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Counter-Mapping and Co-Theorizing Ruinous Postscapes

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This article presents counter-mapping and co-theorizing as a form of multimodal methodology and pedagogy for engaging with and reimagining postindustrial ruinscapes in Zagreb. Drawing on three workshops conducted with different student groups, the authors demonstrate how counter-mapping makes it possible to co-theorize possible futures of deindustrialized sites. The method challenges dominant urban development narratives by foregrounding collaborative imagination, speculative engagement, and critical urban practice.

▪ **Keywords**: counter-mapping, co-theorizing, multimodal methodology, multimodal pedagogy, ruinous postscapes

Članek obravnava protikartiranje in njegovo skupno premišljevanje kot večnačinski metodološki in pedagoški pristop k raziskovanju in ponovnemu zamišljanju poindustrijskih krajin ruševin v Zagrebu. Avtorice na primerih treh delavnic z različnimi skupinami študentov pokažejo, kako lahko protikartiranje služi kot orodje za skupno premišljevanje o možnih prihodnostih deindustrializiranih območij. Izbrani pristop izpodbija prevladujoče predstave o urbanem razvoju, saj poudarja pomen kolektivnega zamišljanja, spekulativnega raziskovanja in kritične urbane prakse.

▪ **Ključne besede**: protikartiranje, skupno premišljevanje, večnačinska metodologija, večnačinska pedagogika, krajine ruševin

Introduction: Engaging with postscapes

> Postscapes are formed by combining the prefix *post-* with nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Postscapes are more than a prefix. The *post-* in postscapes is not a destination; it is a direction. *Post-* changes meanings and the ways we understand our worlds. *Post-* is an attempt to navigate the unnavigable. It brings us back to where we came from and what we emerge from, reminds us of where we are now, and refers to what comes after and beyond … It points toward the future, toward the horizon of anticipation, expectation, and possibility … It enables imagining and narrations, practices and actions, ventures and new beginnings. […] Postscapes are opportunities for constructive discontinuity and for the imagining of continuities, spaces for rehearsal and re-coding, reflection, trial and error, rising and moving, for envisioning alternative worlds. […] Postscapes are spaces of potential for what is to come, for what follows, for postscapes of transgressions … We conceive of the postscapes of Zagreb both conceptually and concretely, practically, poetically, and theoretically. We activate postscapes as sites of research, as practices of creative imagining, critical thinking, and counter-mapping, as spaces of personal and epistemological responsibility. (Potkonjak, 2024)

This excerpt is drawn from a text we used to introduce our workshop at Postscapes Matter, the 2024 SIEF summer school held in Zagreb. The summer school invited students and early-career researchers from various academic institutions worldwide to reflect on the contemporary postsocialist, post-Yugoslav, and postindustrial contexts of Croatia and the city of Zagreb. As local organizers, we sought to grasp all these semantic layers through the lens of postscapes. To explore *how* postscapes may be researched and taught, we designed a methodological workshop.

This workshop dealt with several sites in Zagreb, selected because they make the city's and the country's break from the previous political, economic, and social systems – their post-conditions – visible in space. The participants were asked to engage with these critical urban loci – familiar to some and encountered for the first time by others – from a counter-perspective. They were encouraged to consider what new values might emerge from thinking beyond what is visually present at the sites, by attempting to capture visions of the future, the desirable, and even the utopian.

The concept of postscape emerged from our research within the project The Transformation of the Postindustrial City: Space, Community, and Work (abbreviated PostCity). This project approaches *post-* as "a platform to ask which social orders, worldviews, and forms of (re)development are probable or might become possible

within the context in which the break from past orientations is signalled by this prefix" (Škrbić Alempijević, Kelemen, 2025: 314–315). *Post-* directs the researchers' attention not only to what comes after, but also to how people and places may move beyond their past trajectories.

The term *postscape* is open enough to provide space for multiple understandings of co-mapping and invites co-theorization. At the outset, we described postscapes as complex and contested sociocultural and socionatural spaces, negotiated within the landscape by various human actors and more-than-human actants, inviting speculative engagement with *post-*. We understand postscapes as sites where material decay and everyday lifeworlds intersect with planning regimes, preservation narratives, and land development. They variously manifest as socio-spatial, socio-environmental, and socio-temporal formations, encompassing diverse practices, affects, and meaning-making processes in the late capitalist contexts (ibid.). We approach postscapes through materiality, inscribed meanings, and lived experiences, while also treating them as a useful conceptual tool.

Our research focuses on a particular form of postscapes – that is, on deindustrialized sites in Zagreb, observing different pathways of their transformation into and from ruinous urbanscapes. The overwhelming presence of *post-* at these sites permeated both the everyday life we encountered and our theoretical thinking. In these cases, the term *postscape* signals the accumulation of post-manifestations there, raising the question of living in a city *after* modernization and industrialization, *after* the former visions of progress were abandoned. The question that then arose was *how*, conceptually and methodologically, *post-* should be tackled to avoid falling into a linear narration of these sites' histories or into a univocal rewriting of the causal chains that led to the collapse of industries and their present condition.

This article addresses the methodological challenges and opportunities in researching and teaching the intricacies of ruinous postscapes by proposing counter-mapping and co-theorizing as pathways to knowing differently, opening space for the "unscripted", the unseen, and the speculative (Amri, Ihar, 2025: 634).

