Conflictual Consensus in Austrian Cultural Politics: Urban Cultural Policy Research at the Intersection of Agonism and Situational Analysis

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situational analysis; social world; arena; qualitative expert interviews; mapping; collaborative mapping online; interpretive analysis; cultural policy and politics; agonism; conflict; radical democratic theory; Austria

Abstract: In this paper, we explore urban cultural politics and policy-making in Austria through the conceptual lens of the *arena*. In relation to this, we apply the methodological toolbox of Adele CLARKE's situational analysis. With a focus on the dynamics of cultural political conflicts and negotiation, we analyze urban cultural policies and programming. A particular focus is placed on a city-wide cultural program in the city of Graz. Via interpretive analysis of interviews and situational mappings, we aim to analytically unpack the continuous and contingent processes of cultural political negotiation with *conflictual consensus* as a sensitizing concept. With this objective, our analytical engagement is situated at the intersection between radical democratic theory, referring mainly to Chantal MOUFFE and Oliver MARCHART on the one hand, and social worlds and arenas theory by Adele CLARKE on the other. We hope to contribute to a theoretically sensitized and empirically informed cultural policy research effort by operationalizing the notion of conflictuality in constellations of cultural political actors and negotiation processes in cultural policy-making.

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1. Introduction: Urban Cultural Policy(-Making) as an Arena

Is culture a public good, or should those realizing art and cultural events rather approach them as marketable products to generate profits? Who is actively involved in decision-making when it comes to cultural policies and politics? Culture, including the political control, planning and public funding of art in the narrower sense, is a notoriously complex and conflictual phenomenon. In addition to the contested notions of what even falls under the categories of art and culture, their status within frameworks of public administration and governance is also in dispute. In short, both, cultural policy (i.e., contents, aims, strategies) and politics (i.e., decision-making processes, negotiations) are at stake or, put differently, cultural production, related regulations as well as cultural politics are characterized by conflicts (LANDAU & SCHAD-SPINDLER, 2021; LANDAU-DONNELLY, SCHAD-SPINDLER, FRIDRIK & MARCHART, 2022). As a public and a shared good, culture is embedded in social and political power relations and formed by meaning-making processes. This hints to multiple sites and types of negotiation related to the contested content and administration of culture. In addition, there are questions of access(ibility) and socio-spatial exclusion, which concern persons, discourses and other symbolical matters and values. [1]

Accordingly, to advance conflict-oriented knowledge about cultural policy and politics as well as the democratic processes in the cultural field more broadly, it is useful to approach the latter not as a linear process of decision-making and policy implementation (ZEMBYLAS, 2006) but rather as a complex and versatile *arena*. The arena is set out to grasp the constitutively interwoven dynamics of political negotiations—politics—and their institutionalized outcome—policy. In the arena, cultural political actors such as politicians, administrators, and representatives of civil society (i.e., artists, cultural workers, associations and interest groups etc.) ascribe meaning and concrete content advice to decisions and guidelines. Moreover, they are affected by surrounding and contested political norms, values, and possibilities for change. At the same time, with the concept of the arena, we refer to the permanent contestability and precarious form of political space, as well as to the decisions and "connection conflict[s]" (MARCHART, 2010, p.362)[1] that emerge from it. [2]

Although urban contexts are contingently constructed, cities can be perceived as a roughly definable, situated, and tangible terrain for this empirical observation and analysis. From a cultural and democratic policy perspective, cities offer a "space of possibility" (KAGAN, KIRCHBERG & WEISENFELD, 2019, p.15), in which civil society groups, individuals, and institutions from politics, administration, and business engage in complex cooperative-conflictual relationships. In doing so, they also share a common knowledge space about local conditions and opportunities for change (ZIMMERMANN, 2009). Participants in negotiation processes can be motivated by a shared awareness of problems, which they develop through common cognitive orientations and socio-spatial proximity (LEGGEWIE & NANZ, 2016). Joint problem awareness can thus

1   All translations from non-English texts are ours.

facilitate the constitution of agonistic arenas, in which right or just solutions can be negotiated—although it always remains contested what the participants in an arena conceive as a right or just solution. The city is, on the one hand, a place of *the political* at large, of the "being together of the different" according to Hannah ARENDT (2003 [1993], p.9). On the other hand, it is a place of politics, where contacts with political actors and actants—such as city administration, political buildings, orders and notifications, city agencies, politicians and parties—materialize, or literally take place (for a more in-depth explanation see below). In cities, the realms of the political and politics thus fuse (DIKEÇ & SWYNGEDOUW, 2017). [3]

In cultural policy research, (urban) cultural policy has variously been studied through the conceptual lens of the *arena*. Jane WODDIS (2014) focused on the agency and role of arts practitioners as civil society actors in policy-making. In this sense art practitioners take part in a "cultural arena" as a "legitimate and significant one in which to engage with matters of governance and policy" (p.507) and thus strive for democratic change. Taking into account the dynamics of passion and politics, Thomas BORÉN, Patrycja GRZYŚ and Craig YOUNG (2020) referred to urban cultural policy-making as an "emotionally-charged arena" (p.449). They argued for more attention to "the complex interplay of emotions, politics and power" in these arenas (p.459). Eventually, Eleonora BELFIORE (2020) stressed that the debate about cultural value is an "arena for struggles and a site of inequality" (p.385). Turning to issues of perspective and representation, BELFIORE mentioned the importance for scholars, cultural professionals, and policy-makers "to acknowledge and address (instead of merely reflecting) such unequal distributions of value, voice, and symbolic power" (ibid.). Paul DiMAGGIO (1983) framed cultural policy arenas as discursive sites. As such, they are not limited to institutionalized spaces of cultural politics (e.g., parliaments), but are more comprehensive and can be found in what is defined as cultural "marketplaces of ideas" (p.242). According to DIMAGGIO, cultural policy-makers, including researchers (STEINAU, 2021), regulate cultural arenas or marketplaces by influencing the chances of entry into these public, discursive sites and the possibilities of survival and adaption regarding competing ideas, values, styles, and genres. Contrary to this wider, often implicit notion of cultural policy—following AHEARNE (2009)—explicit cultural policy is dominated by cultural administration and its institutionalized, professionalized, often state-centered manifestations of cultural policy. Here, cultural policy-making appears as merely a managerial expert task to be completed. We view this as a risk, however, of foreclosing more contested and in that sense political negotiation of cultural policies. [4]

