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Inclusion and Exclusion in Urban Public Space: Contemporary Challenges in Vienna and Helsinki

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Abstract

Public spaces facilitate interactions among people from diverse backgrounds and serve as arenas that offer valuable insights into societal dynamics. They have the potential to promote inclusion, yet they can also foster exclusionary practices. Focusing on the years 2022 and 2023, and the cases of Vienna and Helsinki, this article examines how different actors, from the city administration to local stakeholders and young people, perceive and negotiate inclusion and exclusion in public space. Through a multi-method analysis, including background research, expert interviews, and focus groups, we identified four key challenges that define the negotiation of inclusion and exclusion in public space and outline the perspectives, tensions, and policy measures connected to them. Our empirical material underscores how public space is a critical resource that is essential for fostering sustainable and resilient urban futures. Local governments need to be aware of the overlapping and contradictory effects of policies on various groups, and balance between universalistic and particularistic policy measures to address vulnerabilities and diverse community needs effectively. Taking a proactive perspective helps to address future crises while identifying ways of involving the perspectives of diverse stakeholders in such processes.

Keywords

exclusion; inclusion; public space; urban policies; youth

1. Introduction

In the complex fabric of urban landscapes, public spaces stick out as highly visible and exposed arenas that provide valuable insights into contemporary urban challenges and societal dynamics. They allow for mundane encounters between broader social groups, leading to "rubbing along" (Watson, 2006, p. 8) and "forced propinquity" (Clayton, 2009) through close physical proximity. Within urban studies, the question of who owns and appropriates city spaces has been a key issue that is reflected in the broad canon of literature discussing the right to the city (Harvey, 2003; Lefebvre, 1968; Mitchell, 2003). Young people and marginalised groups, such as homeless people, substance abusers, or people with an immigrant background, often face control or displacement within public spaces (Johnstone, 2017; Ye, 2019). Inclusion and exclusion in public space is thus subject to constant negotiation, and struggles over these issues serve as microcosms reflecting larger societal developments and power dynamics that have been amplified by the privatisation, commercialisation, and securitisation of these spaces (Atkinson et al., 2017; Ostanel, 2020).

Most recently, crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, and the accompanying economic crisis have further increased the pressure on public spaces and changed the perceptions and aspirations people have regarding these spaces (Ugolini et al., 2020). In times of (economic) crises, people are more dependent on public spaces, while lockdowns and the flexibility that came along with the introduction of home office have made urban citizens engage in social and recreational activities outdoors more than ever before. This has amplified questions about green justice, sustainability, and inequalities (Venter et al., 2020). The use, allocation, and development of public space is constantly negotiated between a variety of actors, among them the city government and the administration, as well as numerous stakeholders from civil society and businesses to residents, often with distinct needs and demands. Most importantly, not all these actors have the same powers and resources, which adds additional layers of complexity.

Taking the cases of Helsinki and Vienna, this article addresses public space and the way in which it is negotiated from the perspective of inclusion and exclusion. Helsinki and Vienna, both capital cities committed to social housing and welfare policies, offer an interesting comparison due to their differing administrative structures, population sizes, and urban landscapes. While Helsinki is smaller with a lower percentage of foreign residents and abundant green spaces, Vienna with around two million inhabitants is significantly larger, more diverse, and has been confronted with a rapid population growth (see also Section 4). Our empirical data were gathered in 2022 and 2023, covering a period of multiple crises, the intersection of which went along with increased tensions and polarisation that had an impact on public spaces due to changed needs, aspirations, and patterns of usage. Based on an analysis that combines expert interviews and participatory focus groups with diverse actors from the city administration to local stakeholders and young people, we ask the following questions: What do these actors identify as the main challenges regarding public space and the negotiation of inclusion/exclusion in Helsinki and Vienna? What effects do these challenges have, and how are they tackled by the cities? By pursuing a stepwise approach, we were able to refine our understanding progressively, as we started out from the city level and macro factors (like governance structures and policies), to then zoom in on one specific public space in each city, to study these issues in depth. In both cities, we conducted two focus groups, with the first including stakeholders who are active in the public space in question, either professionally (such as social workers, local politicians, or members of local associations) or as resident activists, and the second with young people

living or studying in that area. Hence, through this research design, we were able to contrast the perspective of professional stakeholders with the perspective of young people, whose voice is often underrepresented in politics and research, and who are often marginalised themselves.