The following sections outline our conceptualization of counter-mapping and co-theorizing, and they present our experiences of engaging with postindustrial transformations through adapted counter-mapping exercises (Peluso, 1995) and co-theorizing gatherings. They describe three counter-mapping exercises conducted with different groups of students in 2024 and 2025. These workshops were grounded in shared premises, beginning with our presentations on the PostCity project, our field sites, and the main concepts and approaches to postscapes. The group dynamics within these counter-mapping and co-theorizing exercises were influenced by the participants' insider/outsider positionalities and their varying familiarity with the local context, which is also elaborated on below. Even though the workshops differed in terms of duration, the students' disciplinary backgrounds, and their positionalities in relation to

the city, they revealed comparable outcomes and potentials for co-theorizing, which are discussed in the concluding sections of the article.

Multimodal research and counter-mapping

The PostCity project employs a multimodal framework to address the coexistence of overwhelming complexity and elusiveness of researching, encountering, and grasping postscapes as challenges. Central to our work are immersive, site-specific ethnographies of selected postindustrial sites in various parts of Zagreb. The focus is on the ways in which various social agents attempt to engage with, transform, and activate sites affected by deindustrialization, drawing on shared visions, visual representations, and social ties to imagine and create new life within these spaces. The project conceptualizes our ethnographic methodology as inherently multimodal in recognizing the importance of various ways of collaborative meaning-making beyond written text (Alvarez Astacio et al., 2021). The methodology includes participation in citizen initiatives and transition groups, locally organized walks, municipal council meetings, roundtables, museum tours, public cleaning actions, tactical urbanism interventions, and diverse neighborhood programs, as well as interviews with a range of agents. At the same time, the analysis of policy documents sheds light on the mechanisms of urban planning – the authorized framework within which the lifeworlds of ruinous postscapes take shape and emerge (cf. Kelemen, Škrbić Alempijević, 2025; Škrbić Alempijević, Kelemen, 2025).

Multimodality is used as a catalyst that will inform and empower new forms of experimentation in and on collaborations (Dattatreyan, Shankar, 2016). Multimodality shapes both our integration of diverse methodological strategies and our conceptualization of field sites, as well as the design of specific research methods aimed at challenging dominant knowledge claims about the postscapes we inhabit alongside research participants, fellow citizens, colleagues, and students in the study of transformation. Following Alvarez Astacio et al. (2021: 420), we "embraced *multimodality as an opportunity* to collaborate and invent with our participants, to create alternate pathways for the circulation of anthropological knowledge, and, more broadly, to rethink, recalibrate, and reimagine ethnography as the epistemological grounds." For us, it offered "a more inclusive worldview, where diverse constituents can find *new mutual ground*" (Westmoreland, 2022: 174–175, emphasis added). Recognizing multimodality as a prospect to unsettle and reconfigure, we turned to multimodal methodology. It offered a way to co-theoretization – to building pathways "of connecting, relating, and creating with others" in "producing meaningful interventions" (Alvarez Astacio et al., 2021: 426).

To show how multimodality, seen as a catalyst, informs our work, this article focuses on counter-mapping as a methodological intervention that complements other methodological project strategies. This method resists the dominant mechanisms of

representing and "writing" reality, which often reduce the complexity of spaces and social relations to abstractions shaped by power, and instead seeks to capture multiplicity and people's diverse ways of being in the world (Wainwright, Bryan, 2009: 154–155). In our reiteration of a multimodal approach, the inspiration for counter-mapping came from cultural geography and the visualization *of otherwise*. As Hodgson and Schroeder (2002: 80) note, counter-mapping aims "to counter dominant representations of property regimes and land use practices" and "to meet progressive political goals." Historically, this has included Indigenous land rights (Wainwright, Bryan, 2009) and confronting hegemonic cartographic regimes (Peluso, 1995). Peluso (1995) describes the rise of Indigenous "counter-mappers", motivated by a culture of recognition and resistance to socioeconomic, cultural, political, and environmental oppression tied to imperial and settler cartography. More recently, counter-mapping has become a critical epistemological tool in universities, "instigat[ing] critical organizing and knowledge production" (Counter Cartographies Collective et al., 2012: 441). This is seen, for instance, in the Counter Cartographies Collective autonomous cartographies that "render new images and practices of economies and social relations; destabilize centered and exclusionary representations of the social and the economic; [and] construct new imaginaries of collective struggle and alternative worlds" (https://www.countercartographies.org/). Similarly, the Urban Imaginaries Lab at Carleton University, launched in 2022, engages students and urban residents in collectively imagining multiple urban futures (https://www.urbanimaginaries.com/).

Although counter-mapping originated in resistance to colonial and imperial projects, it retains a liberatory capacity to enact counter-narratives more broadly. We mobilized this power to "speak back" to the ignorance and despondency that diminish the imaginative potential of postscapes, treating counter-mapping as a means of undoing their relegation to mere leftovers and fostering communal reimagining. In the case at hand, directing the students' attention to postscapes meant drawing on the knowledge and imaginaries they brought to the classroom. We invited them to co-imagine and co-theorize Zagreb's postscapes as a form of critical urban practice oriented toward surfacing the unspoken, unthought, unseen, or unheard. Their work was to be informed by their lived experiences and memories, long-term attachments or fleeting impressions, and moments of engagement or indifference. We welcomed counter, critical, and creative insights grounded in the participants' immediate understandings and feelings. We framed the exercise as an opportunity to identify actors and actants that might help reimagine ruinous postscapes, encouraging students to see themselves as agents of transformation. Seen as a cultural intervention rather than a description of our worlds, the multimodal research approach became an invitation for practicing anthropology as collaboration in co-theorizing the prospects of meaningful ruinous postscapes.

