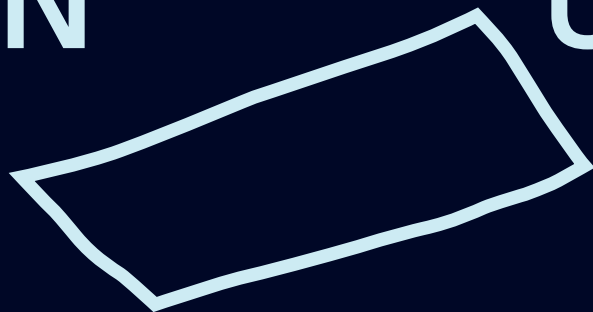
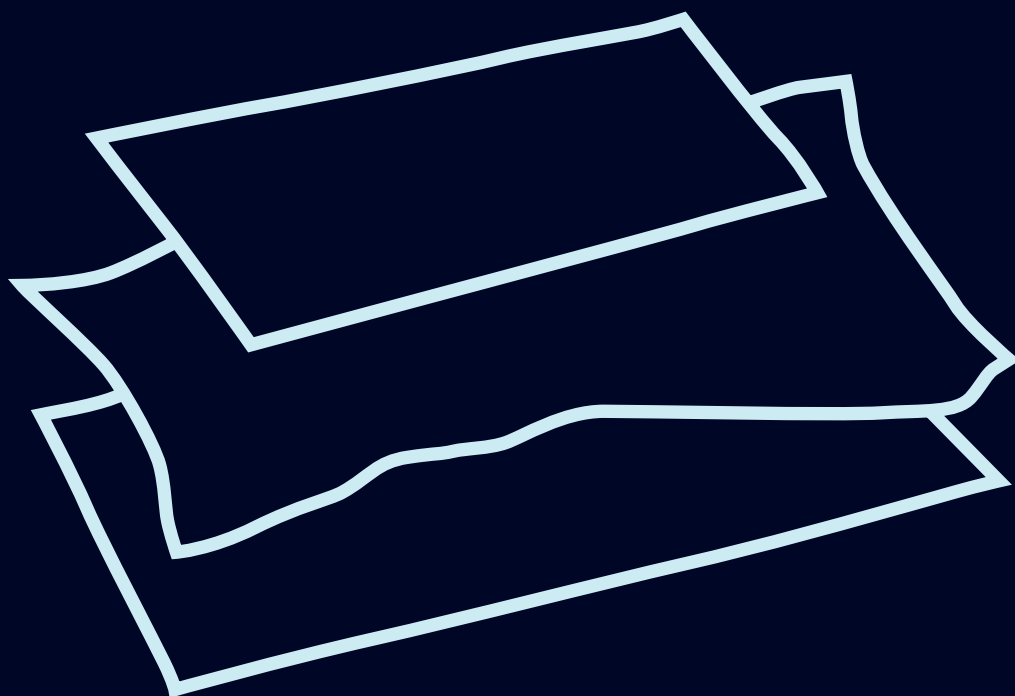


# EXPLORATIONS IN URBAN



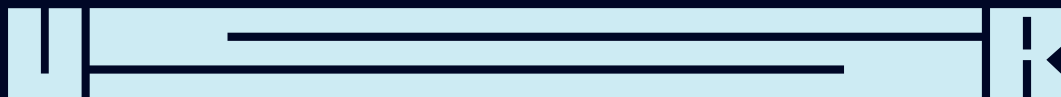
Edited by  
Katja Aßmann  
Markus Bader  
Fiona Shipwright  
Rosario Talevi

# PRACTICE



URBAN SCHOOL RUHR SERIES

**raumlabor**berlin





# ERKUNDUNGEN URBANER

Herausgegeben von  
Katja Aßmann  
Markus Bader  
Fiona Shipwright  
Rosario Talevi

