

Street Life! It's the Only Life I Know. Street Life, and there's a Thousand Parts to Play

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Fig 1: current use of the Viennese street-level environment; © Psenner

1 ABSTRACT

Vienna's urban Stadtparterre (street-level environment) crisis is a key focal point of the city's urban research and for its administration: Although rapid population growth¹ has created an urgent need for additional (living) space, ground floor vacancies are still spreading. Furthermore the environmental impact generated by individual motorized traffic has reached a critical level.

The Stadtparterre concept refers to the city's "parterre" as a holistic urban system: it covers both built-up and non-built-up areas. Thus street, ground floor and courtyard are treated as entity, so that interrelations are coming to light. Because we perfectly know that the potentials of ground floor use and the structure of the correlating public street space are directly related to each other.

Given this perspective the paper is therefore addressing the following issues:

- Which architectural, legal and structural interventions have had an impact on the functional change of the street-level environment?
- How was the Viennese ground level originally used? Which urban functions were located there?
- What are the (historical) interrelations between public space and the life inside buildings?

Thus the causes of the current Stadtparterre crisis is analysed from a historic and systemic perspective.

2 URBAN PUBLIC SPACE

2.1 Street Life!

Public space belongs to everyone. To secure this fundamental right, the use of public space needs regulation, and this—establishing a fair and balanced order—is where the challenge lies: who may use the street space and when? Who shall take precedence when it comes to settling disputes? And why would the car be considered as a "privileged road user" (RTRA)?

The use of public street space is organized by "numerous legal regulations." Aside from the Austrian Road Traffic Regulation Act (RTRA), Adensamer mentions, e.g., the Security Police Act (SPA), which "regulates the maintenance of public order by the police," as well as state legislation such as the "protection of public decency" or the Road Police Act (RPA) (Adensamer 2012). However, it must be seen that the sphere of traffic-relevant legislation is in fact much wider, since tax reliefs like the so-called "commuter deduction," Petroleum Excise Tax exemptions, or the fact that road traffic areas, particularly parking lots, are not subject to property tax, have an indirect but impactful influence on road use patterns. Public subsidization of "single-family home building" must eventually also be seen as generating additional car traffic (Psenner 2013, 132).

¹ At present Vienna's population is increasing by approximately 35.000 each year.

However, we do possess historical photographs of our urban streets, which speak to a different, highly diversified structure of uses. For before the street turned into an exclusive traffic and parking area it also served a number of other purposes, from economic needs and necessities (trade, sales, transportation of goods) to cultural purposes, private self-representation, and the manifestations of public life. Hence both movement and rest were considered as formative factors that defined the urban-design significance of the street as such (Walewa-Coen 1946, 97).

Today, the street space of European cities is mainly occupied by private cars, leaving little or virtually no room for non-traffic uses and thus rendering the goals for public space as set, for example, in Vienna's urban development plan—"social interaction, communication and lingering in public space are to be enabled and facilitated" (STEP 2025, 49)—a distant vision.

This raises the question of what caused the breach in the historical development of street-space use patterns.

2.2 A genealogy of road-use regulation in Vienna

2.2.1 Historical development

In the early 19th century, road and bridge construction engineering still was a "department of hydraulic engineering." Accordingly, the Imperial and Royal Court Commissariat for Road Affairs was manned by hydraulic engineers who also authored in this capacity a number of fundamental treatises about the role, purpose, and design of urban streets and country roads. The term traffic flow, which may sound a little nautical if referring to street space, takes its connotation from there. The flow metaphor relegated other, less mobility-oriented functions of the street to the background: the main purpose of current road traffic regulations as defined by the RTRA is to "ensure the smooth flow of traffic" (Adensamer 2012, 43).

In his 1804 publication on road construction, C.F. Wiebeking, Imperial-Royal Hofrat for civil engineering affairs, attributed to roads, aside from economic, public-health, and war purposes, a highly relevant presentational function. Likewise, the Imperial-Royal Court Commissary for road affairs, J.M. Schemerl, notes in his three-volume work that the measure in all matters of urban street design is the pedestrian, the issue being to provide for "pedestrian comfort" through real or optical "spaciousness" of street layout (Schemerl 1819, 216). Urban planner James Hobrecht² saw the objective of any street design in giving preferential treatment to those traveling on foot:

What results from this is the necessity, in the laying out of streets, to give sidewalks the most ample width possible, and where the width of the entire street cannot be extended beyond a certain measure, even to allow for such sidewalk width at the expense of roadway width. Thus securing there the widest room possible for the needs of the future also gives a more pleasant aspect to streets in general. (Hobrecht 1890, 16)

The earliest specific legal directions are found toward the end of the 19th century: the safeguarding and regulation of traffic was first laid down in the General Roads Act³ and separately – for Vienna and Lower Austria – in the Road Police Regulation of 1875. Clearly, the focus here still was on the individual so that parking in the street at night was simply prohibited at the time for safety reasons and, in case of violation, was punishable under section 422 of the General Roads Act with "imprisonment between 3 and 14 days." Special permits were issued by the authorities only for construction sites, though with the stipulation that enough lanterns had to be put up.⁴ Adequate lighting also had to be provided to secure a broken-down vehicle.

This view of things survived over decades so that even in 1931 night parking in the public space was considered prohibited. Specifically, the Federal law on precepts of road police unless they relate to federal roads (Austrian Legal Gazette 438/1929) said the following:

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² Hobrecht is the author of the 1862 urban expansion plan for Berlin. His writings were verifiably known in Vienna, too.

³ General Roads Act, quoted in Freiherr von Hock 1897.

⁴ Around 1875, Viennese streets already had lighting. From 1845, there were gas lamps, and from 1882, electric street lights were installed in the city. (Psenner 2013, 142).

§ 18. *Halted Vehicles. (3) Unhitched carriages [and motor vehicles] must not be left out on the street in the dark or in heavy fog. If, for special reasons, their removal cannot be done, [...] adequate lighting has to be provided.*

The law also contained an explicit prohibition against molesting pedestrians and residents by splattering street mud. This clearly shows that street users on foot were given preferential treatment and that their safety and well-being was stipulated and protected by law. This specific provision was found both in the federal law and in the Viennese Road Police Regulation (§ 20):

§11. *Driving speed. (1) The driver must choose his speed in such a manner as to cause no danger to persons or property. In built-up areas the driver must furthermore choose his speed so as not to molest other road users or residents by splattering street mud.*

But legislation shifted away from this initial emphasis on protection of people and was over time amended to protect vehicle traffic, not least because car production as well as modern, fast, efficient goods and passenger traffic were seen as boosting the urgently needed economic recovery in the post-World War I and interwar period. Against these “economically convincing” arguments, the needs of pedestrian increasingly moved to the background. The economist Robert Reisch even went as far as referring to the concerns of “pedestrians, bicyclists, and residents” as “special wishes” and gave clear priority to the needs of motor traffic “because of its predominant status” (cf. Reisch 1938, 6). Pursuing along these lines, it was clear that road costs were to be borne jointly by the “three main parties involved, namely, the general public, road users, and land owners” (ibid. 27). Reisch wanted the success of the road construction program to be measured by the following factors: “Promotion of general traffic [...] expansion of traffic facilities, creation of new sales possibilities, promotion of tourism, provision of jobs, saving of time, better use of the labor force, and finally, happier lives because of the improvements in traffic” (ibid., 31). Special emphasis was placed on the goal of “fighting unemployment.”

The NS street ordinance of 1938 provided the most significant shift in the hierarchy of street users.⁵ While this development was a response to the general increase of motorized traffic, the shift of emphasis was accomplished through legislative means. „The promotion of the motor vehicle is the goal set by the Reichs Chancellor and Führer”, and the ordinance (StVO) is intended to serve this goal. “The ordinance wants to pave the way [...] for technical progress.” (Gülde 1938, 105 and 108).⁶

In a summary of commentaries on street ordinances published by the Dresden lawyer Hermann Gülde the following entry appears under the title the Nature and Significance of Street Traffic:

Under the rule of liberal attitudes, road traffic experienced an all but total disorganization [...] There was no coherence and no bond to a larger purpose and meaning. National Socialism alone restored an intellectual basis for a meaningful understanding of street traffic. Its turn towards the idea of a people's community [...] provided street traffic with the right meaning [...] The will to power, expressing itself in an increase of street traffic [...] only receives its proper meaning when understood as a service in the care and evolution of the people. (Gülde, 1938: 105-106)

Following Gülde's views, the 1937 Road Traffic Regulation Act moved “the National-Socialist principle of the traffic community” to the foreground, which places “community interest before individual interest,” expressly “rejecting all special needs and special wishes” (ibid. 110), so that “the slower must give way to the faster” (ibid., 135). Gülde also advocated a driving speed which permitted “bringing the vehicle to a timely halt” (ibid. 138), while emphasizing that

The old judicial practice concerned with in how far the driver of a vehicle has to avoid splattering pedestrians with street mud is obsolete. [...] [For] in road traffic, the needs of motorized fast traffic [come] before the needs of pedestrians. (ibid. 138)

⁵ The German StVO 1937 (a revision of the ReichsStVO 1934) was implemented in Austria in the year 1938.