Counter-mapping and co-theorization as multimodal pedagogy

Our approach to counter-mapping is informed by multimodal pedagogy as a way of engaging with – and potentially unmaking – postscapes. The multimodal pedagogy of postscapes is anchored in our situatedness as university teachers and urban dwellers, researchers, and citizens in the city where we carried out our research. Resonating with Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's (2015) call to attend to life in the ruins and Kathleen Stewart's (2007) evocation of the affective power of place, we approach teaching with a conscious commitment to collaboration and co-theorization. In our case, multimodal pedagogy, seen as a "collaborative venue of its own" (cf. Boyer, Marcus, 2020: 4), was a one-time attempt evolving into a sustained teaching experimentation. It prompted us to reflect on who we are conducting ethnography on and with, particularly when the boundaries of postscapes are blurred, or perhaps, no longer meaningful. Moreover, it foregrounded the question of purpose. We asked ourselves: what kinds of knowledge, relationships, and interventions do our ethnographies of postscapes aim to enact when fieldwork migrates into the classroom?

As Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019: 220) explained their call for integration of multimodality within teaching, "a focus on multimodality and invention invites us to reconsider the pedagogy of anthropology – both in the sense of what gets formally taught within the disciplinary canon and in relation to the manifold ways of teaching and learning together that emerge during fieldwork, which are not always made visible and which exceed the textual and conceptual domain. Indeed, we use multimodality and invention to refer to the multiple ways of doing anthropology that create different ways of knowing and learning together."

In the same vein, in our own project we consider the multimodal pedagogy of postscapes as a vital part of anthropology that aims to do more, rather than just engage and experiment. It calls to "unsettle and disrupt" (Dattatreyan, Marrero-Guillamón, 2021: 271) what is conceived as given. The multimodal pedagogy of postscapes allows for liberation from the bounds of learned expectations and experiences governed by sociopolitical setups in which we live. Multimodal pedagogies strive to surprise. In this sense, counter-mapping translates to co-theorization and multimodal research translates to multimodal pedagogy. A multimodal research approach combined with multimodal pedagogy becomes crucial in mentoring students in seeing, theorizing, and doing things differently.

Following Joanne Rappaport (2007, 2008), we understand collaborative ethnography not simply as a representational project grounded in well-intentioned anthropological insight, but as an emancipatory methodology conducted with(in) a community and aimed at creating a space for co-theorization. In anthropology, this means grasping for meaning together. Rappaport's work centers on collaborations with Indigenous communities and Native scholars, whereas in our project co-theorization facilitates the

emergence of counter-ontologies within the classroom. Our collaborative engagements with postscapes positioned "community" beyond conventionally recognized groups, such as the oppressed First Nations or residential neighborhoods. In our case, "communities" coalesced around a shared investment in working with and co-theorizing postscapes. They consisted of diverse groups of students and urban dwellers participating in elective courses, workshops, and summer school programs organized by the PostCity project team. Even though our pedagogical aim was to raise the participants' awareness of the demands and potentials of counter-mapping as a research method, we also treated the material co-produced by these emerging communities during the workshops as an alternative source of insights into postscapes. We reached toward emerging ethnographers, early career artists in the visual arts doctoral program, and humanities doctoral students to become "collaborative partners" (Boyer, Marcus, 2020: 8) in a co-thinking classroom.

In these three contexts, we turned to counter-mapping and co-theorization to challenge the hyper-narrativized and textualized tendencies of ethnographic endeavor and to boost collaborations where they might not be initially sought. We have recognized counter-mapping as a tool that serves both research and teaching purposes. We designed counter-mapping exercises to explore how students participating in them might understand fragments of postscapes, endowing them with renewed meanings and agency. The participants in these exercises were asked to reimagine sites regardless of the dominant mapping systems, top-down determined purposes, and economically driven urban planning. The activity was guided by what possible futures could be imagined for the sites depicted and how they could be incorporated into visual material, countering it, developing it, and speculating upon it. Selected photos of the sites in which we have conducted ethnographic research as part of the PostCity project – mostly former factories, business and fair zones, and infrastructural project sites – served as the primary source of inspiration for shared endeavor. The photos used as a visual basis for these exercises mainly signaled the effects of ruination and abandonment, demolition, new construction, and infrastructural interventions. They were purposefully under-contextualized, offering only glimpses of the sites' previous functions, contemporary uses, and prospective developments. Participants engaged with them in a variety of ways. They were encouraged to collaboratively intervene using techniques such as co-thinking, co-sketching, co-drawing, co-scribbling, co-collaging, co-discussing, and co-imagining, translating their visions of the sites directly onto the photos. Applied in the spirit of collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) and experimental fieldwork practices (Marcus, 2013), counter-mapping exercises allowed knowledge to emerge through shared doing, understanding, and sensing.

We treated counter-mapping as both creative and empowering, less a militant overtaking of the imaginary than an effort to sustain autonomous imagination while awakening the political stand. It was designed to help participants recognize ruinous postscapes as

spaces awaiting communal co-imagination, opening them toward *the otherwise* as an "ethico-onto-political commitment" to change (Meek, Morales Fontanilla, 2022: 275). It sought to awaken "multimodal readings" and "blur the boundaries" (Aguilera Del Castillo, 2025: 384–385) between the fixed and fictitious, given and possible, planned and pursued, haunted and freed.

So far, we have carried out workshops on counter-mapping with three groups of students: the participants in the SIEF summer school in September 2024, visual arts doctoral students at the University of Zagreb in February 2025, and master's students at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology in May 2025. The following section presents how the counter-mapping strategies were adapted for each group, the activities conducted, and the insights that emerged from these exercises.

