

# Reinventing the City

## About Migrants and the Reuse of Urban Brownfields in Vienna

### RESEARCH TOPIC:

Brownfields and the question of their reuse play a significant role in urban renewal projects. My research looks at the reuse of two different urban brownfields in Vienna in relation to aspects of migration. The aim is to comprehend the processes of reuse, to understand what kind of actors are involved and how the processes of reuse are carried out. The thesis particularly focuses on the involvement of migrants in these processes.

The research question therefore is: *What are the locations of migrants in the reuse of urban brownfields in Vienna?*



Loft-upgrading nearby the "Ankerbrotfabrik"

### TWO URBAN BROWNFIELDS IN VIENNA

I use the term urban brownfield to refer to urban areas that have been used for industrial or infrastructural purposes, have fallen out of the use cycle, and are currently available for reuse.

The research concentrates on two different brownfields in Vienna. It perceives the brownfields in relation to their urban surroundings and as an entry point to understanding wider processes of urban renewal:

- The former "Nordbahnhof" train station: By 2025 a new neighborhood will arise for more than 20,000 residents, partly living in subsidized flats. One tranche of the apartments was finished in 2014. The thematic framework of the housing-developers' competition had been "intercultural housing", foreseeing migrants and so-called natives living together.
- "Ankerbrotfabrik": Parts of this area have been transformed into lofts and a cluster for creative industries, including several galleries. Furthermore, "Caritas", the Vienna Boys Choir ("Wiener Sängerknaben") and the "Konzerthaus"-concert hall built the headquarters of the Superar project in the former factory. Superar offers a high profiled possibility to sing, make music and perform to disadvantaged but talented children in Vienna, as well as in Central and Southeastern Europe. The project can, thus, be seen as linked to the repositioning of Vienna as a regional center of Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, Superar addresses the mainly migrant population of the "Kreta" neighborhood lying adjacent to the former factory. I, hence, focused especially on the role of "Kreta's" migrant residents in the local renewal.

### FIELDWORK

The thesis builds on the material collected during the thirteen months of intensive fieldwork between February 2013 and February 2014. The data was collected separately for the two brownfields under study. In both cases, the fieldwork consisted of participant observation and of interviews with actors involved in the reuse projects:

- Participant observation took place in very different venues where the development of the areas was planned and enacted.
- I conducted 58 semi-structured or narrative interviews.

### FINDINGS

The findings of this thesis could be grouped into the following five areas:

- I Resident migrants are active drivers of urban renewal linked to brownfield reuses in Vienna.
- II Opportunities for migrants are linked to their participation in the informal practices that shape Vienna's urban development.
- III Brownfield reuses in Vienna define persons as migrants although they act as knowledgeable locals, even in taking advantage of their stigma.
- IV Urban locations can offer peculiar opportunities for migrants.
- V Transnational ties can enable resident migrants to take advantage of brownfield reuses in Vienna.



Construction site nearby the "Ankerbrotfabrik"



Construction works at "Nordbahnhof"

### CONTRIBUTIONS TO CURRENT DEBATES

In the light of these results, I want to contribute to three sets of literature:

- The research refers to the debates on the reuse of brownfields in relation to processes of gentrification. Hereby, the thesis focuses on a rather neglected area, namely the role of the resident population in the reuse processes.
- I refer to migration scholarship focusing on the role of migrants in urban renewal in looking at the possibilities migrants and non-migrants find in different locations depending on their positioning in a multi-scalar context. I underline that opportunities for migrants as well as their active role in the renewal itself can vary among different locations in one and the same city.
- I aim to contribute to the growing literature, which underlines that informal practices and formal procedures do necessarily overlap in processes of urban development, even in cities of the so-called Global North.

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