Article

The Role of the Body in Pandemic Geographies of Encounter: Anti-Restriction Protesters Between Collective Action and Political Violence

Sabine Knierbein * and Richard Pfeifer

Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, TU Wien, Austria

* Corresponding author (knierbein@skuor.tuwien.ac.at)

Abstract
This article looks at public anti-restriction protests by framing public space as a vital component of urban life. It argues that the body is rarely introduced as a scale of spatial analysis and usually plays a more prominent role in the subfields of social movement or public space studies, which often tend to focus on the transformative and emancipatory side of urban encounters. By integrating a corporeal perspective, the article aims at understanding how the body transforms political passions into individual agency and collective action. Focusing on the Covid-19-crisis-related protests, particularly the anti-restriction protests, the study examines from different angles how a socially heterogeneous group consisting of both radicals and sceptics joined together, in anger, in an atypical coalition concerning state interventions in their very personal spaces. Based on a literature review of secondary sources on anti-restriction protests and an empirical analysis of media coverage of a key event in Vienna, the study identifies a gap in the theorisation of ambivalent geographies of encounter whose impacts range between collective action and political violence. To frame our key hypothesis, considering the body as a scale in spatial analysis is needed for future socio-spatial research to grasp new and pressing urban phenomena of social change. By bridging empirical observation, methodological considerations and conceptual reflection, this article contributes to an understanding of social change through less romanticised modes of analysis of geographies of encounter with a particular take on embodied space.

Keywords
anti-restriction protests; Covid-19; embodied space; libertarian authoritarianism; political violence; public space

1. Introduction

This article takes a perspective into the role of the body in public space and embodied experience in urban life. Public space is understood and theorised as a geography of encounter and, as such, concerns a vital ingredient of urban life. The urban studies perspective chosen is based on theorising everyday life, which also includes the study of, for example, public life and social movements. Also, public space research has been a vital part of theorising endeavours in planning, as it has usually allowed connecting planning goals to a deeper understanding of new and emerging patterns of social change. While public space researchers have rendered social encounters in the public realm as meaningful or emancipatory, or as conflictive and politicising, the role of the body in transforming inner political passions into outward-bound individual agency or collective action towards social change has remained somewhat undertheorised in wider fields of planning theory.

During the first pandemic years (2020–2022), public space protests took place despite or even because of quarantine measures. Here, the practice of democracy usually entailed participants exercising their civil

rights; for instance, their alleged rights to freedom of speech and of assembly (see Butler, 2015, p. 8). Some protest claims did not relate to the Covid-19 crisis while others were staged explicitly in response to the pandemic crisis, and related restrictive regulatory state measures. We focus on the latter as we are interested in "anti-restriction protests" (Kriesi & Oana, 2023). We take them as an empirical example to showcase that the integration of embodied perspectives informing approaches to further generate knowledge around ambivalent geographies of encounter may help to grasp new social phenomena in public space.

Research on conviviality has related to ideas about the emancipatory and joyful aspects of everyday life that often lie hidden. The affective power created between gathering bodies therefore is not to be underestimated when it comes to research on how internal sensations might be translated to mobilise collective affects that may (dis)connect people. Affects are defined as aspects arising from encounters that are not always conceivable in language, but sensed bodily—their nature is spatial (cf. Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2011). However, while these qualities remain an essential part of urban analysis, researchers seldom address the dark sides of embodied interaction and affective engagement in protest (Knierbein & Gabauer, 2017). Similarly, Back and Sinha (2016, p. 522) identify similar dilemmas for the debate on conviviality when stating that "the notion of conviviality [is left] under explicated [as] it acts like a fugitive hinterland in the context of racism and melancholic nationalism."

This article starts from the reflection that in times of enhanced disruption and unsettling of urban routines (Viderman et al., 2023), an integration of spatial aspects of social change is a much-needed effort to master the transitions and multifarious challenges that planners are confronted with. By learning about new compositions of social groups protesting with various artistic means and driven by spatial rationales of algorithms and artificial intelligence, the study of anti-restriction protests may allow combining methodological insights on how to consolidate repertoires of spatial analysis and add new ones.

The pandemic era has seen a restructuring of protest groups in public space where a new, controversial heterogeneity of insurgents joined together: far-right wing figures, conspiracists, ecologically interested groups and families, esoteric thinkers, anti-science groups, organic farmers and therapists of different professions, alongside uncategorised people, just to name a few. We are empirically interested in the role that the body plays in interweaving these diverse and often contradictory voices of protesters towards temporary forms of seemingly unified collective action. Empirically exploring this with a conceptual interest helps to identify a gap in theorising space in planning, thereby understanding the deeper patterns, dynamics, and tendencies of social change, not as we desire it, but as it is happening day-to-day. To support our argument, we will first outline

the methodological approach, present the empirical phenomenon informing our conceptual reflection, and then revisit how (public) space can be theorised in planning through a renewed focus on the body.