In the empirical material, we identified four key challenges related to public space, inclusion, and exclusion, which we labelled as "complex administrative apparatus and governance structures," "availability and distribution of public space," "effects of global crises at the local level," and "security, insecurity, and securitisation." In this study, we contend that a nuanced understanding of the dynamics within public spaces is essential for local governments to address the interplay of inclusion, exclusion, and displacement in public spaces effectively. The findings shed light on public space as a crucial resource, emphasising how its absence or scarcity intensifies societal tensions, as it became evident in the densely populated areas of Vienna, while underlining the need for creative solutions to address local concerns and specific needs. Importantly, this study highlights the balance between universalistic and contextual approaches in addressing inclusion and exclusion in public spaces and the need to involve the perspectives of diverse stakeholders in the negotiation about the use, allocation, distribution, and development of public spaces.

2. Inclusion, Exclusion, and Public Space

The concept of public space in its broadest sense can refer to an abstract public sphere or realm not necessarily tied to physical space (Arendt, 1958). In this study, the focus is on physical public spaces in urban settings, which include both outdoor spaces such as parks, squares, playgrounds, and public thoroughfares (Ye, 2019), and indoor spaces such as libraries, youth centres, and community houses. Common for these spaces is that they are usually publicly owned, non-commercial, open, and accessible (Madanipour, 2023). Public spaces are also experienced and relational (Lefebvre, 2013), symbolically and mentally important (Soja, 2000), and temporarily, historically, and geographically specific. Hence, they are impacted by power structures in society, and they are constantly constructed in interaction between people (Massey, 2005).

Inclusion and exclusion in urban public space have been topical since Lefebvre's (1968) work on the right to the city (see also Harvey, 2003; Mitchell, 2003), and they have been addressed from social, physical, economic, cultural, and political perspectives (Gorgul et al., 2017; Madanipour, 2023). Inclusion covers both the co-presence and togetherness of people, and the incorporation of difference and diversity in shared spaces (Ye, 2019). However, public spaces are also sites of exclusion, marginalisation, and hostility. This can be related to physical factors such as architecture and infrastructure (Bricocoli & Savoldi, 2014), to policing and controlling "appropriate" behaviour (Carlier, 2020), and to fear of violence and harassment (Litscher, 2014). Marginalised groups, such as homeless people (Doherty et al., 2008), substance abusers, or people otherwise challenging the "public order" (Johnstone, 2017), are often controlled in, or displaced from, public spaces. Yet they depend on public spaces since they have only limited access to commercialised spaces and may lack private rooms (Carlier, 2020; Doherty et al., 2008). The same applies to young people, who are often perceived as a "nuisance" in public space and sent away from it, particularly in the case of racialised youth, who may fear violence (Galanakis, 2016), but who also depend on public spaces in their everyday life and social gatherings (Litscher, 2014).

Hence, the governance of public space includes and excludes. Although the role of public authorities is pronounced, particularly in welfare states (e.g., Tunström et al., 2016), the governance of public spaces

consists of "complex interactions among multiple stakeholders whose decisions and activities affect places' qualities" (Zamanifard et al., 2018, p. 155), with a high level of contextual variation. Some policies drive exclusion forward, such as those amplifying gentrification, the securitisation and privatisation of public space, and the prioritisation of tourist and middle-class interests (Johnstone, 2017; Ostanel, 2020). Other measures can increase the inclusivity of public spaces, including planning and housing policies (Tunström et al., 2016), cultural policies (Quinn et al., 2020), and neighbourhood-level projects and participatory processes (Kuokkanen & Palonen, 2018).

Central in these measures is the tension between universalism and particularism. Public space can refer to both general and specific spaces (Madanipour, 2023), and people using it can be approached from a generic perspective, with an emphasis on their common traits, or seen as representatives of specific groups, highlighting difference (Mukhtar-Landgren, 2012; cf. Laclau, 1992). The agency of the users of public space is also crucial in processes of inclusion and exclusion, as they can protest against public policies (e.g., Carlier, 2020; Németh, 2006) or create proactive forms of "do-it-yourself urbanism" (Iveson, 2013; see also Certomà et al., 2020). Altogether, public space and its use are constantly being negotiated between various actors (e.g., Fenster, 2006; Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, 2009).

We aim to contribute to the body of research presented above by addressing the challenges related to public space, inclusion, and exclusion in two empirical contexts of European welfare states. In the analysis, we acknowledge the manifold stakeholders and the complex processes of negotiation related to inclusion, exclusion, and public space, as well as the tension between universalism and particularism. As our empirical data were gathered during an era of several overlapping crises, we also briefly address their impact.

