MARIBOR IS THE FUTURE

Participation Practices and the Right to the City

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The article explores futures in the deindustrialized city of Maribor in relation to the right to the city and participatory practices. The future is considered from the present perspective; how it informs and inspires people to act. The focus is on the Initiative for Citywide Assembly, self-organized districts, participatory budgeting, and collaboration between cultural producers and NGOs. The article treats these participatory practices as social processes and learning sites in which the future is not just imagined or aspired to but rather lived and put into practice.

Keywords: future, right to the city, participatory practices, deindustrialized city, Slovenia, Maribor

Introduction

The slogan "Maribor is the Future," coined by two artists from the SonDa Foundation (2011), was introduced in Maribor just a few months before the start of the European Capital of Culture Year (ECoC) 2012. I chose this title because it reflects well some futures I encountered in the city, especially the ambivalent relationship with it. The ambivalence was well captured by Žiga Brdnik, who works in the field of culture, and who said that, on the one hand, the slogan motivates, as it brings a determination with emancipatory potential and optimism. Especially for those "who want to do something with the city." On the other hand, the slogan acts as a provocation. Anthropologist Meta Kordiš (2018: 3) wrote that the slogan "ironically captured the spirit of the times," as at the time of its first public appearance, when the ECoC program should have been in full swing, there was still no sign that the project, one of the most important in Europe in the field of culture, had begun. The slogan, however, stuck in the city. It was later used for various instances of cooperation, especially by non-governmental organizations and independent self-employed cultural producers working for a better future in the city.

The slogan also corresponds to one of the goals I pursued in our bilateral research project, Urban Futures: Imagining and Activating Possibilities in Unsettled Times (2020–2024), which aimed to explore future-making in select Croatian and Slovenian cities in post-socialist, post-industrial, and post-2009 crisis times of uncertainty, unpredictability, and precarity. In the project, we considered multiple futures, both

desired and undesired, official and alternative, supportive and resistant, contested, challenged, and invisible – silenced, or stolen. We aimed to analyze the process of urban future-making from the top-down (strategic documents and visions of specific cities) and the bottom-up perspective (citizens' associations and initiatives).[1] My article focuses on the latter, on instances of citizen participation, treating them as future-directed practices. Participation has become a key concept in various political and economic contexts and practices. And yet, as is evident in the article, it remains fuzzy and contested, and we need to consider its embeddedness in specific constellations between the state, the market, and civil society in a given place (Wade 2015: 4, cf. Laister and Lipphardt 2015: 6).

I am interested in how concerns for the future influence citizens in the present and move them to act. The article focuses on visions, imaginations, hopes, and participatory practices. I have selected the *Iniciativa mestni zbor* – Initiative for City-wide Assembly (ICA),[2] the self-organized districts' assemblies, collectives, and individuals from NGOs or independent cultural practitioners in Maribor who claim their right to the city (Lefebvre (1968) 1996; Harvey 2008; Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer 2009; Holston 2009; Marcuse 2009; Mitchell 2003) as their right to the future (Alempijević, Škrbić and Oroz. 2022; Kordiš 2018, 2020; Poljak Istenič 2018, 2019). These practices oppose the dominant temporal-linear modality of modernity based on capital, growth, and acceleration. I consider them as "labor in/of time," as Laura Bear uses the term, "to demarcate our creative, mediating action in the world" (2014: 20), which involves "temporal agency" and "time tricking" (Moroşanu and Ringel 2016). These practices also contradict the prevailing temporal reasoning of "enforced presentism" (Guyer 2007) because they are conceived as long-term practices that strive to create mechanisms that would enable permanence.

The article follows recent calls in anthropology to pay more attention to people's relationship to the future (Appadurai 2013; Bryant and Knight 2019; Gulin Zrnić and Poljak Istenič 2022; Kleinst and Jansen 2016; Petrović Šteger 2018, 2020; Pels 2015; Pink and Salazar 2017; Poljak Istenič 2023, Poljak Istenič and Gulin Zrnić 2022) in order to better understand their present experiences (Ringel 2016). This interest in the future, rather than predicting it, follows what imaginations of the future, or rather a diversity of futures (Pels 2015: 779), do in the present (Wallman 1992: 2), thus examining present experiences from the perspective of the future. In that sense, the present is never merely a result of the sequence of past events, as a retrospective construction of causes, but also entails future-looking practices and views. Felix Ringel, who studied the post-industrial, post-socialist city of Hoyeswerda, showed that even in the "rapidly shrinking city," there is an engagement with the future based on persistence and endurance (2018). Maribor was chosen in our project for a similar reason, as it is a deindustrialized city struggling to find a new identity and a new future. We wanted to examine the impact of political and eco-

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1 More about the project: www.citymaking.eu.
2 http://www.imz-maribor.org/Files/Datoteke/Pdf/Booklet_Initiative%20for%20citywide%20assembly.pdf

nomic changes on contemporary experiences of time from the perspective of the future as well.

The article begins with temporal breaks in the city introduced by my interlocutors to provide a broader spatiotemporal context for better understanding the emergence of participatory practices. The next three chapters discuss participatory practices from a temporal perspective: the Initiative for Citywide Assembly, the citizens' district assemblies, and participatory budgeting. The final chapter, focusing on the podcast Maribor is the Future, presents a discussion between non-institutionalized cultural and non-governmental organizations concerning the city's future cultural strategy.

Methods of research

The research is based on grounded theory and draws on two and a half years of ethnographic research (conducted 2021 to June 2023), including semi-structured interviews with members of the Initiative for Citywide Assembly, individuals working in the NGOs active in urban future-making (CAAP, Hiša!), socially and politically engaged independent cultural producers, scholars working or living in Maribor, a town councilor, a city representative, and an urbanist, and participant observation in the seven self-organized districts in the city (including conversations I had with some of the participants before and after the assemblies) and the two organized city walks (Industriopolis; Rajzefiber). I also studied local media (the journal Večer newspaper, regional television archive, radio news, and podcasts) by using discourse analysis (focusing on how narratives are constructed and issues represented), official documents (urban strategy and the vision of the city), and other relevant published literature.

Maribor was not my field site before the project, but I heard a lot about solidarity economies and collaborative and participatory practices that emerged in the city within the Urban Furrows program (part of the ECoC) and the protest movement after the first uprisings in 2012. I had been following these emerging urban practices from Ljubljana for some time, even before the project began. My interest in exploring urban participatory practices that reclaimed the future as their right to the city seemed an obvious choice for me at the time the project started. In 2021, as well as the first half of 2022, I had to adapt my study to the constraints and regulations of the Covid epidemic, when I had already made my first connections in Ljubljana and conducted some online interviews. Due to the lockdown and the related restrictions on group meetings, as well as my own involvement in other research projects (as the financial system of the Slovenian research policy does not enable us to fully focus on one topic or fully immerse ourselves in one research project, we are thus dispersed between different projects), it was not possible for me to fully pursue my field study all the time.

