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Winning urban competition with a social agenda: The competition imaginary in Viennese urban development plans

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In the last decades many scholars have studied urban competition and entrepreneurial urban policies. Coming from the evolving field of competition research, we are interested in how urban competition is constructed and, for this purpose, examine the competition imaginary of Vienna, a city known less for its entrepreneurial policies than for its social welfare policies. The paper employs critical discourse analysis of Viennese policy papers from 1985-2015, a period particularly shaped by the process of competitization. The analysis shows that Vienna's social and welfare policies are also decisive for the city's positioning in urban competition and rankings.

Keywords: urban competition - urban policies - Vienna - competition imaginary - extra-economic competition - entrepreneurial city - social welfare policies

1 Introduction

Competition among cities has become a much researched topic in recent decades, especially in light of the shift in urban policy toward the concept of the entrepreneurial city (Harvey 1989; Begg 1999; Cheshire 1999; Jensen-Butler 1999; Jessop and Sum 2000; McCann 2004; Kaufman and Arnold 2018; Jessop 2019). With its long tradition of welfare and social urban policies the city of Vienna is an interesting example in this regard since it has a special position as a not fully entrepreneurial, but at the same time very successful city in urban competition and rankings. Interestingly, some of the very aspects that have been dominating Vienna's social and welfare policies are also decisive for the positioning of Vienna in city competition and city rankings. In this paper we want to explore this ambivalence by examining what we call, adapting a term by Jessop et al. (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008; Sum and Jessop 2013), the *competition imaginary* in Viennese urban development plans. We ask how competition between cities is imagined by the Vienna city government and administration and how this has changed since the 1980s, a period particularly shaped by the process of competitization. Coming from the evolving field of competition research and emphasizing the constructed character of competition and competitization as a reversible process, we are interested in how competition comes about (Werron 2015; Arora-Jonsson et al. 2021). In this paper we are especially interested in the discursive side of this construction of competition. Thus, we understand the Viennese urban development plans not just as reflecting or reacting to urban competition but as co-constructing competitive relations between cities by performing the aforementioned competition imaginary. By following this approach our contribution is twofold: First, we expand research on the entrepreneurial city focusing on a city that has not fully followed this entrepreneurial orientation, but that is ambivalent

about this policy change. Second, we contribute to competition research by studying the discursive construction of competition using the example of city competition.

In the remainder of the paper, we will discuss research on urban competition, conceptions of and ways to study competition between cities as constructed (section 2), present our methodological approach (section 3), analyze shifts in the Viennese competition imaginary since the 1980s along urban development plans (section 4) and conclude with some general reflections on competition between cities and the special case of Vienna.

2 Researching the constructed nature of competition between cities

The rise of competitive relations between cities

In the last decades, many scholars from different disciplines have been concerned with city competition and described an increase of urban competition and rankings since the 1980s (Begg 1999; Cheshire 1999; Jensen-Butler 1999). As described by many scholars, this increase of competition went along with a new orientation of urban policy. Cities strive less for social cohesion but for competitive advantages over other cities in an integrated world market and therefore adopt entrepreneurial strategies to enhance competitiveness (Harvey 1989; Jessop 2019). Examples include the commodification, marketing and branding of cities (Harvey 1989; Zukin 1998; Reckwitz 2009) and the orientation to the results of competitive rankings and evaluations (Mattissek 2008; McCann, Roy und Ward 2013).

Competition takes place with regard to a variety of ‘scarce goods’: investors and financial capital, global companies and new jobs, potential residents, subsidies from different institutions (e.g., EU funds), awards and prizes (e.g., in the case of European Capital of Culture, Habit 2013), tourists and first places in myriads of rankings. As becomes clear from this list, cities compete not only in the economic sphere, but also in terms of extra-economic aspects that are 'not monetised and/or do not enter directly into exchange relations' (Jessop and Sum 2000: 2290). Increasingly, city governments target these latter aspects, not least because extra-economic aspects gain more significance in economic competition, especially place-specific assets as so-called soft location factors (Jessop and Sum 2000; McCann 2004; Kaufman and Arnold 2018: 2704; Jessop 2019: 4).

Vienna is an interesting example regarding competition as the city is known less for a pronounced competitive orientation than for its long tradition of social urban policies dating back to the 1920s, the time of 'Red Vienna' (Gruber 1991; Blau 1999; Kadi and Suitner 2019), a point that is currently reflected in the frequent mention of Vienna as an example of best practice in housing policy (Paul 2018; Leonhard 2019; Punz 2019; Channel 4 Documentaries 2019). Nevertheless, also Vienna has undergone a change in economic and urban policy from municipal socialism and a corporatist form of social democratic

