

Breakthrough of the Experiments

"Urban studies is what urban studies does, in other words..."

Bas van Heur, 2024.

Urban Studies at the University of Rijeka started with a study program for the 1st generation of students on 1st November 2022, which is exactly 5 years after the first draft document, and 3 years after the initial accreditation of study. That day was also 2 years, 7 months and 21 days after the WHO declared the COVID-19 pandemic, which was still active at that time. Looking back from today's perspective, the context in which the idea of the study program and its inception arose belongs to two different worlds. In the meantime, accelerated global changes contributed to a spread of many crises, unpredictability and risk. For Urban Studies in Rijeka, this was a fresh field for new research, experimental pedagogies and creative actions. This is complementary with the claims by urban studies researcher Bas van Heur that *'urban studies scholars, if anything, seem to have always diagnosed their own discipline as operating in crisis mode.'* Thus, it seemed that the timing to start the new study program of Urban Studies in Rijeka was perfect.

Returning to the context of its creation, in 2016, the study (then still not clearly framed) was envisioned as the future legacy of the European project *Rijeka 2020 - European Capital of Culture*. The legacy in this case meant transfer of knowledge acquired through the implementation of this project, more precisely one of the project flagships called *Sweet&Salt*. To coordinate and produce the *Sweet&Salt* flagship, the University of Rijeka established the new research and development Center for Urban Transition, Architecture and Urbanism – DeltaLab, which was imagined as a bridge between the City and University, creating and navigating *'urban future'* in the future urban development of Rijeka.

The *Sweet&Salt* flagship, with its subtitle *'Urban reinvention where the river meets the sea'*, was based on the idea of regeneration of dying urban spaces at the very heart of the city. It followed the flow of fresh water through the city, along the riverbanks of the Rječina, to the sea harbor. Although reduced in size due to the COVID -19 pandemic, successful reinventions included some spatial interventions and cultural programs. Moreover, the main *'city-changer'* was the reconstruction and transformation of the Exportdrvo warehouse into a new city venue for public programs and fairs, where DeltaLab set up an architectural exhibition *'Fiume Fantastika – Phenomena of the City'*. The meaning of the phrase *'fantastic Rijeka'* was ambiguous for us in DeltaLab. Looking back, it was at the same time fueled with energy of a collective anthem going forward, and non-seen-before uniqueness and ludic *'discrepancies'* (Easterling, 2022). In 2021, the exhibition got an extension in the format of a book *'Fiume Fantastika'*, which became a kind of basic literature at Urban Studies.

The very idea of urban reinvention, as a way of discovering the new fantasticity of the city, is also contained in the space in which DeltaLab is located: in the building of the former warehouse and wine cellar of Istravinoeksport (IVEX). The building was designed by famous architect Lavoslav Horvat, specialized for industrial buildings, and built in the 1960s. The IVEX building was a modern plant for finishing and processing of wine products for the domestic and foreign market accompanied by office spaces. With production ceasing in the 1990s, the building has hosted a variety of people and functions to this day. Some of the former residents were the Academy of Applied Arts, the architectural office Randić-Turato, the foreign engineering company RI ISA d.o.o., Savez udruga Molekula, ReUse Center and TD Rijeka 2020. Among active residents, it houses the Italian and Croatian drama HNK Ivan pl Zajc, studios of different artists and designers gathered in the organization Delta 5 (Milijana Babić, Tomislav Brajnović, Igor Eškinja, Fokus Grupa, Marno Krstačić-FurićAna & Tomić, Ana Labudović with Riso and friends), punk collective Podroom and DeltaLab.