As we previously mentioned, cities are sites where researchers can find both, (contingent) grounds for empirical research as well as theory-building potential in terms of democratic experimentation, inclusion and innovation. Cities can be construed as social worlds (STRAUSS, 1993) forming mosaics of meaning and power within cities (WIRTH, 1938). Constituting comparatively small, territorially, and politically defined social worlds, in cities, at the same time, one enters a universe of heterogeneous social worlds as well as arenas of multiple concerns.

From our research perspective we thus consider cities to be suitable are(n)as to zoom in into and out from conflicts with help of the theoretical frameworks of social worlds and arenas (MARCHART, SCHAD-SPINDLER, FRIDRIK & LANDAU-DONNELLY, 2023). In this paper we refer to the research and analysis process within the frame of the research project "Agonistic Cultural Policy (AGONART)—Case Studies on the Conflictual Transformation of Cultural Quarters" which was located at the Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna. In our research on Austrian urban cultural policy, we considered local specificities in particular: In Austria's federalist cultural policy system, cities are important players as one third of the state's overall cultural funding is distributed on the municipal level. The three cities selected for this research—Vienna, Graz and Linz—are the three largest Austrian cities in terms of population. They are also the respective capitals of their provincial states (and, in the case of Vienna, also capital of the Federal Republic). All three cities have distinctive cultural political profiles and funding strategies that we assessed through a conflict-oriented analysis. [5]

Based on the situational analysis in the three cities, we contested the notion of *politics* as "merely problem-solving, technocratic or crisis management operations" (LANDAU, 2019, p.3). Instead, we set out on the search for sites where *the political* in its broader forms of resistance and conflict becomes traceable and analyzable (MARCHART, 2010; MOUFFE, 2005). Thus, we were concerned with the core question how conflictuality can be grasped, reflected, and empirically comprehended in concrete empirical research processes: When and how does an arena come into existence—and when and how does it cease to exist? Is an arena only created when some of the concerned actors enter it and mark it as conflictual, or can it exist by itself? In other words, when and how does an arena become a site of (public) negotiation? Observing conflictual dynamics from the perspective of radical democratic theory also led us to investigate arenas that had not yet existed, including conflicts that had not (yet) been perceived as part of public deliberation. Especially for the analytical investigation of (counter-)hegemonic structures, the following questions are of particular pertinence: How can unoccupied or empty positions be grasped in discourse? Which political demands and subjectivities (singular or collective) thus remain unrecognized? What is the role of implicated and "silent" actors (CLARKE, 2012, [2005] p.86)? By engaging with these questions through social worlds and arenas methodology, in this paper we aim to create an analytical approach to conceptualize conflictual cultural political arenas. We thus hope to contribute to a theoretically sensitized and empirically informed cultural policy research dealing with the conflictuality of *the political* (see also SCHAD-SPINDLER, LANDAU-DONNELLY, FRIDRIK & MARCHART, 2023; LANDAU-DONNELLY, SCHAD-SPINDLER, FRIDRIK & MARCHART, forthcoming). [6]

2. Conflictual Consensus—Analytical Explorations at the Interface of Agonistic Democratic Theory and Situational Analysis

Following Chantal MOUFFE (1993, 2000a, 2005), we focused on moments of dissent, contradiction, and contingency in approaching our research questions, problems, and methods. For MOUFFE (2000b), the democratic process is an arena in which conflicts can be negotiated. In accordance with this conceptualization, we see conflict not as destructive per se but as a necessary and generative moment(um) of democratic processes in what MOUFFE called *agonistic pluralism*. For a well-functioning pluralist democracy, she proposed the notion of agonistic struggle, in which political confrontations are negotiated between adversaries who try to institute their own hegemonic views, yet without denying their opponents' legitimacy to do the same. This advances more a(nta)gonistic modes of political strife, in which contestation is assumed to take place between friends and enemies who seek to annihilate each other. With the agonistic model one adheres to a *conflictual consensus* as the core and condition of a "vibrant democracy" (MOUFFE, 2008, p.9). With this concept, MOUFFE specifically worked around the dominant, positivist imperative of consensus. Instead of aiming for finite solutions, within democracies, actors are challenged to provide, and participate in arenas to facilitate the emergence of conflictual consensus. In doing so they also contribute to an enlarged scope of political participation, which again broadens the ways in which conflictual consensus can be designed, maintained, challenged. [7]