urban governance towards the entrepreneurial city since the 1980s when Vienna began to understand itself as part of a larger urban network (Novy et al. 2001; Dangschat and Hamedinger 2009; Grubbauer 2011; Novy 2011; Suitner 2015; Kazepov and Verwiebe 2021; Suitner 2021). Monika Grubbauer, for example, noted that there was a shift in terms of a restructuring of the city administration, the outsourcing and privatization of municipal companies, tighter budgets, the introduction of new urban planning tools and policies implemented in favor of prioritizing private capital accumulation (Grubbauer 2011: 36, 106). Especially since the 2000s, development policy has been much more focused on competitiveness, locational policies and strategic thinking (Suitner 2015: 122; Suitner 2021: 895). Nevertheless, as several scholars attest there was no full-fledged adoption of neoliberal policies and Vienna is *not* a prime example of an entrepreneurial city (Novy et al. 2001; Dangschat and Hamedinger 2009; Grubbauer 2011; Kazepov and Verwiebe 2021; Suitner 2021). Thus, political change since the 1980s in Vienna was ambivalent between welfare and competitive policies. However, Vienna is not only known for its long tradition of social urban policies but has been famous for years for several first places in various rankings, for example in the Mercer Quality of Life index, the EIU Global Liveability Ranking, the Roland Berger Smart City Index or the Netexplo Smart Cities 2020 Prize. Thus, Vienna is what Eugene McCann called a 'success story' in urban competition (McCann 2004: 1919). This special position as a not fully entrepreneurial, but at the same time very successful city in urban competition makes Vienna a particularly interesting example to study competitization. Even more interesting is that some of the aspects that were important in the context of the welfare tradition are also crucial for Vienna's current positioning in city competition and city rankings.

The competition imaginary of cities

As mentioned above, the term *competition imaginary* is an adaptation of the concept of *economic imaginary* (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008; Sum and Jessop 2013). The concept was developed as part of an approach to cultural political economy to analyze the 'semiotic systems that provide the basis for the lived experience of an inordinately complex world' (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008: 1157). From this perspective it is not only the 'actually existing economy' that matters, but also 'the ‘economy’ [...] as an imaginatively narrated, more or less coherent subset of these activities occurring within specific spatio-temporal frameworks' (Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008: 1157). Economic imaginaries are accordingly always selectively defined configurations of genres, discourses and styles around a particular conception of the economy.

We adapt this concept by applying it to competition rather than the economy and ask how actors imagine competition between cities. In this sense, we can understand competition imaginaries as the selection, retention and reinforcement of competition as a semiotic order. The central question is to what extent and in what ways actors understand, frame and narrate social relations, and in our case relations between cities, as competitive. Following this approach, we understand urban development plans as tools that

perform a specific competition imaginary. Thus, in this paper we are interested in how the municipality of Vienna, in urban development plans, tries to make sense of competitive relations between cities and how it positions itself in this respect while at the same time co-constructing these competitive relations. In particular, we examine in which way the competition imaginary of this actor has changed since the 1980s, a period particularly shaped by the process of competitization.

The ontological status of competition between cities

However, competition among cities is far from a straightforward and immediately obvious concept. In many studies it seems to be unclear, in particular, what the ontological status of city competition is. We would like to point out three ontological aspects of urban competition as we conceptualize it:

First, in many studies competition between cities is taken for granted as a universal relation between cities (Giffinger et al. 2010; Kaufman and Arnold 2018). Thus, these studies reproduce a specific competition imaginary - competition as a universal relation (Gräbner and Pühringer 2021). The present paper takes a slightly different approach and comes from the evolving field of competition research (Werron 2015; Arora-Jonsson et al. 2021). We understand competition between cities as part of a larger field of research that deals with the process of competitization. Thus, we do not take competition between cities for granted but are rather interested in how competition comes about. As studies have shown, competition is not a necessary kind of relationship between social entities (e.g., cities), but rather the result of a multidimensional process of competitization entailing the organization of competition but also the creation of scarce goods (e.g., via rankings, Brankovic et al. 2018) and the construction of competing actors (Arora-Jonsson et al. 2021). Competitiziation can be seen as an expansion of competitive formats in different social and economic areas. However, the organization of competition does not necessarily mean that social entities behave as competitors and actually compete (Arnold 2021; Arora-Jonsson 2021). In the present paper we pursue this approach by looking at how city competition is discursively constructed and more generally at how discourses have an impact on understandings of relations between cities (Healey 1999; McCann 2002, 2004; Ringel and Werron 2020). Moreover, not only competition is discursively constructed but also the spatial entities competing, in our cases the cities themselves. Thus, the competition imaginary is connected to a spatial imaginary (Watkins 2015; Davoudi et al. 2018). Nevertheless, these constructions are not all encompassing, but more or less successful. Thus, while certain actors may try to establish and 'perform' city competition, this does not mean that cities are successfully competitizized. Following this line of thought, in the present paper we focus on the competition imaginary as a way of performing competition and, thus, as part of the process of competitization.

Second, in many studies it remains unclear what city competition actually refers to and what cities compete for. And even when the scarce good being competed for is mentioned, specific competitions or competition formats between cities are rarely referred to. Rather, these studies refer to city

competition in general terms, as if cities were competing with each other regardless of specific competitions. Against this conception of city competition in singular[a], we are interested in the different concrete formats of competition and how they are addressed in the competition imaginary. Thus, how competition is imagined - whether in singular or in plural - should be examined empirically and should not be presupposed beforehand. In this regard, we will argue that to understand the changes in the competitive imaginary since the 1980s, one must understand the diversification of competitions in the plural. As will become clear, the vagueness of the reference to concrete competitions between cities is a characteristic feature of the competition imaginary in the empirical material we studied.

