

## TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF LOST PLACES

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With 5 figures

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**Summary:** Places juxtaposing normative and heterodox orders have long been a terrain for geographic research. This paper focuses on derelict architectural structures understood as disordered places outside the norm. Despite the variety of research directions, there is still a lack of a uniform terminology and definition of these places. Following the academic literature, but also the public perception, we term those places as ‘lost places’. Based on an intensive literature research and a four-year empirical fieldwork, we present main trajectories and driving agents on the origin of lost places. We identify the key elements of the origin of lost places in the loss of functionality of architectural structures and their re-contextualization through different appropriation processes. Both elements portray these architectural structures as multitemporal and multimodal palimpsests. Finally, we propose a transition concept that offers the epistemological basis for studying lost places.

**Zusammenfassung:** Orte, die einer normativen und regulierten Ordnung widersprechen, sind seit langem ein geographisches Forschungsfeld. Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit verlassenen architektonischen Strukturen, die als Orte außerhalb des Normativen verstanden werden. Trotz der Vielfalt an Forschungsrichtungen ist eine einheitliche Terminologie beziehungsweise eine klare Definition dieser Orte nach wie vor ein Desiderat. In Anlehnung an die wissenschaftliche Literatur, aber auch an die öffentliche Wahrnehmung wollen wir mit diesem Beitrag den Begriff ‚Lost Places‘ für diese Forschungsobjekte implementieren und etablieren. Auf Basis intensiver Literaturrecherche sowie einer vierjährigen empirischen Studie diskutieren wir die wichtigsten Trajektorien und Einflussfaktoren für die Entstehung von Lost Places. Als Schlüsselemente erweisen sich dabei der Funktionsverlust der architektonischen Struktur sowie deren Re-kontextualisierung durch unterschiedliche Aneignungsprozesse. Lost Places erscheinen unter diesem Gesichtspunkt als multitemporale und multimodale Palimpseste. Schließlich präsentieren wir ein Übergangskonzept das eine epistemologische Grundlage für die Untersuchung von Lost Places bieten kann.

**Keywords:** lost places, derelict architectural structures, ruination, liminality

## 1 Introduction

*“His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet”* (BENJAMIN 1991)

In his ninth thesis of “On the concept of history” Walter Benjamin imparts an allegory of the portrait of Angelus Novus by Paul Klee (BENJAMIN 1991). The angel of history – with his back turned to the future whilst looking at the ruins of the past – refers, according to Benjamin, to a view of history as a consequence of catastrophes instead than a continuum of progress (ZONS and NITSCHACK 1980). Benjamin’s theses are grounded in a fundamental criticism of Marxist historical materialism and, in particular, the inexorable belief in progress and modernity (e.g. BEINER 1984). Synonymous with the portrayal of the accumulating wreckages, schol-

ars interpret the decay of architectural structures as a concomitant manifestation of progress (e.g. ARMSTRONG 2011; DESILVEY and EDENSOR 2012).

As a research object all forms of decaying architectural structures evoke different development paths: depopulation and abandonment in areas of industrial decline (industrial ruination), or abandonment and redevelopment in the urban growth cycle and socio-economic uncertainties as consequences of gentrification (e.g. MAH 2010; O’CALLAGHAN et al. 2018). Derelict architectural structures may also be seen as disordered and obsolete places, which have been conceptualised as alternative territories (e.g. EDENSOR 2005b). Recent studies propose ethnographic accounts, which primarily explore the subculture or the hidden nature and motivations of people exploring such places (e.g. FULTON 2017; GARRET 2013). Despite the increasing attention that derelict architectural structures have inspired, we wish to highlight that there is an inconsistency in the terminology used to analyse them and, subse-

quently, a lack of a sound definition. The aim of this paper is to address these two issues. We focus on the apparent inscrutability of these places, which are usually described by scholars with adjectives such as ‘obsolete’, ‘abandoned’, ‘derelict’, ‘temporary’, ‘no longer used’ (cf. FULTON 2017; GARRET 2013). In a seminal work DESILVEY and EDENSOR (2012, 467) characterise such architectural structures as places “that have been classified (by someone, at some time) as residual or unproductive”. By studying the remembrance of three destructed towns in Australia, READ (1996a) called no longer useable relicts ‘dead places’ and ‘lost places’ (READ 1996b). This discordance and confusing usage of a term is referred by Umberto Eco as ‘termine ombrello’ (ECO 1994). We think that these terminological uncertainties entail an ambiguous reflection about such places. To provide a better understanding of such areas, we focus on the hidden nature of the derelict architectural structures. We develop the term *lost place* for three main reasons. First, it is a term with multiple meanings. Second, it indicates a material object, some kind of demarcation of order and, relatedly, a relict by virtue of the absence of human residents, visitors, or frequenters. Finally, and interestingly, *lost place* is repeatedly used in the internet as a fashionable term and is gradually being introduced into scholarly debates.<sup>1)</sup>

We define lost places (abbreviated as LPs from here on) as the afterlife of the ruins of the past (ARMSTRONG 2011) and, in so doing, we intend to reconceptualise the notion of a *lost place*: What makes places lost, and (especially) *for* whom and, consequently, *for* whom not? What are the driving agents for abandoning a place? What transformation happens to places that are no longer used? How can we characterize these derelict architectural structures?

The empirical basis for advancing our notion of LP is an exploration of abandoned areas in the city of Graz (Austria) and in its neighboring district (Graz-Umgebung). The LPs we explored include single-family houses, terraced houses, military infrastructure, industry, commerce and leisure facilities. In so doing, our research broadens the object of study of analysis of LPs, which is usually confined to industrial ruins (e.g. EDENSOR 2005a, 2005b). In total, we mapped 430 LPs in the study area within a period of four years (2016-2019) (Fig. 1/A-C).

