Urbanity and the Right to Difference

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To the memory of my father,
who believed in the possibility of a better world.

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the tragic fire at the Club Colectiv in Bucharest,[1] which generated uprisings against corruption in the public administration throughout Romanian cities, there were various individual and collective manifestations and civic initiatives. A week after the tragedy a Romanian architect (Dr. Horia Bejan) announced publicly through a popular online social network his choice to interrupt for three months the activity at his private firm, and dedicate his expertise, time and related-infrastructure to schools that need professional documentation for fire safety. He made a call for volunteers who are willing to help through an existing nonprofit organization, and listed the needs and roles that would be necessary to undertake such voluntary consulting activities. As it appears from the initial announcement, his decision emerged from a personal need to make himself useful beyond street demonstrations toward concrete and imminent actions that, unless citizens or organizations of the civil society would step in for, certainly will not be fulfilled because of the limited public budgets allocated to education.[2]

During the same week, spatial designers launched another announcement regarding this year's edition of the *UrbanEye Film Festival* (11-15 November, 2015): revenues from tickets are to be donated to the victims of the Club Colectiv fire. One of the co-founders of this festival (architect and urbanist Dr. Cătălina Ioniță) lost her life in the terrible accident; revenues from the festival screening of the documentary film "Insight. An eye on Bucharest's art galleries" will also be donated to the its author (Miluță Flueraș) who is struggling to recover from the accident.

The *UrbanEye Film Festival* proposes a critical view of current urbanization processes, also from citizens' lens; consequently, this edition has been showing documentary films about the city produced by twelve high school pupils from Bucharest.[3]

On a different note but also from the domain of grassroots media, these tragic events and the lack of inclusiveness of the mainstream media initiated a distributed type of publication, *Ziarul Colectiv* (*The Colectiv Newspaper*). This new publication aims to complement news and information compiled from online sources and social networks, to be then printed voluntarily and further distributed in analogue form in spaces for social life, like cafes, clubs and public transportation, and even to private letter boxes. The newsletter website provides the compiled issues in pdf format, which seem to be edited by a group of volunteers, and a graphic distribution guide.[4]

1 During a live music performance on October 30, 2015, at an alternative club in Bucharest by the name "Colectiv", a sudden fire took many lives (60 victims until November 25, 2015), and over a hundred people were critically injured. The incident generated reactions against the corrupted political and administrative mainstream, with the consequence of the government's resignation, as well as solidarity within various community groups, hinting at consolidating what was perceived until then as the "underground" scene.

2 According to the online source, last checked on November 8, 2015: http://www.reteauadestiri.ro/un-arhitect-isi-suspenda-afacerile-pentru-a-ajuta-gratuit-scolile-care-nu-au-avize-de-la-pompieri.

3 Refer to the online website of the UrbanEye Festival, www.urbaneye.ro.

4 Refer to the online website of the Colectiv Newspaper, www.ziarulcolectiv.ro.

Through these recent examples of grassroots initiatives for community action in Bucharest, which followed one of the most tragic accidents in recent Romanian urban history, I illustrate here the latent potential of spatial design fields to generate social actors' actions catalyzing the thorough transformation of urban spatiality, by employing individual skills and expertise for potential public benefits, and by following a long-term perspective on the urban commons. On the one hand, distributed grass-roots newspapers or film screenings, as well as broadcasting alternative sources of information are a necessary complement to the mainstream media that serves only a limited spectrum of interests. On the other hand, spatial designers may play a significant role in societal regeneration through community transfer of their practical knowledge, but even more importantly, through their experience with teamwork and coordination of collective action. It is certainly premature to speculate about the feasibility of these specific examples, which need to stand the test of time, or to appreciate if this crisis has truly awakened citizen-activists' spirit of protest toward transformative action. The magic of such urban moments resides in their capability to leave room for any imaginable possibility.

Thus, next in the paper, I discuss what could come out of such moments and what might germinate into transformed everyday life and urban spatiality. For that, I go back in time to the street uprising of May 1968 in Paris, in order to explain Lefebvre's formulation of the right to the city, in particular the right to difference. Then I present my recent activities within the cooperative movement in Zurich, through the evolution of this form of collective urban living in the last two decades. In the concluding notes, I come full circle to the understanding of urbanity through the lens of the right to difference. As a suggestion for further action, I express my conviction that the critical relevance of the spatial design professions, which the market demand and the state control have been reducing by and large to another bureaucratic activity, may be revived through its social role within the coming urban revolution.