My main interlocutor, whom I interviewed three times, was a co-founder of the Initiative for Citywide Assembly and the moderator of the district self-organization meetings. I interviewed the two other moderators. In total, I interviewed fifteen people. I am aware of the limitations of the study and that it would be necessary to have more time, especially for more intense participant observation, to follow the self-organized assemblies and other collaborative practices over a longer period of time, in order to capture different social rhythms, affective dimensions, and temporal experiences.

Breaks in the narratives

Temporal ruptures structured my interviewees' narratives, dividing time periods between "now" and "then." The rupture with socialism was rarely explicitly addressed by my interlocutors as many other ruptures from the immediate past played a more important role in their lives: "the crisis" (2009 financial crisis), ECoC 2012, the 2012 protests, and the Covid epidemic. The ruptures mark "vernacular time spaces," as a collective sense of living in an era that has particular temporality (Bryant and Knight 2019). However, these ruptures in the narratives are situational and relational, shifting depending on the topic, interlocutors, and their relationship to the future at the time of our interviews.

I arrived in the city after the Covid lockdown. The epidemic and the lockdown were perceived as major temporal breaks at the time. My interlocutors were still waiting to see the consequences of the damage. The situation of many precarious cultural workers worsened because they were unable to work in the cultural sector during the lockdown and were forced to work in other areas in order to survive. The self-organized district assemblies that emerged as the direct result of the uprisings in 2013 lost much of their commitment and power.[3] This article thus captures the practices in the post-pandemic and post-protest period.

The protests refer to the uprising that broke out in the city in November 2012, bringing masses of people into the streets (Zavratnik and Kurnik 2013; Pohleven 2013; Pajnik and Zavratnik 2016). Radar devices set up by Mayor Kangler on the streets of Maribor triggered citizens' anger against his numerous criminal scandals (for which he was even indicted) and affairs, corrupt private-public partnerships, and misguided budgetary policies.[4] Some protesters who filled the streets chanted "We are Maribor" and "We will not allow the city to be destroyed by private capital interests." The ensuing riots turned violent with increasing fury; police used tear gas and intimidated protesters with dogs, beatings, cavalry, and helicopters. Violence spread to both sides. The uprisings led to the resignation of the mayor and spread

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3 Some of my interlocutors from the Initiative for Citywide Assembly explain this as a result of the lockdown (some meetings were on Zoom, which did not work), others attribute it to the broader political change brought about by the April 2022 elections, and some are looking for explanations themselves.

4 Citizens of Ljubljana also protested against the mayor Zoran Janković.

throughout the state. The protests, which involved many people with different interests and needs, were directed not only against the mayor of Maribor and the right-wing prime minister. Citizens throughout the country protested against political corruption, nepotism, and political and economic patronage. After the riots, some protesters entered politics and founded a new party, while others launched the Initiative for Citywide Assembly, advocating direct democracy. Before I move to a deeper study of this initiative, I consider some other temporal breaks related to the contemporary concerns with the future in the city.

But first, I would like to argue that uprisings and demands for transparency cannot be considered in isolation from the dispossessions that were an integral part of post-socialist transformation and privatization (Lorenčič 2012, Žnidaršič Kranjc 1992). The macroeconomic narrative of transition in Slovenia is described as a success story, but micro studies show that such a narrative obscures class conflict and the dispossessions that hit some regions and social groups harder (and earlier) than others, deepening social inequalities and differences in the country (Vodopivec 2021), including distrust of political institutions. It remains to be studied in more detail how these processes hit Maribor and who in the city was hit the hardest but it can already be said that Maribor was much more severely (and traumatically) affected by deindustrialization than other cities and regions. The loss of the textile industry and especially the automotive industry TAM – the pride of the city – marked the experience of marginalization and peripheralization of the city in the new state. According to a Slovenian opinion poll, Maribor citizens rated their dissatisfaction with political development in Slovenia higher than in other cities, with the opinion that Slovenia had regressed in terms of freedom and democracy ranking very high (Lavrič and Naterer 2018: 67).

Maribor is the second largest city in Slovenia and the administrative capital of the region. It is also a university town, yet, on the other hand one of the fastest aging cities in Slovenia, with many young people emigrating or commuting daily out of the city. The 2008-09 financial crisis led to the loss of livelihoods for many more people and increased criticism of political and economic elites and alliances.

The approval of Maribor's application to become a European City of Culture was seen as another important temporal turning point, which my interlocutors, who work as freelancers in the cultural sector or in financially malnourished NGOs, met with optimism and hope. Hope created a particular orientation toward the future, "a form of futural momentum," which focused "on the possibility to actualize potentiality" (Bryant and Knight 2019: 141). Such engagements must be understood in their respective contexts, which were at the time characterized by crisis, conflicts, and their effects (Kleist and Jansen 2016: 373). Optimism and hope, however, were quickly dashed by numerous conflicts in the city. Maribor spent a long time searching for the right organizational structure for the program, many people left the organizational board, and new ones came from other cities and regions, which led to further conflicts. Some wanted a cosmopolitan cultural performance, others insisted on a local focus, and many strived for a permanent cultural infrastructure (Kordiš

2020), something that would last. Some argued that the ECoC left nothing behind and that Maribor had once again missed a wonderful opportunity to change for the better, while others claimed that one program in particular, Urban Furrows (Babič 2013, 2018), fostered new collaborations, community practices, and solidarity economies that subsequently spread throughout the city. These practices stimulated new future directions and debates on visions of the future in the city.

Many books have been written by intellectuals working and living in Maribor as they searched for reasons for the city's identity crisis (Brvar 1999; Vezjak 1999; Simonič 2012; Godina Golija 2015; Vezjak 2015, 2016a) and the "unfulfilled expectations" that followed the city's search for a new direction for the future (Lavrič and Naterer 2018: 149). The poet Andrej Brvar is often cited in these studies (e.g., in Lavrič and Naterer's social study of the city) with his depiction of Maribor as a "city of undercut roots" (following Zorko Simčič, Premzl and Godina Golija 2017: 13, cf. Lavrič and Naterer 2018: 24), linking three radical ruptures in the 20th century at the level of urban elites and city administration that affected Maribor's identity and whose consequences are still felt in the 21st century. Brvar's interpretation of the "undercut roots" thus asserts that the city's identity crisis has a longer history. It is not my aim to explore Maribor's history or poets' and writers' portrayals of the city. I want to show how some local scholars relate the current crisis to a particular past to point out that, when looking for future directions and seeking explanations for present crisis, the past remains an important point of reference. Interpretations of different pasts can also revive empty and forgotten places and reshapes citizens' attachments to the city (e.g., the City Walks festival, Industriopolis). Ethnologist Jerneja Ferlež's studies, an interdisciplinary work on the city's past, everyday life, the living conditions of ordinary people, and prominent figures from the city's past draw on historical fragments and engage with the city's present to rethink the future of public space and the cityscape and inspire future action in the city.[5] Concerns and desires about the city's future should, therefore, not be considered outside of other temporal frames as they are part of multi-temporality in which different interpretations of the past constantly interact with different concerns and interpretations of the future in the present (Pels 2015; Knight 2014; Potkonjak and Škokič 2021). The same goes with deindustrialization, which continues to influence concerns about the city's future. Studies in the United States or the United Kingdom, where industry closed decades ago, remind us that deindustrialization is an ongoing process that goes beyond factory closures and influences even younger generations and the cities' futures (Linkon 2018; Vodopivec 2022). These influences and impacts may be present even if the city does not address them publicly.[6] Maribor, like many other cities, has declared its new direction in line with the post-industrial paradigm based on