<sup>1)</sup> For example, since 2019 there has been a funding program called Lost Cities: ([https://www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/lost\\_cities](https://www.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/lost_cities))

The mapping of LPs in the city of Graz and its neighboring district is the result of (i) intensive field work, (ii) visual interpretations of aerial photographs (Fig. 2/A-B) and (iii) examination of historical archives, local newspapers and websites/social-media contents of regional urban exploring communities.<sup>2)</sup> When it was possible, we actually explored these places and took a large number of photographs from inside and outside. We observed all mapped LPs during the whole investigation period (we entered some of them several times). The photographs proved to be a valuable data basis for documenting and analyzing any alterations in and on the places. The documentation focused on the different (re)use of the LPs by different actors of the course of four years. In addition, we also observed the development of the building in terms of (i) its decay, (ii) its new formal use or (iii) its destruction by a new construction. During the period under investigation, 73 of the 430 observed buildings were either demolished and newly constructed or renovated. In both cases, they can no longer be seen as LP.

Nevertheless, we clearly point out that this study focusses on the theorization of this derelict architectural structures and not on the practice exploring them. Our field research supports the above-mentioned terminological uncertainties regarding the research object. Drawing on our fieldwork and literature on LPs, in the next section we offer a comprehensive definition for LPs. We focus on two driving agents: the loss of functionality of architectural structures and their re-contextualization through different appropriation processes. Then, in section three, we propose a concept in the attempt to examine the multitemporal and multimodal origin of such places. Following this concept, LPs are regarded as a transitional status of functionless architectural structures. Each section presents examples from our fieldwork and puts them in a wider context. In the conclusion we highlight that LPs are very frequent and dynamic research objects. Furthermore, we reveal further research directions.

## 2 Lost places – towards a definition

In order to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive definition/understanding of LPs we propose to conceptualise them on five levels:

<sup>2)</sup> Selected websites include: <https://lostplaces.at>; <https://www.schlot.at/>; [www.geocache.at](https://www.geocache.at)

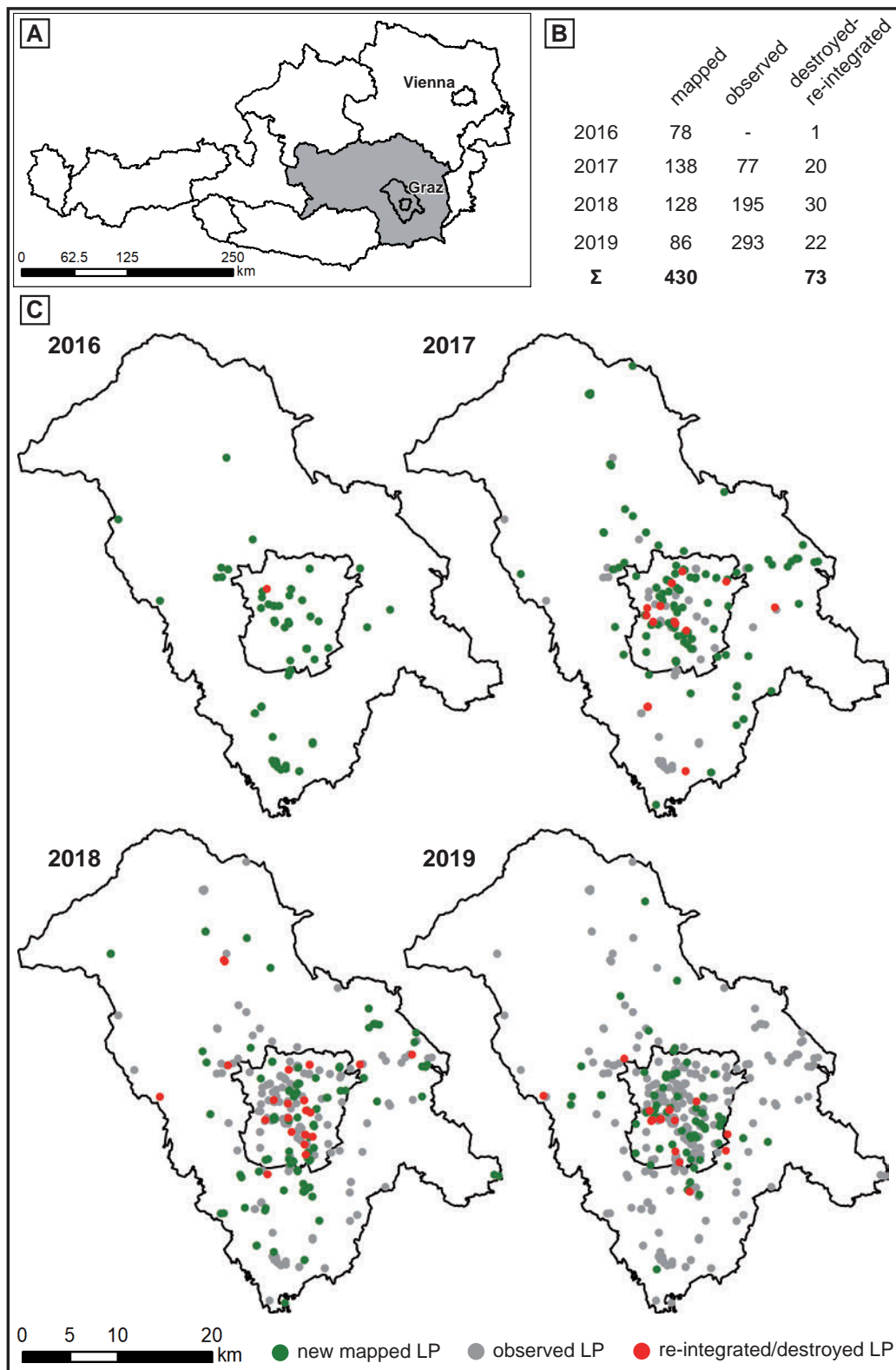


Fig. 1. The studied LPs. Fig. 1/A: Overview of the study area. Fig. 1/B: summarized table of mapped, overserved and destroyed LPs; Fig. 1/C: Spatial distribution of the observed LPs in the period 2016 - 2019.

