

Toward a knowledge exchange framework for community centers: the case of Zurich

A report on the outcomes of the Crochet knowledge exchange project between Switzerland and Croatia on the topic of Community centers, summarizing the exchanges during the research visit in Zurich and proposing a research framework for future collaborations on the topic.



Crochet
SOCIAL INNOVATIONS EXCHANGE

Toward a knowledge exchange framework for community centers: the case of Zurich

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1. Overview

Truly public space in cities is shrinking and community centers represent one of the few options for citizens to claim their right to the city. They can be spaces for socialization, deliberation, art, culture, solidarity, collective awareness, and more.

Better understanding how such spaces can be created and managed in a way that is inclusive, democratic, and resilient, among other values, can play a key role in their proliferation and survival, which is challenged during the corona crisis.

In the context of the Crochet project, NetHood with the support of INURA Zurich Institute provided an overview of community spaces in Zurich through guided visits to spaces, including roundtables with key actors, that showcase different examples on what was identified as the most important dimension for our guests: different types of relationships between the community center organization and the city. The interest in this dimension comes from the fact that in Croatia there is high interest and potential for the development of new public-civic partnerships based on previous experience from similar models of community centers like Pogon in Zagreb or Rojc in Pula.

During the Crochet visits in Zurich, we talked with key people in selected community centers that represent a wide range of approaches in terms of relationships with the city (from city-run projects to projects that are self-organized in principle, but which have nevertheless different types of dependence from the city's policies and/or support. We discussed with them this and other important aspects of their design and operation.

Based on these discussions and our own experiences, we identified three key design variables that affect the character and eventually the success of all community centers: **identity, (economic) sustainability, and governance**. Most importantly, these design variables have certain underlying values, which are subject to challenges that need to be constantly addressed since they are not always to sustain despite the good intentions.

For example, openness and inclusivity are very often a key value promoted through a space's identity reflected in its communication and access rules, but which can be affected by the history, the main actors involved, dominant usages, news articles, and more. Similarly, sustainability often depends on external support and funding which limits the freedom and self-determination in shaping the character of a space over time, which then could also affect its openness and inclusivity. Finally, decision-making processes even if truly democratic, e.g., when governance is based on regular assemblies and consensus, can be affected by power asymmetries that are formed over time because of imbalances in engagement, time availability, skills, and more.

In this report we provide a short overview of the selected community centers and interesting points made during the guided visits. Based on the knowledge produced during the project we propose a framework for deeper research into the design of community centers. More specifically, we summarize the description of the selected Zurich's community centers, Rote Fabrik, Zürcher Gemeinschaftszentren, youth cultural centre Dynamo, Stadionbrache, Parkplatz, and L200, through a comparative table around the three key identified dimensions of its design (identity, sustainability, and governance). We also propose a draft questionnaire for designers, organizers, managers of community centers, that could help us in future research to dig deeper into the subtle factors that need to be taken into account by those involved in the creation or further development of community centers in European cities.

We also provide two supplementary documents whose writing was partially supported by the Crochet project: two articles published in the latest issue of the Derive magazine on "Democratic Spaces". The first one provides a more in depth analysis and historical perspective of the scene of Free Spaces in Zurich, by Philipp Klaus (Appendix A). The second is a detailed description of the recently created L200 space in comparison with other similar spaces in Spain (La Casa Invisible), Italy (L' Asilo), and Greece (Parko Navarinou), by Panayotis Antoniadis et al (Appendix B).

Finally, Appendix C is a translation of a recent news article on a new ambitious project that started in Zurich toward the end of the Crochet project, which is of great interest for our Croatian partners: a huge space of approximately 1000 square meters, the old central laundry (Zentralwäscherei), has been offered by the City as a "temporary use" (until 2026, at least) to an association of collectives and individuals, "artists, musicians, DJs, hobby gardeners, cooks, gastro-people, urbanists, architects, social workers, theatre makers, handicraftsmen, activists, utopians, enthusiasts, doers and shakers". (Appendix C)

The stated vision of Zentralwäscherei seems familiar: "to break out of the bubble, bring different things together and diversity into the room [...] to act across generations and involve the neighbourhood and its actors." (Appendix C). The experience from L200, which shares the same vision and has successfully implemented it in its 2.5 years of operation, but on a much smaller scale might prove useful, and the same for similar projects in Croatia like Pogon and Rojc. Then observing the evolution of the Zentralwäscherei will provide useful lessons for new projects in Croatia and so on. Knowledge exchange is a continuous process and the Crochet project was only a first step that can be extended to include more cases across Europe and more actors involved in the process.

2. Introduction to selected community centers in Zurich: the Crochet guided visits

There are mainly three models of Community / Cultural / Socio-cultural Centres in Zurich based on their scale, which plays an important role for understanding the details behind their key characteristics and design choices.

A. Big Centres

These are cultural centres like Rote Fabrik and Dynamo (cultural youth centre), which were selected for our guided visits, with tremendous offers of cultural activities and huge numbers of visitors. Obviously, also the budgets are big. Another notable big centre to mention is the Kochareal, a squat with a lot of activities, parties, bicycle-repair, solidarity events etc. etc. Since 1990 Zurich has a policy of tolerance towards squats. The use of empty areas and building is tolerated until a permission of construction for the owner enters into force - the next day construction can start. If the squatters have not left the area by then they are evicted.

B. Medium Centres

Also with big budgets we find the Community centers with tasks of socio-cultural activities and neighbourhood outreach. They employ quite big numbers of employees, mainly social workers, at the same time many people, mostly from the neighbourhood of the respective centres, engage on a voluntary basis. Their decentralised geographical structure tries to cover all of the city's boroughs. There are mainly two organisations of medium community centers: 1. The municipal Quartiertreff, Jugendtreff and Quartierzentrum and 2. The Gemeinschaftszentren (GZ) of the foundation Zürcher Gemeinschaftszentren ZGZ) mainly funded by public money. In the context of Crochet we visited the GZ Oerlikon and had the chance to talk both to the manager of GZ Oerlikon and the ZGZ foundation.

C. Small Centres

Most of these centres are bottom-up initiatives, lots of them temporary uses. They have an important impact on the surrounding neighbourhoods as meeting places, gardening, experimenting. For the Crochet visit we chose to visit three of them Parkplatz, L200, Stadionbrache, because of the interesting similarities and differences. There is quite a tradition of self-run spaces and also a (sometimes) intense discussion on "free spaces". There are (more or less always) about 30 squatted places in the city (see Appendix A).

In the following we provide a short description of the selected case studies focusing on the three identified dimensions, and highlighting a few interesting points that were raised during the discussion between their representatives and the Crochet team and guests from Croatia.

2.1 Rote Fabrik - <https://rotefabrik.ch/>

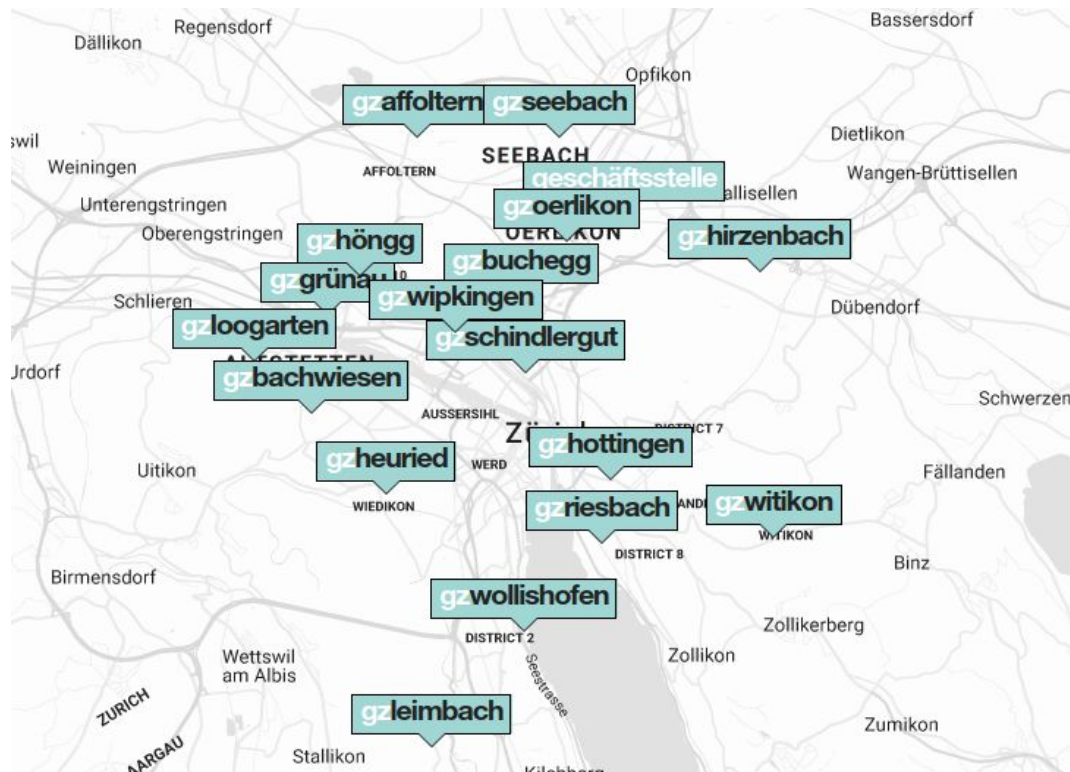


Rote Fabrik is a sort of “public-civic” partnership for a big cultural center, an “iconic” place for the 80s movement (“Züri brännt”). Today the strong dependence on the city undermining its iconic character as a place of independence and revolts generates criticism of various forms. Different non-profit organizations are given different parts of the area to manage. The cultural activities are organized by IGRF, a “Verein” (association) whose members are different associations responsible for different parts of the area, with an annual budget of approximately 5 million Swiss francs. Half of it is sponsored by the city. Governance takes part through the “Koordinationskomitee” (27 groups, divided in 3 departments), and there is also an overall assembly of all Associations involved but which is mostly administrative and the individual departments enjoy significant freedom.