Third, in many of the studies cited above, competition refers to economic competition and extra-economic aspects appear as 'soft factors' (Jessop and Sum 2000; McCann 2004; Giffinger et al. 2010; Kaufman and Arnold 2018; Jessop 2019). In this paper, however, we do not understand extra-economic aspects exclusively as resources in economic competition, but are interested in the mutual relations between economic and extra-economic aspects as well as relations between desired, scarce goods and resources as they are put into practice by the city of Vienna. As Nils Brunsson and Linda Wedlin point out, even though competition for one good may be intertwined with the competition for another good, it is important to distinguish them analytically (Brunsson and Wedlin 2021: 93).

3 Methodological approach

To reconstruct the competition imaginary of Vienna empirically, we examined Vienna's urban development plans, the so-called STEPs (Stadtentwicklungspläne). The STEPs[b] provide a long-term strategic orientation for different stakeholders engaged in urban development. They are commissioned approximately every ten years by the *Municipal Department for Urban Development and Urban Planning* MA 18 under the consideration of different interest groups. Hence, these strategy documents can be described as consensus of diverse stakeholders and as guidance for political action, although they are not legally binding. Following a Foucauldian tradition. we argue that this form of urban planning can be understood as so called ‘soft-governance’, which has increased in the neoliberal era (Foucault 2010; Davies 2014).

The four STEPs published since the 1980s (see table 1) cover a period of 30 years of urban development planning and therefore, allow to trace shifts in the competition imaginary of Vienna. They reflect changing economic conditions such as globalization, European integration and demographic changes, but also shifts in discourses and norms, for example the impact of the neoliberal rhetoric of competitiveness and the orientation towards rankings. Reciprocally, narratives and guiding norms for

[a] This can also be seen in the fact that urban competition in discourse is only formulated with definite articles or without any articles at all. Instead of 'an urban competition', either 'the urban competition' or 'urban competition' is used.
[b] Since there is only a shortened version in English for some of them, we analyzed the German versions of the STEPs and translated quotations.

orientation of urban development are also advanced by the STEPs. In this regard, we understand the STEPS as tools of imagineering in which cities discursively position themselves in relation to their intended image and thus, as a form of self-affirmation (Grubbauer 2011: 35). While the residents, the city administration as well as various stakeholders are addressed, the exact addressees of the policy papers remain somewhat unclear. Moreover, style, language, visual presentation and argumentation change from the older STEPS (84; 94) to the more recent ones (05; 25) towards non-professional readers, suggesting that a larger audience is being targeted at.

[insert table 1]

Our methodological approach to analyze the changing competition imaginary present in the STEPs is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA conceptualizes language as a tool to construct social reality and achieve social and interpersonal objectives by creating trans-subjective meaning (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fairclough, 2013; Wodak and Meyer 2016). The aim of CDA is to deconstruct legitimate knowledge about reality, i.e. the ideas that are structuring discourse, and the power relations that are revealed in discourse positions (van Dijk 1996, 2006; Fairclough 2013,). In this regard, we argue that the competition imaginaries present in the STEPs provide shared knowledge for policy makers that structure their thinking and practices and define legitimate policies to deal with socio-economic or political problems, for instance globalization, European integration or demographic changes (Schmidt 2011). In doing so, this knowledge restrains the scope of possible political action, i.e. the competition imaginaries narrow the space for legitimate policies. In this paper, we seek to deconstruct this knowledge and hence, de-naturalize competition as a social and economic order. For this purpose, we aim to empirically reconstruct the competition imaginary of the STEPs by analyzing how, for which purposes and in which contexts competition is imagined. Though, while illustrating the extent and the way in which competition between cities is constructed discursively, we also consider changes in the material, socio-economic environment of the city of Vienna throughout the analysis.

More specifically, we employed a software-assisted (MAXQDA), corpus-based CDA of the four STEPs in two phases: First, we applied a standardized catchword-retrieval to isolate passages from the STEPs that should be considered for our further analysis (see e.g., Mulderrig 2008 for the use of catchwords in CDA). The catchwords were intended to cover passages in which the competition imaginary becomes apparent. Hence, we used ‘attraktiv’ (attractive), ‘führ*’ (lead*), ‘internationaler Vergleich’ (international comparison), ‘konkurr*’ / ‘wettbewerb*’ (compet*), ‘Positionierung’ (positioning), ‘Sichtbarkeit’ (visibility), ‘Spitzen*’ (top) and ‘Standort’ (location).