3. Methods and Data

For this study, we employed a stepwise mixed-methods approach that integrates various data sources and in which each step is built on the previous one. First, the Helsinki and Vienna teams undertook background research and a literature review to establish the context, identify interviewees, and develop the interview guidelines. Second, both teams conducted semi-structured expert interviews (seven in Vienna and eight in Helsinki, see table A in the Supplementary File), which lasted between one and two hours and covered questions related to inclusion and exclusion in public space, key actors, contested and best-practice areas, as well as privatisation, securitisation, and urban transformations. Based on these interviews, we selected public spaces for in-depth case studies—the third step in our research—followed by two participatory focus group sessions and participatory observations in each chosen area. For the focus groups, we used a game card approach to include interactive elements into the research design. The first focus group consisted of stakeholders who were associated with that space by work or voluntary activism, and the second group comprised young people frequently using the public space, residing, or studying in the area (see table B in the Supplementary File). For the first focus group, we created two sets of thematic cards labelled "space and locality" and "actors and processes," along with "open cards," "challenge cards," and "solution cards," allowing participants to introduce new themes, challenges, and solutions. In the second focus group, we completed the cards with the additional theme of "inclusion and exclusion." All interviews and focus groups were conducted in the respective national languages and were recorded for transcription purposes.

Our analytical approach was inspired by interpretive policy analysis, which is an umbrella concept for qualitative, holistic, and interpretive analyses of policy phenomena (Wagenaar, 2011; Yanow, 2000). This kind of analysis is particularly suitable for complex policy fields encompassing several types of actors, as it acknowledges the heterogeneity of public policies and combines policy actors' experiences and self-interpretations with the researchers' own interpretations (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Wagenaar, 2011). Our analysis was based on an inductive and thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022), through which we first read the material as a whole and identified challenges related to public space, inclusion, and exclusion, and then synthesised the challenges we had identified into four key challenges that covered some of the minor challenges, yet acknowledging the differences between the cities and between the ways in which the various research participants perceived them.

The Vienna team was granted approval by the Ethics Board of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The University of Helsinki did not require an ethical review, but the Helsinki team was granted research permission by the City of Helsinki for gathering data about its employees. We used consent forms and informed all research participants about the gathering and use of data. The interactive game cards developed for the focus groups were uploaded in the Open Science Framework repository (see Data Availability section), serving as a resource for researchers and practitioners alike.

4. Setting the Scene: Helsinki and Vienna

Helsinki and Vienna provide interesting cases for comparison: They are growing capital cities that follow a welfare state tradition with a strong commitment to social housing (Kadi & Lilius, 2022) and extensive planning and social policies aimed at preventing socio-spatial segregation and promoting social cohesion. Both cities are renowned for their high quality of life. Although Finland and Austria belong to different types of welfare regimes ("social democratic" and "corporatist," respectively; Esping-Andersen, 1990), both have comparatively liberal social policies and social engineering is pronounced towards social equality. However, both cities are currently confronted with urban transformations, which have significantly impacted various policy areas (Hewidy, 2021; Kazepov & Verwiebe, 2021; Novy et al., 2001; Tunström et al., 2016).

Both Helsinki and Vienna have complex administrative and decision-making structures involving specialised sectors and numerous actors, but their specific configurations differ. Helsinki has recently merged previously more specialised administrative units and introduced a new model of resident participation (discussed in more detail in Section 5). Helsinki does not have any district-level administration or regional-level governance structures. Vienna, as both capital city and federal state, operates with dual functions and powers that are embedded within the federal structure of Austria. In addition, the city is divided into 23 districts, each of which has an elected political leader and a district assembly.

The two cities furthermore differ significantly regarding their size and population diversity. Helsinki is significantly smaller than Vienna with around 660,000 inhabitants, reaching one million with neighbouring municipalities. Vienna has grown by 500,000 inhabitants since the 1990s and, today, is a truly super-diverse city of two million people that is challenged by this fast population growth. In 2023, 44% of the resident population was of foreign origin (foreign nationality and/or born abroad; Stadt Wien – Integration und Diversität, 2023), whereas in Helsinki, 10.3% of the population had a foreign nationality and 17.3% a mother tongue other than the national languages in 2022 (Mäki & Sinkko, 2022).

A further difference is evident in the urban landscapes, with Helsinki possessing large green areas throughout the whole urban area, while Vienna grapples with a lack of public spaces in the inner districts. Although around 50% of Vienna's urban area consists of green spaces (including woods and agricultural land), not all inhabitants have easy access to green areas, particularly those living in densely built-up areas. Connected to the question of urban green spaces are the climatic conditions, with Helsinki's colder temperatures and shorter daylight hours in winter necessitating more indoor public facilities than in Vienna.