Encountering the city differently: The SIEF summer school

The primary aim of the summer school Postscapes Matter, co-organized by SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore) and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Zagreb's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, was to explore the vitality of the concept of postscapes from different perspectives – from the perspective of postsocialist studies, popular culture and queer studies to that of environmental social movements. Around thirty students attending the summer school came from various universities worldwide and had academic backgrounds in ethnology, anthropology, folklore studies, and related fields.

Our workshop PostCity: Workshop on (Counter)Mapping for the Possible After was a three-hour session. In the introduction to the workshop, we framed counter-mapping amid the ruins and ruptures of the past and encouraged students to engage with the concept of postscapes based on selected examples in multimodal ways. We selected five postscape sites for the exercise from the PostCity project's research locations. The first was the former Zagrebačka banka (Zagreb Bank) building and the Paromlin steam mill, at the time framed as a strategic project of Zagreb's city government. The second was Sljeme, the ruins of a meat industry complex in the Sesvete district on the city's eastern edge, envisioned as an experiment in architectural design within the new urban agenda. The third was the Nada Dimić site, a ruined textile factory slated for redevelopment into inner-city housing by a private investor. The fourth was Buzin, an emerging sprawl adjacent to the Zagreb railway yard, rapidly transforming into a housing, commercial, and corporate zone. The fifth site was Zagrebački velesajam (the Zagreb Fairground), once a showcase of socialist industrial enterprise and now an eroded site of postindustrial change. We approached these sites as contested postscapes awaiting "radical imagination" – worlds wasted or vanishing, but still open to remaking against the dominant ideologies of Growth and Progress (cf. Gan et al., 2017: 12).

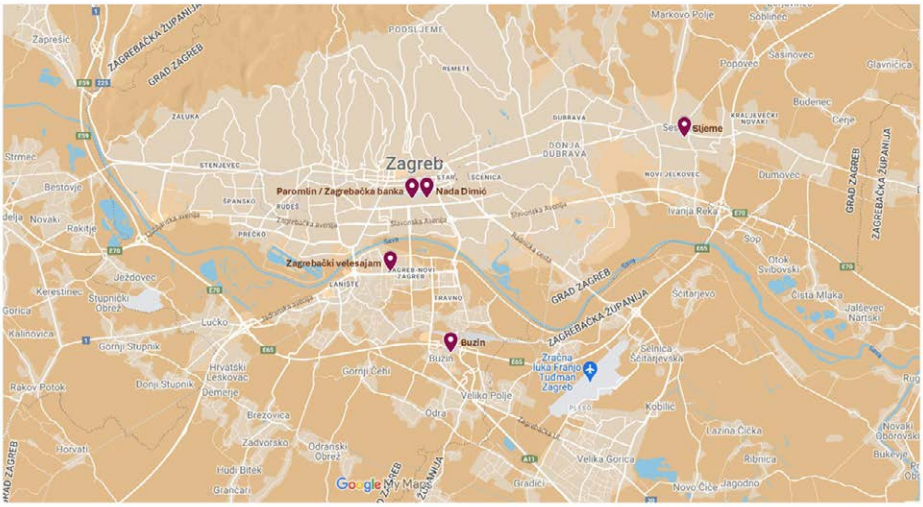

Figure 1: Map of the PostCity research sites selected for the counter-mapping workshop. Produced by the PostCity research team using Google Maps.

Working in five groups, the students responded to enlarged photos taken during the PostCity project's fieldwork. Each group was prompted to present its counter-mapping outcomes through sketches, drawings, and reflections on the imagery. The groups' counter-maps referred to the following questions: Which functions might these spaces serve? Who are the agents of change? What is the possible "after"?

Although most participants were unfamiliar with Zagreb and might have encountered the chosen sites only as passersby, the exercise still generated thought-provoking insights into the city's socio-spatial, temporal, and moral dynamics. The Zagrebačka banka and Paromlin group focused on the proximity to the railway station as a defining factor, imagining an emergency community center for immigrants, passersby, and street users. Rather than emphasizing the nearby locations of institutional power (e.g., the city hall and the courthouse), they rethought the area as a space of safety and support for transient and otherwise policed populations. The Nada Dimić Factory group took a similar stance. Adjacent to a newly built gated condominium complex, complete with an artisan bakery and a coffeeshop frequented by affluent residents, they reimagined the site as a counter-space of solidarity and anti-elitism. Their proposal centered on social integration, social housing, and workshops for small-scale trades such as repair services. The Sljeme group interpreted their site as redundant, disintegrated, marginal, and separated from the neighboring area by a railway yard, sketching crossings to overcome this spatial isolation. Playing on its namesake (mountain peak Sljeme above Zagreb), they re-envisioned the site as a peak of new community life: a multigenerational community hub with shared workspaces for sewing, IT repairs, bike workshops, and other small-scale services. The Buzin group addressed the corporate transformation of the peripheral neighborhood with the slogan "No business!" They argued for the



Figure 2: The Buzin neighborhood, selected for counter-mapping. Photos: Kristina Vugdelija.

missing essentials: safe railway crossings, vegetable gardens, affordable housing, post offices, sports facilities, and doctors' offices instead of corporate headquarters. Their intervention highlighted the costs of commercial encroachment and the neglect of everyday life in the nearby villages. Lastly, the Zagreb Fairground group confronted the deteriorating tradescape by reimagining its future through layered, horizontal zoning meant to repopulate and reanimate the area.

Across groups, students counter-mapped postscapes as openings. Their proposals emphasized modest interventions and small-scale urbanism that reconnect communities and reintroduce shared, public-oriented practices into urban narratives. In doing so, they countered investment-driven approaches that impose commercial and residential megastructures. At the same time, their reflections raised concerns about the social effects of new development: Who is excluded from urban makeovers? What happens when high-income residents are cast as the "ideal" urban dwellers?