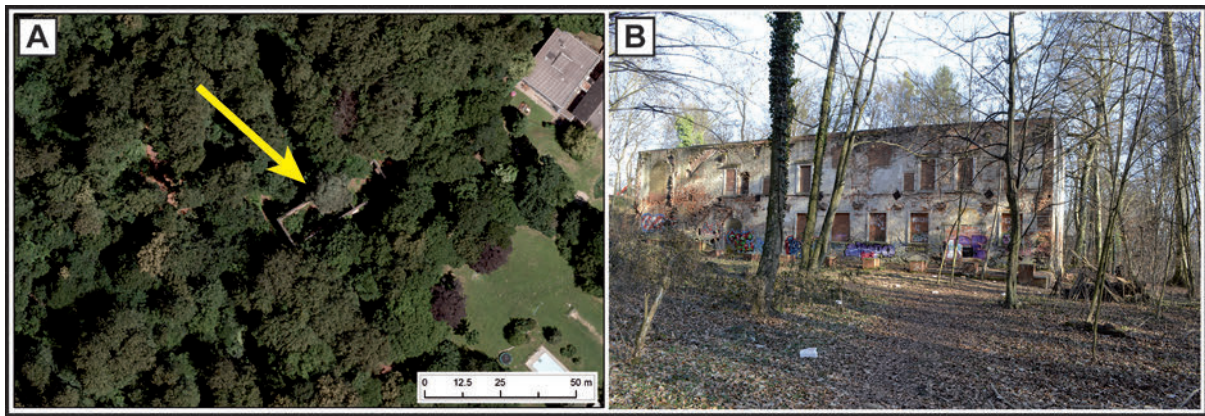


Fig. 2: Mapping LPs; Fig. 2/A: Derelict architectural structure on an aerial photograph (25 x 25cm resolution). Fig. 2/B: Terrestrial photograph of the same architectural structure in winter. Photo: BAUER.

(1) LPs as properties: LPs constitute recognizable remains of architectural structures. This notion of LPs as properties implies that they are bounded territorial units with a natural or legal person possessing the structure; i.e. registered owner(s). This is of crucial importance when setting the loss of functionality as the main characteristic for the definition of LPs (see below). The focus on architectural structures thus excludes a wide spectrum of geomorphic relicts produced by the interactions between human societies and natural systems (e.g. ridge and furrow structures).

(2) The presence of vacant, abandoned buildings: perceivable signs of LPs are industrial, public and private vacant buildings. This encompasses the physical absence of the authorized natural or legal owners of the architectural structure (following termed as owner) and all individuals or groups (e.g. workers), who used to animate the former function of the architectonic structure. Only the complete interruption of this human presence and energy input makes the function of the place become increasingly tenuous until it becomes *lost* altogether. Hence, architectural structures that are only temporarily abandoned (e.g. weekend cottages), are not considered as *lost*. A LP is always abandoned, but an abandoned place is not necessarily lost. The absence of the owner and the former functions are furthermore differentiating LPs from their allocated normative assignation (the primary purpose or meaning of the architectural structure). The relation between human and architectural structure and the interior of the structures (e.g. machines, furniture) is no longer stable and is increasingly dissolving. The progressive disordering of LPs is the antipode to social regularity. LPs are no longer predictable parts of the conventional social order, most obvi-

ously in highly regulated and surveyed urban environments (cf. EDENSOR 2005a). The image of a garden gone wild is a visual example of how social orders dissolve.

(3) LPs as relations: LPs represent intersecting social, cultural, economic, political and natural relations. Following MASSEY's 'progressive sense of place' (1995), such places are uncertain and are perceived and evaluated by individuals in different ways. This notion of LPs as a bundle of relationships implies that places are open spatial formations: their boundaries are porous (see HUBBARD et al. 2005). Such an understanding of LPs implicates a complicated bundle of associations including: lower value and unproductiveness in common understanding (DE SOLA-MORALES 1995), evidence of social disorder alluding to the 'broken window-theory' (WILSON and KELLING 1982; PAIN 2000), object of fascination or place of memories with various histories (cf. EDENSOR 2005b).

(4) Loss of functionality: EDENSOR (2005a) criticizes the notion of derelict places as useless or less valuable in conventional readings. He argues that derelict places can provide possibilities beyond utilitarian views and economic values. Here, we draw on the issue of useless places but slightly broaden such a characterization and ask about the inherent functions of places. Places as those under consideration in this paper are designed or modified for providing to groups of people a space to be used for planned functions. For example: industrial sites provide the required, specific structures (e.g. factory buildings) for entrepreneurs and workers; military constructions (e.g. bunkers) offer protection for soldiers; and residential buildings (e.g. houses) provide shelter from the local environment and privacy for the inhabitants. The meanings and functions that

places have depend on their diverse users' perspectives. For the authorized natural or legal owners an architectural structure can lose its function and become useless. For example, changing geopolitical situations have made many military strategies obsolete and, subsequently, the material remnants of these strategies (e.g. defence installations) remain for years. This loss of the original functionality is eponymous for a LP and stands as a key element in our definition. The transformation processes leading to loss of functionality, moreover, require a thorough understanding of the notion of a place. Considering a chronological perspective, the same material structures of LPs acquire new meanings through second order users (typically not the owner) and thus new functionalities. LPs get successively occupied and modified to preserve and improve the new functionality required. Furthermore, the absence of building maintenance (as a consequence of loss of functionality) displaces the functionality originally intended. Emerging disordering (from first order users' perspective) and reordering (from second order users' perspective) combined with the natural, non-anthropogenic processes of ruination converge and recompose the architectural structure.

(5) Appropriation of places: We specify the dialectical unity of loss of functionality and the appropriation of place (see LEFEBVRE 1996) as a key element for LP definition. LPs, then, refer to a hybrid configuration in between natural and cultural transitions. The recontextualization processes can also cause the complete lack of functionality of the architectonic structure for the owner. The origin of the majority of studied LPs is uncertain: there is a lack of documentation and thus, in many cases, it is impossible to examine who was the original owner and what he had in mind for the architectural structure. This uncertain origin of LPs raises issues about temporal scales. The majority of LPs are the result of subsequent stealthy transformations and embody a multitude of appropriation processes involved. This includes nature's cyclic temporalities as biotic intrusions of species and abiotic agents forcing the reshaping and, consequently, ruination of the architectural structure. In most cases these are appropriation processes resulting from deficient building maintenance (cf. Fig. 3/G-I; Fig. 5).