As outlined in our methodological approach, we focused in-depth on a specific public space in each city. In Helsinki, this was Maunula House, a multifunctional community hub in a typical neighbourhood in northern Helsinki, featuring a library, a youth centre, adult education facilities, and a cultural venue. It was collaboratively planned with residents and municipal officials, and now serves as a meeting point for various user groups, irrespective of weather conditions. In Vienna, we chose Reumannplatz, a typical public space in the densely populated area in the 10th district, where up to 60% of residents hold foreign citizenship. The square's recent redesign involved multiple stakeholders, including municipal departments, social workers, planners, local initiatives, and citizens. Reumannplatz is often problematised and politicised in media and political discourse, and it has frequently been a place for political assembly (see also Haselbacher & Reeger, 2024).

5. Empirical Analysis: Insights Into Contemporary Urban Challenges

In this section, we delve into the complex dynamics that define the negotiation of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces by outlining the contemporary challenges we found in the empirical material. The plurality of voices included in our study provides divergent perspectives on the multifaceted nature of negotiations over public spaces. Public spaces are never neutral, but inclusion and exclusion are intrinsically linked. Or, as one interviewee in Vienna stated: "From a critical perspective, spaces are always exclusionary, regardless of how they are created or how they are structured. The moment I take exclusion out of the picture and only look at inclusion, then I am excluding" (EI_Vienna_5). In the following, we will give empirical insights into these dynamics that influence the multi-sectoral policy field of public spaces.

5.1. Complex Administrative Apparatus and Governance Structures

While comprehensive urban planning strategies are central to the regulation and governance of public spaces, a complex and differentiated administrative apparatus can slow down the implementation of innovative ideas. Despite the comparatively inclusive approach of Helsinki and Vienna to public space, our expert interviews and focus groups revealed diverse views that were critical of the administrative apparatus. In Vienna, this concerned the complex bureaucracy, a lack of transparency in the multi-tiered decision-making processes, and inconsistent citizen participation (see also Ahn et al., 2023; Novy & Hammer, 2007). In Helsinki, the sectorised administration, the high level of regulation, and long planning processes were identified as challenges. These characteristics made it difficult for residents to become active and were perceived as frustrating.

In Helsinki, the interviewees talked about the regular work of the municipal administration in service provision, investment in public space, and residential policies of social mixing in a positive tone, and saw that the political parties in a municipality led by the National Coalition, Greens, and Social Democrats had a joint understanding about the big issues in the city. However, young people in particular saw the city as a

"bigger instance" with its own internal logic that they perceived as difficult to influence. In Vienna, the multi-level governance structure results in notable variations regarding public space policies and local governance arrangements. The participants in focus group 1 noted that local governance in the case study area was perceived as particularly well-functioning, which was not the case in other districts, where local politics refrain from including multiple stakeholders in policy processes. Several interviewees in Vienna stated that the intricacies of the administration, which involve up to 23 different municipal departments that are concerned with planning, supervising, and maintaining public spaces, slowed down and complicated processes.

Social issues have been partially incorporated into planning agendas in Vienna. Interviewees lauded the city's mission statement "social work in public spaces," which frames public space as a social space with political significance, in which the displacement of groups who are particularly dependent on it should be avoided. In practice, economic and political interests frequently challenge such inclusionary stances that would cater to the needs of marginalised groups, leading to continuous negotiations and policy outcomes that deviate from the original objectives.

The municipal officials interviewed in Helsinki mentioned the recent administrative reform, which streamlined the previously more specialised municipal administration and introduced a new model for resident participation. The participation model introduced local participation coordinators working in the districts with the residents, mainstreamed a small-scale form of participatory budgeting in the development of public spaces, required that each of the municipal units produces a participation plan, and institutionalised the (partly previously existing) councils for youth, elderly, and disabled people. So far, the most successful cases of resident involvement have nevertheless been connected to the development of specific public spaces such as libraries or multi-purpose spaces, with adequate resources and engaged administrative representatives across sectoral borders (see also Kuokkanen & Palonen, 2018). Unlike Vienna, Helsinki lacks district-level administration, and some of the interviewees were willing to increase the decision-making capacities of the districts. An alternative solution to an institutionalised model proposed by some interviewees would include more flexible collaboration between municipal units and stakeholders such as associations, companies, and residents in neighbourhoods, or in specific public spaces.

In Vienna, despite efforts to incorporate bottom-up initiatives and to encourage citizen involvement, policymaking is predominantly top-down. It was noted by some of the interviewees and the focus group participants that there is little flexibility on the part of the city to leave previous policy paths and move beyond individual innovative pilot projects. Conflicts over policies regarding the design of public spaces have become particularly apparent in relation to climate adaptation, in which young people feel that their voices are unheard, and that the city's measures do not go far enough.