Second, we developed a coding-system with 8 dimensions that facilitated the further analysis through a first assessment of the retrieved text passages: (1) general goals of the city of Vienna, (2) scarce resources/aspects of comparison, (3) spatial comparison/scale in competition, (4) strategies in competition (with the sub-dimensions challenges, strategies and goals), (5) governance of competition,

(6) (self-)positioning of the city of Vienna (in competition), (7) resources in competition, (8) forecasts of competition. From these dimensions we reconstructed the changing competition imaginary of the city of Vienna. In the remainder of the paper, we present and discuss two aspects of the competition imaginary that are of particular interest for our approach: First, based on the dimensions of the 'scarce good', 'resources' and 'strategies' of competition addressed in the text passages, we examine the complex relationship between economic and extra-economic competitions and resources of the competition imaginary. Second, we focus on the ’spatial dimension' of the competition imaginary and thus analyze the relevance of local aspects in the construction of competitive assets and the changing scale of the competing social entities.

4 The Viennese competition imaginary over time

In the following section results of our empirical analysis of the competition imaginary of Vienna are presented. This section is structured along the four STEPs in our observed time period. Accordingly, each sub section sketches the socio-historical context, against which the respective STEP was written and also provides an overview of its general style, language, visual presentation and argumentation. The main part of each sub section, however, is dedicated to the reconstruction of main developments and shifts in the competition imaginary of Vienna. More precisely, our analysis rests on two main aspects of the Viennese competition imaginary noted in the last section: First, the multifaceted and often tense relationship between economic and extra-economic competition and resources, and second, the construction of competing spatial entities and local resources.

STEP 1984: A city fighting competitive decline

Preparations for the publication of STEP 1984 (STEP 84) started in the late 1970s and took until 1984 when the paper was put to vote in the regional parliament. This period also marks the end of the ‘golden years’ (Hobsbawm 1997) of prosperity after the second world war as several crises shocked the world economy. The foreword to this STEP by the then mayor Helmut Zilk explicitly takes up these developments when it states, that 'the present Urban Development Plan has been triggered not least by the end of the era of constant economic growth […]' (STEP 84: 1). The city did not only face the burden of economic stagnation and increasing unemployment (WIFO 1982, 1983) but also saw a severe decline of its population with a loss of 14% of inhabitants between 1955 and 1982 (approx. 250.000) (Weigl 2003; Oswalt 2006). Overall, this STEP is dominated by a narrative of decline and the city's efforts to counteract these developments.

Although during the 1970s the city started to implement some elements of participation to its urban development strategies as a reaction to citizens’ initiatives (Dangschat and Hamedinger 2009: 97) the STEP is characterized by a rather paternalistic planning perspective (Suiter et al. 2018: 29). This is

reflected in the discursive and graphic narrative e.g., when the mayor Helmut Zilk emphasizes in the foreword that regardless of the flexibility of the STEP, he wants to state, “clearly and unambiguously” that he will personally ensure that everyday decisions of the municipality are within the framework set by the urban development plan; “not just the text, but also in the spirit of the plan.” (STEP 84: 1) The imagery underlines this perspective; maps of the city are illustrated from a birds-eye planner's perspective while resembling microscopic organic formations. Furthermore, photographs show the city predominantly from above and images of the inhabitants' perspective and of everyday life are almost completely absent, compared to the newer STEPs.

The analysis revealed two competitive arenas which are key to the city's competition narrative: First, competition over inhabitants with the surrounding municipalities of Lower Austria and second, competition over (international) reputation and recognition.

The shrinking of Vienna's population is appointed to low birth rates and an aging population but also to the migration of inhabitants to the surrounding municipalities of Lower Austria. In the STEP, low quality of life is pictured as one reason pushing people out of the city which is why it is constructed as a key element in the competition over inhabitants. The importance of this issue predominantly follows economic reasoning, such as (a potential) labour force shortage and financial consequences for the city, as subsidies from the federal state depend on population size. Hence, it is the main concern for city planners to increase the 'attractiveness' of living in Vienna and to improve 'living, working and environmental conditions' (STEP 84: 145, 669) for inhabitants. In this regard Vienna aims to develop a vision of 'urban living' as a guiding principle to oppose the rival concept of 'a family home in the countryside' (p. 112). This way, STEP 84 repeatedly stresses Vienna's extra-economic assets: 'diversity, urban atmosphere, rich job opportunities, differentiated educational opportunities, excellence in cultural life, a wide range of leisure activities' (STEP 84: 118).

The second topic dominating competition narratives in this STEP is Vienna's position in an international competition with other cities over reputation and recognition. The STEP 84 presents city competition as an uncontested narrative when it points out that the city is facing 'constant competition with others who want to take away this special position from them' (34). City competition is discussed with regards to two arenas. First, there is a competition over tourists for which Vienna's cultural heritage is presented as a valuable resource. Second, there is competition for international political reputation, in which Vienna's geopolitical location between the capitalist West and the Soviet East is pictured as an advantage that enables the city to have a ‘mediating role’ (ib.: 34). Although both aspects are relevant regarding Vienna’s position in economic competition (e.g., being a headquarter for international cooperations, attracting tourists) the STEP itself frames these topics primarily as competition for (international) visibility and recognition. Vienna is presented as a city with valuable qualities as it holds a position as a place of 'international encounter' (ibid.: 34) (e.g., peace conferences, UNO city, important

international agencies) and capital of high culture, architecture and music. However, it is also threatened by falling behind. 'Since Vienna is in tough competition with other cities, it is not enough to rely on natural advantages or on what has already been achieved, but constant efforts are necessary to keep up with international developments and to maintain competitiveness' (STEP 84: 42). However, it is left unclear which form of competition is exactly meant.