To carry out the case study, first, a qualitative content analysis of secondary sources has been realised. Those articles dealing with collective action against pandemic restriction measures have been analysed with a range of cities under scrutiny. As we reorganise knowledge collected from differentiated disciplinary perspectives, this research is by nature cross-disciplinary. Our key goal, first, is to qualify the phenomenon by creating a comprehensive conceptual depiction from different disciplinary angles and to gather the state of the art of research into studying this phenomenon in its socio-spatial aspects. This is further consolidated, secondly, by empirical analysis of media coverage of street protests as they occurred in Vienna. This empirical part will then be embedded in the conceptual reflection regarding how far planning theorists, in their attempts to theorise space, have considered the role of the body as a mode of spatial analysis.

2. Anti-Restriction Protests and the Perceived Fear of the Loss of Body Sovereignty

2.1. Conceptual and Empirical Advances When Studying Anti-Restriction Protests

The quick spread of the Covid-19 pandemic led several governments worldwide to take socio-spatial prevention measures, sometimes impeding citizen's civil rights to state their opinion freely in public space and, at other times, imposing access restrictions to those places that were normally used for exerting inhabitants' rights to public assembly. During pandemic lockdowns, people were forced to live in reduced private spaces for a short time. Home then became the main locus of (re)production for wider, albeit not all, parts of the urban population, which produced a range of tensions: inner tensions among individuals, tensions to negotiate private space that was suddenly being used for multiple purposes, yet also tensions between individuals, groups and public authorities, and the state, as part of a wider and more abstract set of social relations. These tensions can be grasped at different spatial scales: the body, the neighbourhood, the city, and the state's abstract or concrete territory (Madanipour, 2003). While planners often locate their analysis between neighbourhood space and more abstract state territories, conceiving the body as a scale of spatial analysis has rarely been their focus. An exception can be found in planning research leaning more toward the social sciences:

> We start from the private, interior space of the mind and move outwards to the extensions of the body in space, the personal space. Then we visit the home, the domains of privacy, intimacy and property, followed by inter-personal spaces of sociability

among strangers, communal spaces of the neighbour-hood, the material and institutional public sphere and the impersonal spaces of the city. (Madanipour, 2003, p. 3)

Facing a situation of repeated lockdowns during a pandemic period with prolonged governmental restrictions (e.g., Austria), while the risk of infection temporarily decreased, led to an ambivalent inward orientation among residents, resulting in increasing psychological tension, frustration, and hyperarousal, but also more cases of domestic violence (Piquero et al., 2021, 5). And while the focus on the role of the body in navigating different social relationships between an individual's personal place and the spaces of other individuals, groups, and the state, had already been central during times of lockdown (Bou Kheir et al., 2020), it continued to matter after the lockdown as well (e.g., in anti-restriction protests), and thus remained central even as residents returned to the streets. Concerning political mobilisation, the recent pandemic severely constrained the possibilities for "collective action: by shutting down public life" (Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 742). In this situation, collective action at first seldom occurred as regards the mobilisation and intensification of protest events (Kriesi & Oana, 2023). However, as the pandemic situation temporarily eased "towards summer 2020, the stringency of lockdown measures became less credible," while "the constraints imposed on mobilisation persisted" (Neumayer et al., 2021, as cited in Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 743). This context prevailed in different national and urban contexts, albeit differently, where it "provided a powerful incentive for mobilising against such measures, although not for other types of protest" (Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 743).

The so-called "corona protesters," which we frame alongside Kriesi and Oana's (2023) analytical choice as anti-restriction protesters, have been sociologically characterised by different authors and along different social aspects: For anti-restriction protests in a German state province, Frei and Nachtwey (2022, p. 31) first confirm that the socio-political background of protesters is heterogeneous. Secondly, they evidence that some social groups, for instance, those following an esoteric lifestyle inspired by "anthroposophy" or so-called "diagonal thinkers" (*Querdenker*) were more influential in issuing their grievances than others (e.g., Christian evangelicals, pacifists, or members of neighbourhood initiatives). Anschauer and Heinz (2023, pp. 90–91) have noted, as shown in Table 1, that the political position of protesters can be distinguished along two lines: those who reject scientific evidence and liberal democratic institutions and those who criticise them without rejecting them. Among the former are diagonal movements, a broader trend of political polarisation that can no longer be subsumed under the term populism alone (Slobodian & Callision, 2021). For these protesters, being "anti-mainstream" or "anti-elite" is rooted in a digitalised political culture that is closely linked to a new "entrepreneurship" of influencers who agitate in order to assemble followers for protests.