The Right to the City

The years following the May 1968 student protests on the streets of Paris, Henri Lefebvre wrote the core of his work that culminated with *La production de l'espace* (1974), which was published in 1991 in the English language translation as *The Production of Space*. This very creative time period of his life was already prepared through previous works like *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947), and *Du Rural à l'Urbain* (a collection of his writings from 1949 until 1969). Some of the ideas advanced in these earlier works were synthesized in *La révolution urbaine* and *Le manifeste différentialiste*, both published at Gallimard in 1970, following Lefebvre's active involvement in the street unrest. In this section of the paper I explain how these last two publications can build an understanding of the right to difference as an essential right to the city.

The Urban Revolution brings – as Neil Smith notes in the *Foreword* to the English translation – "the urban on the agenda as an explicit locus and target of political organizing."[5] Moreover, by interpreting Lefebvre's statement, "We can say that the urban [...] rises above the horizon, slowly occupies an epistemological field, and becomes the episteme of an epoch,"[6] Brenner and Schmid explain that "the reconceptualization of the urban was becoming an essential epistemological and political precondition for understanding the nature of society itself."[7]

According to Lefebvre, modernity has imposed on the modern citizens a particular spatial order – the spatial practice of neocapitalism – that is abstract and remote from our quotidian experience and activities.[8] Therefore, the failure of the state to produce urban space other than abstract or, in

5 H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, translated by R. Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), vii.

6 Ibid., 191, n.3.

7 N. Brenner and C. Schmid, "Towards a new epistemology of the urban?" *CITY* 19(2-3) (2015): 155.

8 H. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (Vol. I), translated by J. Moore and G. Elliott (London & NY: Verso, 1991 [1947]).

other words, urban space disconnected from the everyday life, from sociability and desire, calls for ongoing political struggle.

The Differentialist Manifesto was not written as a call for another political movement, Lefebvre explains,[9] but as a notification of the political failure of the capitalist society, whose closed world may have as alternative a world of difference, which is capable to provide the necessary openness for imagining and acting for new possible spatialities. At present, the state uses space rather as a form of social control through urbanism, that is "the application of industrial rationality, and the evacuation of urban rationality,"[10] and "[...] wants to be a modern philosophy of the city, justified by (liberal) humanism while justifying a (technocratic) utopia."[11] The rational "mastery of nature" twists the difference into "in-difference," in the double sense of undifferentiated and indifferent; state interventions and conceptual top-down decision making processes turn urban locations into abstract spaces that deny differences, by disabling that natural ability to produce them. Lefebvre continued to develop this argument in *The Production of Space,* and showed that creating differences is necessary to sustain life, by comparing "the spatial body of society and the social body of needs," which differ from an "abstract corpus," with the body of a living being.[12] From this perspective, the right to difference is a perpetual struggle necessary to generate living space, which may be understood in contrast to an abstract construct, the right of property, as in the following text,

> The right to difference implies no entitlements that do not have to be bitterly fought for. This is a "right" whose only justification lies in its content; it is thus diametrically opposed to the right of property, which is given validity by its logical and legal form as the basic code of relationship under the capitalist mode of production.[13]

As a form of resistance to the homogenizing planetary urbanization, the "right to the city" formulation coined in 1968 has been used in the last four decades as a ubiquitous "cry" for the democratization of urban space.[14] Lefebvre urged us to take seriously into consideration the political struggle for the right to the city, in order to renew urban society and to renovate centrality as an essential right, which means "regrouping of differences in relation to each other."[15] He further suggests that modern society may become meaningful if it would find some purpose beyond consumption, in order to allow individuals to manifest their particular spatial experiences and urban aspirations in the production of lived space. Moreover, various forms of urban struggle have the potential to generate "differential space" that accentuates differences, and whose "seeds" are carried within the produced abstract space.[16]

This theoretical basis provides also the ideological motivation to my current engagement in the Zurich movement for socially integrated neighborhoods through development of cooperative housing and living. In the next section, I illustrate how the right to difference confers access to the city as specific places, or as places of difference, because "the city is where social differences collide

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9 H. Lefebvre, *Le manifeste différentialiste* (Paris: Gallimard, Collection «Idées», 1970), 7-9.