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5 Her study of courtyards in the city (2001) inspired a documentary film, in which Frlež also participated as a scriptwriter (Mariborska dvorišča, 2004), the citywalk around courtyards in Maribor, organized by Frlež, and the project Živa dvorišča (Living courtyards) organized by the Hiša! NGO (Živa dvorišča).

6 I was looking for the place of industry, industrial workers, industrial life and industrial heritage in the city. Initially, I thought that this theme would emerge in the participatory practices, but this was not the case. Therefore, I addressed this issue, which emerged from my ethnographic material in Prekmurje, in another article within this pro-

creativity and knowledge. On the official website of the city administration, Maribor is presented as a university city.

The anthology Maribor for Tomorrow (Maribor jutri, 2016), written in search of the city's potential and ideas for future directions that could strengthen the city's self-confidence, shows how visions for the city's future are torn between the expectation of major turning points in the city that, deus ex machina, would bring about change for the better, and the idea that the future would be created by the citizens with small steps and transformations.

Concerns with the future in the city are shaped by the particular local social experiences on the ground as well as by the broader transnational context characterized by an acceleration of the rhythmic pace of life (Time-Space Compression by David Harvey cf. Pels 2015). The time regime of contemporary capitalism dictates an ethics of probability, supported by the technology of statistics, rationality, and accounting for the future, and the experience of ongoing crisis, precarity, and social insecurity (Pels 2015). Not only the post-socialist world but also the capitalist world changed; cities transformed from Keynesian to global regimes where mines, factories, hospitals, etc. were replaced by insurance, accounting, law, finance, consulting, software programming, etc. with their own time regimes and logics under the dictates of capital, commodification, the maximization of economic opportunities, competition, and the pursuit of profit and innovation (Sassen 2012). Maribor is not a mega-city like Tokyo or New York, but it is part of these processes. Its urban governance has changed following the entrepreneurial paradigm and urban processes are more intensely shaped by the logic of capital, its circulation and accumulation, and interurban competition (compare Harvey 1989; Sassen 1991).

However, in our research project we have been inspired by scholars and ethnographers who show how people are shaped and how they act in everyday life in different regimes of time. These may counter the prevailing "politics of probability" – systematized rationality, risk management, and cost-benefit calculations – and have a more human and nature-friendly, democratic view of future making, building on the "ethics of possibility" with the capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2013). In the next chapters, I will discuss participatory practices that bring such an "ethics of possibility" to life.

The Initiative for Citywide Assembly (ICA)

"The post-insurgent spirit has not yet died," claimed the co-founders of the Initiative for Citywide Assembly. This supported some other similar voices in the city, namely those that felt that the "post-insurgent spirit" had left a lasting trace in the city, a sense that "it was possible" (to change something). This statement contained

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ject (Vodopivec 2022). However, deindustrialization and the future (including the continued existence of industry) in Maribor remain to be discussed.

two messages: an emancipatory determination and a threat to those in power. The statement that linked hope and expectation to the mobilization of political forces was a response to certain representations and dilemmas dominating the public discourse after the protests. These referred to the sentiment that uprisings did not make a change, that they left nothing, that they did not contain a clear vision, and that once again something failed in Slovenia (Vodopivec 2018).

The hope and expectation that arose during the political protests in Maribor, Slovenia, and the world were followed by disappointment and pessimism. Yet, we should not forget to see the power of the possibilities that they brought. We should also consider these possibilities in a particular setting of certain socio-historical conditions when there was a general perception of a crisis at both the national and global level, which included "a heightened sense of a lack of political ideological direction" (Kleist and Jansen 2016: 376). A certain "utopian spirit" pervaded these various political movements, which sought "a different organization of society and a new way of being" (Webb 2007: 79; cf. Kleist and Jansen 2016: 376). The hope emerging from contemporary political movements could thus be seen as a "thirst for change as much as projections of a better future" (Kleist and Jansen 2016: 377). In this article, I consider the Initiative for Citywide Assembly in Maribor as such a commitment "against the diminishing resonance of the modernist metanarrative of progress" (Kleist and Jansen 2016: 377).

Shortly after the first uprising in Maribor in November 2012, some protesters organized discussions to articulate their demands. Some demanded participation in political and economic processes and formed a political party, while the more radical voices called for a change in the political and economic system. The Initiative for Citywide Assembly emerged from the latter group, which demanded "No to authoritarian rule!" and advocated direct action and democracy. "We believed that civil disobedience, disappointment, and mistrust should be followed by creative and long-term steps," a co-founder of the initiative told me. "And we were looking for ways to verbalize our despair and discontent, an anger that drove people to the streets."[7] This group of mainly young people (the majority of whom were between 20 and 35 years old) saw the solution in self-organization and joint community and educational discussions (Stamejčič 2016a,b; Kordiš 2020). The group was looking for mechanisms and tools for direct democracy. They defined their mission as promoting political and non-partisan self-organization in districts and local communities in Maribor. They began meeting once a week and have continued to meet every week for the past ten years.

They have developed special techniques and communication rules to structure their own debates and ensure horizontal management. Their work is voluntary and based on direct action, "since we all donate our free time, we do not give the responsibility and the work to others."[8] Direct action is characterized by no longer saying "someone has to do it," but rather "I will do it." The members of this group learn from

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7 Interview, Maribor, March 2021.
8 Interview, Maribor, April 2022.

communitarian practices abroad, especially in Latin America, Iceland, the Occupy movement, and the anarchist models of communication and governance that they adapted to their needs and practices. They were inspired by the theories and the world of existing collaborative practices presented by sociologist Marta Gregorčič, who, together with Matej Žonta, led the social-ecological project Urban Furrows, within the ECoC, thus co-shaping solidarity economies and creative practices. Gregorčič and Žonta were also co-founders of the initiative and its first moderators. The Initiative for Citywide Assembly is well known in Maribor (and outside the city) among socially and politically engaged collectives and individuals. Philosopher and media critic Boris Vezjak described them as "thinkers and shapers of the city's future who do not share the resignation and liturgy so characteristic of the city" (2016b: 4).