Anti-mainstream positions are shared by both populist figures and so-called "diagonalist" movements (Amlinger & Nachtwey, 2022, pp. 21–23): The latter are framed as libertarian authoritarianism which refers to subjects characterised by a postmodern personality structure constituted by an authoritarianism that is libertarian in that all forms of social constraint on individual agency are opposed. The identification of libertarian authoritarians is not with a leader but with themselves, with their autonomy. Such a political culture would secure the space of atomized individuals identifying with each other by rejecting what intrigues the realm

Table 1. Differences in dynamics between sceptical and radicalised respondents.

	Sceptics	Radicalised
Attitudes towards Covid-19 infection risk	Take disease seriously	Radical denial of the existence of the virus
Attitudes towards science	Recognise the achievements of science	Denial of scientific evidence
Attitudes towards politics	Massive loss of trust and disillusionment with politics	Disengagement from politics
Science and politics	Political staging of scientific findings increases scepticism	Politics and science in complicity
Motives against vaccination	Uncertainty (e.g., due to previous illnesses, side-effects in the social environment, lack of information)	See vaccination as a genetic injection
Other features	Criticism of capitalism	Cynicism/civil war fantasies
Emotions	Insecurity/fear	Aggression
Effects on the work situation	Perception of exclusion	Threat of job loss

Source: Authors' work based on Anschauer and Heinz (2023, p. 93).

of personal choice, allowing the individual protester to reaffirm his or her own authority while delegitimizing the policies of public bodies. Liao's (2022, p. 2) analysis of 150 leitmotifs of anti-vaccination protests, for instance, revealed three main threats: first, support for individual freedom and rights; secondly, opposition to government control; and third, anti-science arguments, including evidence of misinformation and disinformation.

In terms of protesters' involvement with digital information and social media platforms, the socio-demographics of the so-called middle class were quite pronounced (Nachtwey et al., 2020, p. 51), and the majority politically identified themselves with the political centre, meaning they do not consider themselves radicals (cf. Grande et al., 2021, p. 3). Anti-restriction protesters were found to be relatively weakly politicised, as they seemed rather "alienated" from traditional institutions and suspicious of the state (Grande et al., 2021). Since planning is often considered a state activity, such protest cultures might also enhance people's scepticism towards planning interventions. Such scepticism might mobilise against planning processes altogether, or the discipline as such, and thereby may eventually decrease the societal acceptance and political legitimisation of planning quite quickly, and in the long run make broad public participation even more difficult.

Regarding gender, Brunner et al. (2021, p. 1) identified more cis-women than cis-men among the protesters. Cisgender refers to those persons whose sexual identity relates to that gender which they nominally received by birth (Kühne, 2016). This information can be interpreted also from a feminist perspective including the role of the (female) body in politicising both public and private spaces of the city as political places of everyday life, yet also following the idea that bodily experience has been a key issue in women's lives, and therefore has become prominent in feminist theorising across disciplines and cultures: As Federici (2004, p. 16) has it, the body has been "the primary ground of [women's] exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labour." As communication studies research from the US reveals (Liao, 2022, p. 2), protest slogans issued between the dates of two governmental decisions of the Biden US government imposing vaccination measures on the population show that "body" was among the most cited terms in protest marches (see Figure 1). Yet, besides information displaced in face-to-face politics taking place in urban public spaces around the world, different researchers have also included research into digital and virtual dimensions of these protests.

As political counter spaces gained momentum, Wahidie et al. (2021) identified that many of these quite diverse anti-restriction protesters share a strong orientation towards information distributed via digital media technologies such as messengers (e.g., Signal, WhatsApp, among others) or platforms (e.g., Youtube, etc.) often used in combination. Much of this new type of political resistance has become intertwined with highly selective social media channels in which the quality of information can often not be publicly monitored. In this respect, "an important feature of such anti-vaccine…protests across the globe is a surge of [d]isinformation" (Liao, 2022, p. 1, referring to Ahinkorah et al., 2020) that is "strategically manipulated and circulated with a clear purpose to cause socio-political unrest and disruption" (Das & Ahmed, 2022, as cited in Liao, 2022, p. 1). The expansion of artificial intelligence and certain algorithms has eroded and distorted the public realm as that sphere where public opinion is ideally formed through open dispute and debate (Fraser, 2008). Instead, Eberl et al. (2021, p. 6) have stressed the role played by the unfiltered dissemination of false information on secured

Figure 1. "My body, my choice": Feminist slogans in anti-restriction protests. Source: Sanchez (2021).

social media channels. Such realities echo earlier urban studies debates about the lack of understanding of how public opinion is actually formed (Low & Smith, 2006). Using the analytical scale of the body would certainly contribute to an understanding of how such opinions are informed by protest practices that operate across the private/public divide, increasingly digitally mediated in hybrid environments.