⁶ Other Nazi regional planning legislation went in the same direction, like the Residential Settlement Act, the Decree for the Regulation of Developments or the Decree for the Admissibility of Time-Limited Construction Bans, as well as the Law for the Redesign of German Cities of October 4, 1937 (cf. also Buschmann, 2000, 155–159). The idea of the “automobilization of the people” was also supported by analytical urban studies like the one published 1939 by Gottfried Feder, formerly Reich Commissioner for Land Settlement and honorary professor at the Technische Hochschule Berlin, under the title of *The New City: Attempt to Found a New Art of Urban Planning on the Social Structure of the Population*.

The motorisation of the „Volk“ was the over all goal and it comes as no surprise that from that date on parking in street space was approved (with minor restrictions—a situation not very different from today).

In 1947 the New Austrian Road Traffic Ordinance was passed, which amounted to little more than a renewal of the 1937 laws.⁷ It maintained the unconditional attention to and privileging of motorized traffic. Presumably under the impression that accidents generated higher costs (Psenner 2013, 148), postwar regulations called for “care, caution, and attention” but nevertheless remained primarily fixed on the protection of traffic. It was not until 1960 that the so-called cautionary rule was rephrased, and the human being once again moved into the center, replacing traffic as the focus of attention. But the course had been set for rapid expansion of motorized individual transport and research of the time provided “compelling” arguments for the economical relevance of the car (cf.: Fantl 1969).

This historical and political shift in street-use rights must be borne in mind in any discussion regarding the legitimacy of the private vehicle’s occupation of public street space today. Cities with a significantly different cultural history and, consequently, a different approach to the issue offer alternative solutions. Tokyo, in spite of tremendous pressure regarding mobility (35 million inhabitants in the metropolitan area), has retained the public space character of its residential streets. That is, they are spaces to be used by everyone alike. Cars are parked only at interspersed, dedicated locations (cf. Psenner 2013, 152f; Psenner 2014, 138f).



Fig. 2: Tokyo City center; cars are parked only at interspersed locations; cars in little hide-aways. © Psenner

Street space not blocked up by parked cars is free space and remains available to all: it is engaged, occupied and enlivened by active diversified street use. Enlivened public space in turn brings additional security; its users develop a personal relationship with the place, interfering in it in all sorts of appropriative or aesthetically manipulative ways.

2.2.2 Current use situation in Vienna

The current traffic ordinance, and with it the rights of use of public street space, are rooted in a system of values that privileged the ideal of a *Gesamtvolkssinn* or ‘total interest of the people’ over the rights and the protection of individuals.



Fig. 3: Street primarily used as parking space. © Psenner

⁷ cf. Wedl 1947. The new Austrian Road Traffic Regulation Act (RTRA) was not passed until 1960 (Federal law of July 6, 1960) (Kaltenegger 2010, 228).

In spite of the shortage of free living space, Vienna's street-level environment has one primary user: the greatest part of both open and built-up space is occupied by moving and stationary traffic:

- The average „automobile“ is moving 40 minutes per day, the rest of the day the car stays parked in public space (Posch et al. 2008, 12).
- The average car owner covers only 44% of the costs he or she generates.⁸
- Sidewalks are considered an integral part of street space and as such are restricted to moving traffic; using these spaces for “purposes other than street traffic” requires permission. In urban areas it is additionally forbidden to “obstruct pedestrian traffic by stopping without cause” (§78 StVO)
- A wide range of laws are in favour of a car-centred economic and social life system: e.g. the Viennese parking space regulation (Stellplatzverpflichtung) requires new extensions or even minor restructurings to provide additional parking spaces—one parking space per 100m².⁹ Hence, cars are increasingly invading the basements of GZ apartment buildings.



Fig.4: ground floors of historic buildings are subsequently converted into garages with Potemkin-façades. © Psenner

From an urbanist perspective these regulations are destructive, by rendering the goals for public space as set by Vienna's urban development plan a distant vision: “social interaction, communication and lingering in public space are to be enabled and facilitated” (STEP 2025, 49). Current law still defines street primarily as a transit space and as such reserves it for motorized vehicles.