Taking conflict as a point of departure to *become* political, regardless of the dilemma-stricken phenomenon of political representation, in our research we turned to the social worlds where conflictual consensus can be struck. This led us to Adele CLARKE's discussion on the politics of qualitative methodology. In reference to MOUFFE's concept of agonistic pluralism (2000b), CLARKE (2019, p.25) quoted MOUFFE's point "not to eliminate passions" (2000a, p.103; see also 2000b, p.16) as central to the methodological framework of situational analysis. According to CLARKE, theorists of agonistic pluralism promote "engagement without requiring domination by one camp or phony consensus" (ibid.; see also MOUFFE, 2000b). In reference to Anselm STRAUSS' theories of interactionist pragmatism (1993; see also BLUMER, 1969; MEAD, 1934), CLARKE (2019) implemented the concept of "cooperation without consensus" (p.25; see also CLARKE & STAR, 2007). This concept is particularly helpful in unpacking the conflictual dynamics between agonism and antagonism and "the generative tensions of pluralism" (CLARKE, 2019, p.25; see also MOUFFE, 2000b). In this respect, CLARKE approached agonistic pluralism both pragmatically and methodologically. Just as there are different perspectives on research problems (or conflicts), different perspectives on what might be the right and just approach and solution persist. Both STRAUSS' social worlds and arenas theory as enhanced by CLARKE's situational analysis, as well as MOUFFE's democratic theory, are thus "conflict orientations" (CLARKE, 2019, p.29; see also CLARKE & KELLER, 2014). Consequently, we conceived the concept of conflictual consensus as both a sensitizing concept and an analytical tool to study conflict. [8]

When following these assumptions in the empirical analysis of cultural governance as a political process with conflicting cultural stakeholders, researchers are necessarily concerned with examining the rules and spaces of engagement in concrete arenas and situations of cultural policymaking: How is cultural policy implemented? Which (democratic) qualities are inherent in cultural policies and politics? As we have shown in previous research on cultural governance in Austria (SCHAD, 2019), situational analysis, specifically social worlds and arenas analysis, is well-suited to provide insight into contingent and conflictual, and thus, political conditions of cultural policy and governance. Situational analysts take stock of the manifold relations between articulate(d) and implicit, visible and invisible political elements, which are relevant especially when it comes to questions of representation and participation in cultural policy and politics (ibid.; see also LANDAU, 2019). In the following, we first explore the interfaces of Chantal MOUFFE's democratic theory and Adele CLARKE's situational methodology before we set out to discuss their analytical potential in relation to the empirical data on local cultural policy conflicts in Austria. [9]

3. Investigating Interrelations Between CLARKE and MOUFFE

As pointed out above, to a certain extent, Adele CLARKE merged Chantal MOUFFE's democratic theory with social worlds and arenas theory in the situational analysis methodology. At this stage, it is useful to unpack these interrelations in more detail. Within our analytical explorations, we identified three interfaces between radical democratic theory, and social worlds and arenas methodology, which we regarded as particularly constructive for more in-depth elaboration. The first interface is the concept of the arena itself, which we related to the question of *how* arenas are created and become dynamic. This is an aspect intrinsically linked to acts of boundary-drawing and demarcation. We argue that with CLARKE's empirically oriented methodology (DIAZ-BONE, 2013), these (spatial) conceptualizations, central to the evolvement of democracy in theory and practice, can be thoroughly investigated. For a second interface, we regarded the involvement of non-human actants as well as implicated and silent actors as crucial. This evokes questions on the (normative) prerequisites that entities need to enter and articulate within an arena of democratic public negotiation. We connected this to acts of disembodiment and silencing as active processes within hegemonic political dynamics evolving around meaning, positioning and assertiveness. For the third interface, we were concerned with the question how researchers can trace symbolic conflicts in transforming institutional structures, a prevalent issue when engaging with cultural politics and policy-making. After discussing the theoretical implications of the first two interfaces, we connect our theoretical-methodological observations with empirical data on urban cultural politics and policy-making in Austria in the subsequent part of the paper. We focus particularly on conflict analyses related to the city of Graz. [10]

3.1 Arenas and the act of re-/de-marcation

Chantal MOUFFE (2008) established in her political theory the arena as the venue or "battleground" (p.6) of the democratic process. Within an arena, political dilemmas are negotiated by collective and individual actors with reference to different present perspectives (SCHAD, 2019). Consequently, with the notion of the arena or *agora* (Greek for place of assembly and event, public place), MOUFFE (2005, 2008) outlined a space where political contestation can take place. Entering this arena requires courage to leave one's privacy and expose oneself to the light of publicity (ARENDT, 2003 [1993]). Following Adele CLARKE and Susan Leigh STAR (2007), we understood arenas in our own analysis as the public sites where we can observe how different social worlds interact, generate, and respond to discourses, negotiate conflicts and controversies:

> "If and when the number of social worlds becomes large and crisscrossed with conflicts, different sorts of careers, viewpoints, funding sources, and so on, the whole is analyzed as an arena. An arena, then, is composed of multiple worlds organized ecologically around issues of mutual concern and commitment to action" (p.113). [11]

While MOUFFE was concerned with a normative perspective on democratic processes in societies, CLARKE focused on the sensitizing use of these concepts in ongoing empirical investigations. MOUFFE (1996) insisted on the limits of pluralism as not *all* differences can be accepted or "agonistically maintained" (p.136). This means that not all positions are legitimate in an arena because there are certain value-based boundaries in place. Positions that do not respect the principles of freedom and equality for all (keeping in mind that these terms themselves are contested) are thus to be excluded from the arena (MOUFFE, 2005). As Manon WESTPHAL (2015, p.14) put it: "Despite the irreconcilable dissent over the 'proper' meaning of equality and freedom, the consensus that these principles are the norms central to democratic society according to Mouffe has an essential effect for the survival of the democratic community." The acceptance of these boundaries by all participants in an arena, as a basic agreement, enables conflict regulation via modes of agonistic conflict, or conflictual consensus (see also LANDAU, 2021a). Whilst MOUFFE (2000a) held this inside/outside boundary as constitutive for the arena of agonistic democratic negotiation, she framed the boundaries of agonistic we-they-relations as contingent and reversible. CLARKE (2012 [2005]) also conceived boundaries of arenas and social worlds as porous. Because of this assumed permeability, researchers are allowed to be flexible in their analysis of social worlds and arenas and can therefore grasp a wider range of positions. The social and analytical practices of drawing, maintaining and transgressing boundaries (of social worlds and arenas) are in this sense rather performative than constitutive and require (self-)reflective attention. [12]