Research into the political dimensions of the anti-restriction protests ranges across authoritarianism studies (Anschauer & Heinz, 2023), political radicalisation research (Kemmesies et al., 2022), social psychology studies on conspiracy beliefs or mentalities (Imhoff et al., 2021), and political science research on populist movements (Eberl et al., 2021). Due to the self-selective sampling implied by the open calls for participation in messenger groups on Telegram, or to the well-known mistrust of scientists, earlier research into Covid-19-protest publics admittedly suffered from certain biases (Brunner et al., 2021; Nachtwey et al., 2020). Another group of research approaches then emphasised the need for representative samples and referred to existing longitudinal studies, for example, on authoritarianism, conspiracy beliefs, or social movements (Anschauer & Heinz, 2023; Eichhorn et al., 2022).

An embodied space perspective in this context allows for the integration of political theory and radical anthropological perspectives on bodily action in urban space: By exploring the embodied dimension of protest, Moore (2013) asks whether protesters use their bodies to interfere in political discourse or to disrupt institutional politics. Butler (2015, p. 9), in her analyses of the always provisionary political assembly, asserts that "acting in concert can be an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political."

In planning theory, there is hardly any analysis of the spatial repertoire of anti-restriction protesters. From such a perspective, social science researchers more genuinely contribute knowledge to the sociology of public space use, yet they often have their limits as regards taking space seriously as an analytical modus operandi. While spatial analysis is the key concern of urban studies, particularly urban planners have hardly used their spatial analytical repertoire to scientifically understand social change through their prisms of analysis, that is, space. These repertoires can be enhanced by including "other" approaches to spatial analysis, for example, from the social sciences and humanities, to gather results from thinking space materially, culturally, politically, and socially. Studies on anti-restriction protests could benefit by interrogating how space is appropriated or contested, and how an analysis that embraces the concept of embodied space helps to overcome blind spots in understanding the social change underlying these ambivalent geographies of encounters.

In this respect, Valentine (2008, p. 329) has stated that some of her informants in empirical research "argued that encounters in contemporary public space are regulated by codes of so-called 'political correctness' to such an extent that they feel obliged to curb the public expression of their personal prejudices and negative feelings." With the legitimacy of public health policy severely challenged during the pandemic, and with new digital media technologies for sharing and producing anti-restrictive audiences in digital space as presumably valid alternatives to the regulated public sphere, opinions and calls to action may well escape the safe intimacy of the private setting (cf. Valentine, 2008) and become mutually affirmed interventions in public discourse and space. The significance of the body and how it appropriates cultural codes and its material environment through action makes it an indeterminate element in theoretical analysis: The body is "the wild card in the theorist's deck" (Shields, 1999, p. 123).

This part was meant to introduce the urban phenomenon of anti-restriction protests which so far have shown potential to trigger much, albeit ambivalent, social change. By outlining the state of the art of interdisciplinary research on the subject matter, we have incrementally introduced conceptual considerations as regards public space, the public sphere, everyday life and ambivalent geographies of encounter, all with a focus on the role of bodies and embodied space. In the next section, we will now turn to specific protests in a specific city, that is, Vienna, the capital of Austria.

2.2. Anti-Restriction Protests in Vienna in November 2021

Pandemic media coverage dealt with a rise in anti-restriction protests across Europe and beyond, as well as an increase in both individual and institutional violence in these protests (Kriesi & Oana, 2023): Around November 2021, thousands of protesters marched the streets of cities in Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Italy, and Croatia. In some places, police used tear gas and gunshots to tame the increasingly anxious protesters. In these and other places, crowds have frequently been chased away, for example, with riot police using horses, dogs, water cannons, and batons, whereas anti-restriction protesters behaved more violently as well, attacking police officers and vehicles while reiterating an anti-system rhetoric ("Covid: Huge protests across Europe over new restrictions," 2021). In Austria, police reported that on one weekend tens of thousands of people rallied against pandemic restriction measures as Austria became the first European country to reimpose a third lockdown for those who were vaccinated whereas restrictions were already in place for unvaccinated people ("Covid in Austria: Mass protest in Vienna against measures," 2021).