The basic prerequisite for a calibrated and socially just transformation of the European city lies in recognizing the individual benefits that a reduction of automobility brings. This includes pointing to the (hidden) secondary consequences of the miserable traffic situation like, e.g., the ground-floor problem: vacancies and underuse of ground floors of buildings in Vienna are not least a result of surface-parking-ridden street spaces (Psenner 2012, 2011a, 2011b, 2005).

Although (traffic) science has, in view of the urgency of the ecological and economic situation, long been calling for substantial state intervention in the organization of urban individual traffic, policy-makers and the administration have not yet brought themselves to take the radical steps demanded of them.¹⁰

3 THE URBAN GROUND FLOOR

3.1 The Sidewalk

The holistic aspect of the term *Stadtparterre* (street-level environment) shows the primary function of the sidewalk in its true light: easily and directly accessible, the sidewalk is the most important area of interaction in public space, a place where people can meet and move among, or simply observe, each other relatively freely. Not least, it is the site of interactive integration between minorities and majorities in a diversified

⁸ Cf. VCÖ/FREY 2007.

⁹ In 2014 the amendment of the actual building law will come into force: then one parking space has to be provided per every 100 m² flat space; whereas in Zürich, Switzerland every 120 m² require the amendment of a parking space.

¹⁰ The usual suggestion to solve the problem of stationary traffic is introduction of a congestion charge or expansion of on-street parking pricing systems, which is the policy currently pursued by the city administration of Vienna. Supporting measures include models like the Smart City, regenerative, interoperable Mobility Cards, soft mobility, electric vehicle networks, mobility on demand, road pricing, and shared-space models. What they have in common is that they aim to curb private motor vehicle traffic and to promote the use of public transportation.

society.¹¹ Clearly, it should be possible to engage this multi-functional urban space, adequately dimensioned as it should be, in all sorts of ways.¹² At present, however, the, on an average, 1.7 to 2.2 meters between building fronts and parked cars are reserved for flowing traffic—under § 78 RTRA, it even is expressly prohibited “to hinder pedestrian traffic by stopping for no reason,” although no information is provided as to what might constitute an admissible reason to do so (Psenner 2004, 133; 2011a; 2011b; 2012). Also, using the sidewalk “for other purposes than those of street traffic” is still dependent on administrative approval.¹³

This lack-of-space problem also has to be seen as a consequence of the shifting of rights of use described above: while more and more space was assigned to cars, pedestrians found themselves reduced over time to increasingly narrow walking lanes. In the years after World War II, sidewalks were built with a minimum width of 1.25 meters (according to ÖFS standard specification sheets, 1956), whereas, in the Gründerzeit epoch, the trottoirs—“trotter” meaning to roam about in French—on both sides of the street had been assigned no less than one third (!) of the total street width (Kortz 1905, 174; Drexel 2000; 207 u. 209). On initiative of the city administration, these postwar sidewalks have been increasingly widened in recent years, with additional bulges added at street crossings, so that the hitherto narrow pavements are now offering a little more space to walk and stand, but this still is a far cry from the comfortable 4-meter sidewalks as are common in New York City. To make things worse, the clear width (unobstructed passageway) achieved at great cost was in many places drastically reduced again by signposts.

3.2 Structures of historical ground-floor use

3.2.1 Small (manufacturing) businesses on the Stadtparterre.

The economic, social, and urban-design structure of the city was characterized by a large number of small businesses, many of them manufacturing businesses or workshops, located in Gründerzeit townhouses and preferably accommodated there on ground floor level. Of the businesses registered in the Establishment Census of 1869, only few had more than ten workers—enterprises that employed a larger workforce were more or less all located in the suburbs (Bobek 1978, 36); a specific structural characteristic which also continued to subsist throughout and after the economic crisis caused by the stock-exchange crash of 1873.

