

Three Ethnographic Case Studies

Spaces of political contention and
everyday extremism in Athens,
Malmö and Vienna



Countering Oppositional Political
Extremism through Attuned
Dialogue: Track, Attune, Limit

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Three Ethnographic Case Studies

**Spaces of political contention and everyday extremism
in Athens, Malmö and Vienna**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES	6
TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
1. INTRODUCTION	10
2. TOPOLOGY OF THE EVERYDAY: ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS WITH URBAN SPACE	14
2.1. URBAN SPACES AS PALIMPSESTS, STAGES AND CANVAS	16
2.2. WALKING AS A METHOD.....	18
3. SITUATING THE WALKS: EXPLORING URBAN CONTEXTS IN ATHENS, MALMÖ AND VIENNA	21
3.1. ATHENS	21
3.2. VIENNA.....	22
3.3. MALMÖ.....	23
4. EVERYDAY URBAN LANDSCAPES: NEIGHBOURHOOD WALKS, VISUAL ENCOUNTERS AND MOBILISATIONS	25
4.1. CITY CENTRES AS CENTRAL STAGES: MEMORY, PROTEST, AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY	26
4.2. POLITICAL CONTENTION, STRUGGLES OVER MEANING AND THE VISUAL POLITICS OF SPACE: INSIGHTS INTO THE WALKS WITHIN ECONOMICALLY DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS	31
4.3. GENTRIFIED NEIGHBOURHOODS: AESTHETICS OF RENEWAL, MORAL ECONOMIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CHANGE.....	35
4.4. MAY DAY MOBILISATIONS	40
5. EVERYDAY EXTREMISM IN ORDINARY SPACES ACROSS OFFLINE-ONLINE CONTINUUMS.....	45
REFERENCES	48

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Empirical steps in WP4.....	11
Figure 2: Fieldwork areas in Athens, Malmö and Vienna.....	25

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1: Excerpt from Fieldnotes on Syntagma/Athens.....	26
Illustration 2: Picture from Athens; “Our needs are not criminal offences”	26
Illustration 3: Pictures from Athens; From the left: “The biggest human mistake is capitalism”; Top Right “Long-term strike”; Bottom Right “Chat-bots do not strike”	27
Illustration 4: Pictures from the Lueger Monument.....	27
Illustration 5: Excerpt and Pictures from Fieldnotes on Vienna.....	28
Illustration 6: Pictures from Vienna; on the left commemoration of the victims of the Graz rampage; on the right posters from the “bring them home now” Campaign.....	28
Illustration 7: Excerpt and Pictures from Fieldnotes on Malmö; To the left: “Boykott dürüm” (“boycott kebab”). To the right: A Patrioterne går live viking sticker with the logo carved out.....	30
Illustration 8: Mural in Seved/ Malmö.....	31
Illustration 9: Excerpt from field notes on Kolonos/Athens.....	31
Illustration 10: Excerpt and Pictures from Fieldnotes on Seved/Malmö.....	32
Illustration 11: Pictures from Athens. From left to right: Erased graffiti covered with text saying “Greece or Ash” including a Celtic cross, the initials of Golden Dawn (XA) and Golden Dawn’s symbol; Celtic crosses, and the symbols, initials, and full name of Golden Dawn; Graffiti calling Anarchists “Junkies” alongside meander symbol (equivalent symbolism as the swastika for greek far rights groups) and the initials X. A. (Golden Dawn); A crossed-out swastika and an anarchist symbol.....	33
Illustration 12: Picture from Athens.....	33
Illustration 13: Excerpt and Pictures from Fieldnotes on Vienna.....	34
Illustration 14: Picture From Vienna; “freedom for Manuel” and “abolish the NS Prohibition Act” alongside a QR Code to the Campaign.....	34
Illustration 15: Pictures from Malmö; To the left: two side-by-side posters reading “Long live Palestine! Cross Zionism!,” crossed out and partly torn; To the right: A crossed-out sticker reading “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” below it – a poster saying “Wanted for war crimes: Israel’s PM Benjamin Netanyahu”	36
Illustration 16: Pictures from Malmö; On the left: An image of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin kissing. In the middle: A sticker with a poop emoji overlaid over the American flag with Donald Trump’s	

hair, saying “Guess the poop?”. To the right: An image of Vladimir Putin making a hand gesture, with the text “It’s like this small.”.....	36
Illustration 17: Excerpt and picture from Fieldnotes on Athens; “I am ashamed” slogan written repeatedly around the profile of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.....	37
Illustration 18: Pictures from Athens; On the left: Message on the site of new suites building; In the middle: Anti-tourism street-art. On the right: Airbnb for tourists, camps for immigrants, welcome to Greece.....	38
Illustration 19: Pictures from Vienna; Messages against hipsters, property ownership (“Property ownership is (not) super embarrassing”) and AirBnB.....	39
Illustration 20: Pictures from Vienna; on the left: Visible Traces of Stickers removed from trash can; on the right “fck nzs” tag on Mariahilfer Straße.....	39
Illustration 21: Pictures from Vienna; on the left: Members of the youth organisation of SPÖ marching towards the stage in front of the City Hall, protesting the migration policy of the Party “Separating families = Burning values”; on the right: Trackless trains in the second district.....	40
Illustration 22: Excerpt from fieldnotes on May Day in Malmö.....	41
Illustration 23: Picture taken across Parliament, Athens.....	41
Illustration 24: Picture from the front of the city Hall in Vienna.....	41
Illustration 25: Pictures from May Day March in Malmö.....	42
Illustration 26: Excerpt and pictures from May Day in Athens; on the left: X post where user degrades leftist protesters juxtaposing them with normal people; on the Right: X post with photograph from May 1st rally where protesters march with Palestinian flag.....	42
Illustration 27: The crowd at Folkets Park/Malmö waiting for Magdalena Andersson’s speech. Counter-protesters’ banners in the middle.....	43
Illustration 28: May Day celebrations organised by Kurdish, communist and trade union groups in Vienna.....	43
Illustration 29: “Anarchist May Day” banner at the rally in Athens. “Against: state, capital, war, wage slavery.”.....	44

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report offers insights on *everyday extremism* by focusing on how urban spaces shape and are shaped by political struggle and popular contestation around the circulation and normalisation of extremist narratives in public space. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in neighbourhoods across Athens, Malmö, and Vienna, we examine these dynamics in three types of urban environments: gentrified districts, city-centre cores, and economically deprived areas, in combination with focused participant observations of the 2025 May Day mobilisations in all three cities. Adopting a space-centred approach, we situate visual artefacts within their lived environments, tracking how symbols, posters, stickers, graffiti, and tags circulate across public space. Methodologically, the report is grounded in spatial ethnography and combines ethnographic walking with photo documentation and thick descriptions of observations to capture material, historical, and sensory dimensions of place.

Reflecting core readings from urban ethnography, we analyse urban spaces as palimpsests, canvases and stages of popular contestation, attending to historical trajectories, visual politics, acts and performances of everyday political struggle. Across the three cities and different neighborhoods distinct yet intersecting thematic patterns of political contention emerge: local socio-economic pressures (economic crisis, gentrification, rising rents, commercialisation) are negotiated alongside external crises (particularly the wars in Gaza and Ukraine). Additional themes identified in the visual traces of conflict expressed through graffiti and stickers include traffic and congestion management, and tensions surrounding tourism marketing and the city as a site of heritage branding reflecting both immediate grievances of current inhabitants in these cities, as well as longstanding historical tensions tied to places and monuments that, over time, have become sites of struggle over the right to public space and oppositional political ideologies.

Across the sites explored in this ethnography, urban space emerges as a dynamic interface for social movement mobilisations, visual protest artefacts, and everyday acts of contention. The surfaces of the city - anything from walls, shopfronts, street signs, and infrastructure - bear witness to an ongoing struggle between competing narratives and claims. However, significant traces of explicitly extremist narratives were found only in Athens. In several areas, far-right slogans, insignia, and symbols visibly marked the urban landscape, indicating sites where far-right mobilisations have established a more durable presence. Yet these spaces were not uncontested. The same surfaces also displayed clear signs of resistance, revealing an ongoing struggle over memory and meaning.

A marked contrast emerged in the permeability and permanence of visual artifacts across the three sites: in Vienna and parts of Malmö, sanitised surfaces and empty walls framed the city as a curated canvas, where governance regimes and systematic cleaning practices regulate what becomes visible and legible. Event-driven mobilisation cycles around the May Day, further modulate this visibility, producing temporal surges of marking and counter-marking in the city space that intersect with municipal maintenance, policing, and platform-based amplification. In this context, stickers containing QR codes and urls function as hybrid connectors between the material and digital spheres of mobilisation.

Conceptually, the report builds on the insights of previous deliverables and adds to the relational model for understanding everyday extremism along a range of processes that operate across different continuums – from local to global and translocal, physical and digital spaces, and across various modes of violence. With this deliverable, we contribute to a deeper understanding of how public space operate as a key arena for political struggle and potential space of everyday extremism in which people risk encountering divisive and violent messages as part of everyday life in cities across Europe today.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban public spaces are contested arenas where competing claims and power relations are made tangible through everyday practices and material inscriptions. Rather than neutral backdrops, public spaces are socially produced and continually reworked (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 2013; Massey, 2005) and shaped by a broad range of actors who compete over use, appropriation, and representation. Contestation over urban space unfolds in design, policing, and regulation; in memorials and street names; along protest routes, assemblies, and occupations; and in visual markings and embodied routines that assert presence, demarcate symbolic boundaries, and shape everyday experiences (Certeau, 1984; D. Mitchell, 2014). In this sense, public spaces become a site where struggles over the “right to the city” (N. Brenner et al., 2012; Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 2016; D. Mitchell, 2014) materialise, where political opposition is staged and managed and where inclusion and exclusion are negotiated. Such struggles unfold across scales: localised disputes over walls or squares resonate with broader ideological currents and trends such as commercialisation, securitisation, and democratic participation. Studying visual artefacts and social movement mobilisation in public spaces offers insights into current political debates, local grievances, and the everyday geographies of power and opposition. In this reading, graffiti, stickers, and other markings appear as traces of urban life in contention. Through these visual inscriptions and ‘political residues’, we can trace claims to space, acts of presence-making, and the repertoires of contention that thread through the city.

This ethnographic study of political contestation in different neighborhoods across three European cities is the final report in a series of deliverables within Work Package 4, *Media, Machines, and Mobilisations*, of the OppAttune project. OppAttune tracks the evolution of oppositional ideologies and develops tools to attune, and limit the spread of extreme political narratives, operating at micro, meso, and macro levels. Within the large consortium of the project, Work Package 4 pursues a transdisciplinary approach, bringing together media and urban scholars to identify and understand contemporary extremist narratives in on- and offline spaces and to map their diffusion across the digital mainstream and into local ecologies. This deliverable, like WP4’s broader efforts, contributes specifically to OppAttune’s first objective: tracking the evolution of everyday extremist narratives. In our conceptualisation of everyday extremism, we build on social identity theory (Berger 2018) to categorise narratives as extremist when advocates for hostility or violence against an abject Other in ways that breach with fundamental democratic principles of human equality and dignity. Instead of tracking extremist actors, we look at everyday online and offline spaces. This is reflected in our working definition of everyday extremism as referring to “the recurrent and normalised presence of

extremist narratives embedded in familiar settings such as discourse, spaces, and practices (...) that are “often amorphous, ambiguous, and embedded in the routine aspects of daily life.” (Askanius et al, 2024b, p.21). Hence, we understand everyday extremism not as a fixed category but as a set of processes operating across scales and continuums, from local to translocal and global, and across physical and digital spaces. In our work, we pay attention to how narratives move and mutate between different public spaces, and how they are reinforced by spatial infrastructures (built as well as digital) and how they are mediated through routinised, embodied practices and visual artefacts that circulate in both the digital and physical spaces that citizens inhabit and move through in everyday life.