The idea of "relief" spaces or safe communal places that absorb the needs of commuters, migrants, and residents was particularly strong. The postscapes they explored emerged not as voids, but as sites full of potential.

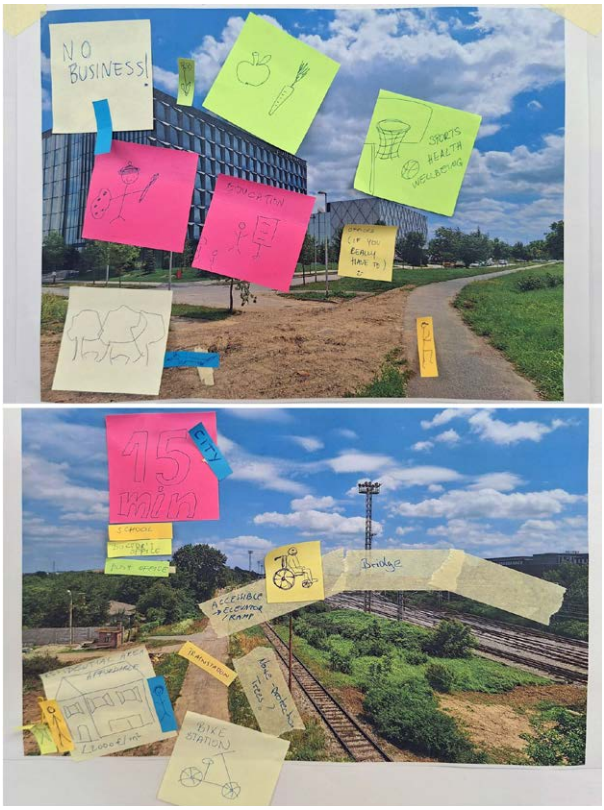

Figure 3: Counter-mapping a possible *after* for the Buzin neighborhood. The counter-map made by the following group of students: Kia Liimatainen, Sascha Sistenich, Stephanie Stelko, Helena Tolić, and Digne Ūdre-Lielbārde.

Visualizing postscapes otherwise: Counter-mapping by visual arts doctoral candidates

In the second case, the community invited to counter-map selected ruined postscapes in Zagreb also included doctoral candidates, but with a markedly different orientation toward theorizing the city. Unlike the SIEF workshop participants, who largely shared our disciplinary affiliation and theoretical and methodological framework, the participants in the February 2025 workshop were attending the visual arts program. Visual modes of engaging with the world are central to this doctoral program and to the artistic vocation of those enrolled in it. The guiding principles of counter-mapping resonate with the program's rationale that "artistic research involves expanding and questioning the boundaries of human cognition, relying on imagination rather than on fact-based description" (Blažičko et al., n.d.: 3). Situated in a transdisciplinary realm through the involvement of ethnologists and cultural anthropologists as workshop organizers, this perspective supported our efforts to further deconstruct linear approaches to postindustrial spaces and times.



Figure 4: The Zagreb Fairground, selected for counter-mapping. Photos: Petra Kelemen.

Counter-mapping was conducted within the Methodology of Scientific Research course, taught by Nevena Škrbić Alempijević, which introduces doctoral candidates to core qualitative research strategies while outlining their potential applications in artistic research. Although the course highlights the relational, contextual, and processual character of research, it also seeks to provide attendants with practical guidelines for formulating their doctoral projects. The counter-mapping task differed from other course components in that it did not prompt them to think using established concepts and methodological tools. Instead, it encouraged them to step away from the postscapes as they are and to reimagine what they could become or even how they might exist entirely within the realm of imagination – not as a plan, but as a dream of an alternative. As one participant put it, the exercise aimed to uncover something "completely unrealistic and completely difficult to carry out, at the edge of the limits of possibility and the real."

Four doctoral researchers participated, each working individually on reimagining one site. As a starting point for counter-mapping, they received a selection of photos produced during the PostCity project's fieldwork. The photos focused on the decaying traces of industrial production and its related activities, notably the sites of the former



Figure 5: "The Tropical Spa" at the Zagreb Fairground by the doctoral candidate and artist Vida Meić.

Nada Dimić textile factory, the Paromlin steam mill, the Sljeme meat industry, and the Zagreb Fairground. The participants were invited to select images that they found inspiring and called to perform counter-mapping. The guiding question was what they might envision in the city amid the ruins of its industrial past, and which imaginings might emerge.

In their imaginaries, the participants counter-mapped postindustrial spaces as a dome-covered swimming-pool complex (a tropical spa) simultaneously serving as a sanctuary for exotic species and experimental communities; as an open public space for articulating opinions, exposed to the sun and social critique, a locus of voice; as a green hollow where deindustrialized remnants are left in ruins and engulfed by vegetation, forming a threshold to a park; and as a space of freedom, unfolding from its own remnants and allowing the existing elements, even in decay, to evolve into something new.