10 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution,* 41.

11 Ibid., 153.

12 H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 396.

13 Ibid., 396-397.

14 Refer to H. Lefebvre, "The Right to the City. and Introduction: Lost in Transposition," in H. Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, edited by E. Kofman and E. Lebas (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996 [1968]), 1-19, 63-184; J. Friedmann, "The right to the city," in *Rethinking the Latin American city*, edited by M. Morse and J. Hardoy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 135-151.; C. Schmid, "Theory: The Right to the City," in *Switzerland: An Urban Portrait*, edited by R. Diener, J. Herzog, M. Meili, P. de Meuron, and C. Schmid (Basel: Brikhäuser, 2006), 167-173; D. Harvey, "The right to the city," *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 23-40; N. Brenner, P. Marcuse, and M. Mayer. (eds.). *Cities for People, Not for Profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City* (New York: Routledge, 2012); M.C. Boyer, "Reconstructing New Orleans and the Right to the City," in *Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture*, edited by Stanek, Schmid & Moravanszky, (Ashgate, 2014), 173-188.

15 Lefebvre, "The Right to the City, 19.

16 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* 52.

and become productive."[17] The future visions for urban living become reality through spatial development shaped by a diversity of actors that might act on behalf of various political spheres such as the public authorities, the market, the media, the community and various civil society bodies.

Socially Integrated Neighborhoods in Zurich

Between 1980 and 1982 there were street riots in Zurich that started with the discontent of youth claiming their right to the city.[18] When the city council allocated a large portion of the public budget for the renovation of the opera house, taking the occasion of a three-days celebration of this cultural institution, youth went to the streets to claim their right to be represented in the city. At the end of two years of street unrest, and other five years of deliberations between different urban actors and negotiations with the city, the buildings and premises of the former factory *Rote Fabrik* were designated as an alternative cultural center for youth; its operation was to be subsidized from public budgets, as it was democratically decided through a referendum in 1987. Note that the Swiss Confederation is a direct democracy, thus political engagement is part of the everyday life of its citizens, who hold more power than in a representative democracy.

At *Rote Fabrik* began the journey of what became today a strong movement, and an urban housing/living policy of the city of Zurich as well. Through meetings, ad-hoc gatherings and conferences, the foundations for a new type of urban living were established, and also were contoured some desirable political constructs to bring that vision to reality. The prototype for the first materialization of such spatial developments was conceived through collective processes, which is the *Kraftwerk1* housing and living cooperative.

While implying innovation in the social space, these "young cooperatives" are certainly following the cooperative housing tradition developed in Zurich during the industrialization age. As collective forms of sustainable living in cities, however, the new movement was inspired by p.m.'s utopia *bolo'bolo* (1983),[19] and was rooted in the squatting scene as well. Current visions are developed around the ideas summarized in a recent book, *"The Power of Neighborhood" and The Commons* that was published in 2014 under the pseudonym p.m., and is the result of collective related-work within the association *Neustart Schweiz*[20] that advocates environmentally friendly, economically and socially integrated urban communities. Nevertheless, the participatory processes within the association's activities follow the resilience principles of *Neustart Schweiz:* transparency, communication, cooperation, democracy, modularity, decoupling capacity, decentralization, relocalization, ecological design, adapted size, cognitive diversity, graduated commitment, and belonging.[21]

Of the state's questionable capability to fulfill its social contract, p.m. made a note in 1998, "the potential for social-democratic solutions based on state intervention has dramatically shrunk;"[22]

17 Schmid, "The Right to the City," 172.

18 Refer to INURA, *Possible Urban Worlds: Urban Strategies at the End of the 20th Century* (Basel: Birkhauser Verlag, 1998).

19 The author of *bolo'bolo* signs his books as p.m., which are the most common initials within Swiss names, and could stand for Peter Mueler or Meyer; in his writings, not only our understanding of "authorship" is challenged but also our current ways of living. The narrative of *bolo'bolo* proposes a different life vision, the options ranging from individual choices to global governance, but with a strong emphasis on the organization of urban life at the neighborhood level. In this scenario, local organization is structured around a "bolo" that may be seen as a nucleus of survival in cities, where citizens may reside, work, socialize and build dreams for the future. Such realistic utopia (sic!) is made possible through individual awareness, reflective action and collective support, and through its multiplication – the plural form (like in some of the African languages) in the title hints at scaling through replication – may transform future urban spatiality.