Turning to the spatiality of the competitive imaginary we observe different spatial scales in regards to economic and extra-economic competition. The competition imaginary of economic competition is very much limited to the national container. Competitors for work force and business settlements are almost exclusively surrounding regions in Austria. The international level only plays a marginal role, e.g., when the city refers to attracting foreign labour force as one option to counterbalance population decline and also regarding tourism. In contrast, extra-economic city competition over reputation and Vienna's cultural and political importance is predominantly located on an international level. The report points to 'the increasing importance of international city tourism' (STEP 84: 105) and Vienna's favorable position because of its cultural heritage. The urge for international political recognition reflects Austria's overall foreign policy under the then chancellor Bruno Kreisky, which portrayed Austria as 'place of (international) encounter and dialogue' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1979). Moreover, as population decline is - among other things - appointed to low quality of life, local space itself (especially ‘green space’) -becomes an important resource in the competition over inhabitants. 'Landscape and nature conservation, together with environmental protection, are of decisive importance for the preservation and improvement of the quality of life in Vienna' (STEP 84: 123).

STEP 1994: New competitive relations in an international context

In the years surrounding the STEP 1994 (STEP 94), Vienna is confronted with two major changes: the fall of the ‘iron curtain’ in the year 1989 and the forthcoming European Union (EU) accession in the year 1995. While before Vienna was at the border of Europe next to the Soviet Union, it now is at the heart of Europe and soon going to be part of the European single market (Dangschat and Hamedinger 2009). These transformations of the competitive space gave rise to a different understanding of the competitive environment in the competition imaginary of Vienna: “For Vienna, this means an increased challenge from other centers in the European urban network: Berlin, Munich, Budapest or Prague and not Mödling, Eisenstadt or Vösendorf will be Vienna's competitors in the urban competition of the next decade.“ (STEP 94: 238). This transformation is also reflected in the printed maps pictured in the STEP 1994, in which the geographical space of reference became larger. In this context, a competition-oriented, proactive approach to urban policy arose that was favored by municipal political actors and the Viennese industry, who expected to benefit from globalization (Suitner 2021). Accordingly, these two reconfigurations of the competitive environment feed into the competition imaginary of Vienna: While the collapse of the Soviet Union is portrayed as an opportunity to make use of the local and

historical advantage of Vienna as former capital of the Austro-Hungarian empire (geopolitical position as competitive advantage), Austria`s entry into the EU is said to bring stronger European economic integration. Given the traditionally low level of outward orientation of the Viennese economy and the budgetary constraints the EU Maastricht-criteria pose on national fiscal policies (Novy et al. 2001: 139), both transformations of economic relations are seen on the one hand as a threat for Vienna: 'The new-forming Europe with tougher competition and competitive pressures [is accompanied by] the loss of ties that provide security, or at least the feeling of security' (STEP 94: 5). Likewise, the opening-up of new markets in Eastern Europe is said to lead to 'tougher competitive conditions' (ib.: 5), which demand international location profiling and the realization of prestigious large-scale projects (Novy et al. 2001; Suitner 20201). On the other hand, the EU gives rise to an understanding of Vienna as being part of a not yet explicitly defined regional cluster with extended opportunities/competitive advantages in international economic competition. In this context, involvement in competition for the better economic location for multinational enterprises and capital appears essential for growth, while party, clientelist and corporatist networks became more important for policy-making in comparison with Fordist planning (Novy et al. 2001). Hence, economic competitiveness becomes a major governmental concern, the creation of clusters an important strategy and knowledge a vital resource:

‘When a center reaches a ‘critical mass’ of mutually supportive activities, growth continues in a self-reinforcing manner (...): The agglomeration itself becomes the true locational advantage.” (STEP 94: 40)

As indicated by this quote, the economy is seen as self-dynamic and hardly shapeable by politics, while growth appears as a result of spatial concentration. According to this rationale, politics only has to create a business-friendly environment. This involves, firstly, knowledge and high-skilled human labor (“human capital”) so that a ‘brain drain’ becomes a serious threat to the Viennese economy, and secondly, ‘soft’ location factors to 'attract high-value economic activities when ‘hard’ location factors (transport links, technical infrastructure, …) are given.' (STEP 94: 241). Such ‘soft’ factors concern quality of life, that is for instance, leisure time, environment, culture, safety, housing and living environment. In this vein, the competitive advantage of green spaces in contrast to urban centers like London or Paris is emphasized in the self-image of Vienna as already in the previous STEP: 'The city of the future will be increasingly measured by its 'soft' location factors, which also include the quality of the landscape and the supply of basic land.' (ib.: 172). Further, the importance of services (e.g., for tourism) both as an economic and extra-economic factor increases in this STEP. So, Vienna is said to have competitive advantages in ‘soft’ factors that increase the attractiveness and economic strength of the city (in the STEP 05 ‘soft factors’ are the most important topic) also in comparison with other European capitals and as a proof of the success of the STEP 84. Consequently, the self-presentation of the city of Vienna is much more self-confident than in the previous STEP. Moreover, Vienna registered, contrary to what was predicted in the STEP 84, a sudden and rapid increase in population bringing new challenges especially for housing. This development is described as the main challenge for Vienna in

