thus public places should be available to all persons living in a city. Within Lefebvre's concept this would resemble the first main further right: the right to appropriate urban space, meaning the right of the inhabitants to full and complete use of urban space in their everyday lives, the right to live in, play in, work in and occupy urban space in a city (Purcell 2003).

The concept of availability comprises the question of physical accessibility, but also the broader element of approachability. Because of its indistinctive character the right to the city can be reduced to a question of accessibility to different places and services, serving neoliberal urban functions, the exact opposite of Lefebvre's initial intention (Jouffe, 2010). From a legal point of view, international law guarantees the physical accessibility in a specific document: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This treaty obliges states party to the Convention to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. States shall take appropriate measures to ensure access for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. Thus, the right of access to the city and its public places is protected under international law and states which have ratified the Convention, have to issue periodical reports on the fulfilment of their duties under this treaty, which are being considered by an international Committee, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, the second element of availability, usability is not so clearly treated in a binding international law document.

There is a difference between rights in the city and the right to the city; a difference between the ways the right to the city is used in various charters of the right to the city and the radical sense in which Henri Lefebvre used it in a vein of critical urban theory (Marcuse 2010). The right to the city is interdependent with all recognised rights, integrally conceived, and open to the incorporation of new rights (Ortiz 2010). However, it is not a recognised Human Right in the traditional sense of Human Rights and has not been accepted as such by the United Nations, regional human rights systems or governments. Still, the United Nations have acknowledged the spatial dimension of development by incorporating Sustainable Development Goal Nr. 11: "making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (World Urban Forum 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals came into force in 2016 and formulate 17 goals to be pursued by every UN member state until 2030. However, the Sustainable Development Goals themselves are political aims only, thus they are not legal rules. Still, the substance that the Sustainable

Development Goals reflect and the process by, and form in which they were adopted indicate that at least some of the targets may qualify as soft law (Kim 2016). However, in relation to Sustainable Development Goal Nr. 11 there is hardly any reference to these objectives set in compulsory international law.

Yet another important elaboration of the right to the city comes from the World Charter for the Right to the City. This document emphasizes the rights of all people to live with dignity in urban areas. It provides a progressive framework to rethink the concept of cities and has the end purpose to build an instrument both universal and compact which may be adopted by the United Nations System, regional human rights systems, and governments, as a legal instrument or at least as a basic reference in the definition and adoption of the right to the city as a new human right (Ortiz 2010). However, the World Charter for the Right to the City cannot be seen as an obligatory legal instrument.

To sum up, so far only the element of physical accessibility to the city and its places can be qualified as guaranteed by international law, whereas the aspect of approachability has not found an incorporation into binding human rights treaties by now.

Nevertheless, Vienna has declared itself a “Human Rights City” in 2014, postulating its aim to raise awareness for human rights as postulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and undertake measures for all parts of society. Thus, it needs to be examined whether this international legal document could serve as a basis for the aspects of the right to the city not covered by the legal framework to ensure accessibility. Even more so, as the right to the city is often defined as no additional human right, but rather as the right to enforce other rights that already formally exist (Mathivet 2010). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledges only the freedom of peaceful assembly and association and the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, yet, mentions only single aspects of the right to the city and no comprehensive approach of this right. This is also confirmed by the fact, that various Human Rights Cities, like Graz and Vienna in Austria have imposed very restrictive terms of use for certain public places, like the prevention of drinking alcohol, the prohibition to lounge around or the ban to play ball. Consequently, also the labelling as Human Rights City can be qualified only as a step towards the guarantee of a right to the city, but not as a legally binding obligation to guarantee this right to all its citizens.