The *act of de-/re-marcation* by actors involved in social worlds is their respective "commitment to action" (p.152), which makes social worlds also differentiable for researchers. The researchers' orientation on collective actions enables empirical analyses of who and what is actually in an arena or part of a social world. Whilst

MOUFFE and CLARKE differed with regards to the process of boundary-drawing of and within an arena, what united them was their approach to refrain from eliminating difference, neither in political nor in methodological confrontations. Instead, they saw differences as generative and valuable for both democratic processes and analytical procedures (VALENTINE, 2008). Yet in contrast to the exclusion based on ideologically illegitimate positions, CLARKE (2012 [2005]) rooted situational analysis in an interpretative paradigm that endures the representation of all positions (see also MEAD, 1938). Researchers are thus required to scrutinize them without making initial value judgments or (politically) (dis-)agreeing with them. Notably, CLARKE (2012 [2005]) specifically included the situatedness and positionality of the empirical researcher (HARAWAY, 1989), whilst MOUFFE (2008) argued from a rather disembodied theoretical position, allowing her to engage in normative judgments on what democracies can or cannot tolerate. [13]

Using mappings as research tools leads researchers to further grapple with the *spatial dimension* of arenas. Particularly with regards to publicness as constitutive element of an arena, engagement with spatial politics or politics of space becomes necessary (DIKEÇ, 2015). Notably, MOUFFE did not further consider the question of where arenas can be established as agonistic public spaces (LANDAU, 2021b). For CLARKE, in comparison, mappings played a constitutive role in constructing (spatial) imaginaries of an arena. Therefore, researchers are co-responsible for the inclusions and (conscious or unconscious) exclusions of specific social worlds. As arenas (i.e., sites of conflicts) are in constant motion, the classification of conflictual scenarios similarly depends on the perspective and power of judgment of those involved, including the researchers. In other words, arena mappings are "cartefacts" (WOOD, 2012, p.290). Researchers are not only present in, but also co-constitutive of the arenas they study. They thus have a position of both power and responsibility. They make articulations (see below) as acts of spatial ordering between inside(s) and outside(s) (in-)visible via mappings (without however revealing any ultimate or stable truth, see LANDAU, POHL & ROSKAMM, 2021). In this sense, the process of zooming in and out of mappings can be read as reduction and expansion of space. CLARKE (2012 [2005]) called this a "democratizing" (p.164) approach to provide less powerful social worlds with more space in mappings. In summary, through mapping, researchers invariably conduct acts of both political and analytical inclusion and exclusion (in space). [14]

3.2 Articulation, human orientation and non-humans

If researchers and theorists assume normative judgement as a constitutive human capacity, they can create further exclusions or responsibilities. Drawing on actor-network-theory (ANT; CALLON, 1986; LATOUR, 2005), another distinctive approach of researchers applying the social worlds and arenas theory-method package is that they seek "to understand the nature of relations and action across the arrays of people and things in the arena" (CLARKE & STAR, 2007, p.113). Whilst MOUFFE (2000b) in her notion of agonistic pluralism focused on humans and empowered them (exclusively) with moral-ethical discernment, researchers

using situational analysis are also interested in non-humans as powerful political entities and how they shape negotiations within situations, social worlds and arenas (CLARKE, 2012 [2005]). Together with LACLAU, MOUFFE (2001) referred to the act of boundary-making as *articulation*. In this sense, we follow an understanding of articulation as "the ways in which we fix meaning within a social arena where everything is discursive" (FELLUGA, 2015, p.20). FELLUGA's universalist "we" refers to us human beings. *The political* is assumed to be "inherent in all human society," whereas *politics* refers to an ensemble of practices, ideas and institutions "which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence" (MOUFFE, 2000b, p.15). As a proponent of ANT, Bruno LATOUR (1999) expanded this notion beyond the limitations of language and human beings. He argued that articulation "may be applied not only to words but also to gestures, papers, settings, instruments, sites, trials" (p.142). Human as well as non-human elements thus co-constitute situations through their material and discursive properties, relations, and interactions. CLARKE (2012) stressed that researchers limiting themselves to human articulation also tend to overlook implicit, implicated and silent elements (both human and non-human). We consider the interrelations of these elements with explicit, speaking counterparts as specifically relevant to any analysis of power-laden, hegemonic practices of both the political and politics. Thus, with regards to the radical contingency of social relations, many more possible relations or forms of negotiation become feasible, including those that are not yet or no longer articulate(d) or openly confrontational. In other words, while for MOUFFE the agreement on common human values was the starting point for democratic negotiation, CLARKE asked the researcher to follow various negotiations as they emerge in manifold relations with things and beings, interpersonal and otherwise. Through her inclusive mapping strategies she strived to map all elements regardless of their positionality of power. For us, this open epistemology of political agency also mobilized new perspectives on processes of dis-/empowerment that are key to analyses of agonistic yet inclusive democratic representation. [15]

As material discursive analytical tools, the mapping exercises that CLARKE (2012 [2005]) proposed, comprise of 1. situational mappings as strategies to show all elements within a situation and to analyze their relations, 2. social worlds and arenas mappings as cartographies of collective commitments and sites of interaction and 3. positional mappings as strategies to sketch out positions taken and not taken in discourses. This enables researchers to access and reflect on actions and interrelations, such as acts of articulation and silencing/silences within situations and arenas. This also means that any theorization that researchers base on analytical mapping exercises is incomplete, provisionary, open to contradiction and contest. Following MOUFFE (2000b), it is crucial to remember that any temporary consensus on research findings remains latently conflictual and transitory. As researchers and citizens, we live with a generative lack of security, ultimate truths, or reasons (LANDAU et al., 2021). In the following, we discuss the question of how these considerations affect data collection and analysis in cultural political research practice. [16]