There is no universalist idea of a diverse range of anti-Covid-19 protests across cities, regional, national or continental borders as "political protest is 'highly unequally distributed across time and space'"

(Koopmans, 2004, as cited in Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 740). However, there are already some comparative studies across EU urban contexts as regards protest mobilisation and intensification during the pandemic, aiming at documenting the variation and possible causes of protests in European countries. Kriesi and Oana (2023, p. 751) have studied "the extent and intensity of protest across 31 European countries in the Covid-19 crisis" and asked to what extent protest motivation became focused on the crisis itself, what kind of actors were mobilised throughout the crisis and in what types of formats. Like their study, our conceptual reflection is informed by a limited empirical phenomenon, that is, "protest mobilisation that occurs mainly in the streets and that is reported in the media" (cf. Kriesi & Oana, 2023). One of their findings was that "not only opportunities but also structural threats, like the threat posed by Covid-19, may stimulate collective action" (Almeida, 2019, as cited in Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 742). The spread of populism and the political entrepreneurs associated with it not only benefited from the wave of protest but to some degree prepared the ground for it (Eberl et al., 2021; Eichhorn et al., 2022, p. 11). Initially, the lack of representation of anti-restriction protests within the political landscape of party politics, which tended to support governmental decisions, moved the political space of debate away from established politics (Kriesi & Oana, 2023, p. 744). While digital media technology played its part before social presence on the streets, the debate moved to the streets, where politics was embodied and realised in personal encounters.

As follows, the case of one specific anti-restriction protest in Vienna which took place on November 20, 2021, will be debated: Shortly before, the Austrian government had decided for mandatory vaccination from the age of 14 years onwards (Pollak et al., 2021), as more than 13,000 deaths had been reported since the start of the pandemic and only 64% of Austria's population (approximately 8.9 million) were fully vaccinated at that point ("Booster-Impfung für alle," 2021). This dynamic moment featured approx. 40,000 protesters (Pollak et al., 2021) and marked a turning point in which Austria's far-right party redefined its role from supporting to organising these protests. This happened in the aftermath of the leading conservative party losing its then-chancellor in a series of corruption scandals and after he had declared the pandemic defeated. While protest crowds expressed their anger in the streets, the situation in hospitals entered a critical phase as the first medical triage measures were reported in some Austrian hospitals (Pollak et al., 2021).

We explored this event by looking at social media content shared on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and related press releases of the actors and institutions involved. These documents were analysed deductively using codes related to what we address as precarious body sovereignty. Body sovereignty transports libertarian ideas about state–citizen relations and aims at defending the realm of personal choice in all bodily matters. We argue that as regards the pandemic protest publics, the active mobilisation of what overall makes up about 15–17% of the Austrian population (Eberl & Lebernegg, 2021), composed of socially heterogeneous groups (Brunner et al., 2021, p. 52), find a common threat in resisting against state interference into their personal space of the body. These codes touch on ideas of alternative ways of curing physical ailments, i.e., esoteric ideas about the body, but also derivatives of social Darwinist or xenophobic discourse. Body sovereignty slogans were also inspired by slogans of feminist movements (see Figure 1), which we found in the photo documentation of many manifestations in Vienna but also, for example, in Freiburg. The rejection of the face mask at protest rallies and the reaffirmation of strong bodily expressions and the perceived loss of control over the protesters' own bodies and those of their children was equally coded in that way. It is clear from our research that the manifestation itself is only one dynamic moment within a transitional field that operates and communicates extensively through digital media technologies and can thus not be isolated. Rather, it is the variegated instantiation of the transnational anti-restriction protests in a particular space-time, intensified by national and urban political choices.

Figure 2 illustrates how conformity to restriction measures can become dangerous in case it is frequently performed without contestation. This type of performance was equally part of the anti-restriction protest culture in other cities, for instance in Karlsruhe, Augsburg, or Zürich. While this performance stages a critique of the perils of submission to a presumed dictatorship, it can also be read as a loss of individuality, social proximity, and bodily expression. The slogans say: "Vaccination is altruism," "lifelong face mask," or "thinking for yourself is a public danger" (see Figure 2). In addition, videos, which are not shared due to research ethical considerations, showed women perceiving forced vaccination as a physical threat and a potential source of (individual and collective) bodily trauma. Following also slogans such as "My body, my choice," female anti-restriction protesters reported that they were initially not interested in changing their electoral choices, but that governmental decisions to enforce vaccination on the overall population particularly triggered their protest against state interference in their personal space. Another argument relates to individual freedom to decide whether to get the jab: This argument is mentioned by protesters in Figure 3 alongside a reference to their constitutional right instead of solidarity with those in need of protection against the pandemic's severe risks to health. The female protester in Figure 4 explicitly resists the state interfering in her embodied personal space when stating that "it is my own body, and no government needs to intervene here."