By the time Vienna had an incredibly wide spectrum of business registrations: e.g. Pfaidlergewerbe (shirt sewer), Paramentenerzeuger (manufacturer of textiles used in liturgy), Bänderzeuger (manufacturer of ribbons), Bettwarenerzeuger (manufacturer of linen), Naturblumenbinder (manufacturer of flower arrangements), Konzessionierter Spirituosenschänker (liquor dealer), Brunnenmeister u. Brunnengräber (well digger), Büchsenmacher und Schwertfeger (gun and blade smith), Bürsten- und Pinselmacher (manufacturer of scrubber and brushes), Deichgräber (dike digger), Nadler Webkammacher u. Drahtwarenerzeuger (manufacturer of wire products); Federnschmücker (feather decorator); Flaschenbierfüller (bottling beer), Fragner u. Greisler (store owner), Hafner (potter), Kamm- u. Fächermacher (manufacturer of combs and fans), Gemischtwarenverschleißer (also called ‚Agent‘ and comparable to a local retailer), Kanal- und Senkgrubenräumer (sewage system cleaner), Kostgeber (landlord or landlady), Lohnfuhrwerker (carriage contractor), Sauerkraut- u. Saure Rübenverschleißer (pickled vegetables dealer), Seiden- Schön- u. Schwarzfärber (dye factory), Tuchscherer, Wirkwarenerzeuger (knitting factory).

3.2.2 Historical development of ground-floor use in the street study

In the high decades of the Gründerzeit epoch (1890–1910), the following businesses, or business premises, were accommodated on the street-side ground floor of buildings along the 190-meter street stretch examined:

¹¹ Integration is societal participation, both by members of minorities and the majority. It is not a static condition, but an ongoing interactive process that happens in everyday life through reciprocally oriented and interpreted actions (Psenner 2011, 203).

¹² Cf. (Schütz 2013); see also the artistic-scientific work of the “Gehsteig-Guerrilleros,” www.gehsteigguerrilleros.net, accessed Feb. 24, 2015.

¹³ Sidewalks are part of the street space, which is why, under § 82 RTRA, approval is mandatory for any non-traffic use of streets: “(1) The use of streets, including the air space above them, insofar as it must be considered with respect to traffic safety, for purposes other than street traffic, e.g. for commercial activities or advertising, requires prior approval under this federal law, notwithstanding other applicable legal provisions. The same applies for activities that are likely to cause crowds to gather or impair the attention of vehicle drivers.” Pursuant to the law, approval can only be granted if there is no “impairment whatsoever of the safety and easy flow of traffic” (§ 83 cl. 1).

- 1 pharmacy
- 1 diary
- 1 barber (for men)
- 1 television business, „Fernsehboutique“
- 2 shirt sewer Pfaidler(in)
- 1 printing house (of the Sonn- und Montagszeitung)
- 1 furniture factory / carpentry
- 1 synagogue;(after 1990: furniture store)
- 1 pharmaceutical company (Pharmakon);after 1964: advertising company
- 1 private educational institution for sewing neckties
- 1 production of cork goods; after 1912: carpentry;after 1971: printing house
- 1 workshop for the production of frames and mouldings;after 1928: glass-cutting workshop
- 1 shop for celluloid goods;after 1970: installer
- 1 paper shop (Papierverschleißer);after 1911: locksmith;after 1970: installer and plumber
- 1 laundry blow room;after 1967: grocery store
- 1 installer display room
- 1 butchers shop and workshop;after 1999: video store
- 1 production of laundry and linen;after 2000: offices
- 1 carpentry;after 1942: butchers workshop and smoked meat production
- 1 production of laundry
- 7 restaurants/ coffee houses/ wine spirit shops of which:
 - 1 restaurant;after 1909: smoked meat production;after 1921: breakfast room;after 1960: patisserie
 - 1 restaurant; after 1904: coffee roaster;after 1933: rest.;after 1970: Cafe; after 1981: vegetable shop
 - 1 coffee roaster; after 1967: Cafe Alsergrund;after 1978 shop
 - 1 restaurant;after 1970: Cafe
 - 1 wine spirit shop;after 1993: painter shop
 - 1 restaurant
 - 1 coffee house
- 5 not specifically defined salesrooms (called Gassenlokale and occasionally „Gewölbe“)
- 4 general store (Gemischtwarenverschleißer)
- 3 bakeries/ patisseries

3.2.3 Structural characteristics of use of the historical Viennese ground floor

Originally, the historical Viennese ground floor was a semipublic space. There was no clear-cut boundary between inside and out, rather, doors and windows were left open most of the time so that there were many places that gave access to the ground-floor premises. Original photos from the period attest to this theory: the ground-floor facades were permeable; semipublic or even private uses of the ground floor reached out to the street, and conversely, the premises were easily accessible to the “public flow.”