4. Applying Combined Methodological Lenses: Data Collection and Analysis in Austrian Urban Cultural Policy

4.1 Data collection and mapping procedure

Our data collection and analysis in the context of the research project "AGONART—Case Studies on the Conflictual Transformation of Cultural Quarters" in 2021 was strongly influenced by the constraints of the COVID19-pandemic. This meant not only that we conducted two thirds of the interviews via online platforms, but also that we were limited in on-site observations in the selected cities due to travel restrictions. Against this backdrop, mapping strategies became important for gathering data shared via digital channels in the field. As we will further illustrate, mappings provided collaborative sites that also created common ground for us researchers in times of necessary socio-spatial distancing. Nevertheless, the limits of this approach also became apparent, and we were relieved when it was possible to physically (re)enter cultural sites and venues pertinent to our research. [17]

For each city, we aggregated data through interviews (30 interviews between 1h-2:45 h), media reports (mainly digital daily newspaper articles and social media), and policy documents. Our sampling strategy for both interview partners and media reports was purposive and iterative (GUETTERMANN, 2015), meaning that initially our search for cultural policy conflicts was more open and became subsequently more empirically informed and thus focused as we further proceeded into the project. The interview process was based on semi-structured, guideline-based expert interviews (LITTIG, 2008). We started with other researchers and long-time involved stakeholders about their respective assessments on cultural policy and politics in Austria in the recent years. Furthermore, we asked respondents for recommendations of further interview partners, thus also generating a momentum for opening our sampling. This led us to narrowing down our selection of interviewees, focusing on cultural politicians, cultural administrators, members of juries and cultural advisory boards, representatives of interest groups and artists collectives, as well as individual artists and cultural producers. Given the evolving and changing dynamic of conflicts, we are hesitant to speak about having reached saturation in our data collection. Eventually, we also had to limit our research given the timeline of our project-based funding. [18]

From the very beginning of the research project, we set up messy situational mappings making use of a digital visual collaboration platform. Based on these unstructured mappings, we identified and ordered clusters of discursive constructions, individual and collective human actors, key sensitizing concepts, political and economic elements, non-human actants as well as implicated and silent actors and actants. These initial mappings helped us to sketch out the broader picture of key antagonistic positions (e.g., centralizing versus decentralizing cultural political decision-making, eventification of culture versus creating sustainable infrastructures, active participation in culture versus passive cultural consumption). But how could antagonism (i.e., confrontational conflict) be

temporarily transformed into agonism (i.e., conflictual consensus) in both political meaning-making and action? At this stage, we investigated arenas of cultural policy, politics, and related social worlds in more depth. In the initial phase, we sketched the bigger picture of the "universes of discourse" (i.e., the social worlds; CLARKE, 2012 [2005], p.86) within and, given the porousness of boundaries, beyond the cultural policy and politics arena. [19]

In the second phase of data collection, we started to work with mappings zooming into specific urban arenas of cultural policy and politics in the three selected cities. We investigated arenas in which multiple concerns and shared commitments (despite different opinions) had accumulated: for Vienna, we chose the "Summer of Culture/Kultursommer" program as the local government's response to the COVID19-pandemic (2020/21), providing artists with a stage and a paycheck to entertain audiences in an open-air festival format. In Graz, we focused on "Year of Culture/Kulturjahr," another city-funded cultural program in 2020/-21, fostering arts and science projects on the question "How do we want to live?" In Linz, we investigated the city's approaches to street art, murals, and graffiti in relation to cultural policy and urban marketing and development. In the third phase of data collection, we compared the city-specific arena mappings to one another, and in relation to the coded data in order to explore differences and similarities. This went hand in hand with extrapolating conflict-oriented frameworks from the mappings and observational memos we used for structuring and summarizing coded data. Our intention with this methodological procedure was to overcome the territorial fixation of data generation in favor of an overarching comparative analysis. [20]

The mapping process went alongside with coding interview data. In the exploratory phase of selected interviews, we coded full transcripts with MAXQDA software, starting with codes that we derived from our research questions and interview guidelines. We integrated memos as well as quotations from interviews and other documents into digital mappings. Thus, we expanded and saturated our coding structure with emerging topics and in-vivo codes. The mappings also helped us to identify missing perspectives in our data that we sought to address thereafter (e.g., through researching specific documents or approaching certain interviewees). In the second phase, whilst we condensed data into arena mappings of the three cities, we became more selective in the transcription and coding processes. To put it differently: the mappings helped us to identify and decide which "stories" of urban cultural policy and politics we "wanted to tell" (CLARKE, 2012 [2005], p.150). The third phase consisted of an interpretive analysis (BEVIR & RHODES, 2016; MÜNCH, 2015) of the coded interview data, where we organized and summarized the coded text into thematic tables (summary grids) to establish frameworks of conflictual relations. To do so, we identified and compared conflict dynamics and conflict types for the cities in dialogue with the mappings. The mappings supported our navigation through the extensive data, and individual articulations, expressed via interview statements, and related to the discourses represented in the arenas. In the next section, we go into more detail about the relevance of the methodology to cultural policy as our research area. [21]