# PRAXIS

URBAN SCHOOL RUHR SERIES

**raumlabor**berlin



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# 0.1 Editors' Note

Dear Readers,

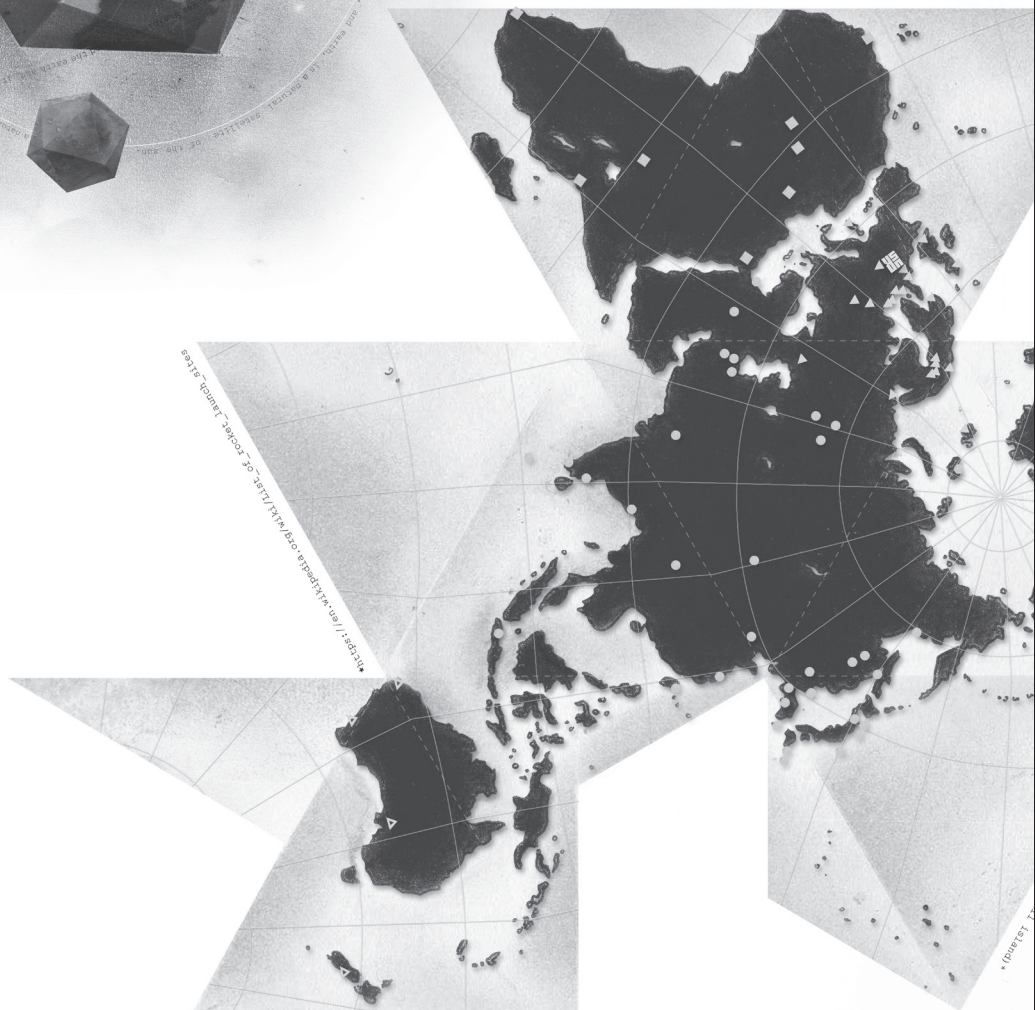
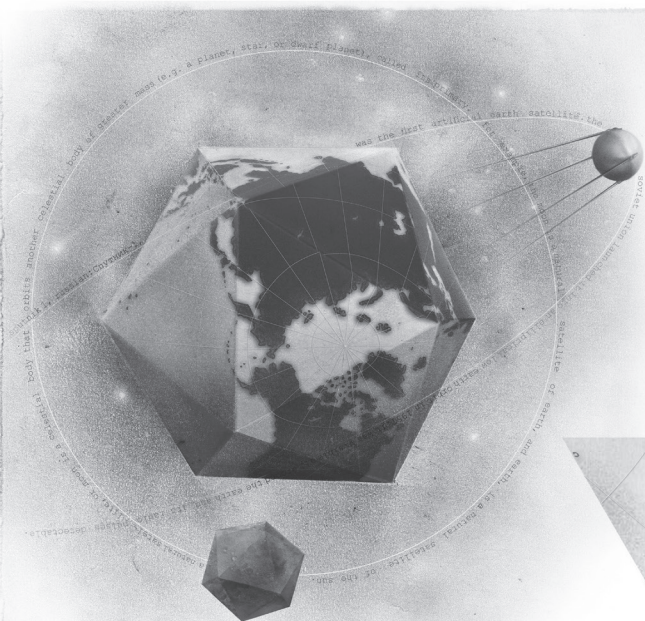
Welcome to the first edition in the Urban School Ruhr Series! This publication, *Explorations in Urban Practice*, is based on USR's experiences to date and draws upon the network and connections they have set in motion. It acts not solely as a document of past activities but also looks to the future of urban practice in contemporary cities. As well as including contributions from many USR participants, the book also brings in additional external voices and perspectives from across the fields of education, spatial practices and cultural production. In doing so, it serves as a handbook of sorts, a foundation for you, the reader, to launch new explorations and modes of practice beyond the frame of USR.