The most important aspects about the origin of LPs are the loss of functionality of an architectural structure and the appropriation of this structure. Next, we turn to discuss these two levels in detail and we clarify, why they are so important.

## 2.1 Loss of functionality

As mentioned above, we conceive of the loss of functionality of an architectural structure from the perspective of the owner. For that reason, we distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic drivers, which can cause this loss of function.

### 2.1.1 Intrinsic drivers

Economic transformation is certainly one of the most important drivers that triggers the origination of LPs. The intrinsic reasons for company closures include, among others, increasingly unprofitable branches or branches with high labour input and low financial profits, and the lack of a potential successor (especially in rural areas). The intrinsic drivers also include altered private demands. For example, inherited properties that no longer comply with modern living requirements (e.g. loss of comfort, insufficient space). Especially in rural areas with an abundance of space available for re-building, the construction of a new building often is preferred to the renovation of the existing structure. Thus, the former structure loses its function for the owner. Even if the old structures are used for a different function (e.g. as storage space), there is no investment in the preservation of the property, which often leads to an increasing decay of the structure.

### 2.1.2 Extrinsic drivers

The loss of functionality of architectural structures due to geopolitical transformations introduces the research object of LPs into the thematic field of border and boundary studies, although an interdisciplinary dialogue is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. VAN HOUTUM 2005; NEWMANN 2006). Geometrically determined modifications (e.g. due to warlike conflicts) along with the loss of relevance of military assistance and administrative borders (e.g. the end of the Cold War) may lead to the loss of functionality of the architectural structures for owners (in particular, states). Structures primarily and directly associated with the border are, for example, military infrastructures (barracks, watchtowers, ramparts). Apart from being outermost closed territorial boundaries, borders are also complex socio-territorial constructs. The implementation of the Schengen Agreement in the

European Union provides a good example: despite the existing territorial sovereignty of the member states (which can be demarcated in space), the free movement of people in the Schengen area has led to a loss of relevance of borders (ZAIOTTI 2011). This geopolitical transformation not only affected the infrastructure associated with the border (e.g. border crossings), but also partially led to a loss of functionality of borderlands. Major territorial and geopolitical changes can lead to a loss in economic and/or strategic importance of formerly intra-territorial transit routes and related infrastructures. This is evident, for instance, with the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the disintegration of former Yugoslavia into national states (cf. HOWKINS 2005).

In addition to the multitude of possible narratives of individual architectural structures, structural economic transformation can create LPs in entire sectors of the economy. Industrial decline initializes extensive migration and depopulation. In some post-industrial economic centres this has resulted in a systematic emergence of LPs. Examples of extensive landscapes of industrial ruins can especially be found in the USA. Detroit, for example, became a true synonym for post-industrial ruination (MILLINGTON 2013).

Extrinsic loss of functionality encompasses environmental and natural hazards, human-induced environmental changes and disasters. An example of a gradual loss of functionality of architectural structures due to environmental changes is the degradation of the Aral Sea (MCLEMAN 2011). The most famous example of a LP created by a human-induced environmental disaster is probably the city of Pripyat after the nuclear accident at Chernobyl (cf. KOPELENTOVA-REHAK 2012; DOBRASZCZYK 2010).

## 2.2 Appropriation of place

The different ways in which appropriation takes place, and which we discuss below, identify potential key areas of research for LPs and links to other disciplines beyond geography.

### 2.2.1 Legal appropriation of space without significant transition

The appropriation processes within this group have one thing in common: their lack of function is only a temporary state. That is, the normative

order may increasingly disappear, but the vacancy period is probably too short for an alternative appropriation of space to take place. It is not certain, whether these architectural structures can indeed be termed as lost.

(a) *Building vacancy*: since the financial crisis in 2008 the global dimension of the real estate market as objects of investment and speculation has been publicly debated (cf. O'CALLAGHAN et al. 2018). Similar trends can be found on a smaller scale in many cities (e.g. SOOS 2012). In districts subject to urban renewal and gentrification the accompanying costs for rental income (renovation) may be higher than the potential profit from the sale of buildings. Moreover, buildings are frequently deliberately abandoned in order to make demolition possible and, in the process, opportunities for a more modern (more profitable) new building are therein created (cf. SMITH 1996). This is particularly relevant in districts with historical or protected buildings (HOLM and KUHN 2011). If the value of an architectural structure is the primary source of profit for the owner, the abandoned architectural structure has not lost its function. The abandonment of architectural structures can be the consequence of the events such as death of the owner or other family related financial problems. Yet, the architectural structures that have been vacant for some time may also become inhabited by homeless (as we discuss in the next sub-section).

(b) *Adaptation to the original function or functional change*: the takeover of ownership of architectural structure is often accompanied by temporary building vacancies. The function originally intended may continue after a rather short interruption or change to something entirely new. LANGSTON et al. (2008) termed the loss of originally intended functionality as 'obsolescence of buildings'. The authors distinguish between six different types of obsolescence. 'Functional obsolescence' can especially be the reason for an adaptation or a functional change of architectural structures without significant delay. In case of residential buildings, the originally intended function typically remains the same - only with a change of ownership. Commercial or industrial buildings are, however, commonly converted to new purposes by retaining the architectural structures. LANGSTON et al. (2008) highlight the shorter development period of this 'adaptive reuse'. Nevertheless, these appropriation processes are intended by the owner. If the conversion takes place without longer delays, the architectural structure cannot be characterized as LPs.

### 2.2.2 Illegal appropriation and places of activities worth hiding

Silent but impressive testimonies are found in places that perform functions for others, such as architectural structures that provide shelter for homeless people (Fig. 3/A). While the effects of urban renewal and gentrification on low income (but legally resident) sections of the population have moved into the focus of research (e.g. LEES 2012; PETERS 2012), the displacement of homeless in LPs remains an invisible process. Urban renewal leads inevitably to the loss of shelter for these people.