4.2 Relevance of cultural political and democratic perspectives: (Non-)audiences and (non-)citizens

Notions of cultural policy are often limited to its explicit appearances (AHEARNE, 2009), for example through manifestations of state agencies and institutions involved in governing and financing cultural productions, heritage, and mediations. Moreover, cultural policy often has a specific normative orientation towards cultural participation. Through an analysis of situations, arenas and social worlds, these normative approaches which *appear* to be inclusive and consensus-driven, can be challenged: Who gets to be integrated into which structures by whom, under which conditions and with which consequences? What kind of conflictual dynamics arise, and how do they develop? To specify: When looking at our mapping of social worlds and arenas in Austrian cultural politics and policies, we observed that audiences, as well as non-audiences are important discursive formations addressed in political justifications, but they usually remain silent or absent in institutionalized negotiations—except for when their (in)visibility is quantified in cultural venues. What does a quantification of audiences and citizens imply and (how) are they still capable of acting despite being marginalized? Our observation also entailed questions about who can act collectively as social world and who is disembodied (e.g., made absent through quantification or other modes of exclusion). Audiences are implicated quite prominently through other social worlds (e.g., politicians and cultural institutions) to legitimize their actions, yet (members of) audiences, as well as the larger proportion of non-audiences, often do not self-represent their positions. On the contrary, they are discussed and decided on in negotiation processes. Cultural policy thus appears as an expert domain ruled by professionals and institutions, devaluing cultural experiences and interests of (potential) audiences. Accordingly, citizens in representative democracies are the sovereign by constitution, yet not in decision-making positions unless they are voting, explicitly invited to the table in deliberation processes, citizens' councils etc. These ambivalent politics of invitation affect how citizens mobilize or raise their voices. [22]

However, we noted a significant difference between non-audiences and non-citizens: Whereas through cultural policy in Austria (at least symbolically) government representatives assured that cultural participation is to be increased, the hurdles towards formal citizenship, or at least the right to stay as permanent resident were deliberately very difficult to overcome (HANDLER & WALTER, 2014). Participation opportunities in political arenas were thus inhibited (and partially overshadowed) by legal-bureaucratic obstacles and complex questions of social inclusion and exclusion, as well as identity-related positional attributes (SPIVAK, 2003 [1988]). Furthermore, the inclusion of actors and social worlds in existing cultural political decision-making regimes remained coupled with hegemonic relations. On the one hand, one could argue that cultural policy is a niche, elitist subject in terms of public funding, stakeholders, and the audiences it addresses. On the other hand, we observed developments in neighboring European countries such as Hungary that show that the freedom of cultural expression is a seismograph for democratic liberalism (or illiberalism; SCHAD-SPINDLER, FEDER, TRÉBAULT & LAZOVIC, 2021). In Austria, too, right-wing

governments and politicians have recently revealed their take on cultural policy as populist identity politics. These developments led us to worry about safeguarding cultural freedoms of (creative) expression in times when in the Austrian capital Vienna a 30% share of its residents do not hold Austrian citizenship. In summary, questions on cultural and political participation are intricately interrelated (SCHÖNHERR & OBERHUBER, 2015). The importance of presence and self-representation in cultural policy arenas is both a question of cultural expression and democratic articulation, as an Austrian cultural policy analyst pointed out:

> "We have a heterogeneous, diverse population, characterized by the most diverse cultural expressions, and which, and this is the really revolutionary thing for me, are all equal. Where we can no longer justify prioritization as we did 50 years ago. So, from the point of view of democratic politics, these cultural expressions must all have an equal right to come forward, to participate and to enter the public arena" (Interview#1, March 2021). [23]

Another interviewee, a non-European artist residing in Vienna underlined social recognition and acknowledgment as a condition for democratic publics: "This is democracy. Not just giving my opinion but feeling part of the space that you are living in. In a way that you are being seen like your voice, your art, your existence matters" (Interview#4, March 2021). By zooming into Graz as one specific arena of contested urban cultural policy, we further unpack the complex interdependencies between (counter-)hegemonic positions as well as the different meanings and perceptions of conflictual consensus. [24]

4.3 Zooming into Graz

The government of Graz, Austria's second-largest city with 284,000 inhabitants, decided to implement a "Year of Culture" as a city-wide program of cultural events in 2020. With a budget of about 5 million Euros provided in addition to the city's cultural budget, the "Year of Culture" was funded and organized by the city's cultural administration and had a broad thematic focus around the topic "How do we want to live?" Out of almost 300 submissions, the city accepted around 90 projects based on a jury decision. The creators of these projects connected artistic approaches with concerns about urban development, climate protection and social diversity. Already back in 2004, the city government had instituted a civic advisory council on cultural matters (*Kulturbeirat*), representing practitioners' interests in both city-owned cultural institutions and smaller-scale cultural associations. Since then, the council has advised the cultural city councilor (*Kulturstadtrat*; SCHAD, 2019), a function that was also relevant for the planning of the "Year of Culture." [25]

Conflictual dynamics started from the earliest planning stage of the "Year of Culture." At that time, the city government was led by a conservative-right wing coalition of the ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) and the FPÖ (Freedom Party Austria). When the mayor together with the cultural city councilor—both members of the ÖVP—developed the idea of the "Year of Culture," established local stakeholders such as the *Kulturbeirat* were not included. As the initial plans were

eventually revealed, the *Kulturbeirat* criticized that the budget was initially planned to be deducted from the city's overall cultural budget. Although the *Kulturbeirat* deliberately represents individuals with different interests and perspectives regarding their artistic and institutional affiliations, their shared understanding of this conflict united their voices as a collective:

> "That was of course our first position, that [this] is not possible under any circumstances, because the budget is so limited that it would be a redistribution and that is not possible at all, [...] that it would then have to be added to the budget. We were all united in this opinion, which was very important and very strong" (Interview#14, June 2021). [26]

This was a decisive moment as the governments' budgetary plans potentially would have resulted in both a major redistribution as well as having shifted the logic of cultural funding from freedom of content to politically set agendas. Although the *Kulturbeirat* did not emerge as a social world articulated from its own demands, it was able to articulate a counter-hegemonic position—contesting the ways in which the "Year of Culture" would be funded. Eventually, they succeeded with both concerns—attracting additional funds and enabling a thematically open call for project proposals which were then selected by an expert jury. Although the city government announced a call (i.e., organizing an assessment based on a professional jury judgment), the competitive selection process triggered antagonization precisely because there was shared content and commitment. As an artist participating in the competitive selection process of the "Year of Culture" program stated: "Culture is an extremely tough competition. It's business like any other business, and the closer the players in the cultural sector get to each other, in terms of content, the tougher the cut-throat competition becomes" (Interview#6, May 2021). [27]