Organised under the umbrellas of the School's three departments – Spaces of Learning, Practices of Commoning, and Intervention as Strategy – *Explorations in Urban Practice* encompasses essays,

conversations, interviews and case studies, that suggest transversal approaches for co-producing the city. Illustrated by a rich collection of images taken throughout USR's activities so far, the book also indexes the sum of parts that make up the wider USR universe. Ranging from people and places across Europe to specific projects and broader practices from across the world – an index describes, on the one hand, the sheer amount and diversity of actors involved in making a school but also breaks down and makes intelligible a plethora of different approaches and initiatives that both current and curious practitioners can pick up on.

We would like to thank all the participants and contributors that made USR and this publication series possible. We look forward to exploring its continuing evolution!

The Editors

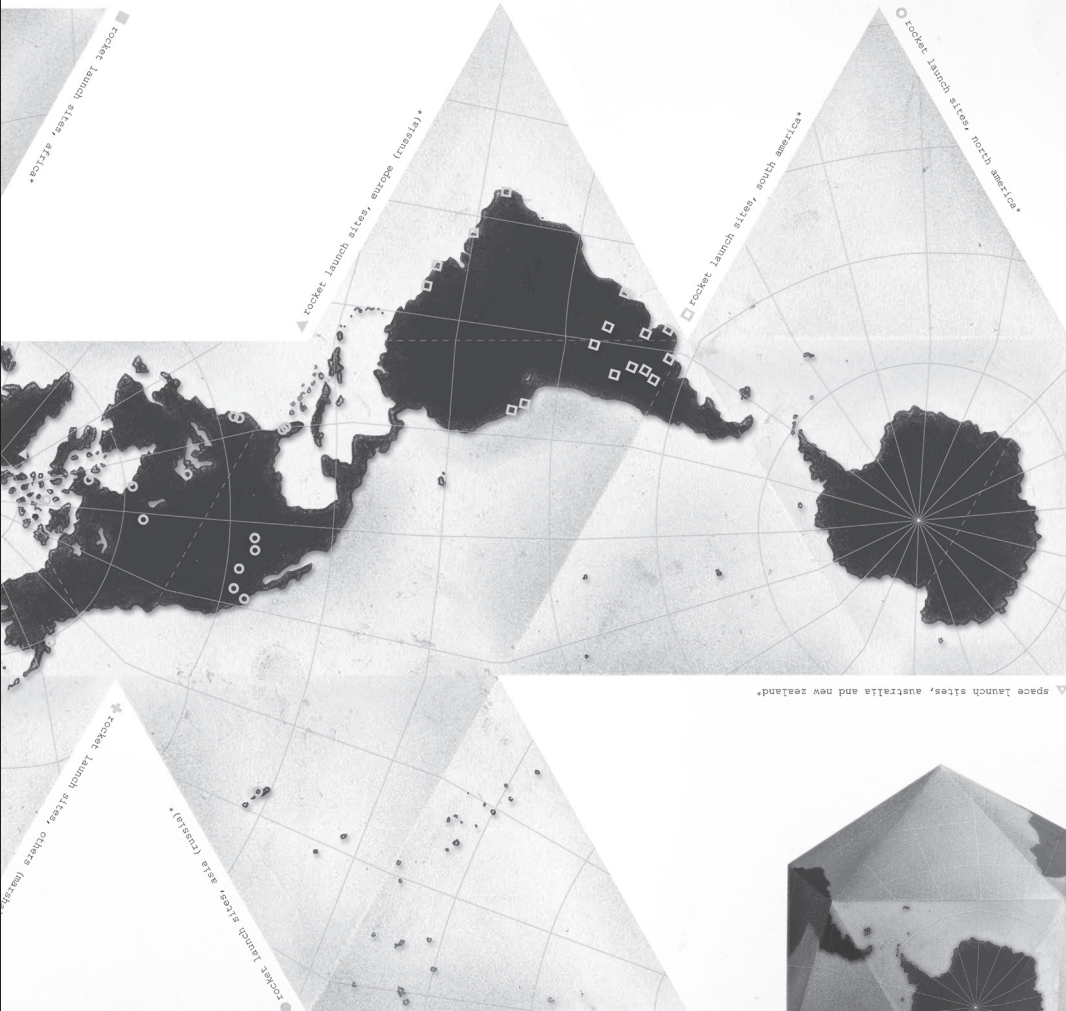


# MAD

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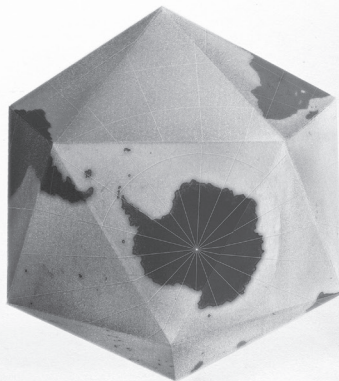
1000 km

SHIP



EARTH

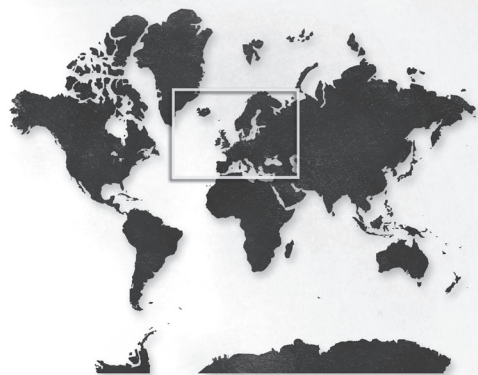
DYNAMAXION





# EUROPE

☐ capital cities  
 hauptstädte



\*mercator projection not in scale  
 \*mercatorprojektion nicht maßstabsgetreu

# UR

urban school ruhr  
 exploring possible cross-links  
 between artistic practise  
 and urban development,  
 in an inspiring learning environment

erforschung möglicher querverbindungen  
 zwischen künstlerischer praxis und stadtentwicklung  
 in einem inspirierenden lernumgebung



reykjavik



dublin

london

paris



lisboa

madrid madrid

andorra la vella

errbat ar-ribaay



SR

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0.3

**EXPLORATIONS  
IN**

**URBAN**

**PRACTICE**

**THE URBAN  
SCHOOL**

**RUHR**

**MARKUS BADER & ROSARIO TALEVI**



Urban School Ruhr is both a learning platform and a pedagogical experiment that investigates participative and artistic practices in urban space. During 2016, USR developed its activities through Assembly Seminars, On-Site Workshops, Discursive Dinners and AS/IF Installations that took place in the cities of Witten and Hattingen in Germany, as well as field trips to other European cities prior to the establishment of the school's Open Programme. All of these endeavours considered the role of citizens (and of the civic) in urban transformation: what can we do in this context? How can we get involved?