20 Refer to the online website of the Neustart Schweiz Verein (in English: New Beginning Switzerland), www.neustartschweiz.ch.

21 p.m. *"The Power of Neighborhood" and The Commons* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2014), 10-11.

22 p.m. "Kraftwerk 1: An approach to a civilisation beyond work," in INURA, *Possible Urban Worlds*, 55.

the "New Commons," or the reinvention of useful work in the social sphere, must inform the practice of the civil society groups. Thus I present next some political constructs that are the result of such useful social practice. They are a consequence of many decades of commons-based urban struggle to provide for the right to difference and to centrality in Zurich, and to express these rights in alternative materializations of social space. Through long-term deliberative and participatory processes, by exercising the instruments of direct democracy, the urban development context was shaped over time to represent a plurality of choices, and to respond to present needs as well as to the desires for future possibilities.

Three Urban Cooperatives

Among the new cooperatives for housing and living in Zurich, Kraftwerk1, Kalkbreite and NeNa1 represent three moments in the ongoing process of shaping collective forms of urban living. The first two examples are reconversions of urban brownfields into flexible constructs accommodating cooperative housing and workspace. This process started with Kraftwerk1 (1993-2001) and evolved by placing a stronger emphasis on ecological principles with Kalkbreite (2007-2014), to reach nowadays what I call the baroque phase of the "young cooperatives" movement with NeNa1 (since 2012). At NeNa1, in addition to economically sustainable urban lifestyle, for instance, through community supported agriculture, stronger emphasis falls on principles of social integration and responding to the neighborhood exigencies for preservation, collective memory and continuity.

It is obvious that, over time, based on the experience accumulated through the already existing projects of this sort, the attention of the involved urban actors has increasingly focused on the urban context, rather than limiting the development process only to the new building *per se*. This perspective on the spatial production has generated a constellation of civil society bodies that are participating from the very beginning in the processes of project conception and implementation. Moreover, in order to function competitively as urban developers within the mainstream real estate market, the active members of these cooperatives have to develop appropriate skills, and that happens within a continuous social learning process.

1/ Kraftwerk1 Genossenschaft is a grassroots social project located in the former industrial area of Zurich West. It started as an experiment in the real estate crisis of the 1990s, from the vision of a worldwide movement of appropriation of brownfield areas and former industrial spaces, toward shaping "a new civilization beyond work."[23] Kraftwerk1 became a collective, self-organized, environmentally and economically sustainable urban alternative, within a mix of residential, social and commercial spaces.

23 Refer to p.m. "Kraftwerk 1."

Fig.1,2: Kraftwerk1 – office and commercial building



In order to organize and implement the project, the *KraftWerk1 Verein* was founded in 1993. A *Verein* by the Swiss Law is a very flexible form of citizen organization, an association that enables its members to act collectively based on a set of principles, which constitute its establishment. At the beginning, *KraftWerk1 Verein* had 150 active and 400 supporting members. In a former factory building, it organized in the summer of 1994 the first large public hearing that they called the *KraftWerkSommer*. During this event, the ideas of the project were discussed publicly, then were presented in comparison with international experiences, and, not less important, the first working groups and contacts were formed. The public event was followed in 1995 by a series of events in the form of a Sofa-University at the cultural center "Rote Fabrik."

The ideas that came out of the initial deliberative processes were also inspired by the *bolo'bolo* utopia. The intentions of the Kraftwerk1 cooperative are to create a place where various forms of housing, work and public services can coexist and benefit from this cohabitation, leaving room for experimentation with new ways of making a living between waged labor and the mostly unpaid housework. The pilot-project was seen as a solution to the societal crisis generated by the augmented difficulties to provide waged work, through a new type of extended home economy, and by creating the structures for collective support through the recreation of local communities in the form of intentional communities. Moreover, the members of the cooperative developed over time environmental standards, operational concepts, and collaborative activities, in order to further develop similar urban alternatives.[24]

While the community spirit that animates these urban processes could be seen as Swiss specific, I would argue that the specificity resides more in the willingness to create such spaces of difference, by exercising in the everyday life the grassroots democracy that is inherent to the Swiss identity. For instance, at Kraftwerk1 various bodies help in the organization of the collective living;[25] the participation in their activities is time and energy consuming, and also requires sustained commitment to the initial vision of this form of living. Temporal engagement is indeed among members' duties, for instance, in the form of time to subsidize internal common services, along with the financial contribution for the collective infrastructure. At the same time, Kraftwerk1 members have various rights among which the life-long right of lodging, of social assistance from special funds, of democratic participation implying support in translation and informal preparation of meetings, and of information through the bulletin board, website, public hearings on demand etc.