The involvement of an expert jury consisting of people not living and working in Graz served as a de-antagonizing justificatory shield for local policymakers and program managers. Although the managing team was ready to engage in discussions, emphasizing that this competition "is not aiming at exclusion" (Interview#25, October 2021), they also noted that some unsuccessful applicants nevertheless withdrew from the program and conversation: "Those who withdraw feel left out and they eventually are, that's social dynamics" (Interview#25, October 2021). This illustrates not only the importance of emotions and exclusions in an arena, but also the difficulty to re-engage those as citizens in a program that were turned down as professionals. [28]

In the case of one project, submitted by the well-established artistic collective and cultural space *Forum Stadtpark* various media reports indicated that the project was not rejected due to the jury's concerns about artistic quality or feasibility but for political reasons (e.g., W. MÜLLER, 2021). This initial perception was reinforced by interviews with local actors. The *Forum Stadtpark* suggested freeing urban space of inner-city Graz of private cars for exactly one week. Journalists called it a "fierce project with international radiance" (N. MÜLLER, 2021, n.p.). While anticipated negative economic effects on citizens and businesses officially

served the politicians to justify their decision to stop the project (despite a positive assessment by the expert jury), newspapers reported a decisive influence from the right-wing government partner FPÖ to put a halt on the project idea. What today, in 2023, seems like a foreshadowing of battles for the streets between climate activists and their opponents, was interpreted at the time as a reaction to the *Forum Stadtpark*: Interviewees linked this to the reputation of *Forum Stadtpark* as a notoriously critical voice among the city's artistic associations. According to its self-description, the institution's role is "to oppose all restrictions on the freedom of intellectual and artistic life by appropriate means" (FORUM STADTPARK, 1958, n.p.). Over the years, *Forum Stadtpark* and the FPÖ have engaged in ritualized public confrontations which reinforced their antagonistic relation. In 2018, the institution publicly called for participation in demonstrations against the national right-wing-conservative coalition in the city government as well as on the national level. This led to the party threatening not to sign the funding agreement for the institution in that year (SCHMIDT, 2018). Furthermore, the FPÖ continuously renewed their populist proposal to turn the attractively located building of *Forum Stadtpark* into a coffee house or beer garden. The party argued that this step would equal to an opening of the allegedly exclusive, elitist cultural space to the general public of Graz. [29]

One interviewee from a cultural organization closely involved in the negotiations of the car-free project shared the impression that the FPÖ only agreed to the "Year of Culture" on the condition that the Forum project would not be implemented (Interview#14, June 2021). Another interviewee working in Graz' cultural sector stressed the antagonistic role of right-wing political forces in restraining the freedom of cultural expression: "The enemies of cultural policy come from the far-right" (Interview#20, September 2021). Yet because the asserted political influence was not publicly negotiated but remained lingering in the pre-political sphere of "the city hall environment" (N. MÜLLER, 2021, n.p.), the motivation to publicly call for solidarity with the canceled Forum project (or to support its potentially strong message) did not materialize. Another crucial factor was the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, coinciding with the actual start of the city-wide program. This caused a severe loss of public space(s) that affected not only the program, but also the cultural political development beyond it. Cultural venues as potential arenas of democratic negotiation were closed, as one interviewee, a local cultural worker and activist, pointed out: "We knew then that something is really lost, and that this is very risky [when] a political space gets lost" (Interview#14, June 2021). Besides the more visible, dominating cultural venues such as museums, theaters, or concert halls, this severely hit culturally marginalized communities and their meeting spaces. [30]

In our data analysis and mapping exercises, we discovered more latent implications of the pandemic onto the urban cultural landscape. Whilst in the course of the "Year of Culture" with the guiding question "How do we want to live?," the city supported projects on urban cohabitation and social inclusion, policy-makers also used the pandemic to further silence marginalized communities. For example, one interviewee working for an artists' collective observed that "concerns over hygiene and security" (Interview#12, June 2021)

deflected from the closure and displacement of small-scale, backyard meeting rooms of ethnic and religious groups. Some interviewees also perceived the "Year of Culture" itself as a means that the city government used to deflect from their ambitions for large-scale infrastructural and urban development projects, selling public land as building sites, and building a hydropower plant on the river Mur. Specifically the latter led environmental activists to protests, which was countered by police (HOLZER-OTTAWA, 2018). Some artists, urbanists, and cultural workers involved in the "Year of Culture" told us that they struggled with their own attitude in relation to these conflicts. Although they defined it as political greenwashing, they also saw opportunities arising from it. Their commitment to different social worlds became overlapped and conflicted. Should they even participate in the arena of the "Year of Culture" and thus risk being coopted by the city government? And yet, beyond additional finances, some justified the cultural program as a possibility for using the subversive power of artistic processes to challenge dominant political practices following a neoliberal agenda. One artist suggested a strategic approach of "catching the politician in his greenwashing ambitions" (Interview#6, June 2021). This exemplifies how artists and cultural workers utilized critical artistic strategies to legitimize cooperation with a cultural political program despite not aligning with political actions in other spheres. Participating urbanists implemented for example projects in development areas on the outskirts of Graz where agricultural and industrial infrastructures were to make way for private property. Here, they wanted to try out what one of them called "micro utopias" (Interview#20), enabling experimental artistic processes that might lead to alternative scenarios for spaces and co-existence. Nevertheless, there are some remaining questions: do artistic and cultural projects serve as a way to channel and control protest? Or do they have effects beyond the realm of art into allegedly more powerful arenas such as integration, urban development, and environmental policy? [31]