Kyros Kikos also confessed that while in general, and in principle, significant freedom is given for the formation of the programme, there is sometimes pressure on avoiding radical political messages and promoting specific types of usages (e.g. theatre) according to high level strategic decisions of the City. The board of the exhibition space Shedhalle was recently resigned because of such pressures.

2.2. ZGZ - Stiftung Gemeinschafts Zentren Zürich - <https://gz-zh.ch/>



ZGZ are city-supported community centers, one per district (more or less), managed through a private, non-profit foundation with a clear hierarchical structure. The ZGZ foundation functions as an umbrella organization which coordinates the individual community centres in the different neighbourhoods, “relatively autonomously from the city”. [2] The 17 centers are given 6 main performance indicators and they report yearly on them. Each center has its own contract with the city for work, schedule and the buildings. The foundation distributes a total budget of around 17 million CHF per year. Additional income from priced activities goes to the center (approx. 20% of income is coming from renting to groups and activities), 80% of the budget is spent on salaries. GZ Oerlikon, the one we visited has a 6 year contract with the city, which makes budget planning rather comfortable.



The history of GZ goes back to 1954 when the first GZ was founded with an aim to provide activities for the children. Nowadays 170 people are employed within GZ having predominantly a fixed working contract, GZ also have approx. 60 volunteers. While there is still special care for children GZ are hosting a wide range of more or less self-organized activities, like cultural and social exchange through activities and usage of common space, informal education, empowering and developing skills (arts, crafts), practical knowledge for neighbourhood residents. They are “for everyone in Zurich”. [1]



During the discussion with the CEO of the ZGZ foundation Sabine Schenk and the CEO of GZ Oerlikon (Leonie Schüssler), the focus lied in understanding in more detail the relationships between ZGZ and the individual GZs and it was made clear that the organizational hierarchy corresponds to a similar decision-power hierarchy. For example, when radical groups are asking to use the space, there is consultation upwards in the hierarchy, sometimes all the way to the city, in order to avoid situations like a recent “shit storm” caused by the revelation that the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland has been organising “secretly” events for two years in one of the GZs. [3]

2.3 Dynamo - <https://www.dynamo.ch/>



The Dynamo youth center is run directly by the city's administration and government with city employees. In the early 1980ies. In the past it was boycotted because it was seen as a trojan horse for the demolition of an independent youth center, while its location was not so attractive as it is today, next to the Limmat river a key destination in the city especially in summer time. It acts also as a manager of temporary uses across the city (Raumboerse).

Special focus is given on music concerts (a well-known scene for subcultures), theatre, dance, and making (metal, knitting, carving, printing). Pricing scheme encourages use by people until 28 years old. E.g., using the metal workshop costs 10 CHF per day for <28 years, and 10 CHF / hour for > 28 years. Rooms are also available for courses, meetings and other activities which are charged depending on the use (e.g., for non-profit activities free access to the rooms is often provided upon request).



During the guided visit by Leonie Haab, head of work area and theatre, our guests were impressed by the creative and engaged attitude that is not often observed in civil servants in Croatia. She added to the main description of the project an interesting dimension. Although a highly institutionalized space, as part of the City administration, Dynamo acts as a laboratory for other creative spaces. For example, many young people are offered the opportunity to do their internships and then use their experience to develop alternative spaces like it happened in the case of Parkplatz described below.



We also had the chance to visit the Raumboerse department, which manages a large part of the “temporary use” spaces in the city, a very interesting model for our guests. It was interesting to see the open-mindedness of the people working there whose answer to the question how could such a model work smoothly without conflicts was they follow a “squatting” attitude with love and trust, very important elements to make it happen.

2.4 Stadionbrache - <https://sites.google.com/site/stadionbrachehardturn/>

Stadionbrache is an example of a “temporary use” project in the city. As Nikos Nikolis, a member of the association explained, “when something is temporary use, it creates a vital energy to do things.” And indeed, a lot of energy has been put from the members of the association to transform Stadionbrache to a green oasis in the city, providing a space for experimentation with permaculture principles, and other ecological practices, a very welcoming community space for cooking with a traditional dirt oven, and a wide variety of art, social, cultural, and political projects. The area of the Stadionbrache Hardturm can be entered by everyone without registration or permission and can be used as a recreation area and venue. There is no waste disposal - everything must be taken out of the fallow land and there are - on a trial basis - no opening hours.



Regarding access rules, “projects that will remain in existence for a while, take up space or change the area must be agreed with the stadium wasteland association in advance and meet the criteria for “wasteland projects”. [4] The Stadionbrache association's quarterly information and exchange meeting is the platform for the presentation and approval of new projects. The association (Verein) is managed through an elected board and a yearly general assembly, but also by regular meetings of the users. An association is a very popular flexible form of non-profit organization in Switzerland based on democratic and commoning principles.



In addition to the “temporary use” access to the land, the City provides a small grant offered as a salary to the manager of the space, Lolo. Despite this small support, the space remains largely independent and self-organized, influenced also by the participation culture of the neighbouring cooperative housing project Kraftwerk1, with which they share many members. Nikos Nikolis who did his master thesis on the participatory process developed in Stadionbrache, [5] described it as a “supervised” organic design process in which Lolo observes how people use the space without any constraints and then puts carefully elements to reinforce and promote the most common usages, e.g., common paths followed inside the garden.



As Nikos Nikolis explained one of the problems with successful temporary uses like Stadionbrache is that they are temporary and there is a strong disappointment and political mobilization against the development plans in the area in which there is no room for Stadionbrache. Unfortunately, both referendums to reject those plans were not successful and Stadionbrache might not continue to provide an open space for recreation, community, and ecological practice, so much needed especially during the corona crisis.

2.5 ParkPlatz - <https://www.park-platz.org/>



The project ParkPlatz is organised in 2 associations. The Verein ParkPlatz coordinates all the activities on ground. The Verein Lokomotive Letten manages the infrastructure and is responsible for the (only) café of ParkPlatz. The profit is used to pay some salaries (bartenders, waiter / waitress) and to support the Verein ParkPlatz. People can apply at the Verein ParkPlatz for financial support to realise projects.

The project is a “temporary use”. The association (ParkPlatz) has a contract with the Quartierverein Wipkingen which in return is renting it from the city. The ParkPlatz sees itself as a space between public administration and squatted use. It has to fit in the policy of the city but attracts people who wouldn’t attend in a squatted place. It employs a highly horizontal and self-organized structure beyond the “official” Verein structure “striving for consensus-oriented decision-making processes”. [6] The space is managed officially by the board, which nevertheless organizes an open to everyone meeting every second Friday to discuss proposals for using the space, build the programme, and make important decisions

with anyone interested, even non-members. There is an additional small funding from the city and Migros Kulturprozent (a cultural funding program from the big retailer “Migros”)



In terms of programme, no commercial activities are allowed and those that want to do things in the space need to self-organize and care themselves for its successful installation and use. A form of “do-ocracy”. During the discussion, Muri explained that there is currently a tension between consumption services and political activities, and there are a lot of discussions on how to avoid being perceived as just a cool bar restaurant and make clear the political orientation of the project.

2.6 L200 - <http://langstrasse200.ch/>



The L200 space occupies an extremely central location owned by the city but rented at market price. The city not only is not involved in the governance but also wants to be very clear that it does not support in any way the project, since the space is classified as one for “commercial” use. The high rent of the space (3300 CHF / month) is shared among participants through a very low annual membership (50 CHF / year for private persons and 100 CHF / year for organizations) and a very affordable pricing scheme (the same for everyone and transparent) for co-working, events, and other activities. The governance structure is the typical model for a Swiss association (Verein) with a board and a yearly assembly. A very detailed description is provided in Appendix B.



During the presentation of the L200 project by Panayotis Antoniadis (the space organizer), there was a long discussion about a key design choice or feature of its sustainability model, which relies solely on its simple cost sharing mechanism covering the expensive rent. A natural question arises: Why refuse or not actively search for the city’s support? Some claimed that they have the obligation to support such projects and L200 shouldn’t accept to be treated as a commercial entity while doing voluntary work and supporting so many grassroots initiatives.

Panayotis explained that the answer to this question is not so easy and there are different opinions inside the L200 team. An argument in favor of avoiding subsidies of any sort, is that this choice, when successful, creates a stronger sense of collective ownership and responsibility, and makes diversity also a need in addition to an aspiration. Most importantly it is not promoted as an “ideal” model, but as a complementary one to the type of public-civic partnerships explored in Croatia. See Appendix B for more details.

2.7 Other community centers

Of course, the above six selected projects are only a small, but representative, sample of community centers in Zurich. We include here a list of other projects that have interesting characteristics for future research:

Hoch-neun, <https://www.hochneun.ch/>, an independent community center partly supported (financially by the city). Located in the district (Kreis) 9 in the neighbourhood “Albisrieden” in a former shed. Functions as a neighbourhood hub, café, co-working space, and so on, and is organised also as an association.

Punto d’encuentro, <http://www.puntodeencuentro.ch/>, is an example of a community center run completely independently from the city, by an association (Spanish culture) renting a big apartment from a private owner. Main income comes from selling drinks and occasionally food.

Wunderkammer, <https://wunderkammer-glattpark.ch>, is an association that offers space for projects of individuals or organisations. The area on the outskirts of Zurich includes a dirt bike park, a bar, offices, event and art space. Funded by private people.