The general goals of the initiative included active political citizenship, "civil control to prevent systematic bribery, clientelism, and nepotism, the plundering of the wealth of past generations, the destruction of the environment through pressure on the ruling structures, the introduction of direct democracy to obtain rights of co-determination at the local, municipal, and national levels, and the transformation of the socio-political system." (ICA booklet). As my interlocutor said, "We realized that people (ordinary citizens) need space to express their own ideas. We stopped talking and started listening. We created public space to meet and network to discuss."[9]

Nova Vas was the first district in Maribor where such a place was created in March 2013. At that time, many people came (according to my interviewees' estimates, 50 to 100). The moderators explained such a response as part of the "post-insurgent spirit" and indirectly linked the activities to political protests, to the protests' climate and emotions, anger but also great enthusiasm and commitment. Self-organization had a strong impact on people, I was told (by the moderators), because "they had no trust in party politics" (see also Lavrič and Naterer 2018: 87, 69). This form of self-organization later expanded to other districts in the city, and the self-organized district meetings still take place once a month in 11 out of 17 districts. They are open to all citizens in the district and are moderated by two trained moderators from the initiative group. Citizens' meetings are still moderated. The moderation of citizens' assemblies is crucial for direct democracy because it structures the debates, "in a time when we have forgotten how to discuss and talk,"[10] and ensures that the debate is focused, not too long (the assembly cannot exceed two hours) and does not become tense or emotional. Moderators structure the discussions, take notes, ask questions to motivate citizens to direct action and help them reach consensus. This is considered the most difficult task. The moderators do not interfere in the affairs of the district self-organization and are not allowed to share their opinions with the citizens in the meetings: "It is hard when you disagree," one of them told me.[11] In

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9 Interview, Maribor, April 2022.
10 Interview, Maribor, 2022.
11 Interview, June, 2023.

the district where they live, they do not moderate the assemblies, but participate as citizens.

In addition to moderating, activists in the initiative spent a lot of time and effort monitoring those in power at the local and state levels, drawing attention to deviations and corruption in city administration, studying the public sector, monitoring its work, observing the way it is governed, analyzing public infrastructure, and exploring models of participatory practices across the world. They envisioned short, medium, and long-term steps toward the future. The short-term steps involve organizing individual actions (political, environmental, individual events, etc.), while the longer-term activities involve challenging forms of governance and proposing better solutions. This work requires a lot of energy, time, and effort, knowledge of how local and state government works, volunteerism, and learning through practice. Their role is educational and pedagogical; they publish documents, reports, and brochures, and promote self-organized district meetings where they act as mediators.[12]

From the interviews I have had with the three moderators over the past three years I have learned that moderation is a big commitment, as there are 11 self-organized district meetings every month. The membership of the initiative has declined over the last decade, not many new people have joined, and only seven members are still active as moderators. Many more people participate in short-term or immediate actions, which are also organized by the initiative, while the role of moderator requires a long-term and high level of commitment.

Participation in district self-organization has also declined. At the seven self-organized meetings I attended in 2023, three to seven citizens came from the district. Some citizens come to the meetings to solve a specific problem in the district. Sometimes, as I have heard from the moderators, they present the problem and, when they see that they would have to solve it with the other participants in the meeting if they want to reach a consensus (and that can be difficult), they leave. Some stay, start solving the problem, and then leave, while others stay because they are fighting for structural change, political inclusion, and are thus shaping the longer-term future of the city. At these meetings, citizens fight for infrastructural changes, for better maintenance of public space, especially green spaces, reclaiming public space by struggling against commodification and the dictates of capital, and advocating for transparency and participation. The most discussed topics in the meetings I attended were the poorly regulated traffic, especially heavy traffic, the organization of public transport, and the maintenance of greenery and public spaces. These efforts were in line with the critique of neoliberal governance and urban entrepreneurship (Harvey 1989; Ploštajner 2014; 2015), a future shaped by the logic of capital, and the meta-narrative of constant growth. With the latest mayor, these processes have become more evident in Maribor, and gentrification in the city has also increased. However, these participatory practices are not directed against individual political figures, but against the structure of political governance at the municipal and state levels and against party politics regardless of their political-ideological declarations/

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12 See ICA web site (ICA)

orientations, as "even good mayors quickly become either victims or protagonists of the system" (stated by Gregor Stamejčič in Trampuš 2014).

These participatory practices explicitly refer to the right to the city as a collective right to change the city and shape the process of urbanization (Lefebvre (1968) 1996; Harvey 2008). This right consists of the right to proper housing, mobility, urban nature, recreation, leisure, and participation, i.e., a right to be involved in political processes to shape the city's future. Such rights are based on citizenship and participation, rather than on capital. However, the struggle for the right to the city in Maribor did not begin with the poor and with the awareness of structural inequalities (which was present at the beginning, particularly among the activists of the ICA), but with the political criticism of the political elites and governance structures, with the demand for political participation, and with the involvement of the educated middle class. The aforementioned initiators of ICA Gregorčič and Žonta are academics scholars, all three moderators (ICA) I spoke with work in NGOs, and one is a self-employed graphic designer. My other interlocutors in the city were also mainly precarious people from the educated middle class.

I was surprised that no social issues were discussed at the self-organized assemblies I attended, as I had read in newspapers about the high number of home evictions in Maribor due to debt[13] and about the greatest hidden poverty. The moderator replied that social and cultural issues are not dealt with by the citizens assemblies in district self-organization, and that they tackle these issues with individual actions as individual activists working in the ICA group. Roma, "people living on the edge" (ICA interview), migrants, and all other dispossessed citizens who lack the means for social reproduction were not present at district assemblies and were not active in the ICA.

The self-organized district meetings – ethnographic vignette

I met the moderator on a sunny day, 10 minutes before 6 p.m., when the self-organized meeting was to begin in front of the district house in Nova Vas. She came a little irritated because the shop on the corner where she wanted to buy cigarettes had already closed at 4 p.m. She turned to her mother, who had also come to the meeting, saying with a mix of anger and sadness that another service in the district was closing down. This is an experience shared by many districts: stores, ATMs, vending machines, banks, and other services are vanishing as infrastructure in the district shrinks. Another meeting participant joined our informal conversation adding that the dentist had also left the neighborhood. The self-organized district meetings serve as places where such disappearing infrastructure is discussed, where solutions are sought, and citizens' visions for the future are created. However, the disappearing infrastructure was not the topic of the June self-organized district meeting. This

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13 Among others see Klipšterer and Mlakar 2015.

was already the 154th self-organized district meeting and it began, as always, with the moderator reading aloud the rules of discussion and self-organization (adopted at the first meeting), which must be affirmed each time (this is the general format that all meetings follow). Body signs and gestures (for intervening in the debate) were presented, with the rules written and drawn on the poster in front of us. We all agreed to them with a hand gesture.