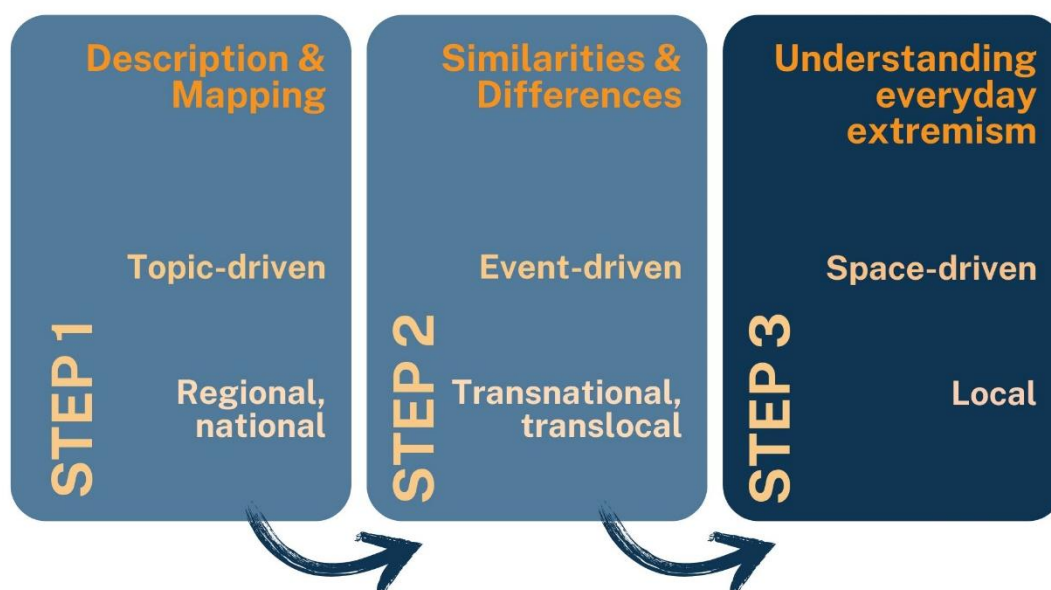


FIGURE 1: EMPIRICAL STEPS IN WP4

As shown in Figure 1, Work Package 4 has followed a stepwise approach. The first deliverable mapped everyday extremist narratives and their online spread (Askanius et al., 2024a). The second deliverable examined the 2024 European Parliament elections to trace how extremist narratives were articulated, disseminated, and contested across online and offline spaces, noting that war and conflict emerged as a crucial topic while vaccination folded into a broader conspiracy frame (Askanius et al., 2024b). Building on these two reports, this final deliverable adopts a space-driven approach, focusing on the local level and the immediate everyday spaces of urban residents. Through three ethnographic case studies conducted across different types of neighbourhoods in Athens, Malmö and Vienna, we ask how public spaces are appropriated and contested, and how urban environments reveal traces of extremist narratives. Empirically, we anchor this deliverable in the tradition of spatial ethnography (Anderson et al., 2025; Hall, 2015; S. Low, 2016) and adopt walking as a method. By combining

ethnographic walks with photographic documentation and thick description, we are able to deepen our understanding of how environments shape social life, considering the material, historical, and sensory dimensions of place beyond human interactions. Walking draws attention to the sensory textures, lived experiences, social rhythms, and spatial entanglements that often go unnoticed in other approaches, allowing to uncover the subtle ways urban life is shaped, contested, and inhabited. Combining walking with photography allowed us to systematically document urban visualities such as symbols, posters, stickers, graffiti, and tags, attending to how they cluster, layer, and circulate across neighbourhoods and specific sites. Walks were conducted in three types of neighborhoods—gentrified districts, city-centre cores, and economically deprived areas—with additional routes timed around May Day mobilisations. This approach situates visual artifacts in their lived settings, tracing their meanings and political messaging. Methodologically, we chose to “go looking for” extremism in ordinary, everyday spaces rather than within explicitly extremist, closed-off groups, conceptualising everyday urban spaces as an important sphere for the spread of extremist narratives. Acknowledging that the boundaries between radical, disruptive and extremist forms of mobilisation are often politically contested and frequently conflated in ways that equate progressive activism with extremism, we distinguish between contentious and antagonistic politics, which constitute an essential component of democratic participation, and extremist narratives that seek to delegitimise, threaten or incite harm against minorities or democratic institutions in ways that breach democratic principles (Berger, 2018; Della Porta, 2022; McAdam et al., 2001; Mouffe, 2020). Rather, we focus on the relational dynamics of contention: narratives, far-right mobilisations, and divisive discourse frequently emerge in reaction to progressive, rights-based protests and unfold across both digital and physical spaces. By tracing these reactive formations on walls, lampposts, or bus stops, we illuminate how urban publics are appropriated, polarised, and contested through spatial practices.

Grounded in the tradition of ethnographic writing, we provide thick descriptions of the spatial dynamics of everyday extremism in the neighbourhoods we explored while walking. In the following section, we approach walking not simply as a method, but as an epistemological practice through which knowledge of the city is made. By moving through everyday urban spaces, we get a sense of how streets, thresholds, and routines are sensed, narrated, and negotiated in ordinary life. We outline how this mode of attention shapes our understanding of ‘the urban’ as something lived rather than merely mapped. We then turn to the three cities and the specific trajectories, memories, and built environments through which their urban rhythms take shape. In the empirical chapters, we present our field work conducted across three types of neighbourhoods and the focused ethnographies of the May Day mobilisations in all three cities. The analysis is structured around visual materials and thick

descriptions to provide detailed insights from our walks and the distinct social, spatial, and material dynamics that shape peoples' everyday encounters with political messaging in urban spaces, including those containing violent, exclusionary ideas. In the concluding section, we link the findings of this report back to our previous reports, reflecting on the ways online and offline narratives fold into one another. Our work within the OppAttune project shows that narratives associated with extremism do not operate as discrete or exceptional phenomena, but are woven into ordinary environments and encounters. Rather than moving in a single direction, such narratives circulate between digital platforms and urban spaces, gaining traction through familiarity, repetition, referencing, and circular spread. What becomes visible, then, is not simply the presence of extremist narratives in everyday settings, but the mundane processes through which they are normalised in daily life. Such an everyday perspective helps us situate street-level expressions within broader ideological currents, and connect protest repertoires to counter-mobilisations, and mundane practices to the wider infrastructures through which political meanings travel.

2. TOPOLOGY OF THE EVERYDAY: ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS WITH URBAN SPACE

Urban space is never neutral. From the suburbs to a gentrified neighbourhood, from a narrow alley in an economically deprived area to the most iconic plaza, urban public space is not a neutral stage but a continuously produced field of relations, scripts, and counter-scripts. Henri Lefebvre's foundational work (Lefebvre, 2013, 2016) emphasises that urban space is not simply a backdrop for social life but a medium through which power, exclusion, and contestation are enacted. Lefebvre's insistence on the socially produced nature of space resonates across scales: the micropolitics of a street corner or public square refract broader struggles over democratic participation, pluralism, and the terms of urban belonging. Following Doreen Masseys oeuvre (2005), space is relational and open, constituted through flows and encounters, and subject of competing claims and trajectories. It is through these relational and contested processes that the city becomes legible as a site of both everyday practice and political negotiation (Certeau, 1984).

Space, in this sense, is never simply physical; it is lived, experienced, and interpreted. 'Seeing' (Amin & Thrift, 2016) and re-imagining the city (Amin & Thrift, 2002) requires assessing how the materialities of the city, the pavements, buildings, and public transport routes, intersect with events, routines, and social interactions. These larger networks constitute urban life and represent the 'essence of a city' (Amin & Thrift, 2016). Public spaces are important elements that make a city and are equally inseparable from questions of power, exclusion, and contestation (Crenshaw, 1991; Hall, 2015; McKittrick, 2006): who is visible, who speaks, who is heard, and who is silenced are spatial questions as much as political ones. More importantly, as Setha Low and Neil Smith argue in "The politics of public space" (Low & Smith, 2006), public spaces are important democratic arenas to express dissent, but are under pressure as they are increasingly regulated through security and/or surveillance. This turns attention to everyday tactics that strive to subvert the strategies imposed from above, such as policing, regulation or urban design (Gehl, 2011; Jacobs, 1992). Through everyday practices residents negotiate, resist, and inhabit the city in ways that can contest formalised hierarchies. This relational perspective illuminates the political dimensions of public spaces and shows how the *right to the city* is not merely about access, but about participation, appropriation, and the (symbolic) assertion of presence.

Hence, attending to the everyday means reading the city's minor registers as much as its spectacular episodes that together constitute the essence of a city. Citizens move through spaces saturated with

political cues: memorials that represent, memorialise and moralise, advertisements that commercialise, zoning regulations that privatise, video surveillance that securitises. Territoriality and place-making manifest through a combination of visual markings, routines, and embodied practices, from graffiti and stickers staking micro-sovereignities to benches designed to repel, to protest routes. Each of these examples can be read as a spatial practice which makes claim to belonging that have the power to accumulate into patterned geographies. Visual politics further shows how visibility and attention shape political subjectivity and how images and signs circulate to contest dominant narratives (Mirzoeff, 2011; Mitchell, 1994). The production of space organises what can be seen, said, and done (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 2013). These layered atmospheres are not only material but moral and affective. Spaces encode norms, like for example who counts as a proper user of a square, or whose grief is acknowledged in a memorial, but also on a micro level, like the question whose stickers are removed.

City centres, representative places or places with specific meaning matter not only because they attract attention, but also because they concentrate social, political, and symbolic power. Protests and demonstrations often occur in the urban spaces or near the institutions they address, for example, outside parliament or in gentrified neighbourhoods. Mobilisations and counter-mobilisations thereby frequently occupy the same spaces, competing over visibility, meaning, and control (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Reactive mobilisations often shadow progressive claims and vice versa, occupying the same routes or walls, or appropriating the same idioms to invert their meaning. Such appropriations don't necessarily need to be grand; they can range from minor interventions like leaving a sticker to overt symbolic acts like hanging a banner from a representative building to organised collective demonstrations. Repertoires of contention shows the multiple ways in which people organise, push back, and respond to opposition (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015); whereas extremist or fringe groups tend to operate underground, anonymously or online, moderate ones are more likely to take their causes openly to the streets. Instances of place-framing and symbolic occupation outlines that identity formation often is tied to particular sites (Martin, 2003) and that spatial configurations serve as powerful social forces in democratic processes (Kohn, 2003), while agonistic pluralism and dissensus remind us that legitimate conflict is constitutive of democracy (Mouffe, 2020). Crucially, analysis must differentiate between antagonistic but democratic politics and extremist narratives. Not all contestation signals extremism but everyday extremism can nest within ordinary and mundane spaces (Miller-Idriss, 2017). Diffuse narratives, suggestive symbols, and lifestyle cues that insinuate exclusion into routine consumption and community life. Urban space can both facilitate the diffusion and normalisation of exclusionary ideologies and provide sites for

everyday resistance and contestation. For these reasons, our analytical framework is designed to carefully distinguish between legitimate dissent within democratic bounds and extremist activity avoiding the misclassification of dissent as extremism.