Furthermore, in both Helsinki and Vienna, expert interviewees and focus group participants noted that marginalised groups are seldom actively involved in the participatory processes. It is predominantly the white, often more affluent groups, representing what was termed the "usual suspects" (EI_Vienna_2), that participate in open planning procedures. In some cases, social space analyses were carried out during planning procedures to map the needs of distinct groups (for Reumannplatz see Gruber & Jauschneg, 2016). In the case study area in Vienna, this led to the creation of niches and corners that allow several groups to use the space simultaneously. However, innovative approaches to incorporate such diverse perspectives in

the planning policies are insufficient in both cities, despite the existence of some participatory planning procedures and the introduction of the new participation model in Helsinki.

5.2. Availability and Distribution of Public Space

The second challenge concerns the availability and distribution of public spaces, which determines their accessibility to all members of society, regardless of physical ability, socio-economic status, age, gender, or other factors. Helsinki and Vienna have low levels of residential segregation in international comparison, which is connected to targeted social housing policies (see Kadi & Lilius, 2022), but there are nevertheless notable disparities between certain neighbourhoods and districts, which limit access to recreational areas for marginalised communities, and perpetuate feelings of social injustice.

In Helsinki, the interviewees positively highlighted the provision of public services, the allocation of green areas and indoor spaces such as youth centres and libraries throughout the city, in addition to an extensive public transport network. Yet, economically deprived populations tend to be concentrated in the eastern and north-eastern suburbs, where the level of services is lower than in the city centre, and people did not prove to be as mobile as was anticipated by the administration. In parallel with such universal policies, the city also conducts targeted measures to worse-off areas and fixed-term projects in the suburbs. The Helsinki interviewees saw that the combination of public and private services (such as libraries situated in shopping centres) could be positive, as the services could be reached more easily. Some of the municipal officials also stressed that collaboration between public, commercial, and civil society actors could make commercial spaces more accessible for young people. In the quote below, the interview partner recounts how an association in youth work, in which the interviewee had previously worked, initiated a systematic cooperation with the biggest shopping centres:

> And big shopping centre operators like this are also starting to pay attention to how [the shopping centre] can be made into a comfortable space for young people as well. I remember having a conversation with one of the shopping centre bosses when a Finnish operator acted really badly, as they started to evict young people from their space, without realising that they were evicting their future customers at the same time. It's kind of like social dialogue all the time. (EI_Helsinki_1)

In Vienna, due to population growth and urban densification, some public spaces and parks have become overcrowded and overused (see also Arnberger, 2012). An interviewee described this as follows: "It is simply that more people use public spaces….On the one hand, we have the demographic component, we have the component of multiple crises, we have people in cramped living conditions, who depend on those spaces" (EI_Vienna_1). Added to the shortage of public spaces in the inner parts of the city, there is also a need to increase public infrastructure and services (like additional rubbish bins or public toilets, with the latter being scarce in Vienna). Furthermore, the accessibility of public green spaces is marred by an uneven distribution that reflects socio-economic inequalities; the most affluent residential areas are located on the outskirts (characterised by large belts of greenery), as well as in the city centre, with prestigious parks and sites of cultural heritage, whereas the densely built-up residential zones face the problem of a pronounced scarcity of green spaces. The city has responded, among other things, by creating so-called micro spaces (*Mikrofreiräume*, e.g., parklets); however, this cannot level out such disparities.

In both cities, places where young people feel welcome and comfortable are limited, because they are either perceived to be a nuisance, or they feel uncomfortable due to the presence of other user groups, as our younger focus group members recounted. Those who can afford it, take to commercially used places for leisure activities, like cafés or the cinema, or to semi-public spaces like shopping malls, or they retreat to private spaces. In Helsinki, both the interviewees and the focus group participants highlighted the importance of consumption-free spaces, and the role of youth centres, particularly in the suburbs, illustrated by the following quote:

> [In an eastern Helsinki suburb], there wasn't really anywhere to go after school for young people except the youth centre if you didn't have money for the bus to visit a public space somewhere else.…In central and southern Helsinki, it's so easy for young people because everything is immediately accessible. (EI_Helsinki_3)

The focus group participants in both cities critically reflected on the different uses and functions of public space for various user groups (e.g., youth, substance abusers, ethnic and linguistic minorities, people in rental versus owned housing) and saw that certain spaces were often "reserved" for specific groups. These different usages can lead to tensions and conflicts and may result in the displacement of other groups. In Vienna, several measures have been aimed at tackling such conflicts operating at the interface of social work and community management. At the district level, so-called Fairplay teams can be established locally, working to resolve such conflicts over public spaces and their usage. In addition, during the pandemic, so-called awareness teams were created to accompany nighttime activities in public spaces, aiming to mitigate noise disturbances and ensuring the safety and well-being of residents and people partying alike.