Apart from the two moderators and myself, only three people came. The moderator wrote the minutes proposed by the participants on the board. First, the follow-up of the last meeting was discussed, as some inquiries and complaints about the transport system had been directed to the municipal bus line. There was no response (and it was too early to complain about it), so we moved on to another minute. This is a general procedure at all meetings. When responses to written complaints or inquiries are received, the participants discuss them and decide on next steps. Inquiries or complaints are usually directed to city departments municipal offices, state administrators, public agencies, or businesses. Some of the participants already know who to contact about various issues, or the moderators help them do so. The rules are focused on direct democracy: Even if the moderators support the participants with information, it is up to the citizens to share the problem and make the decision with consent, plan the steps, and act.

The next topic at the June meeting in Nova Vas was the design of the park around Pekre Creek (*Pekrski potok*), which runs along the border between this district (Nova Vas) and another (Radvanje). This project has a long history that required "a lot of effort and struggle," as one of the participants told me after the meeting. A participant who is also a member of the Pekre Creek working group (consisting of the Nova Vas and Radvanje districts' citizens) presented recent activities in this area. In the last 10 years, a number of working groups have been formed in the city across the districts in which citizens study a particular problem in depth (for example, the protection of users of public goods),[14] exercise pressure on the responsible bodies (the municipality, the state, businesses), inform and remind the citizen of the problem, and rethink possible solutions. The Pekre Creek working group, created in 2017,[15] explored options, regulations, and best practices for designing a park around the creek that now looks like an abandoned canal. The group organized workshops where citizens presented their visions and needs, which were then discussed with formal representatives of the city and the district, and experts (landscape architects, urban planners, and experts in ecological measures), whose studies have shown possible solutions (such as the protection and revitalization of damaged natural areas). Within this interest group, a particular alliance was gradually formed among the activists, citizens, and the district's formal representative due to their shared concern and engagement about the park.

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14 For more, see ICA web site.

15 The group succeeded an environmental self-organized working group formed already back in 2014 when citizens wrote an open letter to the Department of Environment and Regional Planning and the Department of Agriculture and Regional Planning and expressed the need for a park.

The group put constant pressure on the city government, demanding answers and repeatedly reminding officials that they would not give up. The group also reminded citizens of the (promised) deadlines. It thus co-shaped the rhythm of public action by speeding up or slowing down the pace (when necessary, when maneuvers seemed suspicious), pressuring bureaucratic deadlines, schedules, restrictions, or extensions by individual officials, waiting for planning and construction solutions, and reminding citizens in the district (and city) of the importance of the project. After the meeting, the citizen who presented the Pekre Creek park situation at the meeting reiterated to me the importance of keeping an eye on the action and, above all, not giving up: "We cannot stop now. We cannot just give up now! If we do, the whole thing will end up in the drawer." Not giving up works as a tactic. I have often heard at meetings and in interviews or in conversations with district meeting participants that you have to be persistent, combative, and demanding. "It's hard to change things," I heard a moderator said, "it takes time, but we are persistent and we do not give up. Our experience shows that gradually we succeed." These citizens' activities could thus be seen as "labor in/on time" (Bear 2014), which involves temporal agency, "the capacity to deliberately restructure the times we live are living in by acting on existing temporal frameworks and resisting dominant temporal regimes dictated by bureaucracy, public administration, business, the market, etc." (Moroşanu and Ringel 2016: 17). Moroşanu and Ringel use the term "time tricking" to explain temporal agency and thus reconsider how people relate to the temporal dimension of their lives and whether they are able to influence it, which includes their attempts to modify, manage, bend, distort, speed up, slow down, or structure the times in which they are living in.

At another self-organized district meeting, a citizen read a short text about his commitment, which he had written on the 10th anniversary of the district self-organization in Maribor. He emphasized his personal attachment to district self-organizations and his pride in participating in the "High Way" project, which had required a great commitment from him over 4 years. The durability of this activity was emphasized as the future-oriented action and was based on his and his fellow citizens' perseverance and persistence. He saw the importance of the district self-organization in its permanence and in the fact that it became known beyond the region.

"We had to fight a lot," said an elderly but very committed participant of the Nova Vas meeting, a vital woman who is also a co-founder of the ICA. She counted "the fights" in the district. The first was for the district house, then for the bills (the cancellation of the long-term contract between Plinarna and Energetika [gas and electricity companies], which provided the supply of energy at a very high fixed price and threatened the residents with high bills), for the Zebra crosswalk (Zebra) that citizens had been demanding for 30 years, and for the Pekre Creek,[16] the aforementioned project that required the commitment of some citizens for nine years. She pointed to the success of the projects, but also to long-term perseverance, because

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16 10 let zborov http://www.imz-maribor.org/Deset-let-zborov-samoorganiziranih-cetrtnih-in-krajevnih-skupnosti-.html (accessed 29.7. 2023.).

"this (self-governance) is a long-term run" she said. I have heard this statement many times.

"The young people don't have this time as they have children and are still work-ing," she continued, explaining why there are no young people at the self-organized district meetings. She was pointing out that it is hard to manage the different tempo-ral regimes dictated by family life, motherhood, and the labor market, particularly in the new era of acceleration and speed. The activist continued by adding to this ex-planation: "We (the elderly generation) are also used to discussing, as we come from another (political) system." She told me she used to be active and learnt to discuss in the past (socialist) system, as she was active in the workers' councils in the firm where she worked. But it was not merely the workers' councils. Her husband joined our conversation, explaining that they had been asked to – and had to – discuss a lot, even on the everyday level, in the local self-organization regarding neighbor-hood organizations, the road and pavement system, or when some other part of the infrastructure was missing. You had to talk to people to convince them if you wanted something, he said. In such explanations, the experiences of living and working in the past socialist self-governing and self-management system create the potentials for present political interventions. The couple was not addressing merely the past political regimes but social life and the fabric that was part of it. It was an ethos built on solidarity and comradeship, very different from the present capitalist era of "ego-ism and individualism" (their words).