#### **4 FESTIVALISATION IN VIENNA AND ITS MANIFESTATION IN PUBLIC SPACE**

Informed by the conceptual frameworks of social infrastructure and the right to the city, the following case shows current trends of festivalisation of public space in Vienna. The notion of festivalisation has become popular in academic research to explain the development of festivals and events at the turn of the 21st century (Häußermann & Siebel 1993, 2004). Häußermann and Siebel especially emphasise the festivalisation of politics. In times of financial constraints of the public sector, this type of politics is often used to demonstrate political decision-making. Festivalisation serves in this sense to legitimise top-down formulated policies and reach a broad consensus in public discourse. It also serves as an identification process for the general public, as a magnet for international attention, as a strategy in an allegedly growing global competition, as an instrument for generating economic growth and as an attractor for tourists and thus rising tax revenue (Häußermann & Siebel, 1993; Siebel 1994). In times of allegedly growing global competition, festivalisation appears to be the favoured instrument of planning policy to manage public space and thus urban infrastructure.

##### **4.1 Vienna and its Festivalisation of public space**

In the last two decades, festivalisation processes have increased tremendously in Vienna. Whereas in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, public space in Vienna was mostly unused, today, there are events and festivals almost day and night, all year round (Hofer 2008). The importance of public space has increased in the overall political agenda. Promoting public space has become one of the core policy fields for urban development (Knierbein et al. 2014). “New instruments are shaped to overcome the positivist pitfalls of modern urbanism; however, the approaches chosen rather relate to an overstimulation of public space design for enhancing symbolic capital, and thus increasing exchange value.” (Knierbein et al. 2014, p. 36)

Since the 1970s, festivals in public space in Vienna often function as representation of political power. The “Stadt.Fest.Wien” for instance is held since 1978 every year in September in the city centre of Vienna by the conservative party. The annual “Donauinselfest” in June was initiated by Harry Kopietz 1983 as a cultural spring-festival for the social-democratic party on the island, which separates the Danube as a flood

protection and was built on the initiative of the social-democratic party only a few years prior to the initiation of the festival. Also the communist party organises an annual festival at the end of August, the “Volksstimmenfest” at the central recreation area of the city, the Prater (Hofer 2008).

Häußermann and Siebel (1993) refer to the festivalisation of public space as dependent upon the political planning process. For the authors, planning of an event is followed by politics through the construction of new infrastructure, attracting new investors or tourists. However, for Vienna, the reverse sequence can be observed. The local planning regime follows a different process, first building the physical space and the accompanying infrastructure, which are followed by the political considerations how to make use of the space, which often results in the commodification of public space through festivalisation. The Donauinselfest for instance was the subsequent event to the construction of the Donauinsel and the subway U1. One might argue, that this resembles a path-dependent process of an old Austrian tradition of policy style, where party conventions are instrumentalised to achieve certain planning goals (Hofer 2008). The staging of public space through infrastructure planning, which can be observed in many cities hosting major events, is reversed in Vienna: the construction of infrastructure is staged and legitimised through events in public space.

Two institutions serve the purpose of managing festivalisation of public space in Vienna: the marketing agency and the tourism association. The marketing agency, “stadt wien marketing gmbh“, conducts the management and organisation of major events on behalf of the city since 1999. The tourism association, WienTourismus, which was founded in 1995, focuses on the strategic approach of attracting more tourists and managing tourism companies. Both institutions regard the city as a company, striving for profit and economic growth (Hofer 2008). This aligns with arguments by Knierbein et al. (2014), that “the municipality’s underlying rationale for developing public spaces is growth, and thus, an economic and demographic precondition” (p. 37).