Aesthetics are policed: broken windows policies rationalise removal; order-maintenance practices calibrate whose presence is acceptable (Wilson & Kelling, 1982; Harcourt, 2001). Securitisation frames issues as threats, justifying extraordinary measures that reshape everyday freedoms (Buzan et al., 1998). Privatisation and sanitisation narrow the public by design: ownership regimes and surveillance infrastructures recode spaces, altering the conditions for contention (Low & Smith, 2006). In ethnographic encounters, these governance scripts meet tactics: detours and dispersion, pop-up assemblies, coded signage, and careful timing. To write from the walk is to keep these scales in the same frame: bodies and atmospheres, scripts and counter-scripts, infrastructures and improvisations. It is to show how space is made and remade in political struggle, how conflicts over presence and voice become ordinary, and how democratic life persists in dissensus. Visual inscriptions, graffiti, stickers, murals, and other street-level markings, act as both signals and sites of contention. Countervisuality and visual activism respond, making alternate worlds available to perception. Graffiti, tags, and stickers function as communication, identity work, and claim-making, their aesthetics cueing affiliation and antagonism (Campos et al., 2022; Cooper & Chalfant, 2015; Ferrell, 2004). Such an ethnographic attentiveness allows us to see how the everyday becomes a vector for both the reproduction of exclusionary ideas and the enactment of democratic contestation.

2.1. URBAN SPACES AS PALIMPSESTS, STAGES AND CANVAS

Building on these insights from urban geography and sociology, urban public spaces can be read through three complementary metaphors: palimpsest, stages, and canvases. Each one of these helps to foreground how everyday practices contribute to the production and negotiation of urban space, shaping who is seen, who is heard, and how claims to presence, belonging, and political meaning are enacted and contested. As palimpsests, urban settings carry layered histories that remain legible in materials, in decay and transformation, in memorials and street names; as stages, they are the arenas in which everyday practices unfold and where people are heard and seen, pointing to the elements of performance and physical presence; as canvases, they serve as surfaces for inscription and intervention, where actors design, mark, and reinvent the urban. Taken together, these lenses allow us to attune to the multiple functions of public space in the everyday unfolding of political contention. Yet their differences also guide how such spaces can be interpreted, studied, and understood in relation to broader social and political dynamics.

The notion of palimpsest speaks to temporality, accumulation, and the politics of memory: cities are repeatedly written and rewritten, with traces of the past persisting beneath new layers (Hayden, 1997; Huyssen, 2009; Mitchell, 2020; Till, 2005). Visual and textual media, such as maps or photographs, mediate how layers are perceived and politicised (Balshaw & Kennedy, 2000). Typical evidence includes architectural scars, reused infrastructures, surviving toponyms, monuments, informal memorials, regulatory remnants (signage, bollards), and adaptive reuse projects that stitch past and present. History is negotiated along a variety of actors that have left durable marks, which are to be excavated to make sense of urban memory and traces of the past. The strength of the palimpsest lens lies in illuminating continuity and change, showing how past conflicts shape present everyday life and how erasures and re-inscriptions are political acts.

Public spaces as stages foreground performance, spectatorship, and the choreography of social and political life, such as rituals, protests, festivals, policing, and everyday encounters (Ahmed, 2013; Koch & Miles, 2021; D. Mitchell, 2014; Valentine, 2008a, 2008b; Wilson, 2017). In this reading, public spaces are understood as being constituted through the interplay of scripts and roles, visibility and audience, timing and attention, as well as affect and atmosphere. Persons can be read in their roles as performers (residents, activists) and audiences (passersby, media), with mediation bridging street and platform: media practices shape how performances are produced, circulated, and received (Couldry, 2004). The stage lens captures contention and the politics of visibility. In these scenes, questions of who appears, who speaks, and who is heard are irreducibly spatial, mediated by design, ownership, surveillance, and the choreography of co-presence.

Public space as canvas centres on markings and inscription: urban surfaces become media for expression, intervention, and imagination through art, graffiti, tactical urbanism, and branding (Austin, 2010; Dragičević-Šešić, 2001; Zaimakis, 2015). Key themes include authorship and aesthetic choice, openness to modification, experimentation, and participatory design. Evidence ranges from murals, stickers, stencils, and tags to planters, pop-up installations, street furniture hacks, community art, and municipal branding. The strengths of the canvas metaphor lie in showing how everyday actors shape space and how visual politics translate grievances, oppositions, and current debates into material form. Given that the arts sit at the centre of sophisticated visual discourse on neoliberalism, democracy, and the battle over public space, the canvas lens helps connect symbolic practice to spatial politics (Ulmer, 2017). Its limits involve the risk of aestheticising conflict and obscuring power asymmetries behind what gets “painted,” curated, permitted, or removed.

Taken together, this constellation of literatures highlights urban space as a site of continuous negotiation. The city is a palimpsest, a stage, and a canvas where relational space, everyday practice, contested narratives, and mediated circulation converge. Reflecting on the differences between these metaphors helps to foreground what each lens brings into focus. Temporally, the palimpsest centers on past-in-present-inscriptions and erasures; the stage highlights present-in-performance and immediate interactions; the canvas points to present-to-future creation and visual interventions. The modes of action and politics of visibility differ accordingly: the palimpsest traces and inscribes, the stage performs and interacts, the canvas produces and intervenes. Each lens also engages conflict in distinctive ways: the palimpsest situates disputes in historical layering, showing how past inscriptions continue to structure present struggles; the stage dramatises live antagonisms, highlighting the rhythms of contestation, regulation, and attention; the canvas foregrounds contested authorship, and cycles of inscription and erasure. Used together, these metaphors resist simplification. They invite us to read the city's layered memory, attend to its enacted politics, and document its processes of visual-making. This makes it possible to trace the micro-practices through which urban politics are lived, enacted, and resisted, revealing how broader struggles over democracy, inclusion, and ideology are inscribed into everyday urban life.

2.2. WALKING AS A METHOD

Walking as a method provide means to engage with multiple dimensions of everyday life, exploring how spaces are produced, experienced, and contested. Rooted in traditions of spatial ethnography (Hall, 2015; Low & Smith, 2006) and the ethnography of the city (Lefebvre, 2009, 2013), walking methodologies are a methodological and epistemological approach that situates the researcher within the rhythms and flows of the built environment. Following Lefebvre's thoughts on the lived production of space, the street becomes both archive and laboratory. Walking methodologies draw inspiration from the Situationists' *dérive*, an experimental practice of wandering through urban spaces to uncover their emotional and psychological terrains (Debord, 1958). The *dérive* emphasised disorientation and discovery, encouraging participants to drift through the city with an open and playful spirit. This approach resonates with contemporary walking ethnographies, which prioritise immersion, reflexivity, and the co-production of knowledge. Scholars have highlighted the value of walking as a way to engage with the material, sensory, and social aspects of space (O'Neill & Roberts, 2020; Springgay & Truman, 2017), offering insights that static interviews or observations might miss. A walk therefore is not a pre-defined route but is characterised by openness and exploration.

The researcher's role on such walks oscillates between observer, participant, and flâneur. As observer, one carefully examines the environment and attends to patterns and salient features. As participant, one immerses itself more explicitly in interactions, for example by asking directions, performing certain activities or engaging with passers-by. As flâneur, one cultivates attentiveness and drift, letting the city's affordances redirect the itinerary. With regard to data collection, researchers draw on the rich methodological toolkits of ethnographic research, among them participant observations, thick descriptions and field notes, or go-along interviews and conversational interviewing (Kusenbach, 2003). Visual data collection is usually also an integral part of walking methodologies, allowing for the systematic documentation of everyday practices. Photographic documentation, for example, allows researchers to document micro-level details alongside the broader spatial surroundings, like graffiti, signage, architectural features, and other elements of the built environment but also spaces as a whole. Field notes and memos, both written and recorded, complement visual data by capturing sensory impressions, atmospheres, and encounters that may not be immediately visible in photographs to create rich descriptions of places and their social fabric. Images in public space are not isolated artefacts but nodes that reflect power relations (advertising as traces of commercialisation; political messaging as signs of mobilisation or traces of municipal clean-up as signs of urban governance and regulation).

Ethical considerations are central to walking as a method, particularly when it involves the observation of people present in public spaces, sensitive spaces or acts of political contention. In public, the line between observation and intrusion can blur; documenting people's activities, even when legal, may be experienced as extractive. Researchers must respect privacy and are not allowed to document any identifiable or personal data without informed consent, navigating the complexities of public and private spaces with care. Ethically, walking methods demand continual consent-seeking and risk assessment. Thus, we decided not to record any conversations that took place while walking and reduced recording to short memos from the researchers. In documenting street art or informal livelihoods, we paid attention to consider potential harms from visibility and to contextualise violent narratives carefully in order not to reproduce them; furthermore, we avoided to take photographs of people and if so, did refrain from using them in publication or blurred the faces. These ethical challenges require ongoing reflexivity and a commitment to conducting research with integrity and respect. Walking also demands attention to the researcher's positionality and the ways in which their own situated knowledge influences spatial readings (Adekoya & Guse, 2020; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004; O'Neill & Roberts, 2020; Pink, 2015).

The practicalities of walking as a research method require careful consideration regarding route selection, duration, timing, and frequency of walks. Researchers might choose predetermined routes based on specific research objectives or allow for more spontaneous exploration. Repeated walks in the same location at different times of day or across seasons can capture changes in usage, atmosphere, and demographics, providing a more nuanced understanding of the space. In our case, we decided to focus on three different types of neighbourhoods in the three cities and to visit them on different days. However, we did not follow pre-determined routes but moved through the neighbourhoods in an open and exploratory manner. Walking methodologies are particularly well-suited to studying the socio-political dimensions of space, as they allow researchers to experience and document the environment from an everyday perspective. By moving through neighbourhoods without pre-determined routes, one can observe everyday practices, spatial patterns, and social interactions as they emerge, paying attention to subtle details and broader urban dynamics. In this way, we are able to explore neighbourhoods through the eyes of residents and passers-by, asking ourselves questions like: What narratives are they confronted with? What political messaging do they encounter? Who occupies these spaces, and who is present or absent? What traces of the past remain visible, and how do they shape the experience of the urban environment?

3. SITUATING THE WALKS: EXPLORING URBAN CONTEXTS IN ATHENS, MALMÖ AND VIENNA

Before we turn to the ethnographic material, we here briefly introduce the three cities to situate our research within the broader context of these urban environments. Context shapes what we can see and understand: it helps us embed our observations historically, and to read the everyday against the backdrop of local struggles and political tensions. Knowing the particularities of a city, e.g. its everyday pressures but also local eccentricities, can keep us from mistaking the unusual for the ordinary or overlooking what locals take for granted. It helps to read small signs and better understand what we find, be it a sticker on a lamppost, a closed and smeared upon front of a shop, or an overly crowded tram. All these small elements that make up the urban fabric are part of larger stories about urban contention and belonging. With this in mind, the brief city portraits that follow set the scene for the three urban ethnographies, sketching the social and spatial worlds in which they unfold.