A younger moderator told me that elderly people often refer to the socialist past at meetings, especially local self-government, although when he asked some former officials, he heard that these meetings were not that well attended in socialism. How-ever, certain moments in the present lead to the creation of certain memories of the past, which also interact with certain concerns about the future in the present as people connect different fragments of time. The social memory of socialism played an important role in shaping public action in the same district of Nova Vas ten years ago. When the citizens were asked to pay for the use of the district house for the self-organized assembly, they sat in front of the house for six months in the cold (in winter) demanding their right to enter the building because they had "built it." In the letter they sent to the district's representative and the municipality, they wrote, "The building of the city's Nova Vas district was, at that time, the premises of the local community Ivan Zagernik-Joco and local community *Proletarskih brigad*, built with our work and the self-contributions[17] of the residents living here. Its fundamental purpose is for meetings and to act for the benefit of our community for this purpose, as are the children's playgrounds, parks, and other public areas and spaces that were built and put into use, where we meet, work, and use these spaces" (Nova Vas letter). No one could object to this statement because many people in the city still remem-

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17 Local self-contributions (manual labor or financial resources) were in socialism supplementary source of fi-nance for municipal infrastructure and social welfare. They were used when budget funds were insufficient and when local inhabitants planned or desired particular parts of the infrastructure (Duda 2022; Kladnik 2022; Piškurić 2022). Municipalities and local communities could introduce self-contributions only after holding referendum.

ber that, in the 1980s, much of the infrastructure that still exists today, including the shrinking public spaces, was built with the citizens' self-contribution and the obligatory participation of workers in factories. At last, citizens regained their right to use the house.

This article does not pursue the question of whether that particular building was built by the very same people engaged in the present local self-organization, as my interest is to consider how citizens actively use their memories to fight contemporary dispossession by reclaiming their right to public spaces. Such memories are in this article considered in relation to their use and articulation for future interests and ends. This is also visible in another example when one of the participants criticized the lack of transparency in today's political decision-making processes. After the meeting, he told me, "Back then (in socialism), it was more open. There were constant discussions. Now they (politicians) claim the system is open, and there is so much talk about participation, but the (political-bureaucratic) system is so closed, with no transparency, you do not get to know anything. When you ask, you do not get an answer. That makes you angry, you start arguing and you do not give up." Anger mixed with stubbornness are the driving and mobilizing forces in district struggles directed toward the future and should not be considered as irrational.[18] They keep people going and not giving up.

Mechanism for citizens' participation in shaping the city's future

Despite some successful struggles (to follow the term used by my interlocutors), time investments and temporal rhythms of actions were reconsidered from the beginning. As the co-founders of ICA argued, too much time and energy had to be invested to effect change. The activists were thus looking for more efficient mechanisms that would allow citizens to exercise more control over city government and be involved in shaping the city's future. One of them told me, "We discovered participatory budgeting (PB). At first, the Ministry and the Association of Municipalities said it was not possible because of Slovenian legislation. We formed a working group on PB and local self-government, which designed a model. The municipality was initially against it but agreed in 2015 and launched the first pilot project." PB should be viewed in the particular context of time management it emerged. First, the working groups were formed, which studied PB and promoted it among citizens, the group (*Odločaj o mestu*) collected 4000 signatures in support of PB, and urged the mayor (Andrej Fištrovec, who had signed the initiative for the introduction of participatory budgeting a year earlier) to appoint a working group with activists and municipal officials to develop a model for PB (Rubin 2015). These time intervals of waiting, jostling, pushing, and not giving up are important, as are speeding up and

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18 Emotional and affective dimensions of participatory practices should be researched in more details, for some reference on protest and emotions Jasper 2018.

slowing down (when control was necessary) to understand temporal contexts and rhythms in which activists worked.

The Radvanje district was selected for the pilot project, and the most engaged citizens (along with activists from the working group) participated in promoting the action in the city, in the media and social media, and with brochures, posters, and flyers. In the end, the commission selected 22 projects (out of 78 submitted), and 652 people cast their votes, which exceeded the expectations of the organizers, as it was a double quorum (Klipšteter 2015). However, the city did not implement the projects, and a great disappointment followed, which deepened the distrust in the city administration (particularly in this district), the city council, and also in the participatory budget. Yet the citizens of the district did not give up, they continued to put pressure on the city administration. They even prepared a mock city walk to ridicule the city for the unrealized project.

In 2017, activists and citizens put pressure on the city administration one more time to implement PB in the city. Yet, the city administration once again insisted that citizens could not decide for themselves about the projects and that they could only make suggestions. Two interpretations of citizen participation clashed: one, advocated by the city administration at the time, stated that participation means "cooperation rather than decision making" (deputy mayor Luketič in Krušič 2017), while the ICA stated that citizens' participation is only realized when citizens are involved in the entire process, including decision-making.

In the meantime, PB has spread throughout Slovenia, and other municipalities have adopted the model (27 in March 2021 acc. Skupnost občin). Matic Primc, who co-created the model in Maribor and formed an organization for participatory society (an NGO), became an expert on this institution in Slovenia. The city of Maribor finally adopted a model in 2021 after it was already practiced in other municipalities. PB is practiced differently across Slovenia. In the current reports about the PB in the Maribor TV news in the regional RTV archive (for years 2021 and 2022), the ICA or the citizens' assemblies are not mentioned, and PB is organized by the municipality. Nevertheless, we should not forget that Maribor was the only case in Slovenia where the project was initiated by the citizens and the district self-organization.

This is relevant and also relates to the way participation is practiced, whether as a one-time practice when citizens come together or as a longer process where participation is learned gradually and over time.[19] Namely, participation in the ICA and in citizens assemblies did not just happen when people came together but rather was a form of (long-term) learning that took place in social relationships in which citizens gradually acquired knowledge, learned new skills, and were also transforming themselves (Gregorčič and Jelenc Krašovec 2018). As my interlocutor, a participant in the self-organized district assembly in Nova Vas, told me, it was through the discussions at the meetings that he began to look at his neighborhood differently,

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19 Neva Pipan, the city's representative in charge for communication with citizens and PB also confirmed this by saying that every year citizens are getting better with their applications for PB as their plans and desires are more "realistic" in their financial, technical, and temporal estimations (Korošec 2022).

learning to observe and see what was missing and what could be done. According to the moderators, citizens needed time to internalize the rules, especially to "ask the local authorities for a change or an explanation and not beg," to learn bureaucratic procedures, and to understand how the legal framework works. Over time, citizens, activists, and moderators learned more about bureaucracy, legislation, and public infrastructure, and how to write letters and file complaints. They invested their time and energy and were no longer satisfied with statements that "it cannot be done" or "it's not possible" from local/state authorities.

Sociologists Marta Gregorčič and Sabina Jelenc Krašovec interpreted the citizens assemblies and participatory budgeting in Maribor with the concept of transformative learning, pointing out that in the assemblies citizens not only acquired instrumental and technical knowledge about politics and citizenship, developed various skills, and improved their understanding of the importance of common and community care, but also transformed their worldviews, attitudes, themselves, and their relationships with the authorities through these processes (Gregorčič and Jelenc Krašovec 2018).[20] These participatory practices, even though not affecting everybody in the same way, thus open the possibilities for the emergence of new political subjectivities and new citizenship,[21] as citizens were transforming the city by transforming themselves.