The capacity to mobilise lies in addressing affective ideas among sceptics that deepen anxieties through a

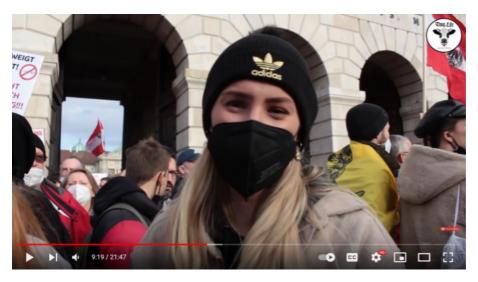**Figure 2.** Vienna: Anti-corona demo, performance group with protective suits. Source: Stadler (2021).

perceived loss of bodily sovereignty (see Brunner et al., 2021, p. 42). This was intensified in the ongoing debates around compulsory vaccination, which in turn provoked deliberations on the relationship between the self and the body, producing protest as a (self-)defensive and bodily empowering stance against that perceived threat. Since there is no natural need for such discomfort and protest to turn towards the populist right-wing over time (Brunner et al., 2021, p. 54), the workings of neoliberal subjectivity might be added for interpretation. By this

Figure 3. Original quote in German: "Die Impfpflicht…das ist mein Körper und ich möchte selbst entscheiden, was ich mit meinem Körper mache…dieses Argument mit der Solidarität…ich kann das nicht nachvollziehen, wie gesagt, es ist mein Körper es ist mein Grundrecht selbst zu entscheiden was ich mit mir oder mit meinem Körper mache" ("The mandatory vaccination…it's my body and I want to decide myself what I do with my body…this argument with solidarity…I can't grasp that, as I said, it's my body it's my fundamental right to decide myself what I do with myself or with my body"). Source: Thug Life Austria (2021, 08:30).

Figure 4. Original quote in German: "Es ist mein eigener Körper, da braucht keine Regierung irgendetwas sagen" ("It is my own body, no government needs to say anything about it"). Source: Thug Life Austria (2021, 09:17).

we mean social norms that emphasise the need to solve social crises individually, and thus embrace individual responsibility and corporeality, which implies an emphasis on the need to operate within the parameters of individual decision-making and personal space (see Anschauer & Heinz, 2023, p. 81). Combining these different interpretative frames is useful when attempting to understand why a range of different protester backgrounds, for example, neo-fascist protesters and those going along with discourses, effectively imply de-solidarisation with vulnerable groups (see Brunner et al., 2021). This individualistic "everyone as she/he pleases" approach also avoids the assumption of a uniform and radical conspiracy mentality, which, according to studies, only accounts for a larger number, though still a minority, of radicals (Anschauer & Heinz, 2023).

These considerations allow us to focus on two further aspects of pandemic protest: political violence and pandemic crisis management: As Bartusevičius et al. (2021) have analysed, the psychological burden of the Covid-19 pandemic is associated with anti-system attitudes and an increase in political violence: hostility towards governments and their representatives, engagement with neo-fascist ideas, verbal but also corporeal acts of discriminatory violence, and a need to produce chaos resulting from felt social exclusion and a lack of control over life, among others (cf. Bartusevičius et al., 2021, pp. 1392–1394). They analyse political activism as participation in collective action for political causes and coin protests against stringent anti-Covid-19 policies as examples of political activism (Bartusevičius et al., 2021). When political activism involves violence, this is addressed as *political violence* (cf. Bartusevičius et al., 2021, p. 1393). These authors detect an increase in public space demonstrations between 2019 and 2020 of 7% globally. Many of these demonstrations had been staged as protests of new groups of insurgents expressing "anger over restricted rights and freedoms, as well

as economic hardship," aspects which "are often cited among the causes of unrest" (Henley, 2020, as cited in Bartusevičius et al., 2021, p. 1392). Anti-restriction protests share an implicit rationale to de-centre power and reposition the political subject vis-a-vis the state.