3.1. ATHENS

Athens serves as the political, economic, and cultural centre of Greece hosting major government institutions, universities, and cultural landmarks. It is a city where historical trajectories are highly present in urban space. Ancient Greece serves as a central pillar for tourism marketing and the Acropolis as the most visible symbol of this era rises over the contemporary skyline of the city that is made up of remnants of ancient Greece, the Byzantine and Ottoman-era, and the postwar polykatoikia apartment blocks. Tourism has transformed central neighborhoods (Gialurē, 2001; Gourzis et al., 2022; Hamilakis, 2007; Pettas et al., 2022): Around Plaka, Monastiraki, and the Acropolis Museum, streets have become zones of consumption, with pedestrianisation and heritage branding coexisting alongside informal vending and local micro-economies. In addition to this axis of cultural heritage and tourism, the economic crisis and its aftermath are inscribed into Athens's urban fabric (Souliotis, 2013; Tsilimpounidi, 2017; Vradis & Dalakoglou, 2011). Austerity measures, unemployment, and precarity reorganised urban life and left traces in the city. Empty storefronts and graffiti-covered shutters once signaled contraction; more recently, reactivation is driven by gentrification and takes uneven forms.

Urban segregation in Athens is subtle but pervasive, produced through real estate dynamics, gentrification, and uneven public investment and planning interventions (Balampanidis et al., 2021; Gourzis et al., 2022; Maloutas et al., 2025; Panori et al., 2019). Affluent districts in the north and northeast contrast with denser, industrial and working-class zones to the west; within the centre, micro-segregation often appears block by block, where renovated buildings are located right next to

buildings in disrepair. Political contention remains central to Athens's public culture. Syntagma Square's mobilisations during the austerity years, the annual Polytechnic commemoration, and ongoing demonstrations across the center make the street a stage for claims-making, from anti-fascist marches to far-right mobilisations, to labor protests and neighborhood campaigns against gentrification and evictions (Arampatzi, 2017; Avramidis & Tsilimpounidi, 2017; Zaimakis, 2015).

With a metropolitan population of over three million people, Athens faces challenges typical of dense urban centers, including traffic congestion, limited green space in central districts, and pressure on public services (Dimitriou & Mihalopoulos, 2024; Maloutas, 2025; Vlastos, 2015). The city's port, Piraeus, functions as a critical hub connecting the mainland to the Greek islands, reinforcing Athens' role as a gateway for commerce, tourism, and maritime transport but has nonetheless been stagnant (Maloutas, 2017). Car-dependence and narrow streets produce congestion and contested curb space, particularly during peak hours and due to the high number of daily commuter inflows from the wider metropolitan region. Although the metro system has expanded, road traffic remains a structural challenge for the city, which makes walking uncomfortable at times and makes it difficult to move across districts and metropolitan regions.

3.2. VIENNA

Vienna's urban fabric is dense with history and the imperial axis from the Hofburg through the Ringstraße still choreographs how residents and visitors move through the city. As the capital and only metropolis of Austria, Vienna occupies an unique institutional and political position, being simultaneously a municipality and a federal state. The city's historical trajectory—from the Roman settlement Vindobona to the imperial capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—is materially inscribed in the urban fabric, most notably in the historic centre. Yet, Vienna's urban landscape has equally been shaped by social-democratic governance in the "Red Vienna" era (1919–1934): the municipal housing estates, baths, kindergartens, and courtyards has left a lasting imprint on urban policy and socially just planning (Blau, 1999). Social housing rests in the hands of the municipality and limited profit cooperatives and stabilises affordability, while ensuring socio-economic mixing and spatial cohesion (Brenner et al., 2024; Kadi & Matznetter, 2022; Litschauer & Friesenecker, 2021; Musil et al., 2022). This becomes visible when walking through various neighbourhoods where imperial grandeur and historical housing stock coexists next to social housing.

Economically, due to its geopolitical position at the heart of Europe, Vienna serves as a Central European hub (UNOV, 2024). Tourism represents a key pillar of the local economy. In 2023, the city

recorded over 17 million overnight stays and surpassed pre-pandemic revenues (Vienna Tourist Board, 2023; 2024). Vienna is furthermore characterised by extensive green infrastructure (Arnberger, 2012; Brenner et al., 2021) and a high quality of urban life (Mercer, 2024; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024). Large green spaces such as the Prater, the Danube region, and the Vienna Woods Biosphere Reserve contribute to recreation, biodiversity, and climate adaptation while also functioning as important social spaces. However, much of this green infrastructure is concentrated either on the urban periphery or in large parks. Many inner-city districts that are characterised by historic housing stock and dense block development experience a relative scarcity of accessible green and blue spaces, alongside growing pressure on public space (Friesenecker et al., 2021; Furchtlehner et al., 2023).

Currently, Vienna is undergoing significant urban transformations while experiencing sustained population growth (Haselbacher et al., 2024). Although around 1900, the city had had two million inhabitants, the World Wars triggered sharp population decline and demographic ageing and until 1988, Vienna lost nearly one third of its population. Since the early 1990s, however, the city has recorded steady growth and since 2005 the population increased by approximately 373,000 people, rising from 1.6 million to around two million. This development was driven primarily by international migration and today Vienna's population is ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse (Lehner et al., 2022; Verwiebe et al. 2015). Depending on the definition applied, the proportion of migrants ranges from 30.8 percent (by citizenship) to 36.7 percent (by country of birth); or 42.6 percent (the two combined) in 2022 (City of Vienna, 2022; 2023). In light of this dynamic demographic growth, the city faces increasing pressure on public spaces, infrastructures and services. Despite the left political majority in Vienna, immigration has not gone unchallenged and was accompanied by recurrent political contestation, the rise of radical right populist parties, and ongoing public debates over integration, social cohesion, and access to urban resources.

3.3. MALMÖ

Compared to Athens and Vienna, Malmö – the third largest city in Sweden – is a young city shaped by rapid cycles of transformation. For long, Malmö has played an important role as an industrial port city, but since the late twentieth century, it has undergone a profound post-industrial transformation, leaving behind a palimpsest of shipyards, logistics infrastructures, and high-density housing developed under the Swedish Million Program alongside new waterfront developments oriented toward higher education, business, and innovation (Tillväxtkommissionen, 2023). Its position within the Öresund region and the connection to Copenhagen via the Öresund bridge have accelerated processes of urban development and mobility, while also sharpening socio-spatial inequalities (Anderson, 2014).

Malmö is one of Sweden's most ethnically and culturally diverse cities, and also one of its most segregated, exhibiting a complex configuration of differences in its citizens' country of origin, ethnicity, languages, legal status, migration trajectories, class positions, political affiliations, and transnational ties (Lundstedt et al., 2024). These intersecting forms of diversity are unevenly distributed across the city and closely entangled with its housing structure and labour market. While forms of gentrification are scattered across the city, they coexist with long-standing patterns of class-based and spatial segregation that closely mirror earlier industrial-era divisions (Hedin et al., 2012).

Malmö's *superdiversity* (Lundstedt et al., 2024) and spatial inequalities are actively narrated, politicised, and made visible in public spaces. Competing representations of Malmö as, on the one hand, a progressive city of openness and solidarity, and, on the other, an emblem of failed integration and urban disorder, circulate in national media and political discourse, turning the city itself into a contested symbol (Hansen, 2022; Ulver, 2023). These tensions become visible at street level through uneven patterns of inscription, erasure, mobilisation, and regulation (Creasap, 2021; Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou et al., 2025; Hansen, 2019), making Malmö a particularly revealing site for examining how everyday extremism and democratic contention are embedded in urban environments.

4. EVERYDAY URBAN LANDSCAPES: NEIGHBOURHOOD WALKS, VISUAL ENCOUNTERS AND MOBILISATIONS

In this chapter, we turn to the everyday landscapes of urban contention, exploring three distinct types of neighbourhoods: economically deprived areas, gentrified areas, and city centres. In addition, we conducted fieldwork around May First, when neighbourhoods and in particular representative places become sites of heightened political contention, where different actors assert presence in public

spaces. Through guided walks, visual documentation, and careful observation, we trace how these spaces are shaped by social, economic, and political dynamics. Across these contexts, the streets, walls, and public squares of the city emerge as arenas where ideologies, histories, and conflicts are not only inscribed but performed, contested, and circulated, revealing the layered and lived dimensions of urban life.



FIGURE 2: FIELDWORK AREAS IN ATHENS, MALMÖ AND VIENNA.

Figure 2 illustrates the fieldwork areas in each city. The first type comprises economically deprived areas, where high unemployment, social marginality, and historical neglect intersect with visible political claims and contestation. The second type includes gentrifying or newly developing districts, where demographic change, rising property values, and municipal investment create a markedly different texture of everyday life and patterns of visibility. The third type consists of mixed or more stable residential areas, where everyday routines, placemaking, and local social networks interact with occasional, highly visible mobilisations such as those around May Day. We approach these neighbourhoods as simultaneously palimpsests, stages, and canvases. These overlapping dimensions allows us to capture the layered, contested, and relational character of urban life, showing how everyday practices, inscriptions, and mobilisations, both subtle as well as staged and

spectacular, constitute the city as a terrain of democratic participation, ideological negotiation, and visual politics.

4.1. CITY CENTRES AS CENTRAL STAGES: MEMORY, PROTEST, AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

City centres are usually arenas of contradiction, simultaneously inviting through commerce and culture, yet imposing through regulation, social hierarchies, and subtle forms of intimidation. In most cities, representative buildings, political institutions and the majority of tourist attractions are located at the centre, alongside shopping streets, museums, and cultural venues, creating a space that is simultaneously celebrated, consumed, and policed. Our walks through the city centres in Vienna, Athens, and Malmö revealed how public spaces in urban cores serve as canvases for collective memory, platforms for dissent, and arenas for negotiating visibility and belonging. Despite their differences in geography and context, city centres are curated and regulated spaces but are nevertheless important arenas for grassroots expressions of grief, solidarity, and resistance.

In Athens, the walks started at Syntagma Square, the symbolic and political heart of Athens and a space where the weight of Greece's economic and social struggles is inscribed on its walls. Fieldwork took place on a quiet afternoon following the May Day demonstrations, when the

"Syntagma Square is where the Greek parliament is located. Historically, this is an area where crowds gather during large-scale demonstrations. The Square was full of people demonstrating earlier in the day, with many attendees and speakers from various political organisations. However, once the demonstrations finished, people left and the square and surrounding streets were left relatively empty compared to the average day-to-day activities, with only a few people, mainly tourists, left wandering around. It was a quiet, sunny and warm afternoon, very different to the usual hectic and crowded atmosphere that characterises that area. This made it much easier for us to identify objects of interest such as graffiti, stickers and posters which address contemporary problems of the Greek society."