Overall, LPs may be venues for activities worth hiding, such as raves, parcou, roofing, skating and geo-caching (Fig. 3/B). HUDSON (2007) emphasizes the importance of derelict places in the context of increasingly regulated urban spaces. Many of these activities are based on the kinetic appropriation of

space in its entire disorder, juxtaposed on the originally intended purposes. In addition, EDENSOR et al. (2012) highlight the absence of surveillance as a motive for alternative appropriations of space. They also consider this unsupervised space to be suitable for hedonistic activities, such as drinking, partying, sexual activities and drug-use. The multi-functionality of LPs is also evident in this context. In addition, LPs can be used as dead drops (this means hidden places to pass items (mostly drugs)). Perhaps, the most common appropriations of LPs are traces of vandalism and visual appropriations in the form of graffiti and tags (Fig. 3/C). As mentioned above, objects within a LP are frequently understood/framed as being outside the normative social order. In addition to reshaping, removing and re-contextualizing of LPs (cf. EDENSOR 2005a; 2007), new objects are also added and integrated from the outside, for example the practice of illegal waste dumping.



Fig. 3: Appropriation of space. Fig. 3/A: LP as a temporary shelter for homeless people; Fig. 3/B: Kinetic appropriation of space. The improvised and recontextualized obstacles provide the layout for the LP as a playground for skating; Fig. 3/C: Example of hedonistic activity: graffiti and vandalism; Fig. 3/D: The temporary use of space: squatting. In this specific case the proclaimed anti-systemic politics (graffiti on the rooftop) was directed against (too high) rent; Fig. 3/E: LP as source of (raw) materials: the unfinished disassembly of a tiled stove. The traces left behind suggest that too many individual tiles were broken due to improper dismantling; Fig. 3/F: LP as memoryscape: the underground armament production in Peggau, sub-camp of the concentration camp Mauthausen; Fig. 3/G: Natural appropriation, abiotic processes. Structural damage caused the ceiling to collapse; Fig. 3/H: Natural appropriation, biotic processes. Fruit body of the aggressive bio-deterioration fungi *Serpula lacrymans* on a window branch in a LP (colour key). Fig. 3/I: Botanical colonisation of a LP. Photos: all DOLGAN, except F&H (BAUER).

Squatting as a temporary usage of LPs is typically related to (neoliberal) urban renewal (e.g. HOLM and KUHN 2011). In contrast to homelessness, squatting is not only aimed at creating or preserving living space (typically, squatters are not homeless), but mainly at politicising space. Amongst other things, squatters highlight issues, such as property speculation, the existence of building vacancies and the simultaneous high demand for affordable housing, the preservation of cityscapes and the gradual displacement of the resident population due to rising rent (PRUIJT 2013). The expression of this politicization is the public staging of squatting (Fig. 3/D). As a kind of urban guerrilla this protest ultimately thrives from media attention.

The raw material potential of urban buildings/infrastructure have already been discussed in previous works (e.g. COSSU et al. 2012). CHUSID (1993) pointed out the potential of derelict places as a source of raw materials and called them ‘urban ore’. Apart from the legal exploitation, illegal urban mining exists also in abandoned and inhabited buildings. This means, for example, illegal metal collectors targeting copper in wiring devices or plumbing and heating constructions. The plundering of metal may cause the (partial) loss of functionality of the architectural structure for the owner. Although LPs are the subject of illegal urban mining, differences exist in properties with intact structural integrity. That is, urban mining in LPs not only aims at metal, such as raw material sources, but also at the interior items of the abandoned structure. Just like the nostalgic flair of derelict architectural structures, decaying objects in these structures are sometimes perceived as nostalgic and valuable (Fig. 3/E) rather than as rubbish (cf. THOMPSON 1979).

### 2.2.3 Reuse in the tertiary sector

“Exploring a ruin is a kind of anti-tourism”. In his book ‘Industrial ruins’, EDENSOR (2005a, 95) sees a clear distinction between exploring derelict places and regular tourism. He argues that staged, themed regular tourism contradicts the non-conformative exploration of ruins. We agree with this distinction between an informal (illegal) exploration of abandoned places (see below) and any kind of tourist marketing. Nevertheless, through increasing awareness and the growing community of urban explorers in the last ten years, partial commercialization is observable. In the city of Berlin, for example, the abandoned fairground Spreepark can be visited through

guided LP-tours. This conscious staging of places as LPs complies with tourist marketing.

To what extent the fascination with the decay of these special places can be seen as a leitmotif, and to what extent thus urban exploring constitutes a form of dark tourism and/or thanatourism (e.g. HARTMANN 2014; STONE 2006), are issues that remain to be clarified. We do not seek to enter into a debate about the different motives, positions and definitions of urban exploring communities here. Nevertheless, at minimum, a deviant, socially non-conformative behaviour on the part of urban exploring communities can be identified. Furthermore, a short review of exhibitions, popular science books (e.g. LUX and WEICHELBAUN 2017), but above all, the examination of websites and social media content,<sup>3)</sup> depict three dominant perspectives of urban explorers: a focus on places from the bygone days that are no longer being used; a focus on places with dark attractions; an aesthetic contemplation of these places and their decay. Photographs with high dynamic range or sepia effects are typical determinants of this aesthetic appeal (cf. PÉTURSDÓTTIR and OLSEN 2014).

### 2.2.4 Memoryscapes

Considering LPs as multitemporal and multimodal composite architectural structures, the traces of past functions also evoke a multitude of memoryscapes. These memoryscapes relate to collective and/or individual memories, official and/or personal ones, and material and immaterial places of remembrance (e.g. ARMSTRONG 2011; EDENSOR 2005a, 2005b; HALBWACHS 1980). Similar to heritage sites, LPs embody collective memories and identities of past architecture, economic structures and of past forms of living and production (e.g. SMITH 2006). In contrast to heritage sites, LPs provide information beyond nostalgic glorification (DESILVEY and EDENSOR 2012). Besides collective remembrance, the interpretation of the assemblage of a LP is not clear - everyone sees it as something different. Furthermore, the historical patina and gradual decay of buildings also symbolise the ephemerality of the existence of things. Even if the architectural structure is destroyed, the past function often remains as

<sup>3)</sup> Selected websites include: <http://www.forbidden-places.net/>; <http://lostplaces.at/>; <http://www.lost-places.com/>; <http://www.thebohemianblog.com/>; <http://www.urbexplayground.com/>; <https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/>; <https://www.schlot.at/>; [www.geocache.at](http://www.geocache.at)



an immaterial memento in topographical names. For example, in Graz there is a Ziegelstraße (= brick-street), although the related factory does not exist for more than 20 years. The same applies to some mill roads without existing mills.