5.3. The Effects of Global Crises at the Local Level

Global crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, or the climate crisis have profound ramifications at the local level, impacting the social, economic, and environmental fabric of local communities. These crises manifest in public spaces, as they can become arenas of protest, and undergo shifts in usage patterns, sometimes being neglected, sometimes being increasingly frequented. This raises the question of whether these spaces and public policies are capable of adapting to the challenges posed by such crises.

In Vienna, the multiple crises have increased the already imminent pressure on public spaces; the Covid-19 pandemic and the inflation connected to the war in Ukraine have especially changed the role of public spaces, rendering commercial spaces less accessible. Inequalities and poverty have become more pronounced and visible against this backdrop. The pandemic itself acted as a catalyst for societal polarisation, amplifying societal divisions and creating a new divide through the introduction of compulsory health measures, visibly manifested through mask-wearing behaviours. The initial stringent lockdowns, culminating in the closure of parks, heightened the awareness of public spaces to people who had never thought about this issue before, as the pandemic transformed them into scarce commodities during periods of enforced confinement. People spent more time outside, and new user groups took to public spaces. As one interviewee described it:

> We have groups who didn't use public spaces and then, during the pandemic, suddenly moved their home office to the park and drank Prosecco but didn't understand why there might be a homeless person drinking beer on the bench next to them. (EI_Vienna_1)

The interviewees and focus group participants in Helsinki discussed the effects of global crises less often than those in Vienna. One municipal official saw that elderly people had "covid debt" and needed to be encouraged to come back to public spaces (EI_Helsinki_1). Young people reminisced about the negative reactions towards them when they met in public spaces during the pandemic but saw that the period made their neighbourhood more important than before. The interviewees saw that the pandemic and the war in Ukraine had augmented polarisation. This, together with climate activism, was visible in public space in the form of protests. One pension-age focus group participant suggested that public spaces such as libraries could have experiments, plays, or audiovisual content on past and future crises to increase understanding about them.

Having grown up during the pandemic and spending large parts of the earlier years of high school at home due to lockdowns, the youth in Vienna were highly aware of these crises, illustrated by the following quotes from the youth focus group:

> P1: Generally, the inflation has increased poverty, and poor families struggle even more. I think that's visible here and there. I mean, these [crises] have affected us all in different ways. And we are aware of that.
>
> P2: It's really hard to ignore these topics; everyone is affected.
>
> P3: I think the effects are not only financial; the pandemic also had severe effects on mental health. For example, my panic attacks developed during the pandemic.

Although the City of Vienna acknowledges the urgency of climate adaptation measures, our study revealed a clear generational gap, as it was solely the young participants who continuously emphasised the importance of climate adaptation measures such as increased greenery and shading in public spaces. In Vienna, heatwaves will exacerbate the existing shortage of public space and will create new exclusions and displacements. Concepts need to be developed on how to deal with such issues, as this has an impact on user groups and on those working in public space. In Helsinki, the young focus group participants saw the climate crisis as a "big issue" at the global level, separate from the small-scale issues usually addressed by the actors in their neighbourhood.

5.4. Security, Insecurity, and Securitisation

In an international comparison, both Helsinki and Vienna are relatively safe cities, also stressed in the interviews. In Vienna, the terror attack of 2022 and developments of the past years have nevertheless prompted the implementation of security and surveillance measures. The topic of security is often exploited in populist discourse, whereby certain neighbourhoods are framed as being inherently unsafe, which is often intertwined with an anti-immigrant discourse, perpetuating racist narratives. In Helsinki, incidents of youth violence and street gangs have been an issue in the past few years, and have provoked an intense media debate. As the following quote shows, gangs were also seen as a failure in social inclusion:

> I feel irritated that today some people are still of the opinion that we don't have gangs…wake up, for God's sake; now quite quickly we should undertake some corrective measures in the case of youth remaining outside society, who feel this sense of exclusion. Those who then search for acceptance and their own role and place from somewhere else. (EI_Helsinki_1)

In Vienna, the interviewees highlighted that it is mostly subjective feelings of (in)security and not actual crime rates that are decisive in whether public spaces are considered to be safe or not. Such subjective feelings of insecurity are often connected to issues like cleanliness, which is why one of our interviewees proposed that the urban competence of residents should be strengthened, stating that "safety and cleanliness are often mixed up" (EI_Vienna_3). Security measures restrict individuals' rights and freedoms in public spaces and one criticism was that such measures disproportionately target certain groups, like people who are read as Muslims, people who consume drugs, or people who are homeless, perpetuating their exclusion and displacement.