ILLUSTRATION 1: EXCERPT FROM FIELDNOTES ON SYNTAGMA/ATHENS

square's usual bustle had subsided. With the rolling shutters of banks and shops closed for the holiday, graffiti and posters that are normally hidden came into full view, offering a raw glimpse into the city's collective anxieties and demands. The dominant theme was economic precarity, a legacy of over a decade of austerity. Graffiti called for wage increases and the restoration of lost benefits, with messages like "Raises to wages – (give back) the Christmas wage gift" and "The minimum wage is not sufficient." These inscriptions, direct and unembellished, conveyed a sense of urgency and exhaustion, reflecting the daily struggles of ordinary Athenians. Broader rights-based claims, such as "Housing is a



ILLUSTRATION 2: PICTURE FROM ATHENS; "OUR NEEDS ARE NOT CRIMINAL OFFENCES"

right” and “Our needs are not criminal offences,” linked economic grievances to a moral critique of governance and austerity. Anti-capitalist sentiments were pervasive, with graffiti and posters decrying the commodification of public goods and the environmental costs of capitalist development. Calls for a “long-term strike” highlighted the enduring belief in collective action, though this was tempered by concerns about automation and AI, as seen in illustration 3.



ILLUSTRATION 3: PICTURES FROM ATHENS; FROM THE LEFT: “THE BIGGEST HUMAN MISTAKE IS CAPITALISM”; TOP RIGHT “LONG-TERM STRIKE”; BOTTOM RIGHT “CHAT-BOTS DO NOT STRIKE”

The square also bore witness to grief and outrage over the Tempi train disaster, which killed 57 people in February 2023, captured in graffiti like “No more cover ups” or the haunting phrase of one person who, while trapped in the collided trains, said to her parents “I do not have oxygen”, while other stickers made links between capitalism and the train accident. These inscriptions linked the disaster to systemic failures, with posters describing it as a “state-capitalist crime” that prioritised profit over safety. Collective grief was hereby transformed into a civic demand for accountability. Syntagma’s walls also reflected broader global solidarities. Anti-Zionist graffiti and posters called for an end to the Palestinian genocide and the severing of Greece’s ties with Israel. Feminist messages denounced gender-based violence and mourned victims of femicide, transforming public spaces into sites of resistance and remembrance. Notably, far-right narratives were absent, with the visible discourse



ILLUSTRATION 4: PICTURES FROM THE LUEGER MONUMENT

dominated by liberal and leftist voices advocating for social justice and human rights. In Vienna, the centre operates as a paradox: a meticulously curated repertoire of grandeur and governance,

nested within a historically rich and at times burdened palimpsest. The immediate vicinity of our offices exemplifies these tensions. Just around the corner lies Karl-Lueger-Platz, named after Karl Lueger, mayor of Vienna's from 1897 to 1910, founder of the Christian-Social Party and known anti-Semitic rhetoric. The square alongside the Lueger monument has become a flashpoint for public debate. Acts of vandalism transformed the monument into a site of evolving contestation. After

"Our starting point for the walks was our office, conveniently located in the heart of Vienna, which allowed us to easily access key sites within the district. To find the first traces of political negotiation processes, we didn't have to go far. Directly in the passageway on the street outside our office, we came across several tags and slogans, including some with right-wing extremist messages. The three images below illustrate how these wall inscriptions reflect a diversity of messages. Among them is the slogan "Remigration jetzt" ("Remigration now"), a far-right extremist demand that calls for the forced return of migrants. [...] The picture in the middle reads "Nervi tesi, fasci appesi", an Italian anarchist slogan that translates roughly to "Tense nerves, fascists hanged" and that alludes to the public hanging of Mussolini and his followers in Milan in April 1945 [...]. In addition, on the last picture, there are references to Vienna's football rivalries: anti-Viola graffiti and the acronym FAK (representing FK Austria Wien), however the viola has been erased to an extent that it is almost not visible anymore, converting it into a pro viola tag and the FAK has been crossed out."



ILLUSTRATION 5: EXCERPT AND PICTURES FROM FIELDNOTES ON VIENNA

controversies, authorities left the graffiti intact, and the square which we crossed on a daily basis on the way to work acted as a living monument for a long time, marked by anonymous graffiti and right-wing counter-demonstrations. This unresolved visibility of burdened legacies raises critical questions: who is commemorated in public space, whose histories are silenced, and how should cities deal with symbols of power and exclusion?

Our observations across different parts of the centre foreground a compelling contrast: tourism mingles with everyday life and corporate life, state representation with grassroots activism, and the



ILLUSTRATION 6: PICTURES FROM VIENNA; ON THE LEFT COMMEMORATION OF THE VICTIMS OF THE GRAZ RAMPAGE; ON THE RIGHT POSTERS FROM THE "BRING THEM HOME NOW" CAMPAIGN

weight of history with contemporary negotiations. This became evident through the abundance of representative buildings we encountered, the smaller and larger public demonstrations and protest actions, the shops and traces of commercialisation, but also the subtle displays of power and social hierarchy embedded in the urban

fabric. Similarly to Athens, we could also see how the city centre serves as a canvas for the expression of grievances and mourning. For instance, during our walks we saw candles and flowers in front of St. Stephens Cathedral commemorating victims of a rampage in a school in Graz, embodying collective grief. Similarly, photographs of victims of the Hamas terror attacks on October 7th, 2023 were displayed outside the Jewish Museum and Vienna's main synagogue as part of the "Bring Them Home Now" campaign.

Public art, too, shows how precarious the line between visibility and vulnerability, between regulation and interpretation is. During the Vienna walks, we could see how even officially sanctioned cultural interventions can provoke contestation, as the example of the *Wiener Festwochen* demonstrates. The *Wiener Festwochen* are an annual arts festival in Vienna that presents a diverse program of theatre, music, dance and performances. This year's campaign was launched under the slogan "Republic of Love" and featured, inter alia one poster of a pregnant woman with her belly and parts of her breasts exposed, and one poster of two naked men in a sensual embrace. This sparked public backlash, with posters being vandalised or burned (in the case of the poster displaying the woman only the breasts and the belly were cut out), revealing a tension at the core of urban visibility: who has the right to speak in public, and how far can a city push toward inclusive pluralism before provoking backlash? As a reaction, destroyed posters were replaced and a vigil was organised, itself framed as a political act defending public space against the marginalisation of certain voices. This controversy highlights the fragility of visibility in public space and the ongoing negotiation over who and what belongs in the city's visual landscape, as well as how misogyny and homophobia shape what can appear publicly without fear of censorship or attack.

Malmö's city centre, stretching from Triangeln to Gustav Adolfs square, is a carefully curated space of commerce and administration. Unlike the more vibrant and residential neighbourhoods of Seved or Möllevången, the centre is marked by cleanliness, municipal maintenance, and a polished public image. Yet even in this managed environment, everyday politics find ways to surface. Stickers and posters, though less abundant than in other parts of the city, punctuate the urban landscape, often placed near transit stops or recycling bins where passersby can engage with both sport and politics. Football culture dominates, with Malmö FF supporters marking territory on lampposts and electrical boxes. Some stickers carry political messages, such as "Malmö supporters hate Nazis," blending fandom with anti-fascist sentiment. Left-wing and anti-capitalist stickers, often humorous or parodic, also appear. Examples include "Mumin mot Moderater" ("Moomin against the Moderates") and "Ät dom rika" ("Eat the rich"), which reimagine corporate logos to critique capitalism.



“Although right-wing stickers were hard to find, I found two by the Danish far-right group “Patrioterne går live” (“The Patriots Go Live”). Several of this group’s members have a background in the Stram Kurs party, the political party of Rasmus Paludan – the Danish-Swedish far-right politician who became famous in Sweden for performing a series of Quran burnings across several Swedish cities. However, the group’s logo was scratched out from one of the stickers, showing awareness of its origins among participants in street culture in Malmö.”

ILLUSTRATION 7: EXCERPT AND PICTURES FROM FIELDNOTES ON MALMÖ; TO THE LEFT: “BOYCOTT DÜRÜM” (“BOYCOTT KEBAB”). TO THE RIGHT: A PATRIOTERNE GÅR LIVE VIKING STICKER WITH THE LOGO CARVED OUT.

Transnational solidarity is another recurring theme. Pro-Palestine stickers, such as “Free Palestine” and “Boycott Israel,” stand out against the commercial backdrop of retail chains and cafés. These messages are often contested: many are torn, crossed out, or altered, reflecting the polarised politics of the issue. Similarly, older stickers expressing solidarity with Ukraine, including anti-Putin imagery, add another layer to Malmö’s palimpsest of geopolitical affects. Right-wing content, while rare, is not absent. Stickers from the Danish far-right group “Patrioterne går live” appeared, though some of their logos were scratched out, signalling resistance to their presence. This interplay of inscription and erasure underscores the contested nature of public space, even in a city centre that at first

glance appears sanitised and apolitical.

Taken together, these three walks through city centres reveal that urban centres and representative spaces are never neutral. They are a stage where authorities and corporations project legitimacy through architecture, installations, and signage, while citizens, activists, artists, and ordinary residents inscribe competing narratives onto the same surfaces. Memory, whether commemorating Graz’s tragedy, the victims of terror, or the victims of femicide, becomes a resource for mobilisation. Grief, when publicly displayed, can become a call to action, a demand for accountability, or a pledge of solidarity across borders. The politics of visibility are both fragile and necessary where each act of inscription renegotiates belonging and who is represented in the city. What stands out across these walks is not a single mood but something that can be best described as a spectrum of affect: spaces that display wealth and authority, that simultaneously invite and overwhelm due to the delicate tension between history, consumption, intimidation and spectacle. Public space, in these contexts, is a site of performance, and a battleground where power is displayed from above and contested from below.

4.2. POLITICAL CONTENTION, STRUGGLES OVER MEANING AND THE VISUAL POLITICS OF SPACE: INSIGHTS INTO THE WALKS WITHIN ECONOMICALLY DEPRIVED NEIGHBOURHOODS

Economically deprived neighbourhoods in all three cities are marked by dense populations, high unemployment rates, and layered social challenges, alongside contested forms of policing and comparatively limited municipal investment than central districts. These conditions shape urban space in ways that are immediately legible at street level. During our walks, political



ILLUSTRATION 8: MURAL IN SEVED/ Malmö

expression was not only present but highly visible, woven into the fabric of everyday life through windows, walls, and lampposts. In Seved/Malmö, the escalation of the Gaza war had clearly intensified the visual politics of the neighbourhood: Palestinian flags hung from the windows of almost every building, while stickers and posters articulated a political landscape firmly anchored in leftist, anti-racist, anti-fascist, and anti-capitalist positions. The absence of far-right or anti-left counter-messages suggested either a degree of ideological homogeneity or the rapid removal of oppositional material. Elsewhere, however, deprivation intersected with a very different political ecology.

In Kolonos, a large, densely populated, working-class area of Athens long described by residents as neglected, far-right symbols such as Celtic crosses were repeatedly sprayed onto walls and street furniture. These markings evoked the area's history as a stronghold of Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi party, which has been designated a criminal organisation, but which once secured significant electoral support locally. Here, visual contention was palpable: far-right symbols were frequently crossed out or overwritten with Antifa signs, pointing to an ongoing struggle over presence, memory, and

“Gradually, the more we approached Kolonos, the more far-right elements were becoming more visible to us. This is not something that we expected to such an extent. For example, [...] a cross inside a circle is a very common graffiti in the area. The symbol is a Celtic cross that is commonly used by the far-right to signify their identity, has been in use since at least WW2 and has been drawn during attacks in left-wing spaces and Jewish cemeteries, among others. The cross was often observed alongside a graffiti that reads as ‘CHΨH’ which literally translates as ‘rot’.”



