

Placing Memories: Ageing labour migrants in Vienna

Austria's so-called "guest workers", who immigrated from former Yugoslavia and Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s, are now reaching retirement age. Although these labour migrants have shaped Vienna (the city where the majority of them settled) for more than half a century, they remain politically/socially marginalized and form a critically understudied part of the population. This is reflected in the way their histories and vital contribution to Austria's post-WWII economic success are neglected and in how they have not become a part of Austria's national collective memory. By locating and analyzing ageing labour migrants' memory places, this study between 2015 and 2018 explored how these histories are remembered. The study employed a mix of innovative qualitative methods combining a narrative with a socio-spatial approach. Memory-guided city walks (including the use of visual methods), semi-structured narrative interviews and participant observation represented key methods.

The findings show how memory and place are tightly entangled. Memories are often attached to particular places and to the movement between places, whereby places become meaningful once they are connected to personal memories of past times. The identified memory places of ageing labour migrants show a transnational dimension reflecting the migrants' mobility and their multi-locale past. These findings question the still persistent concentration on memory and place within a tight national framework.

With the concept of place-making I investigated the different forms migrants appropriate the cityscape and showed how place-making is not only built on the past but how it is also future-oriented when facilitating "home-making". Moreover, the findings show that spatial identities are tightly connected to specific phases in the lives of labour migrants. Thereby this study triggered novel empirical findings in the interdisciplinary fields of migration studies, memory studies, anthropology of ageing and the intersection of said fields.