A self-proclaimed institution, the School has evolved through several different incarnations: from physical ephemera – a stamp, posters, maps, postcards – to a digital presence – the USR website and social media; from a nomadic entity – one-day meet-ups, four-day-long field trips – to its finally becoming situated in a specific context: the Ruhr region.

Cedric Price once asked: “technology is the answer, but what was the question?” Rephrasing this in relation to the Ruhr region is an interesting exercise: the area is an ex-industrial utopia fuelled by the post-World War II *Wirtschaftswunder* (“economic miracle”) and then transformed into a “model” cultural landscape, following Essen's naming as European Capital of Culture in 2010. With Urban School Ruhr we want to ask: culture is the answer, but what was the question?

Built upon a foundational belief that, together, experts and amateurs can initiate a space for conversation, the School prioritised exchange and dialogue that is not necessarily attached to specific outcomes, results or interventions in the built reality, instead understanding conversation as the first step

to co-producing cities. It therefore relied profoundly on immaterial production. By developing informal networks, nurturing friendships, investing in time-intensive encounters and commons-based, peer-to-peer exchange, USR shaped an emotional landscape of value in itself.

### CO-PRODUCTION AND ROLES, PROTOCOLS AND CODES

Understanding the School as being a space of co-production itself, the nature of, for example, the seminar format comprises more than just the output of a time-tabled session – as evidenced during an Assembly Seminar in which the group were to design and publish a fanzine. However, before that could happen, participants had to firstly build the classroom space: a large “bubble” structure on the roof of a shopping mall. This meant that the physical work of producing the setup became an equally important part of the exercise. Participants learnt how to set up an inflatable room, where to find electricity in the city, how to deal with the wind sensitivity of the structure – and also just how much physical labour is required to carry 800 litres of water into an inflated bubble.

The School also performs and inverts certain protocols, such as through the playful use of an “institutional” ink stamp and the reconfiguration of traditional academic hierarchies, like student/teacher. This tendency found a neat synchronicity via the spontaneous organisation of a public reading that took place under the Acropolis during USR's trip to Athens. Together with dpr-barcelona (publishers of the book you hold in your hands) USR officially launched their recently published book by Aristide Antonas, *Archipelago of Protocols*. Through this, we came to understand the very power of the term “protocol”. How do these production processes work? How can I step into them? What is to be done?



These two instances, atop a shopping mall and under the Acropolis, neatly encapsulated – and also enacted – two core principles underpinning the school’s governing ethos: “everywhere is a learning environment” and “everything is of equal importance”.

### DOING AS/IF...

Much of the School’s work involves looking at rhetoric in a very careful way. It seeks a language to use as a tool for understanding the city as a dynamic entity, with us as citizens placed within, constantly producing it with our actions. It is therefore a language that can describe the position of the individual in relation to larger forms, that includes actions as well as objects, emotions as well as thoughts.

In turn, discovering a new language in relation to city making offers us ways of doing differently. Unearthing the terms “dynamics” and “care” in a conversation with Anna Giulia della Puppa about Navarinou Park in Athens, for example, was very helpful for describing self-initiated processes of city making and urban development that incorporate the emotional, social and political energies of all those involved.

The two AS/IF Installations set in Witten’s main pedestrian street for just a few days before suddenly disappearing (“as if” nothing ever happened), operated in a similar fashion. As the urban designer Hans Venhuizen once put it, “doing as if” is very much “doing” itself. This ability to *do*, to actually enact urban transformation, has traditionally been seen as being exclusively the preserve of experts. As urban transformations take place over time, sometimes over the course of generations, it is a core aim of the School to transgress this threshold of abstraction.