ILLUSTRATION 9: EXCERPT FROM FIELD NOTES ON KOLONOS/ATHENS

meaning. A similar complexity was identified in the neighbourhoods we walked through in Vienna's Simmering district, a working-class area shaped by industry, infrastructure, and agriculture rather than historic

inner-city housing. Walking through Simmering revealed an urban fabric of social housing buildings, power plants, cemeteries, and newer residential developments, reflecting both long-standing marginality and recent urban transformations. Once among Vienna's most affordable districts, Simmering has seen rapid change over the past decade, as new buildings and shifting demographics reshape everyday life. Across these contexts, economically deprived neighbourhoods emerged not as politically silent or uniform, but as spaces where material conditions, histories of neglect, migration, and urban change converge.

Although across Seved in Malmö, Kolonos in Athens, and Simmering in Vienna, our walks revealed how marginalisation, political expression, and everyday endurance are inscribed into the fabric of place, these dynamics materialise quite differently. In Seved (Malmö), the emotional register oscillates

between stigma and resilience: cracked pavements and worn façades signal neglect and exclusion, yet the streets feel socially dense and alive, generating a sense of presence and belonging, animated by murals, community art and cultural activities that reframe the neighbourhood as a site of pride and reclamation. Political expression is highly legible here: pro-Palestine imagery conveys grief, anger, and moral urgency, but also strong solidarity and a shared purpose. Palestinian flags, stickers, and posters transform public space into a site of collective mourning and protest, linking local experiences of marginalisation to global

"Unlike in central districts where stickers and graffiti are frequently cleaned, Seved's posters remained layered and weathered. Political expression in Seved was highly visible. The Gaza war had clearly intensified the visual politics of the space. There were dozens of protest stickers and posters on the streets, especially around the Gaza/Palestine question. [...] Palestinian flags were hanging from windows of almost every building. Stickers were recent and vibrant, varying from handwritten and hand-drawn to professionally designed ones."



ILLUSTRATION 10: EXCERPT AND PICTURES FROM FIELDNOTES ON SEVED/MALMÖ

injustices. At the same time, anti-capitalist and anti-racist messages cultivate an atmosphere of mutual affirmation. Notably, unlike in the other two cities, far-right counter-presence was not visible, producing a sense of ideological cohesion. The walks through Seved evoked a complex mix of stigma, resilience, and collective expression. The neighbourhood carries an emotional weight shaped by its reputation as marginalised and "vulnerable," which is reflected in feelings of neglect, and signs of cracked pavements, litter, and worn buildings, which in themselves are not particularly remarkable, but stand in stark contrast to nearby gentrifying areas.



ILLUSTRATION 11: PICTURES FROM ATHENS. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: ERASED GRAFFITI COVERED WITH TEXT SAYING “GREECE OR ASH” INCLUDING A CELTIC CROSS, THE INITIALS OF GOLDEN DAWN (XA) AND GOLDEN DAWN’S SYMBOL; CELTIC CROSSES, AND THE SYMBOLS, INITIALS, AND FULL NAME OF GOLDEN DAWN; GRAFFITI CALLING ANARCHISTS “JUNKIES” ALONGSIDE MEANDER SYMBOL (EQUIVALENT SYMBOLISM AS THE SWASTIKA FOR GREEK FAR RIGHTS GROUPS) AND THE INITIALS X. A. (GOLDEN DAWN); A CROSSED-OUTSWASTIKA AND AN ANARCHIST SYMBOL.

Kolonos in Athens read very differently. The neighbourhood is marked by stillness, visible through closed shops, aging buildings, and the absence of tourism, which accentuate feelings of abandonment. Yet, as our walk progressed, emotions shifted from muted calm to growing discomfort and alarm. The increasing visibility of far-right symbols generates a strong sense of intimidation and hostility, making political conflict feel immediate and inescapable. Graffiti becomes a source of fear, anger, and provocation, especially where extremist symbols and aggressive slogans dominate public surfaces and are inscribed into everyday urban spaces. At the same time, the repeated erasure and overwriting of graffiti reveals an environment of constant struggle and confrontation. Public space feels contested and unstable, shaped by cycles of attacks and counter-attacks that convey polarisation, resentment, and defiance on all sides, with opposing political groups trying to delete elements of their opponents.

For example, in illustration 12, a graffiti saying ‘Athens Antifa’ in support of antifascism had the first two letters of the word ‘Antifa’ erased so that it would read as ‘Athens fa’, indicating support for fascist groups in the city. These visual battles suggest a lack of resolution and a climate of perpetual tension, which becomes visible through the painting over of political symbols and messages. Urban surfaces appeared less as static backdrops than as sites of ongoing confrontation, where signs were continually overwritten, negated, and reasserted. Surfaces



ILLUSTRATION 12: PICTURE FROM ATHENS

bear the traces of successive engagements, each attempting to assert dominance while symbolically erasing the presence of the other. These acts do not merely damage or remove symbols; they enact a form of visual struggle in which meaning is contested through accumulation, cancellation, and distortion. In this way, walls and columns become battlegrounds of everyday politics, where ideological conflict is not resolved but continuously rehearsed through acts of inscription and counter-inscription.

The neighbourhood of inner Simmering (Vienna) presented a quieter, more ambivalent mood. Much of the district feels peaceful and subdued, with low traffic, empty streets, and modest residential buildings creating an atmosphere of everyday ordinariness and stability. There is a sense of stillness, especially in working-class housing areas, that can feel both reassuring and slightly isolating. It is almost odd, given the size of the district, however, it can be explained due to its spread over a large territory and signs of urban sprawl. Arriving at the last stop of the metro station, which is

“Moving through the neighborhood, we became well aware of antagonisms: alongside the traces of right-wing extremism we encountered, we repeatedly saw evidence of ongoing left-right contention. On our second walk, a small sticker caught our attention – “Achtung! Hier wurde antideutsche Propaganda überklebt” [Attention! Anti-German propaganda has been pasted over here] – an intervention marking the spot where something had been overwritten. “Anti-German” here signals a niche current within the German-speaking left, distinguished less by domestic policy than by its explicit solidarity with the State of Israel. In practice, the sticker functions as a tool of erasure, laid over left-wing messages to assert presence and frame the opponent. Peeling at the edges revealed the submerged layer beneath: “FCK NZS,” the blunt refusal of Nazism now partially occluded, its sentiment legible only where the top label failed to adhere.”



ILLUSTRATION 13: EXCERPT AND PICTURES FROM FIELDNOTES ON VIENNA

named after the district, we were almost lost and didn't know where to begin the walk, as it was so quiet. Despite the usual suspects, e.g. stickers of rivaling soccer teams, it didn't take long before we encountered traces of right-wing extremism. Particularly, two right-wing extremist campaigns



ILLUSTRATION 14: PICTURE FROM VIENNA; “FREEDOM FOR MANUEL” AND “ABOLISH THE NS PROHIBITION ACT” ALONGSIDE A QR CODE TO THE CAMPAIGN

surfaced repeatedly across the neighbourhood, their messages circulating through stickers. One called for the abolition of the Verbotsgesetz [National Socialism Prohibition Act], while the other demanded “Freedom for Manuel,” a well-known figure within Austria's neo-Nazi subculture who was convicted under Section 3g of the Verbotsgesetz in 2024. The Verbotsgesetz has been applied primarily to cases of neo-Nazism, Holocaust denial, and the trivialisation of National Socialist crimes. All stickers included QR Codes, directing pedestrians to a website that

assembled selected court rulings under the law, denounced the charges as “absurd,” and portrayed the law itself as a violation of the rule of law and human rights. By linking street-level stickers to digital platforms via QR codes or url-link, these campaigns exemplify how extremist narratives move fluidly between offline urban space and online environments, reinforcing one another. Read together, the two campaigns positioned legal accountability not as a response to extremist activity, but as evidence of state overreach, mobilising everyday urban surfaces to normalise and circulate an alternative reading of justice, rights, and political persecution. However, as we could see in all three cities, these inscriptions into the urban fabric did not go unchallenged but were met with resistance and counter-claims. This mirrors struggles along the left–right continuum, as witnessed in Kolonos, albeit in a much softer and less confrontational form.

4.3. GENTRIFIED NEIGHBOURHOODS: AESTHETICS OF RENEWAL, MORAL ECONOMIES AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CHANGE

Generally speaking, gentrified urban areas in all three cities exhibit socioeconomic upscaling, property reinvestment, and cultural rebranding. This is closely connected to rent and price inflation, tenure conversion towards higher incomes and educational attainment, and short-term rental penetration exploiting rent gaps. In parallel, commercial ecologies shift toward amenity consumption (cafés, boutiques) instead of basic infrastructures, accompanied by streetscape upgrades, green amenities, and tightened cleanliness and surveillance regimes. Social effects include direct displacement (evictions, buyouts) and indirect exclusion (cost, cultural alienation), which are not always immediately tangible within urban landscapes. Yet, there are some similarities and marked differences when it comes to gentrification in Athens, Malmö, and Vienna, as our walks proved.

The walks in Möllevången/Malmö were conducted on two different days circling Möllevångstorget and skirting Folkets Park. The neighbourhood announces itself: Café tables push into the streets, tattooed forearms lift cups and vintage textures and organic labels alternate with the smell of frying falafel. The crowd reads as 20s-to-40s, styled but mixed, a careful casualness that matches Möllan’s reputation as Malmö’s multicultural showcase. Also built surfaces speak the same language, with posters, stickers, and graffiti feeding into a public script where aesthetics is intertwined with politics. Left-progressive messages dominated the scene, speaking to anti-racist, anti-fascist, anti-authoritarian views. The square’s monument, “The Glory of Labor”, anchors this discourse materially, as we can see workers straining beneath stone and the skyline of Malmö in relief. This serves as a built reminder that the market and the May Day share ground and the square feels organised for assembly, even though it is rather quiet when we visit.

Just like in other parts of the city, Palestine is present across poles and walls, but not unchallenged. Some stickers are scored through, others ripped off. By the park, “Free Palestine/Free Gaza” murals take the full wall, nearby a painted sign re-christens a roundabout “Gaza.” These small acts display disagreement with global politics while negotiating solidarity and opposition. There are few other cases where struggles over the meaning of public messages are



ILLUSTRATION 15: PICTURES FROM MALMÖ; TO THE LEFT: TWO SIDE-BY-SIDE POSTERS READING “LONG LIVE PALESTINE! CROSS ZIONISM!,” CROSSED OUT AND PARTLY TORN; TO THE RIGHT: A CROSSED-OUT STICKER READING “FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA, PALESTINE WILL BE FREE,” BELOW IT — A POSTER SAYING “WANTED FOR WAR CRIMES: ISRAEL’S PM BENJAMIN NETANYAHU”.

as pronounced as in the context of Israel/Palestine, where expressions of solidarity often simultaneously convey competing political narratives where the support of one group narrates hostility and rejection towards the other.