Wandelräume, of the Verein **Wandellust** <https://www.wandellust.ch/kontakt>, is a platform for gatherings on the topic of societal transition. DIY culture. It manages several rooms / spaces “Wandelräume” in Zürich (former parish hall of the protestant church)

Brache Guggach: Open space for the neighbourhood: <https://www.bracheguggach.ch/>

Merkurgarten: urban garden: <https://merkurgarten.ch/projekt-merkurgarten/>

Umbo: non-profit club for special audio: <https://radar.squat.net/de/zurich/umbo>

Photobastei: alternative project space: <http://www.photobastei.ch/idea.html>

Autonome Schule Zürich: self-organized and a collective governed school
<https://www.bildung-fuer-alle.ch/eintrag/englisch>

Hohlzke: former association, combines living and working in halls, split up nowadays in several smaller projects: <https://hohlzke.org/about/>

Das Provisorium: co-working space for sustainable initiatives of food, art & culture.

3. Towards a knowledge exchange framework

The following table summarizes the outcomes of the research visits and further discussion in along the three important dimensions identified as requiring further research and knowledge exchange: identity, sustainability, and governance.

Community center	Identity (history, context, actors, communication, access rules)	Sustainability (relationship with the city, economic model, funding sources)	Governance (institutional structure, decision-making processes, conflict resolution)
Dynamo	Explicitly giving priority to young people, aiming to “promote youth and subcultural scenes and to provide the necessary freedom and resources”. For the generation of the 80s movement, there are mixed feelings since it was presented, with a different name, as an alternative to the demolished autonomous youth center.	Dynamo is directly run by the city of Zurich and its community organizers and space managers are city employees. Thus there is no uncertainty in terms of sustainability or any sort of funding scarcity. The pricing scheme is designed mostly to give priority to young people and rationalize usage.	All strategic decisions are taken by the city administration but in a way that does not disturb the feeling of openness and creativity, especially amongst young people. Difficult decisions in everyday operation concern only requests for usage with “extreme” content which are treated carefully, sometimes consulting the city administration.
GZ	Gemeinschaft Zentrums are “For everyone in Zurich”, run by a foundation that puts diversity and inclusiveness at the top of its priorities. Started as an organization focusing on children which might create a small bias toward a more “family-oriented” place.	Strong funding support by the city through the coordinating foundation, which provides security. The fact that the funding is distributed by a single organization among similar projects might in principle create competition but in this case the funding is sufficient for everyone.	Clear hierarchy and control of the foundation evaluating the different GZs and distributing the budget. The fact that the budget is based, even to a small extent, on standardised evaluation criteria might make this level control more “visible” and stressful for the local organizers.
Rote Fabrik	An iconic space whose identity is highly determined/haunted from its glorious heroic past, for many years the “home” of the city’s left and alternative scene. Today it tries to become an international cultural scene, space for experimentation and political activism, competing with a wealth of alternatives while keeping a balance	Highly subsidized by the city with a budget of more than 2 million Swiss francs per year. This level of funding allows for providing professional equipment and services and significant freedom for realizing ambitious projects of high quality, but undermines the spontaneous and experimental character once very dominant.	A complex hierarchy of associations not truly open to the general public. This fact and the dependence on the city raises concerns in the alternative scene and transforms Rote Fabrik to an institution rather than an open space. However, the high level of professionalism and creativity by the core team allows Rote Fabrik to keep playing a

	between criticism “from both left and right”.		positive role in the cultural life of Zurich.
Stadion-brache	An “agricultural concept for urban conditions” with radical openness (an always open entrance) and experimentation characteristics.	Largely self-organized with only a small grant from the city invested for paying the space’s coordinator whose special qualities create a sense of freedom and participation.	A standard Verein but with the space manager having a strong position and influence, which in this specific case is not abused but used to protect the values of openness and participation.
Parkplatz	The strong focus on self-organization and do-ocracy and exclusion of commercial activities of any kind makes the space more welcoming for the alternative scene. But the attractive location allows for the mingling with a wide variety of social groups.	A temporary use, vulnerable to future decisions for developing the land. Receiving small funding support and maintaining a bar restaurant which is somehow contradictory to the exclusion of any other commercial activity.	A standard Verein but which operates a more participative framework, with regular bi-weekly open assemblies and consensus. The possible danger in this case is the hidden power asymmetries that can appear due to the different levels of engagement.
L200	Explicitly presented as a truly open and neutral space with the motto “Also your space”, and the question “Was ist das?” prominent at the entrance. The FirstComeFirstServe possible for the use of the space and the non-curation attitude and the high levels of achieved diversity increases the feelings of inclusiveness.	Fully self-funded through a simple cost sharing mechanism for covering the high rental cost. All work is voluntary and there is no commercial activity by the space itself (no selling of food or drinks). But members can use the space for commerce (e.g., a pop-up shop) or raise funding for their activities through the use of the space.	A standard Verein, with a board and a general assembly trying to define a set of simple rules designed to preserve the agreed-upon values, in a way to reduce the management effort and corresponding power by the coordinating team. To a certain extent is a “structured laissez faire” approach (see Appendix B).

The table above provides already a few “hints” on how important details can affect the actual implementation of declared values of openness, participation, independence, etc.

To facilitate an indepth research and meaningful knowledge exchange between community center designers/organizers/creators/supporters toward this direction, we are proposing a

simple questionnaire whose goal is to motivate such actors to reflect in more depth key details and/or moments that can make a difference during the lifetime of a community center.

On identity toward openness:

- Is there consensus in your group for the degree of openness and inclusivity allowed in your space? Are there specific usages not welcome or not encouraged?
- Are there any historical factors that influence the identity of your space?
- Which specific design choices (e.g., branding and communication material, facade, access rules) have you implemented in an effort to make your space more open and inclusive?
- To what extent do you believe that your space is perceived as open and inclusive from the general public? Is this image compatible with your own aspirations?
- In practice, how diverse are the actual usages of the space?
- Were there moments of tension created by people feeling excluded? How did you react?

On sustainability toward sovereignty:

- What are the main costs and corresponding sources of funding for securing the long-term operation of your space?
- What is your relationship with the city and how does it influence your freedom in shaping the character of the space?
- To what extent is the operation of the space relying on voluntary work? If there is paid work, how do you differentiate between the two and manage potential conflicts?
- Is there any income generated by the use of the space?

On governance toward participation:

- What is the official governance structure of your space?
- Are there any informal or subtle power asymmetries formed between the key actors (e.g., old vs. new members or more or less present/engaged members)? What types of measures have you taken to address them?
- Could you describe the most important disagreements regarding important decisions and what was the final resolution and how it was achieved?

On knowledge exchange, toward successful translation of lessons learned:

- Could you identify context specific conditions that influence your specific strategy for building successful community centers?
- Do you remember moments of revelation/inspiration while listening to stories of other case studies in your or other cultural contexts? How did they help you improve your own practices?

Conclusion

A successful knowledge exchange project raises more questions than those answered. It is not only the experiences brought by the visitors from abroad that provide fresh knowledge but it is also the observation of local activities through different eyes that help to understand better our own experiences and question our certainties and assumptions.

To this end, the Crochet project was truly an emancipating experience for all of us and opened doors for further collaborations, for which this report aims to be a first step.



End notes

[1] GZ Mission statement (September 2014) is available at:

https://gz-zh.ch/app/uploads/2020/02/Leitbild_ZGZ-Webversion.pdf

[2] Interview of Ingrid Vannitsen, Head of GZ Socio-cultural services, Derive no. 81 (p. 16)

[3] <https://www.toponline.ch/news/zuerich/detail/news/islamischer-zentralrat-trifft-sich-heimlich-in-zuerich-00113374/>

[4] See the rules of use of the Stadionbrache (german):

<https://sites.google.com/site/stadionbrachehardturm/archivierte-mitteilungen/nutzungsregeln>

[5] Nikos Nikolis master thesis on Stadionbrache is available at:

https://zukunfthardturmreal.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Nachbarschaft-wa%CC%88re-wenn...-CAS-Hochschule-Luzern_Nikolis-Nikolaos_light.pdf

[6] See Principles of the Parkplatz, <https://www.park-platz.org/>

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http://participatory-governance-in-culture.net/uploads/biljeske_EN_web.pdf

APPENDIX A

ROTE Fabrik ROJC, GÄNGEVIERTEL

A journey through the concepts, places and realities of Free spaces

Author: Philipp Klaus

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Individualised consumption offers and patterns play a predominant role in urban and suburban life. However, the quality of life in cities is also nourished by the opportunities to meet, exchange and participate in public life. Interaction and community life generally focus on events, gastronomy, parties, work and family life, and religious activities at best. However, there are also cities that actively operate, support and allow community facilities, neighbourhood centres, meeting places, cultural centres, as well as those that have no tradition or interest in this area.

In addition to the aspect of coming together, these places also have socialisation, self-empowerment and emancipatory functions, which are indispensable for a democratic society: Education, support for self-help and self-organisation, cultural exchange. The range of premises and their functions is impressive. Large cultural centres supported by the public, medium-sized neighbourhood and community centres, youth cultural centres, smaller meeting places run by a social department or pavilions and rooms that have been created on the initiative of communities. In general, these are centres that are not exclusive, do not (have to) make a profit and are in principle open to all. Self-organised and appropriated spaces, known as Free Spaces, are also included. The history of appropriated spaces is a history of squats. Squats devote themselves fighting speculation, gentrification, providing temporary accommodation, cheap housing. In addition, they also propagate a different model of society and advocate solidarity, collectivity and alternative ways of life. [1] Urban social movements have repeatedly called for Free Spaces - spaces free from the obligation to consume, discrimination, the pursuit of profit, political and administrative structures.

This opens the way for examining examples of community centres between self-government and top-down administration in several cities, and then in Zurich with its rich experience and wide range of community spaces. The aim of this contribution is not a definitive classification, but an approximation.