### EXPLORATIONS IN URBAN PRACTICE

Cities constitute complex fields of interests and forms of life. They are both artefacts and processes at the same time since they exist as physical, social, political and economic environments in permanent transformation. The developments precipitated by the advance of late capitalism prompt renewed urgency for developing alternative ways of city making. Such models should be able to navigate the complexities, recognise the simultaneities and find ways of facilitating a social urban practice.

Urban practice can be understood as a transversal approach for enacting spatial transformation. It is a social and collaborative practice, for the art of city making cannot be limited to one single discipline nor can it be subject to a binary problem/solution logic. With this in mind, *Urban School Ruhr Series: Explorations in Urban Practice* is not merely a compilation of memories and anecdotes of a completed project; it is a book that expands the work of bringing ideas and people together, just as USR aimed at connecting practices with thoughts and positions from across a wide range of fields. Those thoughts and positions are set in this publication within essays, conversations and project portrayals from USR participants and new contributors alike.

Essays are thought here as instances for introducing a theoretical background, giving a contextual framework and historical dimension, or championing entirely new approaches altogether. For example, Sam Vardy and Julia Udall’s contribution expands on the long tradition and historical lineage of critical pedagogical experiments within and across the urban realm – a preceding history that USR builds upon. Their text reflects too upon the activities and spaces of learning

the School developed, observing that its nomadic nature, along with its alternative processes of design and knowledge exchange, were key for allowing participants and locals to collectively produce urban space together.

Silke Helfrich provides a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the theory of the commons by unpacking its multiple dimensions and recognising them as a transformational force. This, she proposes, entails understanding how key elements of the commons operate across a broad spectrum, from physical resources to social practices, as constituent parts of a whole.

Meanwhile, Pablo Calderón Salazar disputes the title of the chapter his essay opens (Intervention as Strategy) by suggesting that, in light of the kind of intervening late capitalism is carrying out in our cities, intervention should be acknowledged as a tactical practice. Only then, he argues, will we be able to regain a sense of agency as citizens.

Conversations, as Liza Fior, Elke Krasny and Jane da Mosto have suggested elsewhere, are by their very nature meandering: “They are filled with turns and detours. Their pleasure lies in not having a clearly defined objective... It is the very absence of an outlined goal that moves the conversation forward by building it word after word, pause after pause, turn after turn.”<sup>1</sup> As conversations depend on all those taking part to be invested intellectually as well as emotionally, rationally as well as physically, their outcomes are wonderfully unpredictable; they can initiate potential extensions into the physical, printed, recorded, documented or even built.

In this book, conversations tackle issues such as the relation between institutionalised and “street” knowledge, value systems and accreditation within academia (Torange Khonsari and Andreas Lang of Public Works/Civic University); discuss the importance of not simply understanding but also implementing – and sustaining – the commons as a social practice (Bianca Elzenbaumer and Fabio Franz of collaborative design practice Brave New Alps, urban-regional theory researcher Hannes Langguth and architect and researcher Merve Bedir) or suggest how to best utilise interventionist approaches, scaling up from temporary projects with limited resources to ongoing and sustainable practices (Marjetica Potrč and Zuloark collective’s Juan Chacón).

In addition, George Kafka, a USR participant who joined the School’s 2016 excursion to Athens, reflects on the heterodox nature of USR field trips and how their shared moments of conversation allowed for the opportunity to consider a range of different possible urban futures in real-time, fusing and then unfastening connections between people and place, ready to be picked up again in following conversations and contexts.

The way we talk about our living environment and its many interdependent dimensions, as well as the values on which these conversations build, directly affect the production of this environment. We offer this compendium of thoughts as part of an ongoing conversation to be further expanded, debated and continued in many forms.

1 Liza Fior, Elke Krasny and Jane Da Mosto “Making Time for Conversations of Resistance” in Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson and Ramia Mazé (eds.) *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practices*. (Baunach: AADR/Spurbuchverlag, 2017), p.161.



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URBANE  
KÜNSTE  
RUHR