As the pandemic caused the organizers to extend the "Year of Culture" into 2021, the new timeline they set coincided with an election and a political shift in the city government from right-wing conservative to left-wing green, with a female communist mayor (a unique constellation in Austria). What caused this shift in the citizens' vote? Was it the "Year of Culture" experiences or rather the politics and policies in areas such as the environment and housing? Looking at our arena mapping, we observed that the social world of the conservative mayor and city cultural councilor were surrounded by a multitude of other social worlds who were engaged in cooperation within the program, as both cooperative and critical partners. In light of a major critical-activist project not being given voice, we interpreted this as a weakening of the city's initial power position vis-à-vis its involvement in pluralist conflictual-cooperative constellations. [32]

5. Discussion and Outlook

In this paper, we argued for approaching the analysis of urban cultural political conflicts and the dynamics of cultural policymaking through the concept of the arena. As sites of conflictual constellations, relations, and negotiations—in other words, as discursive-material spaces of the political—the conceptualization and exploration of arenas proved insightful when we traced the implicit and explicit dynamics of cultural politics and policy. We have demonstrated how a thorough engagement with the interfaces of radical democratic theory and situational analysis helped to gain a more nuanced understanding of contingent democratic processes in terms of agonistic pluralism and conflictual consensus (see also MARCHART et al., 2023). Initially, the empirical approach towards questions of cultural expression, democratic articulation, and conflict was challenging. We found that, on the one hand, CLARKE's social worlds and arenas methodology enabled us to retrace dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the political public arena and dimensions of acknowledgment (being heard and seen) as individual and/or social world. On the other hand, MOUFFE offered a theoretical-normative perspective for a(nta)gonistic democratic development. In combining both approaches, we were able to mark boundaries and conflict lines, and make them tangible as porous constructions. When it came to the political engagement of various actors in artistic and curatorial practice, we observed this porosity, however, often solidify into hegemonic norms, practices and (limits of) action. For human actors in the arena, this also required the endurance of permanent conflicts, with different capacities. For them, it means not only hearing and seeing individual articulations from pluralist perspectives but also trying to understand these articulations via different effects of societal conflicts. As researchers, investigating their arenas made us aware of how much we are already part of the arenas we study. [33]

The conflict-attuned mapping methodology further provided space to gain insight into non-linear, contingent, and situational dynamics of negotiation processes. This is relevant not only from the perspective of interpretive analysis, but also for radical democratic theory and practice. As we crossed the theoretical and methodological perspective of agonistic arenas and situational maps, we created applicable analytical tools to follow and unwind complexities, constellations, and phases of conflicts. As conflicts emerged, became manifest or remained latent, our constant analytical shift between zooming in and zooming out responded to their dynamic evolution. In order to compare interpretations of mappings and interview codings, we considered collaborative tools useful to engage in a dialogue and to challenge one's own situatedness (as well as to share the workload). It was important and insightful that CLARKE's methodology encouraged us to be analytically engaged with the collected material throughout the data collection and analysis process. Nevertheless, we found the limits and efficiency requirements of project-based work challenging to adhere to the methodological requirements of social worlds and arenas analysis. Our decision-making process of which types of possible relations, arenas, and social worlds to follow (and which ones not to study in further detail) thus remained limited with regards to feasibility and capacity concerns. In addition to a differentiation

between phases and types of conflicts as well as dynamics of antagonization (LANDAU, 2019), the mapping of arenas and social worlds sensitized us to scrutinize perspectivity, positionality, and relationality of research in and about conflicts. [34]

A more in-depth positional analysis to map the heterogeneity of all positions as "a more insistently democratic theory of representation" (CLARKE, 2012 [2005], p.165) could be a valuable extension of our proposition to further explore conflicts in the cultural policy/politics arena. Providing apparently absent positions with discursive space in an arena but also spatializing negotiation dynamics through mapping strategies, researchers could further contribute to democratize social-spatial orders. Although we have comprehensively discussed the theoretical interrelations between CLARKE and MOUFFE, some aspects would benefit from additional empirical research and theorization. The lenses of post-colonial and feminist theories and practices would be helpful to explore how acts of disembodiment and silencing manifest within hegemonic structures and struggles in cultural politics and challenges from elsewhere. Another question still lingering with us involves the materialization of a symbolic engagement with cultural political conflicts in institutional structures: How and where do efforts for *cultural diversity* and anti-discrimination in cultural institutions take place? Nevertheless, the social worlds and arenas methodology allowed us to grasp conflicts relationally in the interaction between social worlds and the elements that constitute them. In retrospect, we see the topical statement of the program in Graz, "How do we want to live?," as creating an arena for looking into conflicts over inclusion and exclusion par excellence: Who is *we*? Who are *we* speaking for? (MARCHART, 2010) [35]

The latent expectations of interview partners to provide practical or policy-related suggestions further affected (the perception) of our research. As we engaged in various discussions to connect our findings with local stakeholders in cultural policymaking (e.g., through participations in roundtables, policy-writing processes, podcasts etc.), we have to ask ourselves how our analytical insights can be translated into recommendations for cultural policymaking. Is a strategic agonistically inclined approach to cultural policy processes and conflicts even possible at all, and what would it look like? How does engaging with and in these arenas and conflicts affect the perception of our position as researchers? It requires us to continuously wrestle with the inclusions and exclusions produced by analytical thinking, just like in politics (ibid.). Considering these contingent conundrums, conflict-oriented research processes remain continuously unresolved trials. Yet, we face(d) these trials (and related errors) in line with an understanding of democracy that is always in the making—to become more democratic, and more attuned to the generative potential of conflicts. [36]

Acknowledgments

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