The built-up development was completed in 2001 on a land area of 6,700 sqm, and comprises three residential buildings with housing area of 9,251 sqm,[26] and one building for office and commercial space, with a retail area of 2,440 sqm. A material consequence of the collective principles and lifestyle is the central residential building. It combines two ideas of collective housing units that enabled a large array of housing types. Le Corbusier's concept of internal streets (i.e., *rue intérieure*) materialized at Kraftwerk1 in one-story retail and *maisonettes* that stretch one floor up or down, where Adolf Loos' type of multistory living quarters interconnected with short internal stairs is also put in practice. In this manner the architects conceived openings and connections between the apartments that conform to the overall community spirit.[27]

At the same time, there are multiple ways in place to connect with the city, the outside economy, and the countryside, through exchange of agricultural or industrial products. Kraftwerk1 members maintain a direct link with farmers in the proximity of Zurich, through food supply and temporal engagement at the farms. For visitors, there is provision of guest rooms, and the commercial and office spaces on the premises establish further networks.

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24 Kraftwerk1 cooperative has developed two other projects: Kraftwerk2, and Kraftwerk4 at Zwicky Areal in Wallisellen, in the proximity of the Zurich Airport.

25 Among the organizations that help the operation of Kraftwerk1 are the Building and Housing Cooperative, the Organization of Users and its Board, the Kraftwerk1 Council, the Solidarity Commission (dealing with the Solidarity Fund), sector groups and the General Assembly.

26 The Kraftwerk1 project is housing around 350 people in 81 residential units or suites, of various compositions and sizes: from individual housing to collective living (from two to thirteen room suites), which are self-financing and define their own social structure.

27 See A. Wirz, "Kraftwerk 1: More Than Just Nice Living," in INURA. *The Contested Metropolis: Six Cities at the Beginning of the 21st Century* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2004), 269-276.



Fig.3: Kalkbreite. General view and tramway entrance to the left of the image
Fig.4: Kalkbreite. Entrance to the garden and coffee-shops on the street
Fig.5, 6: Kalkbreite. Interior garden built over the tramway depot

2/ Genossenschaft Kalkbreite is the newest cooperative for housing, workspace and sustainable living that developed its first project in the Zurich city core. The members of the Kalkbreite cooperative gathered around the vision of laying out a social, economic and ecological response to the current multiple crises that surface within the urban living, in order to conceive potential models for future developments. Kalkbreite's recent inner-city mixed use development is the material consequence of a seven-years-long political process, following similar participatory processes that started with Kraftwerk1. It stands as an alternative to a solely profit driven commercial use, the usual choice for city center development, which was the initial proposal for this location. The site selected for the project is a former tramway repair shop in Zurich-Aussersihl that was replaced nowadays by a tramway depot built by the municipality. This large enclosed space has a green roof that functions as a public garden, and is surrounded by the residential development.

In its urban context, the civic presence of Kalkbreite makes a difference and is a catalyst for change. Besides offering a residential alternative, which is environmentally friendly and relatively affordable within an expensive housing market, it represents one more step within the conception process of spaces for collective living in cities, and proposes a model of everyday citizen activism for sustainable urban life.

The spatial program of Kalkbreite is based on principles of flexibility and modularity, and the materialization of its conception is the result of a design competition.[28] The mixed use development hosts 256 inhabitants in various residential arrangements within 89 units, which accommodate a relatively wide social diversity, including disadvantaged groups, and also 5,000 sqm of shops, restaurants, offices, studios, and the Houdini movie theater. Among the novel housing forms there are individual studios with kitchenette clustered around a shared space including a larger kitchen; in the building there are three such clusters, twenty large households for about fifty residents who maintain a common professional kitchen, dining and living spaces, and also other types of large apartments. The professional kitchen is a management solution for the food supply and reserve, by eliminating the losses from each individual apartment's refrigerators and kitchens. There are possibilities for exchanges and permutation within the residential arrangements or for commercial uses, through what is called Joker-spaces; these are spread throughout the building and could be rented for a limited timeframe, and also conference and sitting rooms that are rented out also to users outside the cooperative.