Each doctoral researcher's worldview served as a prism for reimagining postscapes. Some reinterpreted the spaces along the thematic lines that they had already explored in their artistic practice and drew on personal experiences of the city as residents, reflecting on what they felt Zagreb lacked. Their understanding of the position of these

sites within the urban fabric – regular drives past the sites described as "piles of nothing and something", knowledge of routes linking the train station to the city institutions, and familiarity with local attitudes toward particular sites – also influenced the way they reinvented them. Alongside this local grounding, global references also appeared: in their counter-mappings, the participants evoked examples from cities such as Berlin and New York. References to the industrial past were also integrated into the ways the sites were rethought. For instance, the participants recalled traveling past factories and the sharp, unpleasant odors that first came to mind in relation to them. For some, images of ruined factories triggered scenes of former industrial labor, revealing the presence of many workers engaged in highly structured, assembly-line patterns. At the same time, they were explicit about not planning postindustrial futures. Their counter-maps visualized utopias, which were imagined "like a game", as "a space without any purpose, neither industrial nor productive like it once was, nor strictly organized by anyone", allowing postscapes to be "simply overtaken by greenery, with truly nothing being built". Despite their diversity, these reimaginings had one thing in common: they resisted solution-driven, linear planning and instead opened the sites to multiple possibilities.

By encouraging the doctoral researchers to visualize alternative worlds and deviate from conventional paths, the counter-mapping task offered a form of methodological instruction outside the standard canon. It invited critical reflection on the processes and assumptions underlying academic knowledge production itself.

Forward-oriented remembering of the city: The workshop Anthropology of Social Memory

The third exercise, conducted with around twenty students enrolled in the master's course Anthropology of Social Memory, was designed as a more extensive and in-depth activity, reflecting their semester-long engagement with postindustrial memory. Throughout the semester, the students dealt with the industrial pasts and postindustrial transformations in Zagreb through the theoretical and analytical lens of memory studies (e.g., High, Lewis, 2007). Each student pursued an individual, small-scale research project focusing on a specific case study. Their work analyzed and problematized how memories of industrial pasts, industrial labor, and industrial spaces are present or absent in today's urban memoryscapes, and how they are integrated into or excluded from memory politics, public policy, urban planning, and the city's redevelopment projects.

The counter-mapping workshop at the end of the course aimed to shed a different light on Zagreb's postindustrial ruinscapes and broader postindustrial transformations, drawing on the students' research insights and engagement with the postindustrial city. The exercise was structured as a three-part workshop across three sessions.

The first part consisted of a lecture introducing the theoretical and conceptual framework of counter-mapping practices and outlining the guidelines for the fieldwork exercise. The second part was a half-day fieldwork session, during which students walked through three postindustrial sites selected from among the PostCity project's field sites because they were within easy walking distance – the former Paromlin steam mill, the Gredelj rolling stock company, and the Nada Dimić textile factory – and visually mapped the sites by taking photos. They were instructed to document and map whatever they perceived as attention-drawing, relevant, or meaningful – anything that "spoke to them" and that they wished to "speak with or through" in their visions of the future. They worked in groups of six to seven (one group per site). Each group selected four or five photos to serve as the basis for their counter-maps through collaborative deliberation outside the classroom and without our direct involvement.

The students were instructed to walk the ruinscapes with an adjusted gaze, reading the spatialization of power relations, attuning themselves to traces of social injustice, exclusion, and erasure from the public, but also recognizing the potential of ruinscapes to be transformed into postscapes that would address these injustices and make them visible, become more open and inclusive, serve the common good, and be integrated into the citizens' everyday lives.

Unlike in the previous two cases, counter-mapping within this course had a specific thematic focus: memory. Drawing on Tim Edensor's understanding of ruinscapes (Edensor, 2005), this exercise aimed to challenge the dominant understanding of ruins as merely empty or decaying. Instead, the students were encouraged to recognize that ruins brim with potential as alternative sites of memory rich in sensory traces, whether or not they are included in hegemonic memory regimes. The counter-mapping process sought to actualize these memories as part of the future of such spaces, giving them both a place and a voice. In this way, the students were encouraged to see themselves not only as critical and analytical anthropologists but also as politically engaged citizens and potential agents of change.

The third part of the workshop, back in the classroom, involved the collaborative creation of counter-maps, their presentation, and an open discussion. During the session, the main directions of interventions in the postscapes that emerged from the participants' counter-mapping practices were noted and discussed. The aim was to jointly reflect on how we imagine a better future for postindustrial ruinscapes and why.

In this case, the counter-maps also revealed that the students' engagement with ruinscapes and the postindustrial city as a whole was shaped by their positionality as city dwellers. In imagining the city's possible futures, they were simultaneously imagining their own. Their visions did not extend toward distant utopian horizons but rather toward immediate, tangible, and concrete futures that directly reflected their current needs, preoccupations, challenges, and everyday experiences of living in a postindustrial city.



Figure 6: Paromlin and its surroundings, selected for counter-mapping. Photos: Leonarda Andrić, Lina Deković, Anita Dreven, Dora Pšeničnjak, Lucija Severinac, and Tea Žeželić.



Figure 7: Imagining an alternative future for Paromlin. A counter-map created by the following group of students: Leonarda Andrić, Lina Deković, Anita Dreven, Dora Pšeničnjak, Lucija Severinac, and Tea Žeželić.

The imaginative spatial interventions envisioned postscapes that were simultaneously conservative, creative, and corrective. They were conservative in that they did not necessarily challenge the dominant notions of what is possible, appropriate, or compatible with the prevailing socioeconomic order. For example, some projects attempted to reconcile capitalist logics with social justice and inclusion by envisioning spaces in which multinational retail chains coexisted with markets selling products from family-owned local farms or repurposing industrial heritage as tourist attractions capable of generating income for the city. Correctivity was the dominant feature of counter-maps primarily concerned with transforming ruinscapes into new memoryscapes in a way that silenced or erased memories could be acknowledged and reintegrated. Even so, many corrective visions remained conservative in form, relying on institutionalized ways of remembrance.

There were also glimpses of reimagining postscapes through the lens of catastrophic imaginations of future; for instance, in a project that introduced a nuclear shelter into the site, reflecting the embeddedness of the local in the global political turmoil.