The structure of the building was designed and built as a reinforced-concrete skeleton structure that enabled flexible and adaptable spatial organization for diverse types of users. The position of the building and well-designed architecture stimulated interest to move in for many citizens. The IVEX building is a unique Croatian example of a twenty-five-year long (re)usage of a former industrial warehouse complex for work, creation and education, occupied and reclaimed by interested people who became a community gathered around tending the building and sharing cultural programs and projects. In the words of Lidija Butković Mičin (2015), the IVEX building ‘has over time, at least in more informed circles, become a relevant concept, a place reclaimed for culture, a placemaking experiment and the potential for designing the future of Delta in Rijeka’. The IVEX building, like many fantastic Rijeka examples, was created accidentally, by a timely absence of a clear plan due to the complex ownership legislation or by the non-implementation of the commissioned projects for Delta. As such, the existing state is limited in time.

This time-space context made an impact on today’s curriculum of the university specialist interdisciplinary study program - Urban Studies, one of the few accredited in the artistic interdisciplinary field of Science and Art. The variability of the curriculum is maintained through different generational thematic frameworks that navigate the content of all courses. The educational process of each generation is different, unique and represents a kind of an experiment. Harvesting disruption, problems and errors as potentials for positive urban development and embracing the ‘*broken-world model*’ for designing better cities as more-than-human environments set up the underlying value of Urban Studies.

If we zoom out to a global context, recent epistemic shifts in urban environments emphasize a broader, interdisciplinary understanding of both built and programmed

environments – through the research-based design and strategic thinking of complex systems, which students are trained at Urban Studies. Interdisciplinarity, which by definition, unifies the knowledge, methods, and perspectives of diverse disciplines, is the key approach of the studies to address complex problems that cannot be adequately solved within the confines of a single field.

This special issue of *Sociology and Space* features a dynamic collection of articles by various professors and collaborators, of the aforementioned Urban Studies. As cities increasingly become sites of both opportunity and crisis, this issue delves into a nuanced interplay of design, policies, philosophy and culture in shaping our urban futures. Drawing on various theories and methodologies, the contributors engage with the socio-spatial dynamics of contemporary urban life, examining the flows, conflicts and potentials that define our cities. In exploring numerous phenomena from sustainability and resilience to the philosophy and politics of space, this collection reflects Urban Studies' commitment to reimagining cities not just as physical environments, but also as evolving, interconnected systems of immense intricacy within an ever-shifting global landscape.

This issue opens with drawings and visual materials of two students' final thesis projects: Iva Peručić and Dorian Vujnović researching and designing resilience at the University Campus in Rijeka.

In her thought-provoking article *Utopia as a Method for the Critical Examination of Space*, Jana Čulek explores the enduring relevance of utopian thinking as a critical tool for engaging with socio-spatial issues. Far from the grand, all-encompassing visions of the past, Čulek highlights how contemporary utopias have evolved into micro-utopias: focused and narrative-driven explorations that address specific aspects of our built and social environments. By analyzing architectural and literary examples from the twentieth century and drawing on her own pedagogical experiments, Čulek demonstrates the potential of utopia as a method not only for reimagining spaces but also for fostering critical thinking and innovation in architectural and urban education. Through this lens, Čulek unveils utopia's power not just to provoke thought but also to inspire action, positioning it as a playful yet critical method for rethinking the complexities of modern life.

In *Monuments of Devalued Immortality*, Emil Jurcan delves into a paradox of our era: as liquid modernity, described by Zygmunt Bauman, accelerates our preference for the fleeting over the eternal, the world simultaneously experiences an explosion of cultural heritage. From industrial ruins to expansive landscapes, what we consider worth preserving has expanded dramatically, even as our relationship with permanence erodes. Jurcan's article explores the interplay between this "devaluation of immortality" and the "inflation of heritage," questioning how these opposing forces shape our approach to preserving the past in an age increasingly defined by immediacy.

Ivana Katuriċ, Ana Lugar, and Lucijan Ćerneliċ tackle one of Europe's most pressing challenges: the housing affordability crisis, in their article titled *The Possibilities for Local Housing System Analysis in Innovative Housing Policy Planning*. They trace its roots to neoliberal policies that have commodified housing and weakened public and non-profit housing sectors, leaving countries like Croatia particularly vulnerable. The authors explore how the concept of the housing provision chain, combined with the theoretical framework of welfare state regimes, can provide valuable insights for crafting integrated local housing strategies. Their work offers a critical roadmap for rethinking housing policies to meet the growing societal needs, at a time when it is most urgently needed.