The continuity of circulation flow within the housing cooperative is realized through internal horizontal connections, and outdoors through roof terraces and stairs that lead to the public garden built over the tramway depot. This common courtyard is part of the urban green system and is open to the general public. Kalkbreite benefits of a central location in proximity to multiple city services, including good public transport connections.

Of course, the easy access and linkages facilitate the car-free condition for cooperative membership, which is one of the measures toward sustainable urban lifestyle. Moreover, being built according to the Minergie-P-Eco-Standard the building requires little heat supply, which is generated by a groundwater heat pump, and targeted measures on the electricity and water consumption minimize the consumption in the apartments. In addition to the car-free and the minimal energy consumption measures, sustainability is practiced through limiting the space consumption, having an average of only 35 sqm per resident, through insuring an affordable rent and through the participation of the cooperative members in the planning process.

For residents there are various common spaces for meetings and interaction like the foyer, where a service center is located in the entrance area to operate and maintain the entire system, and functions as an information and coordination hub; a cafeteria; a laundry-salon; office and workshop spaces; a bike parking for 300 bicycles; a hotel with twelve rooms that replaces the extra-room for guests in a regular apartment; or a sauna that is resulted from agreeing to "share" some of the private bathroom surface in order to create a common facility. All these design

28 Design by Zurich-based firms of Müller Sigrist Architekten AG with landscape architects HAAG.LA, and engineering by Dr. Lüchinger + Meyer Bauingenieure AG.

choices are agreed-upon decisions made with the residents, who participate in the development process since its inception. At Kalkbreite there is flexibility in the requirements for participation and self-support, while the members' voluntary participation in the cooperative activities reflects a form of attachment to the vision and ideals of this community, and implies also some degree of commitment to bringing that vision to reality.

At present, the cooperative is planning the second housing project, Zollhaus, on former railway land in Zurich Kreis 5, a central location that was acquired through negotiations[29] as the Swiss planning process allows a large array of participatory rights. In the case of the redevelopment of railway land, the initial ambitions of the authorities holding the power of decision were contested for the last five decades. Within this political struggle, a stage for confrontation between diverging interests was created, where the multiple interested actors could build realistic understandings of the current urbanization process. In addition, the decades-long process provided opportunities to advance the green policy agenda through significant additions to environmental legislation (i.e., federal Clean Air Act) including parking policies and car access in the city center.

3/ NeNa1 Bau- und Wohngenossenschaft is a recent cooperative in Zurich, a revival of Kraftwerk1's vision within a constant political process, which explores various manifestations of the collective, self-organized, environmentally and economically sustainable urban alternative, and that at the same time aims to generate ecological and socially integrated neighborhoods. That means an urban insertion that takes into account multiple perspectives, based on the cooperative principles and responding to the necessities of the community at large, including the immediate proximity in the neighborhood. From this point of view, NeNa1 is a contemporary experiment within a broader process of building new understandings of urbanity, urban lifestyle and urban commons, based on self-organization and the affirmation of diversity[30] within an ideal of sustainable city life.

The precedents of successful brownfield redevelopment, created by the Kraftwerk1 and Kalkbreite cooperatives, inspired NeNa1 to imagine the reconversion of the land occupied now by the car parking next to the main railway station. There is high competition over the inner-city development land, which is extremely limited and highly valued, but the competitive advantage of the NeNa1 proposal is a sustained effort to integrating the new development with four other neighborhoods in the proximity. All of them are located in the same district, Kreis 5, and therefore, a neighborhood group was formed by the name of *5im5i* that complements and enriches the activities within the NeNa1 cooperative.

Among the many notable ideas that are generated within this project, some are worth mentioning here, in the context of claiming the right to difference. Through a recent interview (October-November 2015) with Fred Frohofer, co-president of NeNa1 and resident at the Kalkbreite cooperative, I have learned that a "new quality of life within walking distance" is his perspective on the main goal of this contemporary living construct. That combines a strong belief in the possibility of ecological urban lifestyle with the necessary pragmatism to achieve sustainable long-term visions.