Free Spaces with different degrees of freedom

The degrees of freedom of communal spaces are not only related to administrative structures, but also closely linked to the economic situation, especially how much rent has to be paid or what maintenance costs are involved, whether staff have to be paid, etc. For this reason, the focus is also on the importance of temporary use, a kind of temporary loan, namely until the owners can realise a new, profitable use. When industry moved out of the factories during the structural change of the 1980s, they offered themselves as spaces for appropriation for all kinds of communal activities. Even when a bunch of individual offices and ateliers came together, there was mutual support and a Kurdish dance group or a club of railway enthusiasts joined in. Discussions and celebrations took place in the bar or the hall. Many factories developed into “zones*imaginaires”. [2]

These situations are less and less common today, as the old factory buildings have either been converted or demolished (see graph 2). This is particularly true in growing cities with booming economies. In structurally weaker regions, the framework conditions are different. In the region of former Yugoslavia, for example, there are some recent examples of cultural or community centres which have emerged from initiatives, appropriation, occupation or are still occupied, particularly as no new investment is in sight. In Belgrade, there have been various appropriations of various vacant buildings such as factories (INEX film 2011-15), warehouses (KC Grad 2009, Magacin 2007), cinemas (Rex 1994, Zvezda 2014), etc. They serve events (culture, meetings and congresses, parties) and have an important (civil) social function. [3] In Pula (Croatia), the Rojc Cultural Centre has existed since the late 1990s in a former naval barracks. [4] Today, 108 organisations are housed there, ranging from NGOs to educational institutions, ateliers and music bands. The operation and organisation of such large centres is strongly influenced by the local government. The tenants are committed to more participation, collective and self-government, with little success so far. In many cities

of the former Yugoslavia there are still large cultural centres with a traditionally government-oriented management model. The former neighbourhood-based and largely self-organised centres, which existed almost everywhere, have almost completely died out after the end of Yugoslavia. Efforts to reactivate them are only sporadic. [5] Collective forms of administration and operation generally find it difficult to find acceptance and support in former Yugoslavia and in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc.

There are many cities that have understood that free spaces are needed because they contribute to social and cultural life. In Berne, every vote on the continued existence of the Reitschule (squat since 1981) has so far been won in its favour. In the city of Zurich, it has been the practice since 1990 that squatting is tolerated until a building permit has been issued. In Hamburg, the Senate decided in 2009 to buy back the squatted Gängeviertel (district) from the investor after the broad movement Hamburg - Not In Our Name fought against the Hamburg's aggressive city marketing. An initiative called Komm in die Gänge (visit us but also get things going) called for a self-governing, public and lively quarter with cultural and social uses. Since 2010, the Gängeviertel has been organised as a cooperative and is used for a variety of purposes. Art, culture and communal living are the ingredients. Christiania, right in the centre of Copenhagen, is one of the longest, largest and most consistent experiments in building and maintaining a self-governing free space in a city. All attempts to clear and end the Fristad failed. In the meantime, the 34ha large area has been bought from the state. Christiania is a popular tourist attraction and cannabis use is widespread.

Another self-governing project that has been ongoing since the 1970s is the small community of Nimbin in northern New South Wales, Australia, which is also a tourist magnet. Rujigoord, near Amsterdam, survived as a former hippie commune and retained its self-governing structures. Holland knew the largest squatting scene in the world. About 200,000 people lived in squatted houses. In 2010, occupations were banned despite widespread resistance, including from state and church circles. Large cultural centres emerged in the 1970s and established themselves over time as important places of alternative culture, an intensive cultural life and later of course as party locations.

Free Spaces, Art, and Economy

With the commercialisation of culture and the rise of the creative industries, cultural and in some cases community centres took on a new significance as places of creative production and cultural consumption. To ensure creative production, Amsterdam broke new ground from 1999 onwards with the Broedplaatsen (incubators) programme, which provides and makes available spaces, with the awareness of the importance of subcultures and creative spaces for the renewal of culture, society and - the economy. This is because culture, as a creative industry, has developed into an ever larger branch of the economy and, in the course of globalisation and increasing competition between cities, has also become a locational factor. Culture has been commodified and the economy culturalised. [6]

In this way, the concept of a Free Space also came into the logic of the competition between cities. This may contribute to the prosperity of business locations. However, this prosperity also increases the value of the land and thus displaces small businesses, tenants and free spaces. Since the 1990s, the population has been growing in the cities, which offer not only educational institutions and interesting jobs, but also childcare facilities, parties and a rich cultural life, and the free spaces are the avant-garde, the breeding ground for new developments. They are the places where people get involved, where they organise themselves and learn. Many careers in the cultural sector and the creative industries began in temporary uses, cultural centres or indeed free spaces. It is in the knowledge of these mechanisms and the role of free spaces that the economic arguments were formed with which open spaces must also be repeatedly defended against the attacks of right-wing politicians.

Free spaces and temporary uses in Zurich

"There are no more free spaces!" and "We need more free spaces!" are slogans that appear with reliable regularity in Zurich, namely whenever a free space disappears/has to be closed. The demand for free spaces was strongest in 1980. It was about the cultural corpses of this city, about those who received nothing from the city's distributed cultural funds, in contrast to the large institutions such as the opera, the Kunsthhaus, the Schauspielhaus. The so-called non-established or alternative culture was at that time a project of departure and change, of emancipation, a vehicle for a better, fairer, more ecological society. To do this, spaces were

needed and they did not exist, and worse: they were withheld from the young, especially the Autonomous Youth Centre AJZ and the Cultural Centre Rote Fabrik. They had to be fought for. [8] 36 years later, we can look back on a rich history of free spaces in Zurich that can only be found in a few other cities⁷. In addition, there are countless cultural offerings and party locations, at least until Corona reached the city.

The structural change of the 1980s, when industries were shut down or migrated and many workers lost their jobs, was - as cynical as it may sound - a blessing for cultural life in the cities and especially for Zurich. Parties were organised with the new techno music of the time, theatre, dance and performance groups found practice and performance spaces, concerts, readings and exhibitions. Workshops were set up, and workspaces for artists, architects, designers and other creative people were available in large numbers. Not all factory buildings were open spaces and not all open spaces were factory buildings. Free spaces came and went with the offer of suitable premises. The largest project was the Wohlgroth factory near the main station in district 5, which was squat from 1990 to 1993. The wealth of ideas was combined with a sense of power, which enjoyed public and media sympathy. Other occupations also had great charisma and presence in urban life. Two of them still exist: the Kochareal, which is still occupied, and the Cabaret Voltaire, where the Dada movement started in 1916. After the time as squat it became a municipal cultural institution in 2004. A whole series of large factories in Zurich's west were temporarily used and had the feeling of open spaces. They were marked by a sense of departure and experimentation, and activities took place that had hardly been dreamed of before. [9]

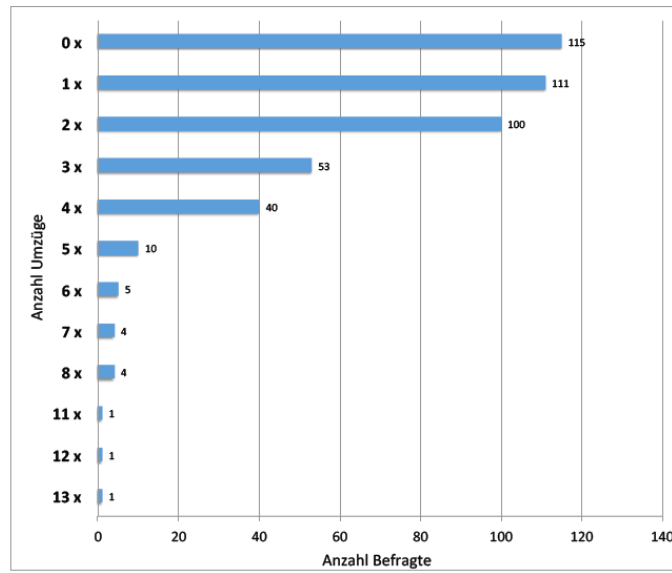
Over time, more and more so-called offspaces were opened, in which exhibitions, art actions, performances, concerts and parties took place, some wild, others more quiet: Kunsthaus Örlikon, Message Salon, OG9, Dienstgebäude, Le Foyer, Starkart, Corner College, Fotobastei etc. etc. (see also offoff.ch). On urban ground, outdoors, gardens are created, pizza and bread ovens are built, pyrolysis stations are installed, skater and BMX parks are set up, and concerts are held from time to time. Organised as associations, these outdoor spaces are more or less self-governing paradises.

Changes in scenes and space offerings

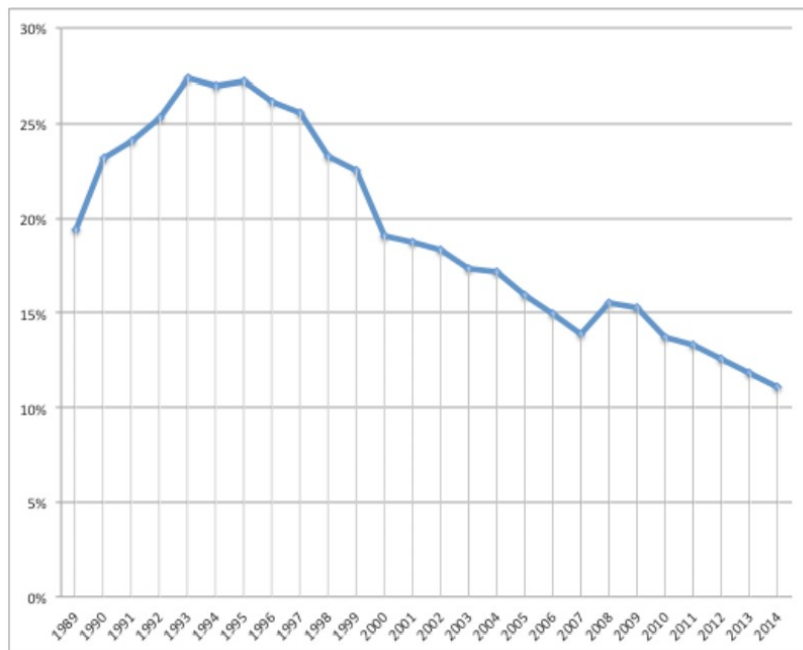
In order for free spaces to be established, an offer of suitable locations is an absolute prerequisite, but not the only decisive factor. The need also "scenes", and scenes need to have circles, people that come and go. Closures, evictions, and the end of open spaces bring about drastic changes for the scenes and users: friendships are strained, collaborations come to an end or have to be repaired, the search for space is stressful, scenes break apart temporarily or forever, socio-spatial capital dissolves. The scattering of people when an interim use is ended is striking. In the study *Räume der Kreativen* we have examined 22 temporary use areas specifically with regard to the target locations: The 65 users of the sites that we surveyed all moved to a different location when they had to leave, i.e. to 65 different places and rooms. This is not always the case, but it is the rule. [10]

As graph 1 shows, Zurich's creative people move very often - one person thirteen times in 25 years. The most common reasons for moving were conversion of the building (27.5%), followed by company growth (14%), rent too expensive (13%) and demolition (11.5%). In other words, the dynamics of urban development was responsible for half of all terminations. In a conversation, an artist told me: "I'm tired of always putting up new plaster walls". The changes in the supply of rooms can be seen in graph 2. The proportion of respondents in factory premises peaked in the mid-1990s at up to 27 %. After that, this figure declined steadily and was still around 11 % in 2014.