The sociologists' research also emphasized the importance of intergenerational relations and the support that developed through self-organization, which was particularly highlighted in Maribor. The older citizens stated that they felt young and energetic again, while the younger emphasized the support and the stability they felt through contact with the retirees, since they themselves lived in precarity. They all reported a new sense of attachment and belonging.

Thus, one must not overlook the importance of the commitment to the special bonds that have developed between the participants (the most persistent have been attending the assemblies for many years or even since the beginning), as well as the attachments that have developed over time with the environment and certain places in the city. Intergenerational communication also enabled the exchange of knowledge and experiences between generations, such as the exchange between the experiences of the socialist past (local self-governance and self-management) and the contemporary theories and practices of the socio-ecological movements.

"In the initiative, we announced a marathon, not a sprint," I read in an interview in 2016 (Lucija Govedić in interview, Stamejčič 2016a: 64). This coincides with what I often heard from my interlocutors. Moderators told me that they gave themselves ten years to see what would happen. Ten years have passed, and some of them are still engaged. Their expectations have not been fully realized, at least not in the way they originally envisioned. Horizontal governance, even though moderated and

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20 The study was based on interviews and participant observation in 2015 and 2016. The transformative learning concept follows Daniel Schugurensky 's (2002) and Boaventura De Sousa Santos' (2005) studies.

21 We could depict these political subjectivities as insurgent citizenship (Holston 2009). This article does not engage with the concept as it is focused on the temporal perspective (and not so much on forming political subjectivities processes), yet it would be relevant to pursue this line of thinking further in the future.

thus structured, is open to collaborations and social creativity and, thus, change. (Vodopivec 2017, 2018). However, the activists' and citizens' ethical commitments, the relationships they have built over the years, the successes they have achieved, and their commitment to the assemblies, districts, and each other keep at least some of them active, making new plans and commitments.

Modern time forces us to act quickly to avoid being left behind by the future (Pels 2015). The future has become a new imperative along with participation, they are integral to the self-activating EU and national policies on which employment and social policies are based, to neoliberal agency (Gershon 2011), and to the new political rationality of self-responsibility and entrepreneuralization (Miller and Rose 2008; Vodopivec 2021). Futurism is characterized by the prediction of progress with an assumption of newness (Tsing 2000: 332–333, cf. Pels 2015: 782). The idea of progress is based on an open future, constant innovation, and profit maximization. However, the ICA, PB, and citizen assemblies resist such definitions and fight for their right to be present in the city and to be included in future political processes. Their struggles go beyond one-time projects, and PB was even created as a mechanism to allow for long-term citizen participation beyond the immediate future (Guyer 2007). I will give another example in the next chapter that builds on such a temporal mechanism in the city.

The importance of written strategies and visions

In the fall of 2022, the "Maribor is the Future" podcast problematized and challenged the way participation is envisioned by local authorities. Žiga Brdnik, a cultural producer and film critic who ran the program, commented that policies and documents are full of terms like participatory and transparency, but insight into the process shows that "the diction of the powerful" overrides such aspirations.

The podcast dealt with the draft document on the strategic development of culture 2022–2026. The local cultural program, prepared by the Office of Youth and Culture of the City Administration, was to be developed on principles of participation. A special expert commission was established, in which Karolina Babič, also involved in the podcast, participated as a representative of civil society and the NGO sector. The document was finalized in April, but the strategy remained with the city administration for four months with no action being taken, and in the end, only one month remained for public debate. The podcast pointed out the city administration's poor time management, as a strategy with a start date in 2022 should have been drafted by that time. It also criticized the municipality's (under)estimation of citizens' time: why did citizens most affected by the cultural program, independent (self-employed precarious) cultural producers "who have to survive besides dealing with the document" (Brdnik), have only one month to discuss the documents and the administration, which is paid by the citizens for this, needed four months to

make the already prepared draft available to the public. However, the main problem was that the draft published in the fall was different from the one presented in the spring.

As Karolina Babič claimed, in the beginning, the participatory process was well designed, but in the end, the diction in the document changed. These were small differences that had a big impact, as parts of the written document became too generic and empty, with some parts that were reformulated whilst others completely disappeared. The latter was related to the location of the cultural center Pekarna Magdalenske Mreže, which is at the moment one of the hottest issues in the city regarding the future of the autonomous, alternative political cultural scene. A former Yugoslav army bakery, squatted by artists, activists, and alternative cultural producers in 1993, has become a significant alternative protagonist in the city.[22] The management model of the cultural center was approved by the city council in 2010, confirming the position of the NGO as the autonomous user of the place.[23] Despite this, the city government leaked information about a possible move of the cultural center from the present location to an empty textile factory in Melje, another district. It is, however, not clear whether the old textile factory is meant for Pekarna or for a completely new cultural center, as it is not even certain whether and when this would happen. There is a lack of information, communication, and dialogue even though the municipality claims it aims to do this. The uncertainty and conformability regarding the information and the city's plan regarding the future of the collective is pressing. And this is something that unorganized and organized non-profit initiatives try to avoid in order not to depend on the "current good will of the local government and people in power."

As often argued in public by its users, creators, and supporters, Pekarna should not be treated as a place for consuming culture located at the edge of Magdalen Park but rather as a site produced through time, spontaneously, and organically, through collaboration and participation, for critical thinking, education, experimentation, addressing social issues and vulnerabilities. The place is interwoven with the environment, and thus it cannot be moved, as it is not an asset.[24] The problem of independent, spontaneously grown spaces cannot be discussed in detail here, but I would like to draw attention to the temporal dimension of demand, the claim to the future of this place based on long-term persistence and preservation. The place was produced over time (Lefebvre 1991: 87), not through capital but through participation, collaboration, social creativity (Vodopivec 2017, 2018), investments of time, energy, and commitment, with "labor in/ of time" (Bear 2014).

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22 I use the term "alternative" here for a protagonist (even though consisting of different people, interests, needs) that explicitly calls for the right to the city against urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey 1989).

23 This was the first time in Slovenia that the relationship between the municipality, public institutions and NGOs was determined. The model confirmed position of the NGO as autonomous user, public institutions as technical managers of buildings and the municipality as the owner of the buildings and founder of the public institution (interview with Urška Breznik, Maribor, April 2022).