In the article *Developing Urban Resilience Criteria Using Multi-Criteria Analysis*, Ida Križaj Leko, Aleksandra Deluka-Tibljaš and Barbara Karleuša examine how spatial resilience can be assessed using the *Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA)* method, specifically *the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)*. Recognizing the challenges posed by the dynamic nature of urban environments and both spatial and resource-related impacts of climate change, the authors highlight the value of MCA in navigating complex, uncertain decision-making contexts. Through a methodological workshop, Urban Studies students at the University of Rijeka developed spatial resilience criteria and applied them to the area of university campus in Rijeka. The study demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating scientific and artistic approaches, supporting a holistic and innovative model of urban planning aligned with the pedagogical goals of the Urban Studies program.

Drawing on the work of Jonathan Wolff and Avner de-Shalit, Nebojša Zeliċ identifies key characteristics that make cities unique: institutional authority, population density, cultural-political identity and the role they play in fostering diverse ways of life. In his article *Justice in the City*, Zeliċ argues that cities, home to more than half of the world's population, deserve a more prominent place in political philosophy, especially within theories of justice. The article then explores how two influential theories of egalitarian justice (John Rawls's justice as fairness and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach) can be adapted to address the specific challenges cities face. Zeliċ suggests that these theories must evolve to account for the unique urban context, particularly in terms of public services, spaces, and the sense of belonging that defines city life.

Through the lens of epistemological vice, Marko-Luka Zubċić and Ida Križaj Leko introduce a provocative approach that challenges designers to rethink and reimagine complex socio-technological and spatial systems in their article *Error Harvest: A Method for System Design in Non-Ideal Conditions*, focusing on how to turn inevitable flaws and disruptions into opportunities for innovation. The *error harvest* method challenges designers to confront and reinterpret inherent flaws and predictable disruptions within existing systems, transforming these weaknesses into productive design solutions. The article situates this method within the broader fields of spatial prac-

tices, system design, and non-ideal institutional epistemology, offering new insights for designing in the face of uncertainty.

Finally, in his article *Green Architecture and the Concept of Sustainability in the Capitalocene*, Filip Pračić challenges the conventional green narratives, proposing that the environmental crisis of our time is not merely the result of human impact, but rather a product of systemic capitalism's exploitative modes of production and insatiable drive for growth. The paper delves into how "green" architecture, often promised as a solution to ecological concerns, has become a profitable industry that ultimately perpetuates the very systems of environmental destruction it claims to address. Pračić's analysis interrogates the insidious intersections of real estate, financialization, greenwashing and neoliberal dogmas in contemporary architecture, offering a concept of *urban metabolism* and *degrowth* as possible trajectories out of this deadlock.

This issue represents a joint milestone for the journal *Sociology and Space* (Institute for Social Research in Zagreb) and the *Urban Studies* program (University of Rijeka). For the first time in its 60-year history, *Sociology and Space* opens its pages to the interdisciplinary field of art and science - not only through a curated selection of scholarly articles but also by dedicating a special section to the visual representation of two thesis projects developed by students of the first year of the *Urban Studies* program. This editorial shift is further underscored by a deliberate transformation in the journal's graphic design and material presentation, effectively reconfiguring the publication as a designed object. For *Urban Studies*, this collaboration marks a significant moment of emergence into the academic sphere - a symbolic "*coming out of the closet*" - through a collective intellectual performance. The double peer-review process implemented here constitutes the first formal assessment of the methodologies, theoretical frameworks and pedagogical approaches developed within the program. This opportunity for critical reflection and mutual learning represents a genuine breakthrough.

Ida Križaj Leko, Filip Pračić

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