LPs can, moreover, narrate episodes of the past – the only question is, whether this narrative wants to be heard. There are places that have been deliberately and collectively forgotten and repressed from perception. This ambivalence is inherent in the culture of remembrance and monuments (cf. HALBWACHS 1980) and can be seen, for example, in the way the Holocaust was treated in Austria after the Second World War. Until the 1980s the victim narrative<sup>4)</sup> served as the basis of Austria's national identity (cf. UHL 2001). While in the first post-war years the political issue of the thesis of the victim manifested itself in the multitude of memorials erected exactly for materialising such myth (UHL 2012), many places of National Socialists' crimes on Austrian territory remained in oblivion and thus got lost. In the mid-1980s the victim myth and Austria's contribution to National Socialists' violent crimes were both increasingly questioned (UHL 2001). This led to an overcoming of remembrance-amnesia concerning the existence of a large number of sub-camps of the concentration camp Mauthausen (e.g. FREUND 1989, 2000; UHL 2012), followed by a historical reappraisal and building of numerous memorial sites. The sub-camps were mainly used for armament production and, in many cases, were built underground to protect weapons from air strikes (Fig. 3/F). While the majority of the sub-camps had already been demolished once they were rediscovered in the 1980s (most of them consisted of wooden barracks), relicts of underground production sites have remained to this day, some of them as LPs (Fig. 3/F).

#### 2.4.5 Natural appropriation

According to our definition, LPs are of anthropogenic origin. Nevertheless, the typical visual motif of decaying architectural structure is always associated with natural processes. The resurgence or prevalence of biotic and abiotic processes indicates the lack of maintenance activities due to the loss of functionality of the architectural structure. LPs

are successively transformed and shaped by natural processes. Decoupled from the social order, LPs represent alternative social (dis)ordering and renaturation. This emphasizes the hybridity of LPs, referring to what ARMSTRONG (2011) describes as “the power of nature to absorb ruins and to anchor them in a setting”. JORGENSEN and TYLECOTE (2007) call the ambivalence of biotic renaturation in cultivated urban areas ‘interstitial wilderness’. Renaturation is an efficient agent in eroding the structural integrity of architectural structures (e.g. roof damage caused by falling trees). This damage is not specific to abandoned structures. Yet, in the case of LPs, repair of the damage usually does not occur, ultimately causing water penetration and, consequently, extensive structural damage. Natural appropriation illustrates the fragile dependence of the intended function from the social order of an architectural structure.

We differentiate renaturation into abiotic and biotic natural processes. Abiotic processes are all kinds of physical decay, especially by gravitation (Fig. 3/G), but also water damage (e.g. caused by defective plumbing) and frost shattering. Biotic processes, including the colonisation of plant and animal species, are typically more progressive. Decaying architectural structure and their vicinity are equivalent to a (natural) ruderal environment. Consequently, LPs are affected by a secondary biotic succession with different stages, initiated by pioneer species (Fig. 3/H). Without further human influence increasing colonisation with perennial plants takes place, until trees start finally growing (cf. Fig. 4). Nevertheless, the ecological characteristics of these environments differ from natural ones: first, the pioneer stage may persist longer due to infertile soil (e.g. acidity/alkalinity conditions in industrial sites) and, second, ongoing physical disturbances (e.g. successive collapse of the architectural structure) can hinder the further spread of vegetation. The hybridity of LPs is impressively demonstrated in the colonization of the places by moss and fungi (Fig. 3/I).

Once the normative order of a place disappears (loss of functionality), the appropriation processes commence. Our field research showed that LPs are typically affected by multimodal, isochronous appropriation processes. Hence, the appropriation in most cases is not only assignable to one single process. In addition, the loss of function is not necessarily a continuous state. LPs can therefore also be re-established in a normative order. In the next section we discuss a procedural concept that can merge the key elements of the origin of LPs.

<sup>4)</sup> This term refers to the focus on post-war Austria as the first victim of Hitler's Germany and National Socialism and the subsequent categorical rejection of Austria's responsibility for the National Socialism regime's crimes.

### 3 Transition concept

Following the definition given in section 2, LPs represent (past) episodes of different functions and different users, superimposed by natural processes. Like a fading sequence of layers, LPs retain traces of these different appropriations of space and can be related to the concept of palimpsests (GRAHAM 2009; EDENSOR 2005a). In the simplest case LPs as palimpsests are characterized by the loss of functionality for the owner and at least one layer (trace) of anthropogenic or natural successive superimposition. After the loss of functionality, however, LPs are typically affected by overlapping multiple appropriation processes. Consequently, the temporal boundaries of the layers are not necessarily successive (chronologic) but rather may blur into each other. BAILEY (2007) calls this type of palimpsests ‘cumulative palimpsests’. Considering LPs as multitemporal and multimodal composite places, is well suited, to reveal the ambiguous meaning of LPs (Fig. 4).

LPs are of hybrid origin, contradicting the normative ordering originally intended by the owner. Nevertheless, they still bear the imprint of function original intended. It is due to the resulting ambiguity that authors dealing with the subject of LPs (however terminologically referred to) often refer to FOUCAULT’S notion of heterotopia (e.g. DESILVEY and EDENSOR 2012). FOUCAULT’S concept of heterotopia describes places that exist outside (beyond) the normal (logical) order (FOUCAULT 2005). Heterotopias guarantee the social order/norm by concentrating on the social non-conformative. In this way, they facilitate a social-normed functioning and/or educate others to behave according to social-norms. However, FOUCAULT’S heterotopias are neither abandoned, nor have the necessarily lost the function originally intended. They simply gain additional, out of the ordinary, functions. Therefore, the concept of heterotopia is not appropriate for LPs from our point of view, because the process of abandonment is a key to the definition of LPs.