Abbildung 19: Umzugshäufigkeit aller Befragten



Graph 1: Number of moves by respondents (N=445) Räume und Bewegungen der Kreativen in Zürich (1989-2014), INURA Zürich Institut, 2015, p. 32



Graph 2: Creatives in factory buildings in % (self-declaration of respondents) Source: Räume und Bewegungen der Kreativen in Zürich (1989-2014), own calculations 2017.

Permanent Free Spaces

Free spaces are almost always temporary in properties that are intended for new use in the near or distant future: Work, life, music, art and temporary parties. Temporary uses always entail relocation unless an owner wishes to retain the previous use or sells it to a company, foundation or cooperative that intends to continue doing the same. Examples of this are the Lagerplatz in Winterthur and the Gleis 70 in Zurich, which were bought and maintained by an ethical foundation and pension fund. Over 200 workshops, commercial enterprises, ateliers, associations, a music club and a roof-top canteen were thus secured.

But Zurich also has permanent spaces that make a major contribution to living together, the quality of life, culture and where there is no pressure to consume. These include the Rote Fabrik cultural centre, a variety of community centres, the Dynamo youth cultural centre and the neighbourhood Centres. Even Zurich's seventeen public open-air swimming pools on the river, at two lakes and in basins become seasonal open spaces. Several of them are admission-free. Countless Zurich residents have grown up with the mentioned community facilities. Finally, there are the self-administered housing cooperatives, which are not only housing projects but also accommodate cultural and social uses, shops, workshops and offices: Mehr-als-Wohnen, Karthago, Wogeno, Dreieck, Kraftwerk1, Kalkbreite. With fair rents, they contribute to alleviating the pressure of work and salaries. In the same way, a piece of basic democracy is permanently cultivated and enacted in them.

Could there ever ...?

In this tour through concepts, places and realities of Free Spaces, some examples were mentioned and discussed, others not, for example the traditional Centri Sociali in Italy, culture factories and circles of wagons in German cities, in Austria, also in Marseille and Paris, occupations in Spanish cities, the inner-city district of Exarchia in Athens, etc. etc. The importance of free spaces, whether bottom-up appropriations or more top-down institutions, for urban societies is undeniable. The situation with the coronavirus, which has been going on for months now, is a cause for concern for community institutions; social distancing is actually the opposite of community life. Cultural and party life is already struggling to survive. But for non-consumer-oriented institutions the chances of survival are rather better.

Over the past forty years, Zurich has seen a lot of open spaces, some of them magnificent. Most have disappeared again. The time of the temporarily used factories has expired. So many times you could hear "There is no more free space!" and "More free spaces are needed!" and yet free spaces have always been created. This is partly due to the fact that Zurich has been open to them in recent years, especially with its policy on occupations, but also with its commitment to cooperative housing and temporary uses. The tradition of community facilities with their focus on self-organisation and self-help, education and cultural mediation has proven its worth in living together in the ever-changing Global City. Above all, however, the scene that fought for open spaces has constantly renewed itself and never stopped claiming: "There are no more free spaces!" and "More free spaces are needed! Finally the question arises: could there ever be enough free spaces?

End notes

- [1] See also Martinez, Miguel A. (2019): The autonomy of struggles and the self-management of squats: legacies of intertwined movements. In: Interface: a journal for and about social movements. Volume 11 (1): 178 – 199 (July 2019)
- [2] Angst, M., Ph. Klaus, T. Michaelis, R. Müller, S. Müller, R. Wolff (Hrsg.)(2010): zone*imaginaire - Zwischennutzungen in Industriearealen. Zürich, vdf-Verlag
- [3] See also: Cukic, Iva and Jovana Timotijevic (2020): Spaces of Commons. Urban Commons in the Ex-YU Region. Ministry of Space/Institute for Urban Politics, Belgrade
- [4] S. Tomašević, Tomislav (2018): Rojc Community Centre, Croatia. In: Tomašević, T, V. Horvat, A. Midžić, M. Dakić: Commons in South East Europe: Case of Croatia, Bosnia&Herzegovina and Macedonia, Institute for Political Exology, Zagreb. (S. 85-94).

[5] You can find example in: Čukić, Iva (2013): Mapa Akcije. S. 97ff. Inicijative za društveni i kulturne centre. Ministarstvo Prostora.

[6] Klaus, Philipp (2006): Stadt, Kultur, Innovation. Kulturwirtschaft und kreative innovative Kleinstunternehmen in der Stadt Zürich, Seismo-Verlag Zürich

[7] See also: Nigg, Heinz (Hrsg.) (2001): Wir wollen alles, und zwar subito! Die Jugendunruhen in der Schweiz und ihre Folgen. Limmat Verlag, Zürich.

[8] See also: d'Ariano Simionato, Michele und Marco Jacommella (2017): Alles ist Gut, Freiräume in der Stadt Zürich 1960-2015. Zürich, Präsens Editionen, Zürich.

[9] One example was the Labitzkeareal (1989-2014) , very well documented in: Bärmann, Diana (2020): Labitzke Farben, Archäologische Untersuchung einer Stadtutopie. Hochparterre Verlag, Zürich.

[10] INURA Zürich Institut (2015): Räume und Bewegungen der Kreativen in Zürich 1989-2014. Stadtentwicklung Zürich. Download: inura.ch/publikationen/publikationen (p. 35).

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Čukić, Iva (2013): Inicijative za društveni i kulturne centre. In: Ministarstvo Prostora (Hg.): Mapa Akcije. Beograd, S. 99–107. Verfügbar unter: https://issuu.com/ministarstvoprostora/docs/mapa_akcije [Stand 15.09.2020].

INURA Zürich Institut (2015): Räume und Bewegungen der Kreativen in Zürich 1989–2014. Stadtentwicklung Zürich. Verfügbar unter: <https://www.inura.ch/projekte1/veranstaltungen> [Stand 15.09.2020].

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Martinez, Miguel A. (2019): The autonomy of struggles and the self-management of squats: legacies of intertwined movements. In: Interface: a journal for and about social movements. Volume 11 (1): S. 178–199 (Juli 2019).

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APPENDIX B

L200: a model for hybrid common spaces in Zurich

Authors: Panayotis Antoniadis, Ileana Apostol, Thomas Raoseta [1]

Self-organized spaces managed and used in common around the world showcase bottom-up options complementary to the market and the state for providing urban places that support conviviality, alternative culture, grassroots initiatives, participatory practices, political struggles, and more. Depending on the context they have developed different types of identities, governance models, and relationships with the local municipalities, acting as examples for others to get inspired from and translate to their own realities. In this article we introduce L200 as a community space, which was founded more than two years ago in Zurich's city center, and compare it with spaces like *La Casa Invisible* in Malaga, *L'Asilo* in Naples or *Navarinou Park* in Athens.

Langstrasse is one of Zurich's most famous streets, an important traffic axis, shopping and entertainment mile. Anyone strolling past number 200 is going to see the L200 space. Perhaps a few people are bent over their laptops while others are having a conversation or setting the table for a meal. Perhaps a discussion meeting is taking place or there might be a party going on. A shop window might be announcing events and advertising a new housing cooperative. Another one might be presenting a new product like the plant fertiliser made from urine while the nearby window shows vases made from coloured concrete that are for sale. "What is this?" is written on a board at the entrance, and next to it another board answers: "Also your space". The premises, which are an event location and coworking space too, is a space that invites everyone to use it, who do not want to exclude others.

The L200 space is run by an association of organizations and individuals without subsidies or any other external financial support. L200 is particularly focusing on developing an inclusive identity through a participatory process, which has the potential to serve as an exemplary model for three different ways of merging the concepts of commons and infrastructure.

First, L200 space is designed and governed as a common infrastructure. As an urban space it is conceived across both physical and digital domains, whose costs, use and operation are shared between the members of the L200 association through a simple cost and space sharing mechanism. Second, since its first days of operation L200 has been infrastructuring the commons, having become the home of various local initiatives that promote urban commons solutions to critical domains like food, housing, digital platforms, sustainable lifestyles, and the like. The space has the potential to provide high visibility to a wider audience and to facilitate exchanges, cooperation, and synergies between initiatives that, although are like minded and prone to networking and working across networks, often stay isolated being kept too busy with their own struggles. Third, L200 is conceived from the beginning as a prototype that is meant to be easily replicated through a detailed documentation of its governance model and other important design decisions. This is actually a process of "infrastructuring" for the creation of such spaces, an easily replicable model of a shared, hybrid, central, and self-organized urban space.