this period and is targeted with large-scale social housing programs. These programmes, but also private-public partnerships in the housing area contributed to a leveling-off of rent levels in Vienna compared to other (Austrian) cities (Novy et al. 2001). This STEP, thus, reflects tensions between perpetuating welfare planning and adopting a competitive development model (for debate see Suitner 2021).

STEP 2005: Increasing competitive advantage of soft location factors

The STEP 2005 (STEP 05) was elaborated against the background of a major shift in the geopolitical order of Europe with implications for the economic position of Vienna (Dangschat and Hamedinger 2009: 97): first, the accession to the European Union in 1995 and second the enlargement of the EU to the East of Europe in the 2000s (Suitner 2015: 116). Many of Austria's Eastern European neighboring countries became EU member states which changed the position of Vienna from the margin of the EU to the center of it. For the strategic positioning of Vienna in this new geopolitical order the STEP 05 refers to the initiative CENTROPE[c], a new region beyond the state borders, wherein Vienna is supposed to be developed as 'a Metropolis in Southern Central Europe' (STEP 05: 16). Concerning competition, the integration of Eastern European countries is pictured both as challenging and as creating an 'impulse' (ib.: 32) for Vienna. The STEP anticipates that under these new competitive conditions in Europe, Vienna can make the best use of its development opportunities if it 'concentrates on the advantages arising from accession' (ib.: 32). Growth is seen as one of those opportunities and is a major topic in this STEP. Besides meticulously elaborating different forecasts for demographic transformation of the city based on scenarios of population growth, the STEP 05 also attempts to emphasize the potential but also the threat of economic growth for the so-called 'soft location factors' (ib.: 33). In contrast to the previous STEPs the imagery changes and is dominated by photographs from the inhabitants' perspective, viewpoints and landscapes of the surrounding nature and of urban every-day life, which underlines the general orientation towards soft location factors. While rankings do not appear at all in the STEP 84, and the STEP 94 only implicitly refers to rankings, namely when the “rank of the city” (STEP 94: 181, 220) in relation to the economic position of the city is emphasized, in the STEP 05 ‘city rankings’ gain more relevance and are addressed in regards to multiple competitions, for example in the case of rankings for good tourism destinations (STEP 05: 136).

Soft location factors are key to the competition imaginary of this STEP and they illustrate the complex relationship between economic and extra-economic competition. The endangerment of soft location factors must be avoided, even by the potentials of growth, as this could be 'problematic for the residents

[c]The CENTROPE (Central Europe) initiative was founded by regional and municipal representatives from Austria (Vienna, Lower Austria, Burgenland), Slovakia (Bratislava, Trnava), the Czech Republic (Southern Moravia) and Hungary (Györ-Moson-Sopron, Vas) after the accession of these three neighbouring countries to the EU on 1 May 2004 (wien.gv.at).

as well as for future competitiveness', since soft location factors are 'increasingly regarded internationally as a key prerequisite for ‘competitive urban locations' (STEP 05: 33). The STEP 05 mentions a wide variety of soft location factors such as the urban and supra-regional natural area, the living and working situation, educational opportunities, urban spaces and urban diversity, creative industries and innovative milieus, leisure and cultural activities as well as health in the city. But considering the ontological status of competition it remains unclear whether these seemingly extra-economic aspects are an end in itself or an asset in economic location competition. A telling example is the ‘Biosphere Growth Region’, in which natural areas and national parks and their qualities are merged with their valorization as a resource and 'economic potential' (ib.: 91) for their economic growth of the urban region (ib.: 99). Also, quality of life illustrates different relations between economic and extra-economic aspects. While quality of life was already considered as an important aspect in the STEP 84 to attract residents, and in the STEP 94 as a competitive advantage, in the STEP 05 it is given a key, albeit ambiguous role. On the one hand, quality of life is addressed as an end in itself, which benefits the residents of the city and which must be preserved and further developed (ib.: 22). On the other hand, it is understood as a 'requirement for competitive urban locations' (ib.: 33) and as a 'soft factor' (ib.: 79).