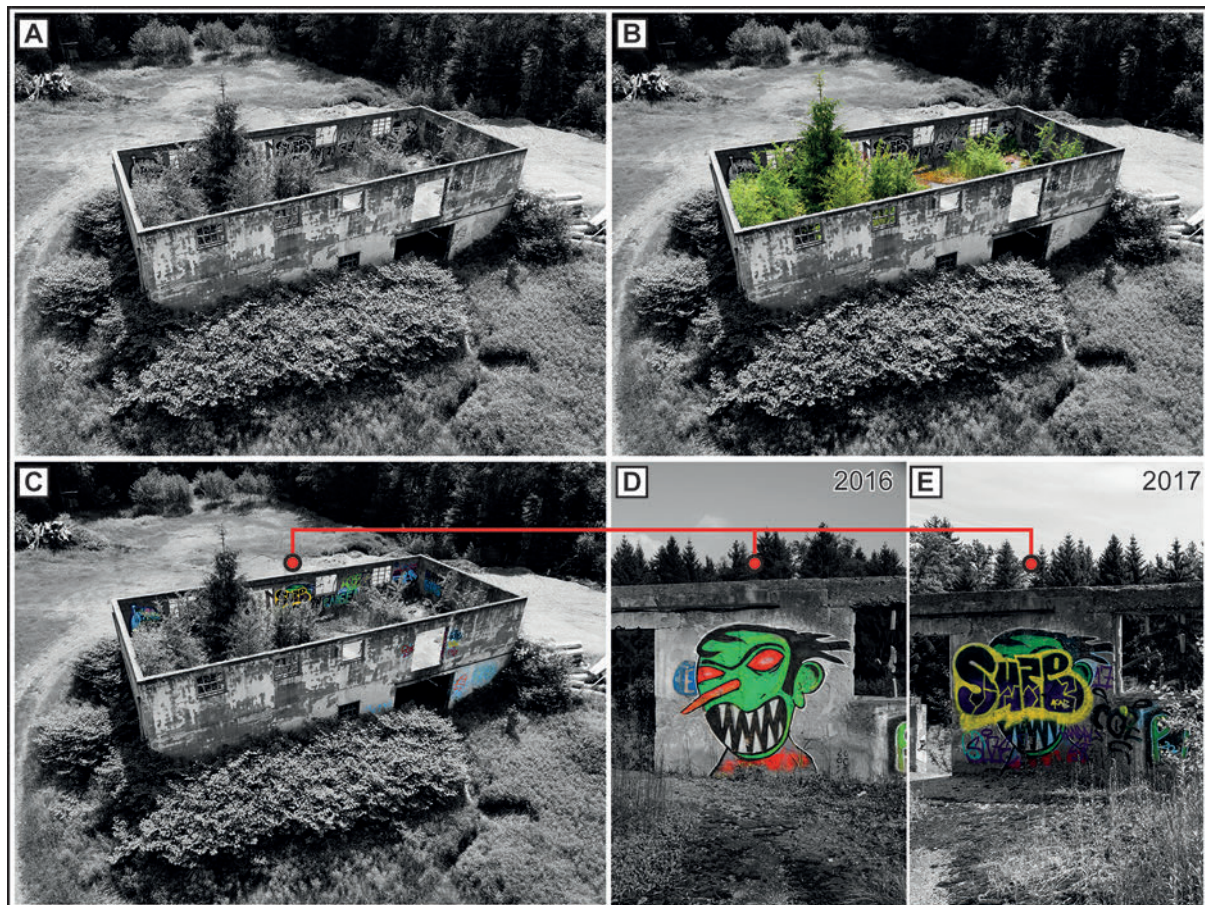


Fig. 4: LPs as palimpsests. Fig. 4/A: Cumulative palimpsest. Note that the current state of this LP embodies a set of unknown episodes; Fig. 4/B: Natural processes, represented by the invasion of species (colour key), superimposes the architectural structure; Fig. 4/C: LPs as playground for hedonistic activities (colour key). This appropriation of space is isochronous with the invasion of species; Fig. 4/D-E: Detail insert of a palimpsest of graffiti. Photos: BAUER.

The origin of LPs requires a transition concept that contradicts the temporal continuity of normative order and instead offers the opportunity to conceive anti-normative and unintended appropriation processes as a passage of functionless architectural structures. Disrupted from the normative order, the architectural structures become re-arranged by coexisting, multimodal, but ephemeral episodes (which accumulate in palimpsests). We want to highlight that LPs do not entail the unavoidable climax of buildings. In fact, the superimposition of abandoned architectural structures and their status as lost are limited in time, if indeed they take place at all. For most architectural structures either a seamless transition of sub-sequent functions is planned (e.g. taking over a house or company) or prompt demolition, thus preventing the edifice from becoming lost. If the architectural structure gets superimposed by additional appropriation processes not intended by the owner, the episode of being lost can also take its effect over a long period of time. This could be the case, for example, if architectural structures are lost for decades but get revitalized with the objective of preserving the existing historic, structural condi-

tion. We propose a concept that offers an epistemological basis for research on places getting lost, relating to the cultural and natural sphere of causations at various times and scales: the concept of liminality. This concept - based on the term liminal (eponymous for boundary) - was coined by the anthropologist VAN GENNEP (1909) and developed further by TURNER (1966) for complex societies (MORAN et al. 2013). In his concept VAN GENNEP (1909) calls the transition to adolescence 'rite de passage' and defines three phases with clearly recognizable boundaries (limes): (1) separation ('rites de séparation'), (2) margin ('rites de marge' = liminal phase) and (3) aggregation ('rites d'aggregation'). Conceptualized for social and cultural contexts of rites, VAN GENNEP'S theory was applied in geographic research of physical (e.g. PRITCHARD and MORGAN 2005) as well as for spaces of the imagination/representation (e.g. MADGE and O'CONNOR 2005). The evolution of LPs can be perceived as a rite of passage, a liminal space for multimodal appropriation processes (Fig. 5). In contrast to VAN GENNEP'S and TURNER'S clear and distinct delineation, the boundaries of a LP rite of passage are blurred or even nearly dissolved. The phase of