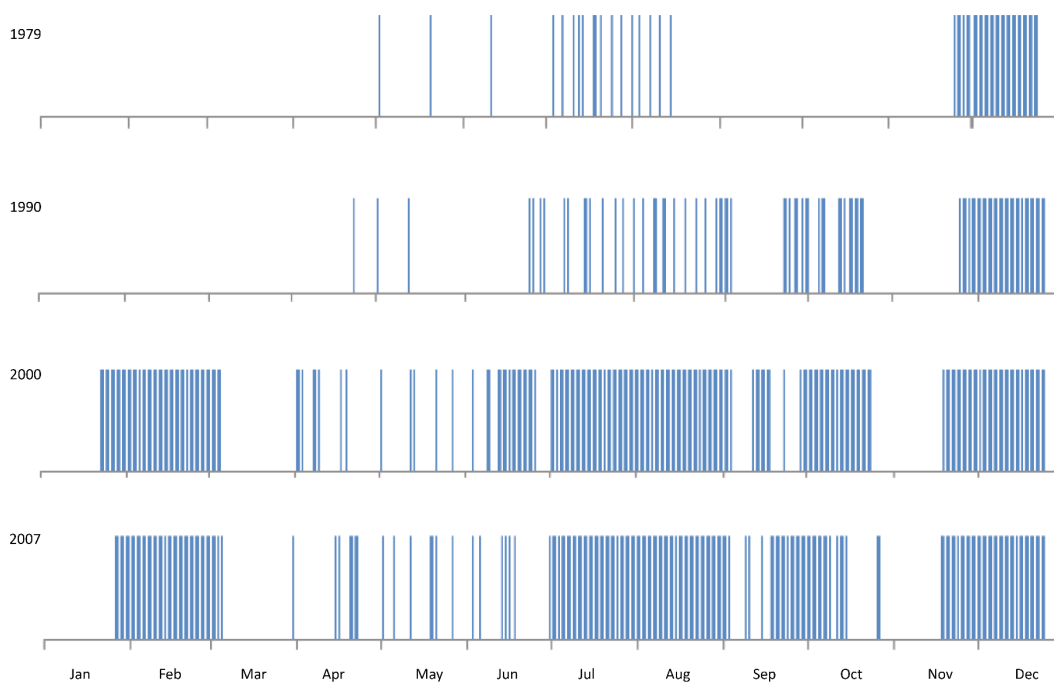


Fig. 1: Comparison of use of the town hall square 1979, 1990, 2000, 2007 (Hofer 2008, p. 244, own adaptations).

## 4.2 The Town Hall Square

The Town Hall Square in Vienna is situated in the centre of the city and surrounded in the north by the building of the University of Vienna, in the south by the parliament building and in the west by the city hall. In the east the square abuts Vienna’s Burgtheater and the “Ringstraße”, the circular street surrounding the first district of Vienna. In the north and south of the town hall square is the town hall park, which was built not just for recreational purposes but also to connect up the surrounding monumental buildings. The park was finished at the same time as construction for the town hall began, on the 14th of June 1873 (Stadt Wien

2019). The park was inspired by British symmetrical style of park design and is often part of the festivalisation of the town hall square. Until 1870, the town hall square was military area, used mainly as a parade ground where streets, planting or greenery were forbidden, thus making the square unattractive for the public, which avoided the space for the most part. After the conveyance of the military area, the town hall was constructed and with it the square, which was planned as an event venue for political demonstrations. However, political events only took place after the First World War, with an exception of the demonstration of the social-democratic party in 1911 (Hofer 2008).

After a short period of anti-social-democratic demonstrations, the square soon became the stronghold of the social-democratic party. However, until the 1970s, only a handful of events took place in the town hall square. The space was mostly used as a parking space from the 1960s until the 1990s and only after the reclassification of square as event- and open space was the motorised use of the space prohibited. Social-democratic mayor Helmut Zilk promoted events on the square in the 1980s and 1990s, until in 1990 events were held on 83 days of the year (Hofer 2008). Today, the town hall square is occupied by events and festivals almost every day of the year, counting not only the days of the events but also the days needed to assemble and dismantle the constructions. As Fig. 1 shows, the occupation of the town hall square accelerated each year.