And yet again, what is striking is the absence of right-wing or nationalist material and the comparatively little partisan competition. Politics here appears as belonging rather than ballot. Slogans like “Refugees Welcome” persist, weathered but unremoved. The same orientation have the other slogans: “Skånerost against racism” crushes a swastika with a coffee machine, “No Nazis in Malmö” repeats across corners and the names of the victims of the far-right extremist attack in Hanau,



ILLUSTRATION 16: PICTURES FROM MALMÖ; ON THE LEFT: AN IMAGE OF DONALD TRUMP AND VLADIMIR PUTIN KISSING. IN THE MIDDLE: A STICKER WITH A POOP EMOJI OVERLAID OVER THE AMERICAN FLAG WITH DONALD TRUMP’S HAIR, SAYING “GUESS THE POOP?”. TO THE RIGHT: AN IMAGE OF VLADIMIR PUTIN MAKING A HAND GESTURE, WITH THE TEXT “IT’S LIKE THIS SMALL.”

Germany, are listed on stickers under the sober declaration “Racism kills.” Amid this collage, caricatures of Trump and Putin puncture the local with global anxieties, their grotesque masculinity mocked into critique. The medium itself—peeling, fading, layered—renders time visible: a palimpsest of conviction and contention, where neighbourhood identity is continuously affixed, contested, and renewed.



“We started our walk near the center of Exarcheia and moved around the same square. Right off the bat a busy atmosphere, the hustle and bustle of the neighbourhood gave the tone of what it’s like to live in Exarcheia today. We walked through the narrow streets during peak traffic time, around noon. Cars and bikes honking, lively conversations of residents, visitors and tourists revealed the very active and vibrant street life. As expected, the socio-spatial dynamics were equally intense. Virtually all walls, columns and any kind of surfaces were filled with politically charged stickers, posters, graffiti and tags.”

ILLUSTRATION 17: EXCERPT AND PICTURE FROM FIELDNOTES ON ATHENS; “I AM ASHAMED” SLOGAN WRITTEN REPEATEDLY AROUND THE PROFILE OF PRIME MINISTER KYRIAKOS MITSOTAKIS.

The walks in Athens’ Exarcheia neighbourhood immediately showcased its history and reputation as Athens’ crucible of anarchism, counterculture, and the 1973 Polytechnic Uprising. Protests, police encounters, and grassroots networks have shaped how space looks, is used and defended. Today, state-led redevelopment encroaches and the area faces increasing pressure from gentrification, including the controversial construction of a metro station right where its central square once marked the beating heart of the whole area. All this prompted ongoing resistance from residents and activists trying to preserve the radical character of the neighbourhood. As the insights from the field notes show, surfaces act as public ledger. Walls, columns, doors are layered with stickers, posters, tags—anti-government and anti-private university messages, Antifa mottos, anti-vaccination notes, calls against trafficking—evidence that in Exarcheia, most political questions are present at the local level and translated to fit local debates and grievances.

What we could sense was that contention around gentrification is explicit and ubiquitous. Graffiti names investors as culprits of rising rents and fresh façades attract paint-bombings and accusatory tags. One newly targeted building bears leftist insignia and messages linking ownership to foreign capital. Keypad locks on many building entrances hint at the spread of short-term rentals. AirBnBs and new luxury suites introduce a sleek, futuristic aesthetic that jars against the mid-century fabric. Across the street, a stark “stop gentrification” sign extends the indictment. Public space functions as both a message board and a battleground: inscriptions like “Tourists go home” and “Tourism kills the cities”

cast over-tourism as a direct threat to liveability, while food and rent inflation provide the message against private universities: “Down with the private universities”.



ILLUSTRATION 18: PICTURES FROM ATHENS; ON THE LEFT: MESSAGE ON THE SITE OF NEW SUITES BUILDING; IN THE MIDDLE: ANTI-TOURISM STREET-ART. ON THE RIGHT: AIRBNB FOR TOURISTS, CAMPS FOR IMMIGRANTS, WELCOME TO GREECE.

Anarchist and leftist symbols—red stars, circled A’s—anchor a local political vernacular that readily sutures Exarcheia’s struggles to global ones, from immigration to Gaza. The cumulative effect is an environment where memory, ideology, and place are inseparable. Exarcheia reads as a living archive in contention: a neighbourhood asserting itself through the very materials of its streets, staging resistance in plain sight while testing how much of its past can survive a reengineered future.

In Vienna, the neighbourhood walks took the team through its 7th district, *Neubau*, a stronghold of the Green party, retail magnet, and shorthand for the city’s hip, left-leaning middle classes. *Mariahilfer Straße* supplies the branded artery, while *Neubaugasse* and the lanes of *Spittelberg*, with their Biedermeier fabric and dense small businesses, curate an “alternative” aesthetic. Redevelopment, condo conversions, and rising rents suggest gentrification, though Vienna’s social and subsidised housing complicate the diagnosis and blunt its edges.

Rain flattens the first walk. The second, in June sun, animates lunch crowds and storefronts trimmed in Pride rainbows—more branding than politics. We expect insurgent surfaces. Instead, lamp posts and bins carry mostly advertisements. Political residue is sparse and standardised: a handful of stickers against gentrification, tourism, or property speculation and solidarity with Palestine, now ubiquitous citywide. In illustration 19, one altered tag reads “Property ownership is (not) super embarrassing,” the inserted “not” signalling a tug-of-war over tenure norms in a city where most rent, migrants more



ILLUSTRATION 19: PICTURES FROM VIENNA; MESSAGES AGAINST HIPSTERS, PROPERTY OWNERSHIP ("PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IS (NOT) SUPER EMBARRASSING") AND AIRBNB

precariously so. The slogan "hipster scum" is another anti-gentrification sentiment, targeting and mocking "hipsters", who are often perceived as symbols of neighbourhood change and rising living costs. Finally, an anti-AirBnB sticker registers housing pressure despite regulations limiting short-term sublets to 90 days.

Space is actively curated. On May 8, posters invite the *Fest der Freude at Heldenplatz*—commemorative programming that reclaims a symbolic site from far-right reinterpretations of World War II memory. Mariahilfer Straße's pedestrianisation has turned it into a stage for demonstration. Gaza solidarity marches move along its two kilometres, and assemblies gather at the Marcus Omofuma Memorial, a granite sculpture that serves as a memorial against racism and xenophobia, named after Marcus Omofuma who died in 1999 during his forced deportation from Austria. Today, the square is called Human Rights Square.

At the former "Leiner Haus" site, which used to belong to René Benko, whose business empire collapsed amid a major financial scandal, the team expected critique of investor urbanism. Instead, surfaces are wiped clean and dissent has been removed with the scaffolding. Vienna's famed cleanliness is an actor here: orange-clad crews rapidly strip stickers and unsanctioned postings



ILLUSTRATION 20: PICTURES FROM VIENNA; ON THE LEFT: VISIBLE TRACES OF STICKERS REMOVED FROM TRASH CAN; ON THE RIGHT "FCK NZS" TAG ON MARIAHILFER STRASSE

(especially extremist content), producing a sanitised central streetscape. In Neubau, contention exists—but muted, managed, and often commercialised. Politics appears as curated atmosphere, surfacing briefly in marches and memorials before maintenance folds it back into display.

Field observations across Möllevången (Malmö), Exarcheia (Athens), and Neubau (Vienna) reveal a shared repertoire of gentrification—amenity-led consumption, demographic upscaling, and visual rebranding—yet differentiated by governance capacity, housing regimes, and conflict intensity. All three display retail diversification (cafés, boutiques), upgrades to public space, and the inscription of global politics (e.g., Gaza solidarity) onto local surfaces. Each also evidences platform pressures (short-term rentals) and shifting temporal rhythms toward curated events. However, the density, durability, and management of “surface politics” constitute a central axis of divergence.

4.4. MAY DAY MOBILISATIONS

On May 1st, our teams in Vienna, Athens, and Malmö went out to observe the May Day marches. In Vienna, one gets the feeling of being transported back to another era, when social democracy maintained near-total political control over the city. Delegations from all 23 SPÖ district organisations gathered early in the morning in their respective districts to form the traditional “star march” [Sternmarsch] down to the City Hall. The star march commenced around 7:30 am in all districts, arriving at the City Hall around 9 am. Each of our team members joined the march from their respective home districts: Leopoldstadt (2nd district), Simmering (11th district), and Ottakring (16th district). As usual, the walks to City Hall Square were quite ambitious, many of them several kilometres long, so small trackless trains were provided for people with limited mobility. The crowd was mixed, with the mix shifting from district to district – some proceedings consisted mostly of traditional older SPÖ supporters, while others were dominated by younger attendees and, depending on the



ILLUSTRATION 21: PICTURES FROM VIENNA; ON THE LEFT: MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH ORGANISATION OF SPÖ MARCHING TOWARDS THE STAGE IN FRONT OF THE CITY HALL, PROTESTING THE MIGRATION POLICY OF THE PARTY “SEPARATING FAMILIES = BURNING VALUES”; ON THE RIGHT: TRACKLESS TRAINS IN THE SECOND DISTRICT

demography of the area, groups of immigrants. Brass bands and drum ensembles set the pace as we moved.

In Malmö, the day was unusually sunny — the first true day of spring — and Gustav Adolf Square was crowded with festive energy. Our team arrived to the sound of drums and a sea of red flags. Around 2,000 people had gathered: elderly Swedes in

“As we walk, people cheer us on from cafés, wave at us from their balconies. This kind of ambient support says something about how ingrained May Day remains in the Swedish political calendar. Seeing this level of unity, it’s almost hard to believe that the Social Democrats currently represent the opposition in the Swedish parliament. Despite them remaining Sweden’s largest party for over a century, the right-wing bloc claimed more votes at the 2022 election, famously lifting the cordon sanitaire on the Swedish Democrats — the country’s far-right party and currently the second-largest party in parliament. But if there are any right-wing sympathisers on the streets today, they don’t make themselves known.”

ILLUSTRATION 22: EXCERPT FROM FIELDNOTES ON MAY DAY IN MALMÖ

wheelchairs, teenagers draped in Pride flags, families with young children holding red balloons, trade union representatives with stylised banners. Signs and posters showcased a range of struggles: “The class war is a feminist war,” “Peace for Palestine,” “Education is society’s self-defence,” “Save the planet, not the corporations.” The heterogeneity was immediate and visible.

In Athens, our fieldwork began in late morning at Syntagma Square, the city’s most symbolic site for protest and political expression. We arrived around the announced gathering time, and the street across the Parliament was already flooded, but attendees felt calm and collected. The crowd kept growing: organised groups mixed with looser clusters of attendees of all ages, many parents with children, and many elderly people. Red flags and banners were prominent, and the square was layered with signs and slogans about labour rights and anti-capitalism. Some tourists stood close by too, watching the Changing of the Guard Ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier as the rally gathered around them.



ILLUSTRATION 23: PICTURE TAKEN ACROSS PARLIAMENT, ATHENS



ILLUSTRATION 24: PICTURE FROM THE FRONT OF THE CITY HALL IN VIENNA

As the Vienna team approached *Rathausplatz*, the scale of the demonstration became visible. District delegations kept arriving one after another, each with its own tone — some traditional, some more modern, colourful, and diverse. At the stage in front of City Hall, delegations and professional groups were welcomed and honoured. Speeches followed, including one by Vienna’s mayor, Michael Ludwig, who, as he himself proclaimed, had a special reason to celebrate: his party, the SPÖ, had won the

election the previous Sunday. In his speech, he praised Vienna as a European stronghold of social democracy and a bulwark against authoritarian and right-wing populist movements. Critical voices were rare at the event, although we did notice delegations from the Socialist Youth expressing dissatisfaction with the suspension of family reunification for refugees.

