Worldly Vienna – the city with the highest quality of living worldwide

Gerhard Hatz

Dept. of Geography and Regional Research, University of Vienna, Universitaetsstrasse 7

E-mail: gerhard.hatz@univie.ac.at Phone: +43 1 4277 48631

In the renowned survey by Mercer Consulting, Vienna, Austria's capital, scored highest for overall quality of living in the rankings of best cities in the world in 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015 as well as in 2016. However, dissecting the factors drawn on evaluating the quality of living in this ranking reveals just few factors directly linked to the performance of the city itself and the notions of "quality of living" circulating in urban discourses. Following these ideas that circulate through time and space in Vienna, the analysis of worlding practices in Vienna is based on the notions of Foucault: "We are in the epoch of simultaneity … in the epoch of juxtaposition … of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed" (Foucault & Miskowiec 1986). By re-interpreting the diverse spatializing practices as the relation among sites, simultaneously re-presenting different ideas of urban worlds, the paper seeks to scrutinize Peter Sloterdijk's concept of "Foam Cities" as a blue print for examining physical form, social relations and the aesthetic and atmospheric memes of 'worlded' cities.

Recent visions of urban worlds have developed as a backlash to the shortfalls of modern urban planning. Relating to the notions of Henri Lefebvre, respective ideas like those of 'New Urbanism' have been aiming at instantiating 'a human scale', 'diversity', 'encounters' or 'creativity' and promoting concepts of mixed used and walkable urban worlds, where residents find identity and feel "at home". These notions, however, seem to refer to a romanticized historic interpretation of urban milieus. Visual strategies and regulations on the aesthetics have become predominant and enforced by law, their objectives have moved on to the production of ambience and emotions. Worlding practices have become associated with the atmosphere, the oeuvre, the image of urban milieus.

Following the line of worldly urbanism, four fragmentations are selected that have been shaping the discourse on and the performance of urban spaces in Vienna: (1) Culture, heritage and identity, (2) social cohesion, (3) creativity & innovation, (4) environmental care. The paper identifies, selects and dissects different worlds that have emerged in Vienna, pointing at fragmented re-presentations of worldly urbanism:

(1) In the historic city center the re-production of an idealized urbanity and of the cultural heritage has resulted in the production of an exclusionary enclave and commodified destination for consumerism. Visual strategies have become the force of law and have been extended over the entire city and gained power over urban functions that now have to follow the urban form.

(2) In course of a "soft urban renewal program" in the inner city billions of Euros have been invested by the City in the re-production of the historic ambience, at the same time ensuring social sustainability. Vienna's soft urban renewal model has been exported by being honored with the best practice award in sustainable urban renewal by UN HABITAT in 1996.

(3) Creativity & innovation in terms of creative milieus have been instantiated in worlded i.e. mixed used environments of New Urban Centers and redeveloped historic brownfield areas, even though physically quite far from - but in relation to time-distance - within the city center.

 (4) Energy efficiency has not only transformed the issues of the soft urban renewal program and the architecture of new constructions, but also provides the dramaturgy for life styles dedicated to ecological sustainability, like a "Bike City" or a "Car free City".

Fluid concepts of wordly urbanism follow the rationale of a dispositif (Foucault), which is constituted of intertwined heterogeneous discursive and non-discursive, referring to a fluid relation of power, knowledge and space that is continuously negotiated. When put into practice, concepts of worldly urbanism reveal themselves as 'Heterotopias' – real and unreal urban spaces – or 'a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live' (Foucault & Miskowiec 1986).

Following the notions of Foucault, further research will examine the potential of the concept of "Foam Cities" as a theoretical framework in reading the plethora of urban worlds. The poly-atmospherical "Foam City" serves as a "Meta-Collector" of different urban worlds defined as inventions, installations and interiors of space settings – building the macro-molecular entities of the city, and providing the dramaturgies and the "soundtracks" of the aesthetization of daily life (Walter Benjamin).

References

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