Ultimately, these imaginative futures revealed a layered perception of the postindustrial city. On one hand, students viewed it as a city of *lack* – that is, lacking affordable housing, adequate transport infrastructure, ecological food systems, public spaces for cultural and political activities, and recognition of diverse histories and memories. On the other hand, this perception of lack was counterbalanced by an imagination of the city as a space of *potential*: potential for accessibility, safe movement, ecological and social responsibility, sustainable resource distribution, inclusion, fairness, meaningful encounters, knowledge exchange, leisure, and shared open spaces.

Positioning

While designing the counter-mapping workshops, we adjusted the workshop structure and duration according to the participants' backgrounds, available time frames, and feasible levels of engagement. As shown, in each introductory part we provided a conceptual framework by explaining postscapes and counter-mapping. For the first two workshops, we also supplied photos, which served as windows into imagining possible afters. For all three exercises we also offered – and were further requested to provide – basic historical and contemporary information about the sites. Beyond that, during the workshops we primarily acted as observers of the counter-mapping process and later as discussants of the results. We tried not to interfere with or guide the participants' imaginative directions but instead to remain attentive listeners.

However, one occasion prompted us to reflect more deeply on our own positionality and the methodological challenges inherent in counter-mapping. During the SIEF summer school workshop, one of us (Iva) assumed a dual role: she participated in the

school's activities as a doctoral researcher while simultaneously serving as a project collaborator familiar with the spaces being counter-mapped from a research and analytical perspective.

Her group worked on the Zagrebačka banka building and the Paromlin steam mill. Alongside another master's student from Zagreb, the group included two doctoral researchers from Hong Kong and Canada. At the very beginning of the group work, when Iva revealed her involvement in the project from which the workshop originated, the other group members, especially those from other continents, expected her to provide not only the context of the selected spaces but also "insider" information about the plans for those sites. Although she tried not to influence the group's counter-mapping process excessively, other participants took her input as a "factual state of affairs", even though it was merely one of many possible interpretations of the space. The group faced a dual problem.

On one hand, Iva found it difficult to distance herself from what she "knew" about the sites, their pasts, and their planned futures, especially because Paromlin was already undergoing reconstruction for the new city library, making its future appear predetermined and limiting the sense of open possibilities. Her familiarity with the sites' histories and official development plans made it difficult to enter the imaginative "state of mind" that counter-mapping requires (i.e., one unburdened by predetermined futures).

On the other hand, the two foreign participants experienced discomfort and at times frustration, but not simply because they lacked contextual knowledge. Rather, their frustration stemmed from the awareness that such knowledge was present within the group, embodied in Iva's research experience, yet remained paradoxically inaccessible. They expected Iva to "solve the problem" of counter-mapping because she "knew" the context and plans, which placed them in a position of dependence rather than enabling collaborative imagination. Whatever counter-mapping approach they pursued, they felt they were acting without adequate understanding of the city and its inhabitants' needs – an impression reinforced by the cultural anthropological instinct that, in order to conclude and propose something, one must deeply understand complex relationships of different agents in these spaces as well as all the different layers of their pasts.

Thus, knowledge was simultaneously present and absent: "here" in the room but "not really" available for the collective reimagining that counter-mapping demands. This epistemological paradox partially blocked the group's counter-mapping capacity. Feelings of confusion and uncertainty accompanied the group's work.

Despite being intrigued by alternative "possible afters", the group could not get rid of the impression that each of its "solutions" was unfounded and omitted key insights necessary for more serious planning of the space's future. The group felt that the boundary between possible alternative futures and mere utopian fantasy was extremely thin and blurred. It was uncertain whether to inscribe a future utopia into their assigned spaces, or rather propose a more conservative, "practical" solution that

would simply differ from what had been, what is now, and what is officially planned for the future of these places. These feelings of confusion and uncertainty shaped the group's counter-mapping process in a decisive way. Unable to ground their proposals in the kind of deep contextual knowledge they felt was necessary, and uncertain whether they were producing meaningful alternatives or merely detached fantasies, the group members shifted their strategy.

Rather than attempting to map a future grounded in intimate local understanding they did not have, they descended to a different level of engagement: one anchored in universal, embodied experiences of urban transit spaces that were intrinsically common to all of them. This shift from locally specific to translocal imagination revealed new insights into the possibilities and limitations of collaborative counter-mapping across different positionalities. The resulting output reflected this methodological transformation: it was less rooted in Zagreb's specific urban struggles, but perhaps more attuned to globally recognized needs for spatial relief within the late capitalist urban rhythms. This shift manifested concretely in the group's focus on the Zagreb central station, where it considered what would allow users to feel safe, balanced, and calm within the frenzied rhythms of a city railway station.

From this emerged the idea of transforming the former Zagrebačka Banka space into a green oasis next to the station, offering passengers and passersby a contrast to the everyday urban rush. The group envisioned a place for pausing, grounding, and resting beside the mobility hub. In this way, the group's counter-mapping of a small local space by the Zagreb central station became a reflection of globally recognized needs for slowing down amid the whirl of late capitalism. At that moment, a rare and fleeting collaboration took shape, as the weight of deep-lived local insights briefly gave way to a quiet, sensorial co-theorization of spatial relief by a collaborative outsider.