The high standard of quality of life is explained by spatial assets when stated that 'it (quality of life) is based on the favorable geographical climatic and natural conditions (e.g., natural space, air, water, etc.)' (STEP 05: 79). Spatial assets thus, are valued and worth protecting as they are considered assets in competition. Furthermore, the category of space is central to the competition imaginary when spatial assets like nature and the new geopolitical position of Vienna, establish new territorial spatial references. As an example, the CENTROPE-Region is targeted as a 'green middle' (Grüne Mitte) connected by different national parks and landscapes between Vienna, Györ and Bratislava and establishes the Biosphere Growth Region previously mentioned. Concerning the scale of competition and the geopolitical position as a spatial asset, we can observe a further transformation in this report. Whereas in the 1980s the competition imaginary was focused on economic competition on a national between the city and its surroundings, the 1990s saw a transformation from competition to cooperation with these areas in order to increase economic competitiveness on an international level (creatings the spatial reference ‘Vienna Region’) (STEP 05: 20). With the institutionalization of the CENTROPE region we therefore observe an expansion to the transnational level.

STEP 2025: The multiplicity of competitions

The STEP 2025 (STEP 25) was published in 2014, yet the title is programmatic. The STEP 25 is aiming at sketching a forward-looking view on Vienna and is following a strategic planning perspective, with an increased importance of Private Public Partnerships and the coalition of policy makers with interest groups from different fields in society (Suitner 2020). Against the background of the still pressing

consequences of the financial and economic crisis 2008, Vienna is confronted with intensified economic challenges, particularly with regard to the transformation of social housing (Litschauer and Friesenecker 2021). In the STEP 25, however, the city administration continually refers to the international reputation of being the most livable city since 2009 and stable population growth which is seen as a result of successful urban development. It is also the most decentralized STEP. The Councilor and Mayor distance themselves explicitly from a regulatory large-scale planner's perspective. Thus, urban planning is rather understood as management of governmental, societal and economic actors in 'various networks and initiatives' (STEP 25: 18). This STEP reads more like a political statement and self-positioning through pointing out core values while concrete spatial and technical projects and measures are outsourced via PPPs. The imagery barely contains any maps; it reads like a brochure with less text, more easily consumable graphics and large photographs which mediate a modern 'lively urbanity'. In this vein the STEP defines the following principles for Vienna's future development: Vienna as a 'livable, socially and gender equitable, learning, cosmopolitan, prosperous, integrative, ecological, participatory' city (ib.: 21).

In the STEP 25, 'hard factors' and 'soft factors' continue to be described as essential, but in addition, the aspects treated under these terms appear in competitive contexts and in competitive frames that are not reduced to economic location competition. Vienna is to achieve a top position in various fields, not only in economic location competition, for example as 'one of the leading European research metropolises' (STEP 25: 27), as an 'international leader' in terms of the share of public transport in the modal split (ib.: 102), as 'one of the leading international metropolises' in terms of gender equality policy (ib.: 16), as the 'wealthiest city in the world' declared by the UN (ib.: 21) or as 'one of the most affordable cities in Europe' (ib.: 23). Quality of life is no longer just an end in itself or a 'soft factor' in economic competition but is itself a competitive goal (ib.: 21). Hence, the reference to rankings is gaining even greater importance than in the previous STEP 05 and it is emphasized that Vienna is 'among the leaders in a number of international rankings' (ib.: 20). However, in many passages it remains unclear whether the aspects cited are regarded as resources in economic location competition, in their own competitions, or even as an end in itself without competitive purpose. Often, reference is made to an unspecified attractiveness of the city without specifying who this attractiveness is supposed to appeal to. The concept of attractiveness simultaneously ties together different competitions and a seemingly universal value and does not clarify for whom this value applies - who doesn't want an attractive city?

Interestingly, some of the competitive framings in the competition imaginary of Vienna address aspects that were also decisive in the welfare tradition of the city such as equality or affordability. One important slogan in the self-presentation of Vienna in STEP 25, which directly links to the competition imaginary of Vienna, is 'affordable city', which is prominently used as title of the first section in the STEP ("We afford city", 12). To be an affordable city is confidently stressed against the background of the tense relation or opportunity costs of green spaces but also of social infrastructure and not least social housing,

especially in the center of Vienna, which accordingly also provides an attractive location as the Central Business District for companies. Consequently, an affordable city also means that different competitions can come into conflict with each other. This way, for instance Vienna's attempt to succeed in the competition of being the most-livable city in the world potentially challenges its position in economic market competition.

Compared to earlier STEPs, STEP 25 marks an important shift in the spatial competition imaginary of Vienna. Although green spaces have already been present as 'soft location factors' earlier, particularly the term 'quality of life' has become equally important to economic location competition in STEP 25. Hence, in order to remain the most liveable city in the world, STEP 25 also stresses the international attitude and reach of Vienna: 'Vienna is international, because its population and its economy are international' (STEP 25: 20). Yet, it remains unclear whether both the focus on extra-economic fields of competition as well as the increased international self-description of Vienna is resulting from a stronger orientation to rankings (and thus an indication of the performativity of rankings, see section 1) or whether top positions in ranking are used first and foremost as a marketing-oriented 'unique selling proposition' to survive in international city competition (Giffinger et al. 2010: 300).