Fig. 5: LP (former brick factory) as rite de passage. Fig. 5/A: Phase of separation. The normed order is disappearing increasingly; Fig. 5/B: The liminal phase illustrated by the disordered structure due to alternative appropriation processes (in the particular case illegal waste dumping and fire raising). The fire spread in the year 2017 damaged even the roof. Such processes may cause the complete lack of functionality of the former function intended; Fig. 5/C: Phase of aggregation (2018). The architectural structure is becoming subject to a new utilization and is thus being refurbished; Fig. 5/D-E: UAV-photos, exterior-view of the same LP, illustrating the ongoing re-establishment of a normed order (e.g. weed control). Photos: BAUER.

separation corresponds with the loss of functionality. During this phase the architectural structure appears abandoned but additional appropriation processes have not yet taken place (Fig. 5/A). At this point it is still open, whether the structure traverses the liminal phase or not. It is also possible that the function originally intended may continue after a rather short interruption period. This could be the case, for example, for a company that is insolvent (e.g. stop in production due to takeover) or perilously close to insolvency (e.g. production stop) and therefore has temporarily ceased production. The liminal phase describes architectural structures that no longer hold the function originally intended. Yet they likewise do not belong to anything new, i.e. they are at non-normative, in-between stage (Fig. 5/B). TURNER (1966) highlights the unstructured characteristic of the liminal stage. The same applies to LPs. Utilized by multitudinous appropriation purposes, they become prevalent unstructured and disordered in their liminal phase. The former infrastructures and interior for maintaining the function intended are modified, rendered and re-contextualized due to alternative appropriation processes. This corresponds to the visual absence of order as the anti-normed demarcation for LPs. Finally, LPs may re-integrate and switch over into a new function for the owner (e.g. refurbishment). Alternatively, they can be destroyed by the owner (in order to obtain a new function beyond the architectural structure) or due to natural processes (e.g. structural collapse). This phase of aggregation is accompanied by the (re) integration of the architectural structure to a conventional social ordering (Fig. 5/C).

#### 4 Conclusion

The focus of this contribution has been on defining LPs and thus to develop the term as an academic, anchored research object. The origin of LPs follows two main trajectories: first, the loss of functionality of an architectural structure and, second, the appropriation of that structure, which can be both summarized as the afterlife of architectural structures. Since a material place has no function within itself, the loss of functionality emerges only through the perspective of the property's owner. Our field survey including the observation of LPs over a period of four years has led the following results: (1) Based on the definition we offer in this paper, LPs are not a rare feature. In fact, there are a lot of them, and they are not only limited to industrial ruins as discussed in most

of the literature. However, they appear much less noticeable than the picturesque derelict places that are often portrayed in the social media and popular science books; (2) The origin of LPs is very dynamic. This dynamic was observed several times in the study area even in a period of four years; (3) Therefore LPs require a concept that is able to grasp appropriation processes in-between natural and cultural transitions. Based on our research, we consider the concept of liminality to be suitable. Because liminality captures LPs as a transformation of functionless architectural structures through anti-normative and unintended appropriation processes, as an (ephemeral) transition. In that pursuit, LPs are considered to be cumulative palimpsests, portraying dynamic episodes of different functions by different users and overlapping multiple appropriation processes.

We think that the temporality of LPs points to issues that need further research. As mentioned above, the status of being lost does not entail the unavoidable climax of architectural structures. Previous studies focused primarily on the analysis of derelict places as a static snapshot. But, the temporalities of LPs (meaning the 'rite de passage' of an architectural structure from the loss of functionality and the further appropriation processes, including the reintegration of a LP into an ordered structure or its destruction), do not represent a continuity, but are often subject to very rapid changes. Our field survey and continuous observation showed that these changes also occur in the relatively short period of four years. Following LUCAS' (2013) categorization into 'slow ruins' and 'fast ruins', DE SILVEY and EDENSOR (2012) differentiate between abrupt transition (due to war devastation and natural disasters) and the gradual transition (due to socio-economic transition) of ruins. Even if this temporal scale of the ruination is coherent in many cases, in the context of LPs, we do perceive difficulties in the assignment of slow and fast: (i) the process of ruination encompasses elements of the loss of functionality as well as elements of appropriation; (ii) these elements can, but do not necessarily, have the same temporal scale. For example, the loss of functionality of architectural structures may occur fast, but its appropriation might happen more slowly (in particular through renaturation). We agree with DE SILVEY and EDENSOR (2012) that structural economic changes lead to a more gradual loss of functionality (e.g. industrial decline). Nevertheless, regarding individual LPs, economically driven loss of functionality might occur rather fast. In fact, many LPs do not evoke the appearance of a gradually decline, but rather the abrupt absence of humans.

Finally, LPs are not a phenomenon of the last decades but rather apply to a wide range of time periods. Therefore, LPs offer the opportunity for studying imagined past. For example, a research on publications and user generated web-content reveals that urban exploring communities emphasize a dominant retrospective view on LPs. The ideal case is an untouched, pristine place, outside the realm of historic place and time. Due to alternative appropriation processes, deviations from expressions of nostalgic desire for the past (e.g. graffiti) are perceived as negative by urban exploring communities. This yearning for the imagined past raises questions of sociocultural issues of nostalgia (cf. BECKER 2018) in the field of urban exploring communities, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the imagined past of LPs is strongly linked to BAUMAN'S concept of retrotopia (2017). CLEGG (2018) describes retrotopias as retrospective and backward-looking utopias. In contrast to fictional utopias - which emerge from not yet existing and thus uncertain future visions - these retrotopias emerge from a lost/stolen/orphaned or undead past. In a way, this refers to what EDENSOR (2005, 829) called 'the ghost of places'. In an immaterial realm, this emergence of retrotopias can be understood as a counterpart to the material adaptation, utilization and exploitation of LPs (e.g. illegal urban mining). This kind of reuse of materials can be described as the technique of bricolage (LÉVI-STRAUSS 1962). Transferred to an existential level, this also holds true for the homeless constructing an ephemeral shelter from these wrecked places. Going back to the portrayal of the angel of history: We think that the accumulating wreckages, which Benjamin only sees dystopian, can also be perceived as raw material for the emergence of something new.

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