Fig. 5: Historical permeability of the façade; top left: 9. Hahngasse 11, 1905; right: Pramergasse 13, 1903, both: August Stauda (source: ÖNB www.bildarchivaustria.at)

The actual living areas were really small and mostly used by several residents in shifts. Many functions were therefore moved to the outside. This accounts for the relatively large number of taverns and coffee-houses. Only few apartments had real kitchens, and spaces that could be used to store foods were equally rare so that shopping for perishables had to be done on a day-to-day basis.¹⁴

Many of the ground-floor premises in this street (the study that this text is based upon had to be anonymized for data protection reasons) were connected with the basement floors or cellars underneath. The ground floor was thus extended; also, the (commercial) use of the street-facing premises in most cases included the use of the interior courtyard.¹⁵

- The historical Stadtparterre was ramified, varied, much-used and hence engaging space.
- The Viennese ground-floor zone originally was a semipublic space.
- Ground-floor facades were permeable: public and semipublic spaces on the Stadtparterre were in inter-active communication with one another.

4 THE ANALYSIS

As the cadastral map only shows building perimeters, it contains no information about the city's internal structure. Street, ground-floor, and courtyard uses are not documented with the necessary clarity and completeness and can therefore not be objectively analyzed in a structural context. The Comprehensive Street-Level Environment Map (ZPA zusammenhängende Parterre-Aufnahme) recently compiled in a pilot study now provides precisely the kind of information that we see as prerequisite for an authentic morphological analysis.¹⁶



Fig. 6: left: official cadastral map of the street "Mehrzweckkarte", right: comprehensive plan ZPA © Psenner

¹⁴ In view of the shortage of resources and under the general heading of "scarcity," urbanists today sometimes call for the down-slicing of our present-day apartment sizes.

¹⁵ Today, interior courtyards mostly accommodate garbage cans or dumpsters. More intensive, diversified uses of this part of the Stadtparterre are rare (Psenner 2014c; Psenner 2014f).

¹⁶ The pilot study surveys the exemplary Stadtparterre of a typical Gründerzeit ensemble in a street in Vienna's 9th district.

Based on the ZPA and on building inspection data¹⁷ (historical and present-day submission plans, rezoning procedures, trade licenses and operation permits), changes in the architecture and use of the historical Stadtparterre can be identified. Also recorded in the survey are modifications of facade design with respect to building apertures and the resultant permeability of the facade. Moreover, the ZPA enables an analysis of structural modifications of residential units or premises and of the type and quality of connecting pathways between built-up spaces, street, and courtyard.

The pilot study confirmed the hypothesis that, historically, the ground-floor area is a semipublic space and that the facade functioned as a permeable membrane, facilitating interchange between the public and semi-public spheres. The following illustrations show the historical structure of uses around 1910 and the present-day ground-floor situation. The juxtaposition makes evident a significant reduction in semipublic ground-floor uses over the decades.

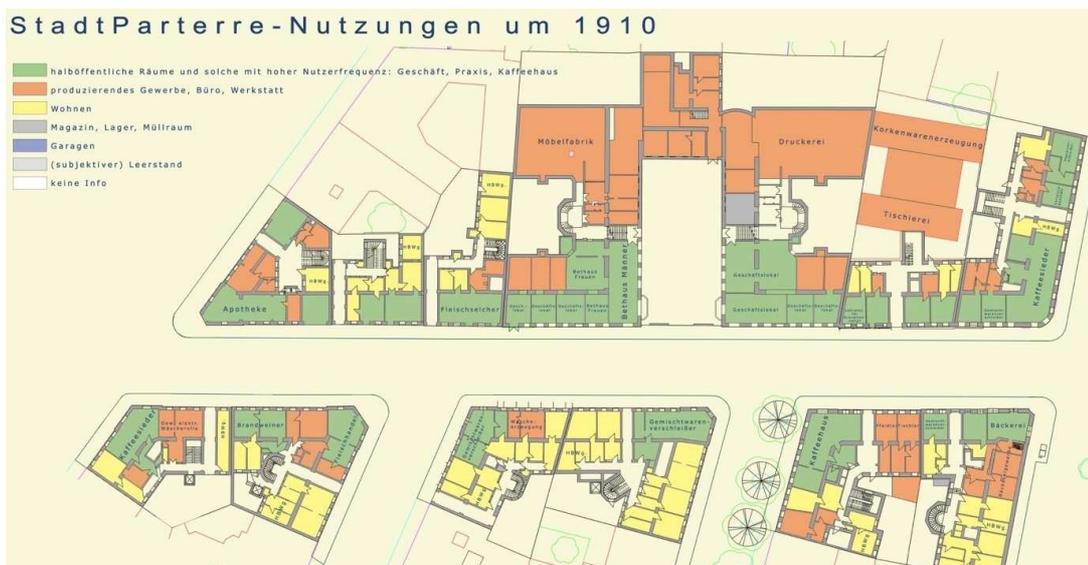


Fig. 7: The Stadtparterre as it was used around 1910; colour codes indicating different use: offices, workshops, dwelling, etc.; © Psenner