In this circumstance the role of the civil society is critical at present, as it is led by different values than those that inspire the mainstream urbanization actors (e.g., the civil society does not work for financial profit), and also compensates the failures of the market and the city to provide imminent citizen needs. In context it is important to remember though, what Benjamin Barber noted in 1998,

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29 This land allocation for cooperative projects comes "in compensation" to Europaallee, the commercial development at the railway station area, which responds to a city vision dating back to the late 1960s to redevelop the railway land and to extend the financial and business district of Bahnhofstrasse, the main commercial boulevard in Zurich, through an internationally visible flagship project. Among the main opposition arguments was the neighborhood gentrification "posing a threat to low rents, neighborhood shops, small-scale industry, low-end shops and bars" (Wolff 2012, p. 121). However, this last version of the project was approved through a referendum in 2006 by 65% of the voters of Zurich.

30 Refer to I.M. Young, "City Life and Difference," in I.M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 226-256.



Fig.7,8: NeNa1. A workshop on dwelling
Fig.9,10: NeNa1. Playing domino on the occasion of monthly encounters
Fig.11: NeNa1. Tour of the neighbourhood organized by 5im5i and associated with the activities of NeNa1

> There are three obstacles to civil society as the mediating domain between the government and the private sector: government itself, when it is arrogant and overweening; market dogmas, when they presume that private individuals and groups can secure public good; and the yearning for community, when it subordinates liberty and equality to solidarity.[31]

Moreover, appropriate social space is necessary to achieve an ideal civility, which Barber considers the everyday life activities of socializing and people watching in spaces that are "neither radically individualistic nor suffocatingly communitarian."[32] Drawing on Barber's work, Iris Marion Young elaborated a convincing setting[33] for an "appropriate alternative vision of a democratic policy" that is, nevertheless, different than the ideal of community which "exemplifies the logic of identity." It is rather "an ideal of city life as a vision of social relations affirming group difference without exclusion." But she states that, "City life as an openness to unassimilated otherness, however, represents only an unrealized social ideal."[34]

The cooperative movement in Zurich is an experiment of celebrating differences within civil urbanity. However, as Frohofer contended during our conversation, novel ways of dealing with collective deliberations and decision making processes are necessary to mediate conflicting interests, and to operate effectively within the "third sector" or civil society. For that he mentioned the potential of sociocracy,[35] but also the necessity of flexibility and diplomacy, which brought to my mind the dialectical condition of urban collective life that may be expressed in Plessner's suggestions for community institutional arrangements,

> all agreements that are carried out in the public sphere must be artificial according to two sides: they must be schematic and arbitrary up to a certain degree; and they must satisfy constantly the aura that produces a demand for distance.[36]

Therefore, another idea highlighted in the social practice at NeNa1 is related to a dynamic understanding of these urban processes, for instance, the antagonism of human existence between being and becoming, for "behind every determination of our being lies dormant the unspoken possibility of being different."[37] Life is both a process and a project. Lefebvre uses the art metaphor to explain differences, either through the antic tragedy or through music, which responds to the logic of harmony and is not separated from action, movement, dance, sociability, and desire. This is highly relevant for NeNa1, and to what civil urbanity might strive for. At present NeNa1 manifests as multiple gatherings, citizen initiatives, and participatory conception processes. Through participant observation for ethnographic research, I am engaging in some of these activities, and argue here that, before a concrete spatial materialization, the political processes themselves produce the experience of lived space that is, "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. […] space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate."[38]

The social events and activities within the NeNa1 cooperative generate a context for the lived space to come to fruition, and over time has the potential to shape appropriated social spaces of difference.

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31 B. R. Barber, *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 69.

32 Ibid., 48.

33 "Building a survival community where men must confront differences around them will require two changes in the structuring of city life. One will be a change in the scope of bureaucratic power in the city; the other will be a change in the concept of order in the planning of the city." (R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992).139).

34 Young, "City Life," 227.

35 That is a system of governance using decision making consent or "no objections," instead of consensus, and is organized through a hierarchy of semi-autonomous circles of decision; see for instance J. Buck and S. Villines. *We the People: Consenting to a Deeper Democracy* (Washington D.C.: Sociocracy.info Press 2007).

36 H. Plessner, *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*, translated by Andrew Wallace (Amherst NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 151.