Other authors have raised concerns about the impact of authoritarian forms of pandemic crisis management, noting that "Covid-19 measures are necessary to save the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in society, but at the same time they produce a range of negative everyday effects for already marginalised people" (Branicki, 2020, p. 872). Most responses to the pandemic were dominated by national "one-size-fits-all" policies characterised by the logic of large state bureaucracies rather than by more nuanced and spatially sensitive strategies that would address the specific needs and risks of particular groups (cf. Branicki, 2020). Consequences of such crisis management involve high levels of carelessness such as elevated risk for workers in low-paid, precarious, and care-based employment; overrepresentation of minority ethnic groups in case numbers and fatalities; and gendered barriers to work (Branicki, 2020). Yet these case studies hardly stressed the role of the (perception of the own) body and the state's potential interferences with different bodies as a joint source of protest and political violence. Although protest groups might not share the same self-perception of the role of their own body in addressing political freedom, they might be able to agree across diverging values, beliefs, and world views on the fact that they disagree with felt interventions into their privacy, intimacy, and vulnerability, that is, into the personal space of their body, fearing a loss of own body sovereignty. Since the body, as understood by Hardt (2007, p. ix), functions as a facilitator between internal passions and external actions, it can also function as a link between individual anxieties and the politics of fear in the context of collective threats that, while primarily discursive, are bodily experienced.

The role of the body in anti-restriction protests during the pandemic has been of interest. In demonstrations, bodies have been both used as a practical resource for issuing political disagreement and dissent, as a vehicle of exerting (political) violence against "the other," and as a reference in protest rhetoric, in weaving together quite disparate groups of protesters. Bodies were also exposed to political or state violence, therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between the discursive role of the body in resistance-based discourses against the status quo ("politics") and the body's spatially disruptive function within protest and the resulting political impact ("the political"). Moore (2013) here identifies what bodies do to move people from being involved in reform to resistance, or from anti- to alter-politics: enabling political dynamics through the disruption of established routines, affective relations, and by bodily using space. Nachtwey et al. (2020, p. 55) differentiate between the value of authentic bodily experience and its narration within the "community of resistance." Such a narrative expresses one's anxieties, provides a shared framework that allows heterogeneous protest publics, ranging from sceptics to radicals (cf. Nachtwey et al., 2020; see also Anschauer & Heinz, 2023, pp. 77–78), to employ their body as a resource to enact "the political" (Moore, 2013). Similar to Anschauer and Heinz (2023), Slobodian and Callision (2021) have also found that such a community of resistance framing defines politics among "diagonalists."

3. Conclusion

This research emphasised a body-centered scale in spatial analysis, using the empirical example of anti-restriction protests in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Without moralising about the behaviour of the protesters, we wanted to excavate the required analytical concepts of how to study the hidden dimensions of everyday life through the body. This research aimed at further deepening our interest in space and its role in understanding social change, especially the anti-restriction protests during the Covid-19 pandemic. Taking a specific perspective into the role of the body and embodied experience in new forms of protest publics has facilitated the re-theorising of public space as an ambivalent geography of encounter for anti-restriction protesters. An attempt has been made to de-romanticise analytical procedures for social movements to also facilitate and trigger analytical spectra for analysing the dark sides of public space, for example, ephemeral encounters of people seeking to cope with the psychological burdens of the Covid-19 pandemic by turning to anti-restriction protests involving both collective action and alter politics, alongside increasingly destructive, aggressive, and disruptive acts of political violence and anti-systemic behaviour. In navigating between individual and internal psychological pressures and external and more vocal collective political expressions, the body has been introduced as a central analytical vehicle, manoeuvring between the scales of internal incivility and radicalisation and external moments of solidarisation with seemingly disparate individuals and groups producing political bodies of all kinds.

Whereas the focus on conviviality has been debated in the context of cosmopolitan lives, multiculturalism, and superdiversity, tensions in research on cultures of conviviality are related to both conceptual and analytical biases and dilemmas: Everyday life research on public space tended to overemphasise progressive aspects of temporary geographies of encounter experienced around protests and protesting bodies, whereas analytical perspectives were based on emancipatory forms of social encounter in public space. Valentine's (2008) approach to geographies of encounter addresses the question of how we can forge a civic culture out of difference by narrowing the analytical focus of these debates to the idea of meaningful contact. Valentine (2008, p. 325) identifies a paradoxical gap emerging between values discursively attached to encounters between strangers in public space and embodied practices of encountering others when going beyond a "worrying romanticism of urban encounter" which "implicitly reproduce[s] a potentially naïve assumption that contact with 'others' necessarily translates into respect for difference." While the role of the affective body in transforming internal political passions into external action has been under-theorised, especially in disembodied theories of planning, this is less true for public space research which has consistently used the body as a scale of spatial analysis.