Fig. 8: The actual nowadays use of the Stadtparterre. 3D-ZPA, © Psenner

¹⁷ The data is archived in the Städtische Magistratsabteilung MA 37, also called Baupolizei. In Vienna (unlike in other European cities) this kind of building data is considered to be private data. As this legal situation is holding up valuable research, change is urgently needed.

5 CONCLUSION

Nazi legislation created conditions in Vienna that reduced urban street space to a public supply facility, a conveyor of traffic that does not invite lingering. Also, the separation of uses effected by urban planning in the name of classical Modernism led to a commensurate increase in traffic, so that today the prerogative of motorized individual traffic seems indelibly inscribed in public space.

The car-centered use of street space which increasingly affects adjacent ground floors of buildings entails another highly detrimental development: the Viennese *Stadtparterre*s becoming increasingly less attractive and, contrary to its original function, is being used only for storage or as a transit space or passageway. The (indirect) link between motorized individual traffic and urban-structure problems of ground-floor use has been pointed out here. What follows from this is:

- It is necessary to designate secondary consequences of our current automobility on urban structure: the bad state of the *Stadtparterre*, vacancies and underuse of ground floors in Vienna are not least a result of street spaces clogged with surface parking.
- Possession of cars comes at a high social cost. Considering the causal nexus stated above, tax reliefs and other measures that promote traffic and car possession need to be recalibrated.¹⁸

One significant prerequisite of successful regulatory measures in urban planning, administration, and economics is a solid and detailed knowledge of the actual architectural structure, current use—and potential use—of the street-level environment. When used on a larger scale ZPA will realize this information in an easily accessible and locally contextualized form. Thus, the potential of the street-level environment will be clearly identified and can successfully inform urban planning. Given the complex micro-analytical capability of the ZPA, it will be possible to document vacancies and street-use issues in various neighbourhoods and to analyse the contributing economic, traffic and social factors. In addition a systematic 3D-mapping of the built-up structure (cf.: Psenner 2014c; 2014f) and inventory of the historic, the actual and the potential ground floor uses will provide a basis for developing long-term views of Vienna's street-level environment, practical guidelines for future interventions in various neighbourhoods, and for the (re-)design of individual street complexes.

But—unlike in other European cities—in Vienna this kind of building data is considered to be private data. As this legal situation is holding up valuable research, change is urgently needed.



Fig. 9: Street-space is traffic-space—it “belongs” to the car. © Psenner

¹⁸ For the so-called “com-muter deduction,” Petroleum Excise Tax exemptions, or the fact that road traffic areas, particularly parking lots, are not subject to property tax, have a significant influence on street use behavior. Subsidizing “single family home-builders” does not only lead to urban sprawl and uncontrolled development on the outskirts or in the com-muter belt of urban agglomerations, which in turn prompts an extension of the urban street system, but is also responsible for an increase of commuter traffic.

Once the predominance of cars is broken—the arguments to do so have long been provided by social as well as economic research—the street can again be thought of, and planned, as a living space. And in the course of this, the *Stadtparterre* will automatically develop, with residents being able again to use the street as if it belonged to them.¹⁹ The functions of the house, or at least of the ground floor, will again extend to the street outside—and in turn, the street will reach into the ground floor again. The ground floor would again become a threshold space – a space that is both inside and outside –, which would induce new atmospheric qualities. If this means that the current sharp and apparently necessary demarcation between the public and the private spheres breaks down, space use regulations and policies may have to be renegotiated.