As Table 1 shows, the main festivals, which are held on the town hall square today, were initiated in the 1980s and 1990s. Until then, only a few short-term events took place in the square. The majority of festivals are organised and managed by the institution “stadt wien marketing gmbh”. Despite being initially constructed to accommodate political demonstrations, the political function of the town hall square changed fundamentally over the last decades. Only two of 16 annual festivals are for political demonstrations or political interest groups. Other interest groups organise two other festivals, whereas the rest of the year, sport-, culture and tourism-events dominate the occupation of the square. In total, 15 of the 16 held festivals and events serve leisure purposes.

Event Title	Since	Institutions	Theme
Rathauskriterium (Jul)	1920	Wienstrom Section Cycling	Sports
1. Mai-Kundgebung (May)	1946	SPÖ	Politics
Safety Festival Vienna (Oct)	1948	Helfer Wiens	Politics/Interest Groups
Austrian Tour (Jul)	1949	Austrian Cycling Union	Sports
Wiener Festwochen-opening (May)	1951	Wiener Festwochen	Culture
Wiener Weihnachtstraum (Nov, Dec)	1986	stadt wien marketing gmbh	Tourism
Austrian Brass Band Music Festival (May)	1990	Culture Department Vienna	Culture
Silvesterpfad (Dec)	1990/91	stadt wien marketing gmbh	Tourism
Filmfestival (Jul, Aug, Sep)	1991	stadt wien marketing gmbh	Tourism, Culture
Jazz Festival Vienna (Jun-Sep)	1991	International Jazz Festivals Organization	Culture
Life Ball Opening Ceremony (May or Jun)	1992/2000	Life Ball	Culture
ARGUS-Bike-Festival (Mar)	1995	ARGUS-Die Fahrradlobby	Sports/Interest Group
Wiener Eistraum (Jan, Feb, Mar)	1996	stadt wien marketing gmbh	Tourism, Sports
Steiermark-Dorf (Apr)	1996	Steirische Tourismus GmbH	Tourism
Animal Welfare Day Vienna (Sep)	1998	stadt wien marketing gmbh	Interest Group
waldviertelpur (Sep)	2003	Waldviertel Tourismus	Tourism
Vienna Night Run (Sep)	2006	Erste Bank	Sports
Anniversary Festivals			
Special Events (e. g. Fan Zone EM 2008)			

Table 1: Annual Festivals Town Hall Square Vienna (Hofer 2008, own adaptations).

The dominant theme of the town hall square, judging by its seasonal occupation, is sports and culture. Especially with cultural events, pseudo-historic symbols of high-culture are often portrayed to reach and maintain the image of Vienna as the centre for high-culture. Through the marketing of the town hall square,

the city administration functions and acts as a firm, letting economic interests cross over to society and culture. The town hall square as an important public space in the city centre, it is the focus of attention regarding the intersection of urban infrastructure and the public realm. The fundamental nature of public space is therefore leveraged against capitalist accumulation strategies of “bread and games”. Building “normative ecologies” of inclusion and exclusion, the festivalisation of the town hall square includes all those willing and able to pay and participate in a consumer-culture, whereas excluding all those not fitting into the envisioned image of Vienna as a culture and tourist city. In the case of the town hall square public space as a process of interpretation is therefore left to economic interests of private or semi-private institutions. From the celebrated multifunctional public spaces for economic, political, religious, cultural and social activities of ancient times, the focus of the town hall square has increasingly shifted to monofunctional leisure-only occupation. The festivalisation process often disguises the multifunctional potentials and possibilities of the town hall square for the public, presenting variety and spectacle and normalising the capitalist occupation of the public space for very specific interests. Functioning nevertheless as a public space, the town hall square, therefore consolidates the underlying structure of economic interests, making them appear inevitable.