A notable tension exists between suppressive security measures, such as surveillance or safety zones, and softer approaches like social work. The interviewees in Helsinki had divided opinions about the increasing use of CCTV, many of them presenting relatively positive or neutral views, particularly when it was used in "anonymous" places like the commercial city centre. However, many highlighted the benefits of "softer" measures and the importance of community work in creating safe public spaces in residential areas. In Vienna, the implementation of security measures like the institution of safety zones and alcohol bans in certain public spaces faced substantial criticism from participants in focus group 1, depicted by the following quotes:

> P1: We also witnessed that the problem was not solved, but simply moved. At Reumannplatz they reacted by putting security staff there….I think they even removed benches?
>
> P2: Yes, that's a good example of how problems are solved: "We have a problem with the youth, so we remove the benches, then they won't be here anymore."

The young focus group participants in Vienna had contrasting opinions and even wished for tougher security measures and increased police presence, as the following quote outlines: "On the side of that café, they could open a little police station, I think that would discourage people from doing anything because they'd see 'Ah, there's the police.'" In Vienna, young female participants voiced strong grievances about feeling insecure in certain public spaces due to the presence of groups of men and negative experiences of catcalling and harassment, saying that such experiences made them withdraw from using those spaces.

In Helsinki, the expert interviewees stressed both the humanity of the local police, and the violence used by some private security guards against young people, as well as the racism met by visible ethnic minorities in public space. Moreover, they underlined the need to find a balance between unsupervised spaces and social control, particularly in the case of youth. Young people in both cities mentioned being uncomfortable with drug and alcohol users in public spaces, although the young people in Helsinki said that they felt relatively safe with a group of alcohol users regularly sitting in front of Maunula House. In Helsinki, the young people stressed the differences between the feelings of safety among children in rental and owned housing, mainly due to substance abuse in the yards of the rental houses and in the public spaces surrounding them, illustrated by the following quote from a focus group participant:

> No one was ever invited to the Heka [municipal rental houses] yard because there was [somebody] with a syringe or with a can of beer; we were then at the playground, or we were at the schoolyard at the time. The need for public space was emphasized.

6. Discussion: Universalism, Particularism, and the Complexities of Inclusion

Helsinki and Vienna are both embedded in European welfare state regimes, although they represent different models (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Although the cities have extensive welfare policies and recognise the importance of public spaces for social cohesion, the comparison revealed both similarities and differences. In both cities, the administrative structures were an issue, albeit for different reasons. In the case of Vienna, the multi-level system and historically evolved complex bureaucratic structures tend to slow down and complicate processes, making it difficult to create and implement policy measures ad hoc. The interviewees and focus group participants in Helsinki perceived that it was difficult to influence the administrative structures, despite reforms such as the new participatory model. The availability of and access to public space was another theme that was yet more pronounced in Vienna compared to Helsinki, as public space is scarcer in the inner and more densely populated parts of the city, which was amplified through rapid urban development. In Helsinki, the Nordic weather puts pressure for indoor public spaces to be provided in the winter, and the city's current planning policies affect the local green spaces, particularly important during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Hence, the temporal, historical, and geographical contexts of specific spaces impact how they are experienced, and influence the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in a locality (see Lefebvre, 2013; Madanipour, 2023).

Young people rely on public spaces in their daily lives (Litscher, 2014), as these spaces provide them with autonomous environments for social interaction, where they can connect with peers and escape the supervision of family or guardians. In both cities, young people's access to public spaces was partially contested. The focus group participants at Maunula House and Reumannplatz narrated how their access to these spaces differed according to neighbourhood, gender, and social background. Many of the young participants, especially the female ones, preferred to take to commercially used spaces, or to go to the inner and more affluent parts of the city, which requires economic resources and mobility. This underscores the importance of having non-commercial public spaces in all parts of the city, both indoor and outdoor, to provide young people with opportunities for social and leisure activities, irrespective of their social and economic background and weather conditions. Furthermore, both cities rarely involve young people in participatory planning processes, which is why the youth perspective is often missing. Young people are mostly mentioned in relation to certain problematic aspects, such as party culture, noise, or youth gangs. Hence, while children are integrated into the urban fabric through designated playgrounds, teenagers and young adults are barely represented in urban landscapes. Instead, they are often viewed as a nuisance when occupying public spaces (Galanakis, 2016). Finally, the issue of security and securitisation was tension-laden, and controversially discussed. While feeling safe in public space was important for all the interviewees and focus group participants, they had differing opinions about camera surveillance and police presence. In the case of young people, a balance between control and free spaces in which to hang out was perceived as being important. However, security was also gendered, particularly in the case of Vienna, where participants withdrew from using certain spaces due to negative experiences and the fear of being harassed, but it was also a matter of class, as young people in Helsinki highlighted differing feelings of safety between children in owned and rental housing.