Meanwhile in Malmö, as the orchestra played traditional marching songs, flagbearers lined up: the Swedish flag, the Social Democrats' red banner, and, notably, for a second consecutive year — a NATO flag, marking Sweden's recent accession. The



ILLUSTRATION 25: PICTURES FROM MAY DAY MARCH IN MALMÖ

crowd cheered as the Social Democrats' party leader Magdalena Andersson arrived together with local party representatives, and the parade commenced toward Folkets Park. Along the route, people waved from cafés and balconies. Once at the park, we saw a small group of counter-protesters holding banners such as "Socialists to prison" and "Fight against socialist destruction," but they were largely ignored as the crowd pressed toward the stage.

In Athens, chanting moved in waves, coordinated by microphones and megaphones. One chant stood out to us: "From Chicago to Kaisariani, history is written through class struggle." Both Chicago and Kaisariani are powerful symbols of workers' resistance; Chicago with the 1886 Haymarket affair that sparked the international May Day movement, and Kaisariani, a historic suburb in Athens, where 200 Greek resistance fighters were executed by the Nazis on May 1st, 1944. We also heard familiar anti-

"Overall, left-wing groups in the public demonstration maintained a high level of ideological harmony, which provided a peaceful, collective atmosphere with minimal contestation. However, the online space was dominated by high political heat with competing narratives, revisionist histories, and xenophobic criticisms coming through more assertively. Another online observation was that a number of posts criticized the demonstrators for allegedly prioritizing foreigners (notably Palestinians) over Greek citizens, suggesting that leftist mobilizations are disconnected from "real Greek" concerns. This kind of rhetoric exposes a clear ethno-nationalism and resentment aimed at progressive movements and transnational solidarity efforts. In this context, we can see a fragmentation of collective struggles between those who care about the interests and rights of Greeks ("the patriots") and the leftists that "attend festivals to blame the system about their own uselessness", as one user on X states"

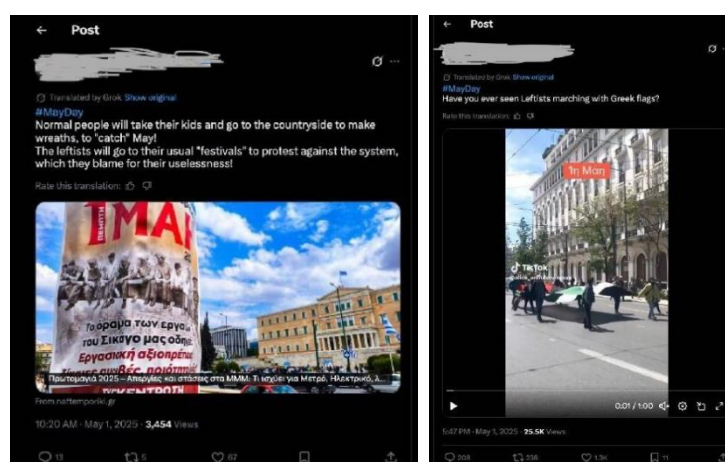


ILLUSTRATION 26: EXCERPT AND PICTURES FROM MAY DAY IN ATHENS; ON THE LEFT: X POST WHERE USER DEGRADES LEFTIST PROTESTERS JUXTAPOSING THEM WITH NORMAL PEOPLE; ON THE RIGHT: X POST WITH PHOTOGRAPH FROM MAY 1ST RALLY WHERE PROTESTERS MARCH WITH PALESTINIAN FLAG

imperialist refrains, and the song “Which side are you on?” played from speakers in the background. The war in Gaza was another key theme. Palestinian flags were held alongside red flags and union banners, and several speakers dedicated time to proclaim solidarity with Palestine and condemn Israel’s actions in Gaza. Around the square, posters and graffiti echoed the rally’s tone — anti-capitalist slogans, anti-state accusations, and anarchist symbols were prominent.

Gaza flags were also present at the demonstration in Malmö, and when Magdalena Andersson addressed the war from the speech tribune, the mood in the crowd tightened. Pro-Palestinian chants and shouts rose and at one point become louder than her voice; she paused and urged the crowd to let her speak. When she continued, she condemned the war in stark terms, calling it “a stain on the history of humanity,” and expressed critique of the Swedish government’s silence.



ILLUSTRATION 27: THE CROWD AT FOLKETS PARK/MALMÖ WAITING FOR MAGDALENA ANDERSSON’S SPEECH. COUNTER-PROTESTERS’ BANNERS IN THE MIDDLE.



ILLUSTRATION 28: MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS ORGANISED BY KURDISH, COMMUNIST AND TRADE UNION GROUPS IN VIENNA

In Vienna, the day featured multiple events that were taking place in proximity to one another without fully merging. Near Rathausplatz, Kurdish and communist groups and trade union alliances had set up tents in a nearby park, serving food and playing live music. There were also groups protesting the Islamic regime in Iran and global imperialism near the main gathering. Later in the day, the annual MAYDAY demo of the Autonomous

Left took place in Simmering, making the radical left visible in the outer districts rather than only the inner city. The mainstream SPÖ event remained dominant, but the city’s May Day was clearly plural, layered across spaces.

In Athens, police presence was minimal at first, positioned at a distance. As time passed and union marches approached, riot police units were deployed to control the protest. We decided to safely distance ourselves at that point. No major clashes broke out, but the shift was perceptible: the square remained occupied and ideologically unified, yet the conditions of that unity were managed at the edges.

Across the three cities, May Day repeated certain gestures: walking long distances together, standing shoulder to shoulder, listening to speeches and chants, watching squares fill and empty again. But the atmosphere differed slightly.

Vienna felt ritualised and historically thick, a carefully staged display of



ILLUSTRATION 29: “ANARCHIST MAY DAY” BANNER AT THE RALLY IN ATHENS.
“AGAINST: STATE, CAPITAL, WAR, WAGE SLAVERY.”

social-democratic continuity with parallel gatherings orbiting nearby. Malmö was warm, plural, and lively, holding multiple struggles together even as frictions surfaced in the open. Athens felt dense and uncompromising, a square saturated with leftist symbols and international solidarity, calm on the ground yet edged by visible policing as the day progressed. For a few hours, streets and public squares became intensely lived political spaces before slipping, unevenly, back into the ordinary.

5. EVERYDAY EXTREMISM IN ORDINARY SPACES ACROSS OFFLINE- ONLINE CONTINUUMS

Across Athens, Vienna, and Malmö, the spatial grammars of contention diverge sharply, yet what we could observe is that they are increasingly organised by hybrid forms of mediation that connect platforms and pavements. Athens is dense and turbulent: a palimpsest where traces of history, modernist overlays, and urban decay coexist, a vivid stage animated by protest cultures and a rich canvas thick with street art and political inscription. Vienna's public sphere is comparatively clean and regulated: an imperial and social-democratic palimpsest, a stage for protest, civic ceremonies and cultural events and a curated canvas where public art and branding dominate. Malmö sits between saturated presence and strategic absence: a port-industrial palimpsest in transition, a stage for multicultural festivals and political gatherings amid urban segregation and a neighbourhood-scale canvas of tactical urbanism, punctuated by empty walls and sanitised surfaces.

Yet these material and regulatory differences are no longer confined to urban politics and the physical environment of cities. Hybrid mediation shapes what can be seen, said, and sustained. Narratives articulated online materialise offline as stickers, graffiti, and rallies which are then re-digitised, as they are photographed, memefied, and circulated. Memetic aesthetics flow between screens and surfaces, showcasing how streets and platform are interconnected. Our walks underscored this continuum: QR codes functioned as literal portals from wall to web, hashtags with spatial references as a way of situating online content physically, insider jokes and typographies indexed subcultures, meme templates were printed as stickers; colours signalled movements and layered intertextuality linked global repertoires to local scenes. While seemingly inconspicuous and often short-lived, stickers link street-level interventions to online spaces such as websites, messaging channels, or social media profiles, or indirectly by merely referencing internet aesthetic and memes known from particular online communities. At the same time, the online documentation of sticker campaigns or graffiti actions transforms the act of marking of urban spaces itself into a form of performative communication, where visibility is amplified through platform logics of sharing, archiving, and replication. Urban surfaces thus operate not only as sites of inscription but also as stages for actions designed to be captured, circulated, and validated in digital environments. Such online-offline loops are not incidental; they are strategic. Activist groups perform inscription for the camera, posting videos of tagging or stickering with music and captions that clarify or amplify otherwise ambiguous images. Conversely, online framings can recode the meaning of gatherings. The media portrayal of pro-Palestine chants interrupting Magdalena Andersson's speech in Malmö, often reduced to the

slogan that she was “silenced by protesters”, illustrates how reporting styles can shift public interpretation from grievance to disruption. Offline events are organised and advertised online, shaping attendance, repertoire, and the visual economy of protest. In Athens, the dense semiotic field and permissive street ecology provide abundant hooks for memetic circulation, enabling rapid uptake of online frames and quick sedimentation in place. In Vienna, curated surfaces and regulation channel visibility into ritualised formats. Much agonism is displaced into digital fora even as branding and sanctioned art pre-empt or aestheticise contention. In Malmö, the managed emptiness of many surfaces, coupled with strong online discourse, produces a disjuncture: Meaning is contested translocally, often by actors who are not present, while neighbourhood-scale interventions attempt to materialise alternative narratives on the ground.

Read through the spatial metaphors guiding this report, hybrid mediation reconfigures the city simultaneously as palimpsest, stage, and canvas. Digital platforms extend the palimpsest by layering new interpretive frames onto existing inscriptions in urban space. Political gatherings and demonstrations become stages not only for those physically present but also for distant audiences who encounter them through livestreams or recordings. At the same time, walls, lampposts, and urban surfaces operate as canvases within a broader communicative ecology, where visual artefacts function as nodes linking local struggles to translocal ideological repertoires. In this sense, contemporary urban contention unfolds within hybrid infrastructures where streets and platforms become mutually constitutive arenas of political meaning.

A relational model helps hold these dynamics together. Narratives, emotions, and symbols move fluidly across infrastructures: ideology, contestation, and belonging are co-produced across scales. Following these flows ethnographically shows how political contention is inscribed into the urban fabric and how it resonates with online discourses. Removal from walls does not mean that a political conversation ends. This recursive process also produces mismatches between representation and experience, between who is present, about political majorities and acceptance.

Seen through the lens of everyday extremism, these dynamics reveal how exclusionary narratives become embedded through mundane circulation across infrastructures, media environments, and spatial practices. Extremist narratives rarely appear in isolation; rather, they travel through familiar communicative forms, like slogans or visual cues, that make them suitable for both online platforms and neighbourhood spaces. Urban environments thus function as everyday interfaces where broader ideological conflicts are translated into visible, localised encounters.

Understanding and governing contemporary urban contention requires abandoning the street/feed dichotomy. Research should follow objects and meanings across online and offline to track how they mutate between surfaces and screens. For the OppAttune project, this implies that tracking everyday extremism cannot remain confined to digital platforms or monitoring organised political actors alone. Instead, attention must also be directed toward the ordinary environments where narratives materialise, circulate, and are contested in daily life. By attending to these hybrid spaces of mediation, spatial ethnography offers a way to understand how extremist narratives become normalised, challenged, or transformed within the everyday textures of urban life.

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