For the different actors involved, however, the starting points and final objectives differ. For some, L200 was conceived as a means to fight neighborhood gentrification. Thus L200 would provide an affordable place supporting small local shops and businesses. For others, L200 is part of a wider claim for the right to the city and the right to centrality, providing a central location with particularly good visibility for promoting commoning practices. From a global perspective, L200 is seen also as a laboratory for developing sustainable models for addressing the urgent climate crisis, reflected by the high number of initiatives on sustainability, food waste or cooperative housing. L200 is seen also as a

digital place allowing experimentation and learning processes based on grassroots digital platforms that are built with free and open source software and are anchored in physical locations namely a way toward an “organic Internet” (Antoniadis 2018).

Community places that promote social cohesion, conviviality, and collective awareness --a necessary ingredient for a democratic society-- are disappearing when are most needed, in times when urban demographics change rapidly and become more and more diverse while digitization leads to more alienation and polarization. It is not difficult to see that all these narratives are actually overlapping and depend on each other. At L200 internal cooperation and synergies are already being formed, between initiatives that concentrate their activity on one domain, let's say food waste, but to which the shared infrastructure provides fruitful and necessary exchanges with related organizations such as housing cooperatives or neighborhood associations.

In terms of specifics of shaping spaces as commons, Stavrides (2016) notes that in the co-creation process of “common spaces” there are certain rules developed about how this sharing is to be performed. Likewise, to keep the space common “there must be developed forms of contestation and agreement about its use and character which explicitly prevent any accumulation of power. Especially, any accumulation of situated, space-bound power” (Stavrides 2016, p.106).

There are many examples of urban self-managed spaces, which could be characterized as “common spaces,” and perhaps the most important challenge that they face independently of their particular focus (culture, politics, sustainability, neighbourhood life) is the difficulty in materializing their intentions toward three key values:

- inclusivity: who feels or does not feel entitled to use the space,
- freedom: to what degree the project is independent from the state and/or the market in the space operation, and
- democratic decision-making: how the power relationships between the different actors contributing more or less to the operation and maintenance of the space evolve over time.

L200 shares many commonalities with existing projects, but also important differences in trying to address some inherent contradictions that appear over time. In the following we will include a few remarks comparing design decisions at L200 compared with those of three selected projects that actively try to find solutions to preserve the above values of self-organized spaces: *L'Asilo* in Naples, a model of the ‘civic use’ (uso civico) in the commoning processes in Italian cities; *La Casa Invisible*, a landmark project for the right to the city struggles in Malaga, Spain; and *Parko Navarinou*, a collective claim for green public space in a very (politically) vivid neighbourhood in Athens, Greece.

The physical space

L200 is located in an especially central and visible location in the city. Langstrasse is one of the busiest and most diverse streets at the heart of Zurich, connecting two central districts (4 and 5) with high quality urban life. It is in close proximity to many active urban nodes including the newly built cultural center Kosmos, the art cinema Riffraff, and the convivial Josefstrasse and Limmatplatz. Its main space has an area of only 75 sqm that may be flexibly organized for various uses throughout the day. Although its surface is rather small, there is a wide variety of activities with very different needs sometimes in the course of a single day, which might take place even in parallel. The relatively small size of the space and its very high visibility are two key differentiating factors compared to other similar community spaces, and they have influenced significantly the space’s identity and its distinct characteristics.

High visibility is generally considered as a spatial quality of critical importance. In the case of L200 it supports our claim of the right to centrality that means to regroup differences in relation to each other

(Lefebvre 1991), aiming to bring alternative underrepresented voices on the main urban stage and at the same time aiming for diversity. In other words, rather than treating alternatives as “special” cases, from this standpoint they belong to a wider collection of voices across social, political, or economic bubbles. As we explain below, this proves to be a goal that requires a constant effort.

Identity and otherness

The identity of the L200 space is explicitly defined as neutral. It does not try to secure a place in the market by establishing a “brand” as a new competitor, but to promote holistic thinking and inclusive values. The choice of the space’s name was such a decision: L200 refers to the physical location derived from the address at Langstrasse 200.



Figure 1. L200 entrance showcasing two explanatory panels including the question “What is this?” (Was ist das?) and the main motto “Also Your Space” (Auch Dein Raum)

In the case of goods used in common, there is a risk that individuals will try to appropriate them. Therefore, a decisive rule of the spatial concept was: no member should dominate, neither the space itself through extensive use nor its overall identity, for instance, in communication and appearance to the outside. On the one hand, this rule came as a result of the desire for diversity and inclusivity. On the other, it is based on more pragmatic reasons required by very high rental costs, by a rather small size of space and by the multiplicity of actors involved in its founding, because L200 came to life from a wealth of aims, needs, projects and actors.

Similarly to L200, *La Casa Invisible* has been initiated in Malaga through a merge of four “traditions” as described by Kike España [2]. In this particular case they are the classical squatting movement together with other social movements, with academics, artists and creators without a workspace in the city. Then two additional generations entered this constellation namely the 15M-Movement and more recently feminism and climate change activism. Still, although the project is “against any form of

community identity or self-reference,” “this never works ideally” and mechanisms like the *acogida* (welcoming) are devised for newcomers.

In the process, however, Kike España identifies a so-called double danger, which is “of not being open enough for new people and new ideas to engage with and, at the same time, of losing the radical and politically experimental form of doing things in the city (not just being a place for activities).” To this respect, L200’s claim is different since it explicitly presents itself as “a place for activities”, but which also include radical, alternative, and progressive ones.

Comparable challenges and dilemmas are faced by the key actors of Napoli-based *L’Asilo* --the so-called “inhabitants”-- those that are frequenting and contributing to the space. As described by Antonio Vesco [3], “it is absolutely true that l’asilo can be perceived from the outside ALSO as a space managed by a closed community of subjects.” But “it is also true that their efforts to maintain an openness and an effective accessibility of that space are constant [...] the more they feel capable of (and good at) welcoming people outside the community of the inhabitants, the more their clan spirit grows. Because this ability gives them the confirmation that they are a community capable of applying the “best” principles of commoning.”

Unlike these projects, in the case of *Parko Navarinou* in Athens, this inherent contradiction is spelled out as a concrete disagreement between competing groups. Stavrides summarizes it by means of a (rhetorical) question: “Is the occupied park a place of the movement, part of the anti-capitalist movement’s network of squatted places and open only to those who belong to the movement, or is the park an open common space that has to provide to different people the opportunity to enjoy and create what capitalist urbanism has deprived them of (green areas, urban gardening, free access to alternative events, open and imaginative playground areas, etc.)?” (Stavrides 2016, p.247).

Another challenge that *Parko Navarinou* has to address is the use of the park by drug addicts who frequent the neighborhood. The most recent (difficult) decision to make was to extend the “big playground” project to the entire park and to install an additional entrance gate. That together with the fence erected a few months ago, now considerably limits the park’s accessibility but better protects the children, its most vulnerable users.

At L200 such dilemmas have been discussed in advance within the initiating group, and the agreed-upon resolution was that failing to keep the space neutral and open to all types of usages would be against its main purpose. Therefore, the desire to be as inclusive as possible is made explicit, by choosing a neutral name representing the actual postal address, by using “Also Your Space” as the main motto, by placing the question “What is this?” prominently in the space’s facade (Figure 1), and in the overall communication and decision-making.

Access to the space for activities is, for instance, on a strictly First-Come-First-Serve policy, subject only to a few standard rules on respect, consideration, inclusion etc. Most importantly, after any event or installation, the space has to return to its previous, relatively neutral state.

In spite of being aware of these “dangers” since the L200’s initiation, to avoid the domination of the space’s identity over time --not only by powerful actors, but also by powerful types of usage (e.g., art, technology, politics, ecology)-- is still a task more difficult than it might seem. The L200 operation is a continuous struggle in keeping a certain balance, as some usages become more popular or intentionally or not, members try to appropriate the space.

Legal form and decision-making

L200 is an association (“Verein L200”), which by the Swiss Law is a very flexible form of bottom-up organization. Note that the Swiss Confederation is a direct democracy through which citizens tend to be more empowered than in a representative democracy. As political engagement is part of the everyday life of Switzerland’s inhabitants, this democratic exercise enables a multitude of self-organized expressions of community. A Verein enables its members to act collectively based on a set of principles constituting its establishment. The L200 Verein counts today around 150 members [4] and has an elected board of five people, making everyday decisions and holding the activities in accordance with the association’s principles. Aside from the board and the yearly general assembly -- in the first two assemblies around 30 members have joined-- at L200 there is an elected general manager and a users’ group staying in communication in order to organize the daily space operation and maintenance. Participation in the board is open and there has been significant turnover of board members. Since the model is still in development other imposed rotation rules are not yet in place, but they will be considered in the near future.

The coordination of such a diverse set of groups and activities becomes a challenging task subject to complex decision making. In practice the initial set of values and corresponding rules have been defined through quick adaptations over time by the core group (general manager, members of the board and president, and members of the users’ group), and were presented for approval to the general assembly together with the situations in which some of the rules had to be enforced or refined. [5] For example, a rule was introduced stating that big organizations (i.e., with more than 20 employees, commercial activities, and national or international scope) are not allowed to use the space for co-working. Also, there are certain limits on the number of events per organization and per type, number of co-workers per organization, maximum duration of window usage, and more.

The decision-making process of L200 departs significantly from the regular assemblies taking place at places like *L’Asilo*, *La Casa Invisible*, and *Navarinou Park*. Such regular assemblies are clearly important participatory tools but at the same can cause “participation fatigue” --especially in Switzerland where people participate typically in many associations-- and an inevitable “domination” by the “regulars”.