As noted above, marginalised groups frequently face control or displacement in public spaces (Johnstone, 2017; Ye, 2019). Although the Helsinki and Vienna cases showed co-presence of people from different backgrounds in shared spaces, they also revealed tensions and processes of exclusion (e.g., Lefebvre, 1968; Watson, 2006) that result in the constant negotiation of public spaces (Fenster, 2006; Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, 2009). Vienna and the Reumannplatz case study exemplify how multiple crises increase tensions between different user groups, resulting in a significant increase in control over specific groups that are framed as undesirable, along with various mechanisms of displacement. Our findings highlight the importance of public space as a crucial but often scarce resource, that becomes increasingly contested as its availability diminishes, underscoring the need for policymakers to invest in it. Administering public space should not be a top-down process but involve residents and users of various ages and diverse backgrounds, leaving room for bottom-up uses of the space (Iveson, 2013). In this study, we were able to incorporate the perspective of young people, who are partially marginalised, but we did not directly reach the most excluded groups. However, such a research approach which incorporates different perspectives has proven fruitful for making contradictory effects of policies visible and diverging needs more tangible. In order to effectively counteract the further exclusion of groups and individuals, policymakers should aim for creative approaches that allow for the incorporation of the diverse perspectives of (marginalised and vulnerable) user groups, even though they might refrain from taking part in participatory planning processes.

The policies of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces are intricately connected to the tension between universalistic and particularistic policy measures (Laclau, 1992; Madanipour, 2023; Mukhtar-Landgren, 2012), which involves balancing the overarching goal of promoting inclusivity and equity for all with targeted interventions to address specific needs and challenges. While the overall approach of the cities is mostly universalistic, partly due to their welfare state contexts, zooming in on specific places reveals differences in resource allocation, infrastructure, and services between neighbourhoods. The challenges stemming from the tension between universalism and particularism have implications for the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in public spaces. Our study showed that the requirements of inclusive, accessible, and safe public spaces are not identical for all user groups and providing inclusive spaces for certain groups can inadvertently exclude or lead to the displacement of others (cf. Madanipour, 2023). This raises critical questions about potential trade-offs between inclusion and exclusion and emphasises the acknowledgement of difference and the need for incorporating diverse perspectives when negotiating the use, allocation, and development of public space.

Recent crises have increased the pressure on public spaces and the tensions related to them, and will continue to do so, especially regarding the climate topic. Interestingly, the issue of climate change emerged as one of the most pressing issues regarding public spaces for the youth focus group participants, particularly in Vienna, while it was only briefly, if at all, addressed by other research participants and interviewees. Navigating future crises would imply a more proactive form of policymaking, anticipating future challenges and implementing preventative measures (DeLeo, 2016). Reactive policymaking tends to respond to immediate crises and policy issues as they become apparent, often from a particularistic perspective. It bears the risk of addressing symptoms rather than underlying systemic issues, potentially leading to unintended consequences such as the further marginalisation of certain groups. Furthermore, some challenges stemming from global crises extend beyond local capacities.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to address the specific challenges Helsinki and Vienna face regarding public space and the negotiation of inclusion/exclusion according to the views of city officials, stakeholders, and young people. Moreover, we asked what effects arose from these challenges, and how they were tackled by the cities. Our findings highlighted the complex administrative apparatus and governance structures, the availability and distribution of public spaces, the effects of global crises at the local level, and controversies related to policies and feelings of (in)security. The impact of such crises becomes more pronounced the scarcer public space is, as seen in the differences in how these issues were discussed in Helsinki and Vienna. Our findings revealed similarities and differences between the cities, with many of the challenges currently being slightly more pronounced in Vienna, where easily accessible public space in the inner city is scarcer, and migration-related diversity and urban growth are more dynamic than in Helsinki. Our research highlights the complex dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the right to the city, paying particular attention to the perspective of young people. Local governments need to be aware of the overlapping and contradictory effects of policies on various groups and balance between universalistic and particularistic policy measures, while identifying ways in which to involve the perspectives of diverse user groups in the negotiation about the use, allocation, and development of public space. Crises exacerbate the tensions related to public space, which requires a more proactive governance approach for tackling future crises. In future research, the topics above could be analysed with a broader variety of urban contexts, for instance from different welfare state traditions. Moreover, the delimitation of the study to one of the themes analysed in the current article would provide a more in-depth perspective on the phenomenon.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The interactive game cards developed for the focus group workshops are available in the Open Science Framework repository (https://osf.io/s4vu7 and https://osf.io/9wxz3).

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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