Regarding the spatial entity of competition there are no further changes regarding the coverage or expansion of regions. However, we observe an intensification regarding the location marketing and labeling of spaces creating location brands (e.g., Stradtregion Plus, Vienna Region or CENTROPE) visible in the establishment of marketing organizations, websites etc.

5 Conclusion

We want to conclude by highlighting three aspects of the development of the competition imaginary of Vienna since the first STEP of the 1980s.

The transformation of the spatial entity of competition

The analysis of the discursive representations of spatial competition has shown that space is an important aspect of Vienna's competition imaginary. Specific attributes of the physical space are considered to contribute to and increase the competitiveness of the city. For instance, the geographical proximity to important international markets or trading hubs, the potential of specific districts within the city to attract tourists, or green space (nature) which contributes to the quality of life but also increases the attractiveness of the city for companies, workers, tourists etc.

The analysis of the STEPs has shown that the spatial entities in which competition is thought of, firstly, differ between the forms of competition (economic, extranon-economic), and secondly, are subject to change. When it comes to economic location competition, we can observe a transformation of the competitive entity from the city to transnational regions. This implies an extended understanding of

Vienna as part and center of a central European economic cluster facing international economic competition. One important explanation for this seems to be Austria's accession to the European Union which also subjects Vienna to European classifications, evaluations and policy tools (e.g., the implementation of the NUTS region classification in 2003). But economic regions are not only constructed by the EU but are also proactively produced by policy makers, e.g., through location branding (producing ‘place imaginaries’; Watkins 2015: 513). In contrast, with respect to other forms of competition, the city itself remains the key competitive entity and, thus, also remains a central element of the self-image of Vienna, not least in the reference to rankings that identify Vienna as the most livable city in the world.

From economic location competition to the multiplicity of competitions

In sum, an increase in the number and diversity of referenced competition formats can be observed from older to more recent STEPs. While competition between economic locations was the central point of reference in the STEP 84, the competitive references have diversified over time. However, the increase in competition does not necessarily mean an increase in economic competition. The relationship between economic location competition and extra-economic competitions is not straightforward and changes over time in favor of greater independence of competition formats beyond the economy. This ambiguous relationship between the realms of competition is also evident with regard to the goods addressed. Goods can sometimes be both: scarce goods for which cities compete and resources that can be used in competition. For example, top places in quality of life rankings are themselves cited as desirable aims in the later STEPs, but at the same time they are understood as resources for economic location competition. In general, quality of life is addressed as a 'soft factor', i.e., as a resource in the competition between economic locations, as an end in itself and as a competitive purpose in its own right. In some cases, one could speak of nested competitions: Scarce goods are sometimes themselves resources to achieve 'higher' scarce goods. For example, competition for educational institutions is a subcompetition in the larger competition for human capital or business location. Sometimes it is even difficult to distinguish whether a good is invoked as a goal or as a resource. In general, there is a greater variety of comparative aspects in later STEPs (e.g., social affairs, public transport, rankings), which are also treated less under the main aspect of economic location - i.e., more competitions but less economic competition.

Winning urban competition with a social agenda

This ambivalence becomes even clearer in the case of the city of Vienna, whose good positions in rankings and urban competitions result, not least, from the city's social welfare tradition. Examples for this successful position of Vienna are inter alia the winning of competitions for social housing policy such as the Netexplo Smart Cities 2020 Prize, but also the emphasis on equality and affordability as a

competitive purposes in their own right and in the mayor of Vienna's claim that the city is the 'world capital of social housing' (Ludwig 2009: 1). How can this strategy to win urban competition with a social agenda be understood? Could it be seen as an entrepreneurial strategy of being less entrepreneurial? Even if the construction of Vienna in the context of competition as a particularly social place may just be another way to gain value through extra-economic aspects and uniqueness of place, this still indicates fault lines in entrepreneurial city policies.

We argue that more attention should be paid to such ambivalences in the study of urban competition, and especially to cases like Vienna in which entrepreneurial policies are not followed down-the-line. This is all the more important because today's cities are, as noted, not confronted with a singular urban competition, but are located in an 'ecology of competitions' (for the term see Arora-Jonsson et al. 2021: 224). The paper shows that this competitization process of the last decades is difficult to grasp in a framework that focuses solely on economization. Competition can be found in regard to scarce economic goods as well as scarce extra-economic goods. Moreover, important aspects of social phenomena are overlooked when extra-economic competition is reduced to economic competition. While certainly extra-economic aspects play an important and growing role in economic location competition, the example we analyzed shows the multiplicity of competition beyond economic competition.

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Appendix:

Table 1:

Title of Document	Year of Publication
Municipal Department for Urban Development and Urban Planning MA 18: Urban Development Plan for Vienna 1984.	1985
Municipal Department for Urban Development and Urban Planning MA 18: STEP 1994. Urban Development Plan for Vienna.	1994
Municipal Department for Urban Development and Urban Planning MA 18: STEP 05. Urban Development Plan for Vienna.	2005
Municipal Department for Urban Development and Urban Planning MA 18: STEP 2025. Urban Development Plan for Vienna.	2014

Table 1: Policy documents used for the CDA