37 Ibid., 109.

38 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

Concluding Notes

In light of the above-described spatial representations of a different perspective on urban living in Zurich, I propose to consider the Bucharest initiatives for community action, which I mentioned in the Introduction, as initial steps toward a specific form of sustainable urban living that values common well-being, and thus prioritizes collective support instead of exclusively personal financial gains. These are necessary steps that in the future might lead to the organization of grassroots groups and their search for localization within the urban fabric. Such process of shaping urban space would be the consequence of struggling for the right to difference, and of claiming the right to centrality, which implies access to power and representation within the political spectrum.

Within the current globalization processes, there are multiple dispersive forces that, despite any physical proximity, limit significantly the incentives and capacities of urban communities to socialize, share resources and information, and most importantly to identify their values "in common." Shaping a stimulating space for the continuous expression and integration of shared values in the everyday life has the potential to restore a sense of being-together, more intimately than modern society allows. The cooperatives for developing sustainable, ecological and collective forms of housing and living in Zurich generate such social space; an example that comes to reality due to an urban context that produces differential space. Some of the immediate effects of restoring the urban commons is the diminishing of the society's disintegration, and the strengthening of the role that the local action plays in improving the quality of life in cities.

Throughout his work, Henri Lefebvre's optimistic perspective on the promise of the city has been led by the conviction that different worlds can be imagined and brought to reality. In more recent writings, Lefebvre approached the everyday life from the perspective of its rhythms and temporalities. Similarly to space, social time is a social product, and thus "time divides and splits itself into use and use-value on the one hand, and exchange and exchange-value on the other. On the one hand it is sold and on the other it is lived."[39] Consequently, he suggested the method of rhythmanalysis as a means to unveiling the ideological structure of everyday life:

> Without claiming to change life, but by fully reinstating the sensible in consciousness and in thought, he [the rhythmanalyst] would accomplish a tiny part of the revolutionary transformation of this world and this society in decline. Without any declared political position.[40]

By claiming their right to the city, local communities may become significant players within the current phenomenon of planetary urbanization,[41] as laboratories of social learning[42] that can beneficially provide alternative views to the solutions generated in the marketplace. The sources of resistance generally depend, however, on the initiatives of highly motivated individuals and take place outside the formal institutional frameworks, mostly restricted to progressive neighborhoods or specific urban subcultures.

In Bucharest more than 150 citizens, among them many architects and students of spatial design, responded to the architect's call for voluntary involvement in the civic initiative supporting schools with their fire documentation, and participated in the initial public gathering (November 9, 2015), for which the University of Architecture and Urbanism provided assembly space. As the fire accident in the Club Colectiv has affected tragically the architectural profession, its professional body (OAR) has made an invitation to dialogue to the state institutions and professional associations, and appealed the institutions responsible with the civil protection and safety for a thorough revision of the law.[43] Furthermore, following the government resignation, for the first time

39 H. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, translated by S. Elden and G. Moore (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 73.

40 Ibid., 26.

41 N. Brenner and C. Schmid, "Planetary urbanization," in *Urban Constellations*, edited by M. Gandy (Jovis, 2011), 10-13.

42 Refer to J. Dewey, *The Public and its Problems* (Athens, Ohio and Chicago: Swallow Press, 1954 [1927]).

43 November 4, 2015; refer to the online website oar.org.ro; OAR Open Letter: "Siguranța reală, dincolo de iluzii" [from the Romanian language: "Real safety, beyond illusions"].

the Romanian presidency has invited the civil society for dialogue and consultation (November 6, 2015). These significant beginnings open toward a differential urban space, by strengthening the role that the social sphere may play in Romanian cities toward revolutionary transformations.

Thus I propose, on the one hand, to call everyday citizen activism to resist the mainstream urbanization through alternative lifestyle choices and through small, sometimes informal actions, as part of the everyday spatial practice which enables urbanites to claim the right to the city. On the other hand, it is crucial that the players in the urban development processes transform the dynamics between the political spheres namely the market, media, public authority, and local community, in which also spatial designers are actively engaged. If necessary, they could even reinvent them. But they have to invest their knowledge pragmatically into actions according to shared values and clearly formulated goals, and thus make thoughtful choices in shaping spatiality for urban life. By these means, the potential to revive the relevance of the spatial design professions relies on the spatial designers' civic presence, and on their role as communication vessels in claiming the right to difference, in order to generate lived space and civil urbanity for elaborating on the future urban commons.

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