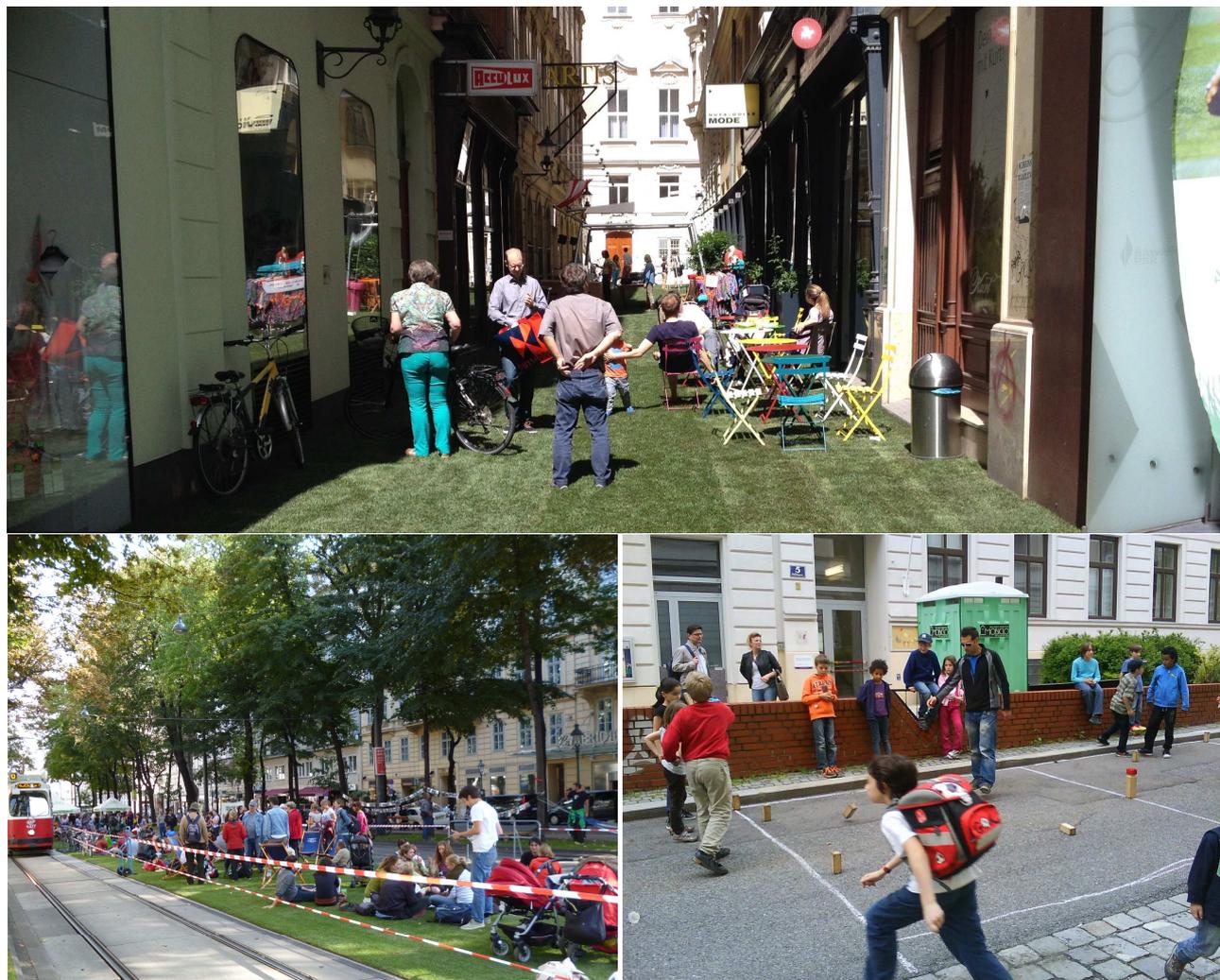


Fig. 10: „lived street”—a radical shift in usability and availability is needed; temporary(art)projects in Vienna2014, © Psenner

Amanda Burden, former director of the New York City Department of City Planning, knew “that the street is the barometer of the health of city life, and that every new development must have a dynamic connection with the street to ensure its vitality.”²⁰ If the street is no longer considered just a supply facility, traffic spaces will again develop into attractive urban spaces affording users a quality urban experience and places to identify with. Restored to their proper urban functionality, they can become part of a coherent *Stadtparterre* again.

¹⁹ Vestiges of this historical right are still present today in the fact that developers, upon completion of construction, have to provide at their own expense and in accordance with the specifications of the city administration a sidewalk, which is then made over to the city. Until today, the snow-clearing of sidewalks has also remained a responsibility of building owners.

²⁰ Nate Berg, “Interview: New York City Planning Director Amanda Burden,” Oct. 6, 2006, <http://www.planetizen.com/node/21476>, February 28, 2015.

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