### **4.3 A reconstruction of public space as social infrastructure – towards the right to public space**

“The pattern of development of cities today is subject to control, it is not the result of uncontrollable forces, is not the result of iron economic laws whose effects states are powerless to influence.” (Marcuse and van Kempen 2000, p. 272, original emphasis),

To move from festivalisation of public space to the right to public space, we want to emphasise what Marcuse and van Kempen (2000) stated as subject to influence. However inevitable current tendencies of festivalisation and capitalist occupation of public space may seem, there is always hope for change. This change may come from different perspectives and may have many sources:

- Acknowledging public space as a form of social infrastructure provides the fundamental understanding of its importance and underlying structure for society and the city. Both, social infrastructure as well as public space are easily overlooked until they are no longer available and are missing from our everyday lives. However, understanding infrastructure as a public good, which satisfies common needs may redirect the focus to both public space and social infrastructure.
- As we live in an age of infrastructure, we emphasise the importance of social infrastructure in this context. Scholars have often focused on technical and networked infrastructures and largely neglected social infrastructure. We pledge for more attention in this respect, following the assumptions that social infrastructures are also complex socio-technical and socio-economic systems, interdependent on economic, societal, political and planning conditions. As the example of the town hall square shows, the economic conditions of financial constraints of the public sector heightens the institutional settings of planning conditions through relocated managing and marketing firms, which plan the annual events at the town hall square on behalf of the city, thus intensifying the business-oriented city management. In consequence, economic conditions of excluding those who are not able to participate in the consumerist culture becomes the societal norm for this specific public space. However, the “normative ecologies” of inclusion and exclusion are always the product of 1) the physical place and organisational structure and 2) the process of interpretation, hence leaving space for change towards a more inclusive public space and planning process.
- This leads to the right to the city as the right to participate in urban life, as the right for a new, emancipated and fair urban development and as the right to change ourselves by changing the city. First, this would mean for the town hall square the availability of public space as non-commercial space throughout the year, available for the appropriation and use by the public. Second, the approachability of the town hall square within its seasonal use through festivals and events could include a more diverse range of activities, not just promoting events of high-culture, but, for instance, also alternative and niche cultural events. And lastly, the physical accessibility of the space could be enhanced by minimising the time spent with assembling and dismantling the festival stages and accompanying booths, for example through investing in a more elaborate support team.

These different contextual influences need to be coordinated through planning and politics with the aim to negotiate between diverse interests and claims to public space. However, as long as the city acts as a firm,



trying to maximise profit, this will continue to be a utopian aspiration. Change is necessary to shift the focus to public space as social infrastructure, thereby ensuring the importance of city space for the public and reaching a right to public space for all.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This paper built upon the festivalisation of public space, which led to a loss of many functions of public space in many Western cities in the last decades. It argued that connecting public space to the notion of social infrastructure serves as a useful conceptual framework for heightening the important and indispensable nature both of public space as well as social infrastructure for the functioning of our societies and cities. To challenge dynamics of festivalisation we propose to make use of the concept of the right to the city and connect it with the notion of social infrastructure to move towards a right to public space. The proposed framework provided useful insights into similarities between public space and social infrastructure and pointed out the missing pieces for achieving a right to public space.

The framework was applied to the specific case of the town hall square in Vienna, a representational public space in the city centre, which has been subject to increasing festivalisation since the late 1980s. The case study did confirm that the town hall square as a public space is the physical manifestation of interconnected global urban processes and local tendencies which manifest themselves through increasing festivalisation and restricted access. Being occupied by festivals and events almost all year round, the seasonal use of the square leaves those unable or unwilling to participate in commercial sport and cultural activities far behind. Building upon the notion of social infrastructure as a public good highlights the importance of public space as social infrastructure for public interest. Being currently a symbol of specific normative values of a global competitive economy, where public space functions for economic purposes of attracting tourists and creating tax revenue, this focus could be shifted through the notion of the right to the city. Applying the concept of the right to the city showed that an alternative approach for the right to public space is also possible for the town hall square in Vienna. However, exceeding the individual level and forming a collective right to change, is no easy task to tackle. Nevertheless, the right to public space could be employed as a new collective normative value, building on the concept of public space as social infrastructure and serving as an alternative interpretation of public space as a public good, which includes a diverse range of interests.

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