SSH13-020 - Reconfiguring public spaces through green urban commons. On the significance of agrarian movements for transitions of urban space in Vienna

Zusammenfassung

Space was and still is the main locality and subject of negotiating sovereignty and „the public“ in social practice. Different forms of participation and democratic governance come to scrutiny in disputes over access to space; in a very fundamental way indeed, when access to material space, that is, land, is at stakes, as debates on the “right to the city” and on “urban commons” suggest.
„Public space“ in the city is very often being associated with images of certain localities, such as squares and parks or as spaces for (political) demonstrations, but is rarely being related to as a collective means of material production, i.e. “green urban commons”. Nevertheless, the occupation and use of unsealed urban or peri-urban areas for agriculture is historically and contemporarily significant: dominant notions of public space are contested by movements, which collectively claim and cultivate vacant lots, fallows or simply private property. Thereby, issues of agriculture, food culture(s) and urban life as a whole are being renegotiated alongside three dimensions of space, as argued by Henri Lefebvre: material space, lived space and the space of representations.
The project focuses on the (re-)negotiation of „the public“ via self-organised acquisition of land (which is perceived as being public or is being defined as public by – more or less – collective appropriation and production) by means of agricultural use in urban Vienna. Drawing on data gathered in the field, from existing literature and coeval sources, we will seek to answer three basic questions: (1) Which are the conditions for the emergence of social movements promoting transition in the context of public spaces by cultivating and claiming land for agricultural purposes and by changing urban landscapes, (2) what are the factors for success, failure or demise of such movements and how do they impact the “production of public space”, (3) which (constructions of) meaning and subjectivities are developed or contested by these movements and how do they relate and are they attached to agricultural production and interventions in urban landscapes?
Starting from the 19th century, the historical part of the project will include the reconstruction of the history of movements claiming or creating green urban commons in urban and peri-urban space. A second approach within the project will focus on contemporary movements, to identify current discourses on transition and meaning within those, by using qualitative ethnographic methods and quantitative analyses. The third part of the project will consist of localising the findings within broader theoretical perspectives, by further developing a theory of public space from a commons perspective, as well as a theory of social innovation in urban governance of public spaces.

Schlagworte:
public space; urban agriculture; right to the city; commons; social movement; food activism

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