24 KC Pekarna, vsebina ali nepremičnina.

Organized and unorganized initiatives, including those based on participatory principles, strive for more strategic planning as they are concerned with their durability and sustainability. On the one hand, there is the idea that city government would be more committed if strategies were clearly formulated, and this would ensure sustainability of the centers and practices. On the other hand, skepticism remains because the strategies are not legally binding. Urška Breznik from Pekarna stressed the need to "take seriously what strategic planning means for the community. If policymakers do not understand this, the potential of the community will be lost." Her comment refers to value and time: whose time is valued and whose is not can be a question of hierarchy and discipline, but also of respect and commitment.

"Personally, I am cautious about strategies," Karolina said, continuing:

> I always go into these strategy preparation processes with a bitter feeling that we are once again wasting time and money, but I was surprised that so many people participated in the processes, even from the cultural sector, the NGOs. There was no previous hesitation. We wrote the bill with enthusiasm and even methodically pointed out that the whole sector must be supported horizontally. That's why it's even more painful now, because we were aiming for structural changes in the long term, not just asking for financial support and naming them with strategies. We need to reflect on the current importance of the sector in the city and plan its role for the future.

As we see from Karolina's statement, bad experiences do not completely override hope. Yet, the non-profit cultural sector shares this view that the city does not have a long-term plan on how to support culture as "each mayor thinks in his or her own way." Strategic documents are also crucial when applying for EU projects, as references to these documents have to be made, and NGOs are mostly funded with EU money.

With the insight into this podcast, I wanted to point out how NGOs and individuals fight for structural changes and long-run solutions to maintain their missions and visions. This is important to acknowledge because they are not funded by long-term programs but only by short-term projects. Often, finances arrive at the end of the project, which means one needs money to invest and proceed and is reimbursed at the end. This time interval plays an important role. Another problem is that project proposals demand constant innovation. It is thus not merely temporal limitations of projects to 1-3 years but also criteria that make it hard to maintain the sustainability of a mission.

All these topics are discussed in various "Maribor is the Future" podcasts, an interdisciplinary art program that critically examines the state of art in the field of culture (film, theater, intermedia art, education, theory). The podcast is broadcast on Radio Marš, located in Tkalka, a building where communitarian practices, cooperativism, and social economy were thought out and practiced. I emphasize this because Tkalka was once a strong shaper of the social economy in the city and provided a vision of the urban future in cooperativism (Primc, Žižek, and Lužar Sajt 2018;

Simonič 2023). Tkalka no longer exists in its former form, although the people who founded it are still active in the city with their visions of communitarian practices. Tkalka was an example of a bottom-up community that had a five-year contract with the city to lease the building. "That relationship worked well until there was an initiative based on commitment and enthusiasm on our part. At the time, we had that energy," says Karolina Babič, Tkalka's co-founder and key player, "but when we wanted to resolve our relationship with the city long-term, our story fell apart. We would need a place in city planning where the city government would see us as an important player." Babič's statement clearly points to the demand for a right to the city as a right to the city's future. Her account also complements the aforementioned criticism that the city lacks a vision, especially with regard to culture.

Conclusions

The last time I went to Maribor, before submitting this article, budget cuts were announced in the city (June 2023), especially in the areas of culture, youth activities, social welfare and sports. Much of our conversation during my visit was marked by fears and concerns about the future, as some institutions were threatened with closure, and their plans, commitments, continuity of work, visions, and expectations for the future, both Maribor's and their own, were questioned as the city faced bankruptcy. Some of my interviewees expressed concern about participatory budgeting and whether the city would meet its obligations given its current financial situation. Concerns about the future change as they depend on current political, social, and economic issues. The budget cuts were also perceived as part of an ongoing crisis in the city's relationship to culture, social welfare, and the NGO sector, as well as its handling of public funds. The cuts strengthened alliances and coalitions among individuals and collectives, as well as NGOs, in their criticism of the city's claim that the current situation was an immediate, unforeseen disaster and not the result of poor investment planning. They called on the city government, city councilors, and the mayor to take responsibility.[25]

This article examines precisely those individuals' and collectives' future-making and their claim that their right to the city is their right to participate in shaping the city's future. The slogan "Maribor is the future" captures the criticism that the city lacks vision and support for such self-organized initiatives but also brings with it a determination to alternative future making in the city, or what Appadurai calls the "ethics of possibility" (2013). The article proposes to see citizens' participation (through various cases) as attempts to co-create the city's future that also challenge the regimes of time dictated by governments, public administration, finance, and markets. The efforts of my interlocutors aim to overcome the "immediate future

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25 I am referring to the two publically published reactions, the ICA's public reaction to the mayor's interview in Večer newspaper (Reaction), and the open letter sent to city's councilors by cultural NGOs (Public letter).

temporal regime" (Guyer 2007) by seeking mechanisms that would ensure permanence, sustainability, and structural change, thus securing their right to the city and the future. With their everyday actions, time management, "time tricking," plans, dreams, hopes, persistence, and knowledge they resist the idea of a single regime of time dictated by capital.

The ways in which people take hold of their future through political mobilization in the present are structurally tied to the limits of uncertainty that are materially produced by economic and political structures and institutions (Narotzky and Besnier 2014: 11), the staccato rhythm of precarious work, and the needs and commitments to people's family lives. This can lead to frustration and dilemma but also to anger, hope, and agency. Citizens are in a tension between the "politics of possibility" (hope, aspiration, desire) and the "politics of probability" (systematized rationalities, risk management, and cost-benefit). However, one should not be too quick to pick a side of the divide between success and failure. I see the efforts of my interlocutors as continuous "labor in/of time," which involves temporal agency based primarily on persistence and determination but also on knowledge and high-level commitment.

The article does not intend to predict the future of citizens' meetings or other participatory practices in Maribor. It shows how concerns for and engagement with the future lead people to act in the present, contributing to a better understanding of the ethnographic present (see also Ringel 2018). It shows how alternative futures in the city lead some people to act now to create a better future based on the "ethics of possibility" (Appadurai 2013), and such a perspective works against the idea of a single homogeneous future or other temporally limited narratives.

Acknowledgement

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"Maribor je budućnost". Participativne prakse i pravo na grad

U radu se istražuju budućnosti u deindustrijaliziranom Mariboru u kontekstu prava na grad i participativnih praksi. Budućnost se razmatra iz perspektive sadašnjosti, kako ona informira i nadahnjuje ljude na djelovanje. Naglasak je stavljen na inicijative za mjesne odbore koje uključuju cijeli grad, samoorganizirane mjesne četvrti, participativno određivanje proračuna i suradnju između kulturnih proizvođača i nevladinih organizacija. U radu se prema tim participativnim praksama odnosi kao prema društvenim procesima i mjestima učenja na kojima budućnost nije samo zamišljena ili se njoj teži, već je se živi i provodi u praksi.

Ključne riječi: budućnost, pravo na grad, participativne prakse, deindustrijalizirani grad, Slovenija, Maribor