Having established a well-defined (simple) interface between the space as a common infrastructure, and the non-curated usage by the different members, a wide variety of activities can take place without having to allocate unlimited time for discussions, decision-making, and conflict resolution. We call this a *structured laisser faire* participatory design approach allowing every member to have access to the space for certain periods of time as if it was their space, given that they respect the same right for all other members (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Examples of L200 activities: a children workshop and a large public event. A detailed list showcasing the high level of diversity achieved is documented online [4]

Relation to the City as renter and the question of sustainability

L200 is renting the space from the City of Zurich but at its market price. For the members of the association, however, the space is a commons, increasing the density of use and sharing its time-space in creative ways by constantly changing uses over the course of a week and even during a day. From the very first days of its operation, L200 became home to the Forum 5im5i association, [6] which is active in support of small shops in Zurich's Kreis 5 and against the impact of gentrification on neighborhood life, to the NeNa1 cooperative housing project that works toward imagining alternative and sustainable ways of living and working together, Transition Zurich that is active in maintaining a

wide network of initiatives promoting sustainable and ecological lifestyles, and NetHood a transdisciplinary research organization developing a wide variety of tools for self-organization at the neighbourhood level. Having started already with the involvement in the infrastructuring process of such a diverse group of actors, which although like minded had different audiences and methodologies, the general aim for diversity became fast one of the core characteristics of L200's identity.

This was important both for political and social reasons, as well as for economic ones, since the use of the space by many actors, as a common infrastructure, was necessary to meet the very high rental cost. This sharing strategy not only reduces dramatically the cost for each individual member, but at the same time makes available, again at low individual cost, a pool of resources necessary to run the space successfully and take advantage of its particularly high visibility.

It is important to note that neither particularly profitable commercial activities (e.g., a bar or a restaurant) enable cross-subsidization, nor does the L200 space itself enjoy financial support from external actors (e.g., the municipality). This is an important distinguishing characteristic of L200, which is self-sustainable in regards to paying a high rent to the City, unlike *L'Asilo* that receives significant support from the City of Naples, or *La Casa Invisible*, which by operating a bar has its own fundraising mechanisms. *Parko Navarinou* relies on donations in exceptional cases like the recent infrastructure costs for the playground extension and the new gate. The work that such an enterprise entails is carried out by L200 members voluntarily. In concrete terms this corresponds to about 2 "person months" (full time jobs), which are roughly distributed among four to six people.

A natural question arises: Is the lack of any sort of subsidies from the City or any other external support a conscious choice? And if yes, why not? There are differing views currently in the L200 association, other being more open to receiving external support and other less. Those members that defend the position of staying away from such support argue that having to pay the market rental price as a tenant of the City provides a strong sense of independence and sovereignty, which is very valuable. Arguably it offers more freedom for defining the identity and governance of the space and it is more resilient against future withdrawals of the initial support. Others see their work as a contribution to the local community, and as a necessary experiment in the development of a more sustainable economy, thus turning L200 into an attractive place where appropriate organizations can provide effective support.

Will it still be possible to carry out all the work required to keep the business running free of charge? There is a discussion among the members of the association as to whether certain activities should be paid for or whether it should continue to rely on the voluntary work of the members in the sense of self-help. Both have advantages and disadvantages. Also a transition process through which some people get paid for their work and others do not would not be easy. Nevertheless, there are always new members who want to make an active contribution to the L200 space, despite that not always is their integration that easy, even sometimes not being successful. More than two years after taking over this central location, many processes are still informal and depend on individuals. What does it take to establish a stable organisation that can also be supported by constantly changing actors?

Today L200's tenant-landlord relationship with the City of Zurich is placed somewhere between the harmonious relationship of *L'Asilo* with the City of Naples and the confrontation between *La Casa Invisible* and the City of Malaga. Another alternative intermediate case is *Parko Navarinou*, a form of "tolerated squat."

In principle, the L200 model may be applied also with success in the free marketplace when spaces are rented from private owners. So the creation of such spaces could continue without the need for negotiations with external actors on special privileges and painful compromises. In other words, the achievement of the L200 also lies in using novel cost-sharing mechanisms to develop strategies for paying high rents in central locations without waging political battles.

City subsidies are more likely to be granted for projects in peripheral locations, while properties in central locations are often deliberately rented out at high market prices. Paying the market rental price brings L200, aside from some obvious disadvantages, the advantage of being able to use the space also for commercial activities.[7] The cost-based prices for spatial use by members [8] do not currently include a profit margin for the L200, nor are there mechanisms for profit sharing, in the case of sales.

To date such activities have been typically pop-up shops by small producers like Atelier Pnoe and bfair, and low entrance fees for concerts or film screenings. So far, these have often been organized by the filmmakers themselves or belong to the series *Filme für die Erde*, which is itself a kind of public domain. But in principle there is no limitation for commercial activities by “bigger players” subject to the non-domination of the identity rule, which for now forbids the placement of logos of big companies in the windows. This rule applies as well to political parties, religious groups etc.

All in all, L200 is a non-commercial open space, used by members of the association from the closer or further neighbourhood and also by small firms often within the sustainability framework. So L200 is a venue for common activities like the Tuesday’s cooking group, for social events like anniversaries, celebrations or dinners with friends, a wide variety of open-to-the-public events, workshops, exhibitions, co-working between 09:00-17:00, and for numerous informal ad-hoc gatherings and interactions, especially during the regular opening hours (daily between 17:30-19:30). Because of the Covid19 pandemic, the opening hours are now limited to Tuesday and Friday. On these days, passers-by can drop in to ask questions, make first contacts, socialize and discover what’s happening at L200.

Even with relatively low occupancy rates and difficulties during the Corona crisis, the L200 has generated enough revenue to pay the rent until the end of 2020. The question of remuneration for voluntary work will arise at the latest when profits are made, and from then there will be an opportunity to continue investing in infrastructure and communication.

Infrastructuring the commons

A key resource of the space due to the L200’s location is its sidewalk interface made out of six large street windows and the facade on a busy street corner. The exterior can be designed as an information infrastructure allowing small shops to display their products, activist groups to promote their campaigns, and the like.

For many of the L200 members, and especially for those promoting urban commoning alternatives to the market, even having an affordable place in the center of Zurich, where they can display their work and engage more people in their project seems like a luxury. It is often that passers-by in arguably the most frequented street of the city just drop-in, motivated by a sign on a window or an interesting activity taking place in the space. Indeed Zurich showcases a variety of vibrant and well-functioning associations, networks and clubs that experiment with new forms of cooperation for sustainable urban life in relation to food, money, housing, digitalization, and more. The existence of spaces for information, negotiation and convergence are of critical importance in particular at the neighborhood level, where the assemblies provide ‘the basic unit of democratic participation’ (Jacobs 1961, pp. 405-427). Bringing in the same location all these different actors in the city together with people that are not necessarily active in this “scene” promoting an alternative to mainstream is already a step toward the L200 project’s vision; there are not many places in the city, hosting such diverse publics. What is even more interesting, however, and challenging too, is to promote (and design for) more substantial interactions and synergies. New common services can be created, including digital ones, public facing interfaces and regular platforms, and other dissemination activities, which offer a design space for infrastructuring the urban commons. For that, the L200 is an ideal living laboratory.



Figure 3. An example of a parallel use: the fair trade startup *Crowd Container* using L200 as a pick-up location for already ordered fruits from local producers, and Radio Lora, the radio station of the neighbourhood, initiated during the 80s movement that has a strong political voice against racism, fascism, and patriarchy.

The L200 space resides among a large ecosystem of initiatives, organizations, businesses, and individuals, and there is (almost) no constraint on who can become a member. This means that even if all work for the space operation would remain voluntary, the existence of L200 itself can contribute to the economic benefit of its members, as it promotes the development of the projects not only by the favorable rent, but also by the quasi automatic networking among the members, and as these projects become directly visible to passers-by simply through the presence of their operators in the space. That is important especially for commoning initiatives that often struggle to find adequate funding to advance their research and action agendas, and reach a wider audience. The L200 space as a laboratory for action research, as a dissemination platform or as a networking venue increases the credibility and potential impact of a project proposal.

The regular “platforms” created as collaboration between members such as this of ISOC Switzerland and NetHood (7at7.ch) and this of Transition Zurich and NoSweatShop (Tuesdays for Future or in Swiss German “Ziischtig fürd Zuekunft”) are very good examples of this infrastructuring element, since both were funded exactly because of their intention to use the L200 common space with proven visibility and popularity for projects. The main objective was people’s engagement in learning processes around critical issues in times of increasing threats from Internet giants and climate change respectively.

The digital space

From its inception L200 is conceived as a hybrid space, with a local-only WiFi network used to engage visitors in digital potentially anonymous interactions, file sharing, and more. It focuses on well supported free software like NextCloud and Etherpad, what is called the MAZI toolkit, co-developed by NetHood in the context of the Horizon2020 project MAZI [9]. A public web server located in the basement of L200 is under development with the goal to host a wide variety of self-hosted services (e.g., web sites of small local artists and businesses etc) to be used by its members

instead of commercial hosting services. In addition, members of the association (i.e., rao GmbH and NetHood) are slowly developing free software tools for internal management like an open calendar, bookkeeping, and more, which will eventually become part of the L200 prototype for acquiring and running a central space as a commons.

Finally, the Corona crisis created the need for spaces that can provide suitable infrastructure for groups to participate in online meetings or stream their discussions for online audiences. So L200 has transformed to a laboratory for creating such hybrid spaces using open source conferencing tools like the BigBlueButton platform and recycled audio-video equipment in the context of the 7at7 series (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: A hybrid event both physically in the L200 and online in the context of the 7at7 series, <https://7at7.ch/sep20/>

L200 as prototype

Reducing the overhead for space management, and making it easy for anyone to contribute, has been a strategic choice that is actually part of an on-going action-research process, for which digital tools can play a key role. These tools further facilitate the coordination and collective awareness among diverse activities that take place in a single location. Then the L200 can become an easily replicable prototype of a hybrid urban living lab. It showcases the power of sharing the operation of successful central spaces in the city, turning them affordable and multiplying their reach for communication and interaction with the public, due to good accessibility and high visibility. At L200 is the value of centrality democratized.

Acknowledgement

L200 is a collective work par excellence, and many of the ideas and design choices presented in this article have been developed in collaboration of the authors with the rest of the co-founders Claudia Modellmog, Elin Braun, Martin Furrer, with the initial supporters Res Keller, Hans Widmer and Guido Holenstein, with the new members of the L200 association board, Jasmin Helg and Anastasia Nechalioti, but also with many other active members of the L200 space.