Shields's (1999) reflections on Lefebvre's (2014, p. 80) fourth form of capitalist alienation, alienation from the body, seem equally worthwhile to be addressed here. We may ask if the (capitalist) colonisation of everyday life and its connected fourth form of alienation from the body has increased at such a pace that theorists need to envision new analytical categories to come to terms with the massive pressures that affect bodies. It is not inconceivable that the fierce defence of an individualist freedom of choice (cf. Amlinger & Nachtwey, 2022, p. 16), which is to be found among many demonstrators, is equally the result of an instrumental view of the body, its potential for further commodification and economic growth, and the imperative of neoliberal self-optimisation which tends to enlarge precarious and unequal social conditions (see Butler, 2015, p. 14).

What kind of conviviality can exist within classificatory struggles induced by neoliberal urban development regimes (Tyler, 2015), as well as in attitudes expressing welfare chauvinism? Such anti-democratic aspects of urban public life can also spark anti-systemic attitudes or even political violence. Studying the structural aspects that bring people out of peaceful political protest into aggressive aspects of political violence is essential to understanding both the democratic burden of the Covid-19 pandemic and the role of planners, architects,

and urban designers. They often translate neoliberal urban policies into the physical layout of public squares and streets. However, this translation can unintentionally interfere with lived space, and with the task of transferring state pressures into their intimate, personal, and embodied space.

We suggest that a qualitative understanding of the temporality of public protest spaces as ambivalent geographies of encounter is necessary. These can be both meaningful contacts that generate respect for "the other" and tolerance, and meaningless contacts that tend to foreground discriminatory practices in the scope between disrespectful, anti-pluralist, anti-democratic, or even anti-constitutional actions, both individual and collective. This new plurality of anti-restriction protesters complicates the mission of traditional social movement studies and public space researchers and is part of a more recent tradition seeking to explore "the dark sides of public space" (Knierbein & Gabauer, 2017, p. 217) as they relate, for example, to anti-pluralist, neo-fascist, and racist tendencies in public protests. Valentine (2008) emphasises that aggression is even articulated by individuals who themselves benefit from a respectful public encounter (Phillips & Smith, 2006, as cited in Valentine, 2008, p. 326). Even within accounts of conviviality and cosmopolitanism, posing the question of whose conviviality and cosmopolitanism might analytically point to inclusions and exclusions, presence and absence in new social movements. "Spatial proximity" in this respect "can actually breed defensiveness and the bounding of identities and communities" (Valentine, 2008, p. 326).

From our research into Viennese anti-restriction protests, we understood that the protesters produced not only public unrest, but also among themselves a social space that allowed for bodily expression of all kinds, from expressing anger to bodily performances and self-defensive rhetoric about the body, be it joyful shouts or angry chants: The body was often perceived as simultaneously "being threatened" by the state and "collectively liberated" in public space, and it is this productive tension that we believe not only mitigated potential conflicts between different types of protesters with different ideological backgrounds but also stimulated the emergence of ambivalent pandemic geographies of encounter. The body has been treated as an aspect that seems to bring all these very different people together despite their assumingly quite diverging value systems, political beliefs, and everyday experiences.

Incorporating the body as a scale of spatial analysis in deciphering social change, both in public space and other types of planning research can be considered a promising analytical route to further develop adequate research questions and methodological considerations, and to bring to the fore new sorts of empirical results. Enhancing methodological approaches that support exploring new paths of contemporary social change in forms of knowledge production that include embodied space epistemologies is a first step before more sustained empirical insights can come to the fore. Empirically, many studies on urban protests and social movements have tried to come to terms with democratising, progressive, or even liberatory accounts of urban collective life, while those bodily encounters that promote discriminatory aspects, or actively help to socially and culturally separate or discriminate people in public space have often been disregarded. Also, forms of aggressive or violent encounters have been underrated in urban and planning research, although particularly participation processes increasingly suffer from political polarisation, verbal violence, and aggressive discrimination of participants. That is why this article takes the study of anti-restriction protests as a form of bodily encounter and the enactment of the political in public space seriously.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors

Sabine Knierbein (PhD in European Urban Studies and PD in International Urban Studies) is a professor and head of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, TU Wien, Austria. She researches everyday life and urbanisation, urban politics and democracy, disruptive precarity and crises, and intersectional methodology. She has co-edited numerous books and articles and has been a visiting professor for Urban Political Geography at the University of Florence and a guest research fellow at the University of Florence (2021) and HafenCity University (2022).

Richard Pfeifer (MA) is a socio-cultural anthropologist. He is an assistant professor at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, Faculty of Architecture and Planning, TU Wien. His research focuses on the intersection of political theory and urban studies, including theories of housing regimes, urban restructuring, and the proximity of social differences in public space.