End notes

[1] The article was written originally in English (this version) but published in the German language in *dérive* No. 81, Okt-Dec. 2020, translated by Thomas Raoseta & Claudia Modellmog.

[2] Interview of architect and activist Kike España about *La Casa Invisible* by Kristina Tešija titled “We need to expand radical democracy”. Available at: <https://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/we-need-expand-radical-democracy>

[3] Personal communication with Antonio Vesco, researcher of the *L’Asilo* project and activist, based on the forthcoming Report 4 (Case Studies in Italy) of the Heteropolitics ERC Horizon2020 project, available upon publication at <https://heteropolitics.net/>

[4] The member profiles are very diverse. From more opportunistic cases, who became members to profit from the “welcome offer” of a free event, without the intention to renew their membership for the next year, to members who don’t use the space at all, but keep paying their yearly membership (50 CHF / year for individuals and 100 CHF / year for organizations) to support the overall cause. Until now these tendencies were balanced keeping the average number of members to around 150. In case there is a significant increase of members our current decision is to try to create more spaces like L200, instead of refusing potential usages due to lack of availability.

[5] See <http://langstrasse200.ch/pub/werte/> for the latest draft of L200’s values and corresponding rules.

[6] More details about the different organizations active at L200 are available at: <https://langstrasse200.ch/pub/de/projekte/>

[7] There have been discussions for introducing “differentiated” pricing between commercial and non-commercial uses. Because we decided not to perform such characterizations, which could lead to disagreements about what is commercial and what is not, we have introduced a voluntary price differentiation scheme for the case of events. More specifically, according to the current model the “normal” price for events is 70/100/120 CHF / hour, which is close to the market price in this neighbourhood. But we also offer a “solidarity” price of the same amount up to 4 hours that anyone can take. So, we don’t enforce the normal price but big organizations or funded events are “strongly encouraged” to take it. In reality most events happen with the solidarity price, which was initially the “normal” one and the higher was called “institutional”. In some cases of funded projects, like the 7at7.ch series or the Crochet project, the “normal” price is paid. That proves to be very helpful for the economic sustainability of the L200 project. This is the current draft of the price list, which has not changed much since its first version: <https://www.langstrasse200.ch/pub/de/werte/l200-pricelist-oct2019.pdf>

[8] Any kind of spatial use requires a membership in the L200 association. That is deliberately kept relatively cheap and is not negotiable: the group of users of a common must be clearly defined, one of Elinor Ostrom’s most important rules.

[9] See <https://nethood.org/mazi/> for an up-to-date description of the MAZI project and its main outcome: the MAZI toolkit.

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APPENDIX C

Translation of a recent article at the city newspaper Tsüri on a new big cultural space with the “temporary use” mechanism presented during the 2nd Crochet research visit

Author: Rahel Bains

Date: July 7th, 2020

Original article: <https://tsri.ch/zh/ZWZ-verein-zentralwaescherei-stadt-zuerich/>

Translation: Panayotis Antoniadis

The new temporary use at the Hardbrücke: A visit to the central laundry



In the hall of the former central laundry (Zentralwäscherei) in the industrial area of District 5, a cultural space for everyone is to be created. To this end, around 30 Zurich collectives such as Urban Equipe, Blau Blau and Extraleben have joined together to form an association. But how will the ZWZ function and look in the future? Tsüri.ch was at the "Open Day" on Saturday.

In the Zentralwäscherei Zürich (ZWZ AG) in the industrial area of District 5, 50 tons of laundry for Zurich hospitals and homes were washed daily from 1967 to 2019. Now something new is being created there. Something that has nothing to do with freshly washed laundry.

The building will one day make way for an indoor swimming pool and flats for the elderly - but until at least 2026 it will be used by the city as a sports hall and space for culture and creativity. Numerous studios have already moved into one of the towers and a non-commercial event space for

experiments, exchange, cooperation and culture will be created in a part of the warehouse, implemented and coordinated by the association (Verein) Zentralwäscherei Zürich (ZWZ).

The association consists of about 50 active members and around 30 collectives, which are located in different areas; among them the Urban Equipe, BlauBlau, Rhizom, Kombo and Kein Museum. According to the website <<http://zentralwaescherei.space/>>, the association consists of "artists, musicians, DJs, hobby gardeners, cooks, gastro-people, urbanists, architects, social workers, theatre makers, handicraftsmen, activists, utopians, enthusiasts, doers and shakers".



The Zentralwäscherei 1980. Photo: ETH Bildarchiv

Together instead of against each other

At the beginning of 2019, the association of organizations applied jointly for the approximately 1000 square metres of cultural space on the ground floor of the building - instead of competing with each other. They were successful: last spring they received the go-ahead and hope - as soon as the municipal council decide on the release of 0.5 million investment costs, among other things - to be able to start the conversion work this autumn.

The aim is to create a modular hall that offers space for events and a small catering service. Because the ZWZ is to be used without consumption in the future, the association has already asked the city, which originally envisaged 7090 francs rent per month, for a rent waiver in its application. In the end, the Raumbörse, which put the hall out to tender, and the city's Department of Social Affairs confirmed the rent waiver. "We knew from the outset that the space could not be used for non-

commercial and mostly voluntary purposes, but that at the same time we could generate a sum of money of this magnitude," say Kas Dedden and Lars Kaiser.

Both have been active in the association since its foundation. On the "open day" last Saturday, the studios in the basement and on the upper floor offer an insight into their work, they sit outside on a stone ramp. Someone plays the guitar, visitors come and go, red wine with lemon soda is served at the bar.

You don't just want to party, they say. The offer should be broadly based, you want to break out of the bubble, bring different things together and diversity into the room. They also want to act across generations and involve the neighbourhood and its actors. Lars: "Let's say you're sitting at home on a Friday evening and ask yourself what you could do. Then you might go to the central laundry and have a drink first. Maybe there's an exciting exhibition there, maybe there's a concert going on. You don't have to wait in line and wonder if you're properly dressed to get in. It should be an open space, accessible to everyone."



This is what the hall of the central laundry looked like when the association first inspected it. Photo: zvg

4000 unpaid volunteer hours

A year ago, the association was allowed to enter and inspect the hall for the first time. Since then it has tried to strengthen the structures, to prepare the building application, for example to procure a gastro kitchen and other material, and this was divided into different working groups. In the meantime, they can look back on around 4000 unpaid volunteer hours, 40 recorded meetings and at least as many more unrecorded meetings. Every month they also hold an extraordinary general

assembly at which 20 to 30 members are regularly present. All of them were now ready and "on fire" to get down to work on the reconstruction. No longer just to plan and discuss, but to finally get down to work.

In order to be able to hold music events, the construction of a soundproof wall is planned, in the small laundry in the entrance area a cafeteria or a canteen is to be built, where you can also consume what you have brought with you, the floors must be newly sealed or covered, and an office for the operating team is also to be built.

The rest should be left as open as possible and separated with individual, mobile elements. "Over the years, it should remain a changeable space in which exhibitions, theatre performances and much more can be created, preferably in parallel so that there are as many points of contact as possible," says Kas, who is a trained carpenter. However, all this is only possible when the instructions, to which the building loan is also tied, are issued by the local council - and there are no objections.

This is what everyone involved is now hoping for, because such a project is of great importance, especially in a neighbourhood like Kreis 5, where the upgrading process is in full swing. "Finding a non-institutional space that can be operated in such a way that projects can find a platform when they have nowhere else to go or cannot afford a space is absolutely unique," they say.

"Being open means also to give".

"There are already comparable projects where people try to manage a place themselves on a smaller scale, but a project of this size is something very special," says Antonia Steger. Like Lars, the 32-year-old works for the Urban Equipe and has also been an active member of the ZWZ since its beginnings. Antonia sits in a sofa landscape in the middle of the spacious hall, the so-called "Stammtisch".

While ping-pong is played next to her, she says: "I am also interested in how cities develop and people can participate, what new ways and means there are to cooperate with administrations and how the latter make spaces possible for which they actually hand over responsibility. After all, we would have a lot of well-educated, creative, independent and committed people in Zurich - perhaps more than ever before. It is therefore time to provide young people with rooms in which they can try out new forms of organisation and event formats.

In a city like Zurich, where many things are institutionalised very quickly, where one usually needs a large budget and often encounters hurdles, she is attracted by the idea of creating a space like the future ZWZ. Where nothing is perfect, but a lot of improvisation, tinkering and change. Her wish for the next six years is that the ZWZ will end up being used by different people than today. "This would be a sign that we have managed to be open - and that means at the same time giving up and leaving the space to others".

Until then, she hopes that there will be room for experimentation, that people will be allowed to try out different operational concepts and that the confidence of the participants in themselves will increase. "There is also something emancipatory about all this," she says. Lara Hausheer, also a member of the association, also wants structures within the project to be continuously questioned and to remain flexible: "The project should remain accessible to people and contexts who want to participate".

Directive to be presented to the city council in the 3rd quarter

Antonia hopes that one day others will find new ways with the city administration to create even more such spaces and how to lose the fear of allowing this kind of self-government. "I would like people to see us as interlocutors when it comes to developing this area. And that people understand that we are a new kind of actors in this area, and that we are self-determined on the one hand, but nevertheless very open to dialogue. Because important experiences are now being gathered that are worth reflecting on and passing on - be it in this place or anywhere else.

According to Heike Isselhorst, Head of Communication of the Social Department of the City of Zurich, the instruction regarding the temporary use of the ZWZ is to be submitted to the City Council in the third quarter of 2020 and then transferred to the City Council. In concrete terms, the additional financial support of around one million Swiss francs is also to be discussed then. If everything goes as planned, nothing stands in the way of Lara's vision - that the ZWZ will become a place that sees itself as part of the city of Zurich and the neighbourhood in which it is located. How things will continue and what the association plans next will be communicated in a newsletter in the near future.