Conclusion

The counter-mapping and co-theorizing exercises reflected our efforts to capture the complexity of ruinous landscapes in Zagreb. In the three workshops we organized, our multimodal pedagogy took the form of a short, several-hour session, an intensive course, and a semester-long ethnographic experiment that culminated in a half-day field trip followed by discussion and co-theorizing. What began as a discrete teaching exercise grew into a methodological tool for reimagining postscapes, aligning with critical urban research in its insistence that counter-thinking and critique should be treated as urban pedagogy tools of inclusion rather than dismissal. We approached these counter-mapping exercises as "open and nimble, grounded and propositional; [those] that combin[e] thinking and doing, writing and engaging, caring and challenging" (Cupers, Herz, 2022: 7). Across these collaborations, our goal was to stimulate

new ways of co-theorization, capable of countering the accelerating, late-liberal developmental narratives of urban design in Zagreb and of extending the postscapes' co-imaginary beyond the classroom. They were conceived as exercises in anticipation, reinscription, and recoding of postindustrial urbanscapes. They allowed different participants – co-creators of urban imaginaries – to draw, write, imagine, reflect, and rehearse potential futures that reconfigure the present.

In our experience, counter-mapping conducted in collaboration with an anthropology class proved equally fruitful whether carried out with master's or doctoral candidates in an ethnology summer school. More challenging and open-ended was an exercise conducted with visual arts doctoral candidates, a serendipitous encounter intended "to augment collaborative practices and potentials within conventional anthropological research and ethnography by engaging insights and practices drawn from other arts and disciplines" (Boyer, Marcus, 2020: 14).

All three exercises grasped the unspoken and possible meanings of postscapes as more than the relics of an industrial past, showing that co-theorizing, like any good anthropology, aspires to have a political effect (ibid.: 17). The collaboration made space for what is otherwise conceived as impossible. In that sense, it echoed and underscored the significance of the "otherwise", as articulated within feminist scholarship, which seeks "solidarity with transforming worlds precisely through not knowing in advance what this may mean, not demonstrating mastery, not (only) condemning but, instead, extending liberatory worlds" (Meek, Morales Fontanilla, 2022: 275). By engaging with postindustrial sites through layered temporal perspectives that ranged from near-future scenarios to expansive, long-term utopian imaginaries, the participants developed counter-maps that challenged the dominant narratives of urban development. They articulated alternative visions grounded in care, transgression, diversity, and inclusion, ultimately reframing ruined urbanscapes as spaces of possibility rather than decline.

The counter-maps brought intimate, individual experiences of space into dialogue with shared knowledge and collective meaning-making. The method encouraged creativity, imagination, and dialogue, facilitating speculative co-theorization. This pedagogical approach to co-thinking also revealed how positionality and asymmetries of knowledge shape the horizons of collaborative imagination. Suspended between the certainties of insider expertise and the uncertainties of outsider perspectives, counter-mapping illuminated the delicate boundary between situated understanding and hesitant speculative inquiry. In turning toward global experiences of urban life, the group found that even across differences of positionality, alternative futures can emerge in the fleeting space between transparency and opacity of ruinous postscapes.

In sum, multimodal research and pedagogy demonstrated their ability to contest endorsed narratives of space and time, as well as everyday assumptions and imaginaries that shape ruinous postscapes. As a result, ethnography was performed as an inspiring and collaborative generative practice of co-theorizing in the classroom. Through

collaborative partnerships and visual inquiry, participants could not only document hindrances of ruinous postscapes but also unleash unthought-of possibilities. Multimodal engagements thus allowed postscapes to be viewed as non-linear formations, unfolding as pasts, presents, and futures co-theorized. Perhaps the most enduring lesson from this multimodal pedagogy is that it transformed from a one-time experiment into an ongoing practice "in which we aim to turn our assumptions – the things we think we know – into questions" (Cupers, Herz, 2022: 7).

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Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on ethnographic research materials that are not classified as research data. All additional information concerning the ethnographic research materials are available on reasonable request with the author.

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Protikartiranje in skupno premišljevanje krajin ruševin

Članek predstavlja protikartiranje (ang. *counter-mapping*) kot obliko večnačinske pedagogike, namenjene izzivanju prevladujočih narativov urbanega razvoja in spodbujanju skupnega premišljevanja možnih prihodnosti poindustrijskih krajin v Zagrebu. Avtorice na podlagi treh delavnic z različnimi skupinami študentov pokažejo, kako protikartiranje odpira prostor za skupno domišljijsko ustvarjanje, kritično urbano prakso in avtonomno ponovno zamišljanje deindustrializiranih območij. Raziskava temelji na etnografski angažiranosti projekta PostCity v urbanih krajinah ruševin (ang. *ruinous landscapes*).

Avtorice konceptualizirajo postkrajine (ang. *postscapes*) kot kompleksne sociokulturne ter socionaravne prostore, v katerih se materialno propadanje, vsakdanje izkušnje in življenjski svetovi prepletajo z urbanističnim načrtovanjem, dediščinskimi narativi in razvojem zemljišč. Ti prostori izražajo družbeno-prostorske ureditve, družbeno-okoljske interakcije in družbeno-časovne konfiguracije. Avtorice uporabljajo večnačinski pristop, v katerem protikartiranje deluje hkrati kot raziskovalno in pedagoško orodje v duhu sodelovalne etnografije in eksperimentalnih terenskih praks. Po Joanne Rappaport (2007, 2008) sodelovalno etnografijo razumejo kot emancipatorno metodologijo, katere cilj je ustvarjanje prostora za skupno premišljevanje kot proces skupnega iskanja pomenov. Skupno premišljevanje omogoča nastanek protiontologij (ang. *counter-ontologies*) med učnim procesom.

Na prvi delavnici, ki je potekala v okviru poletne šole SIEF leta 2024, so študenti etnologije, antropologije in folkloristike sodelovali v triurni vaji, osredinjeni na pet poindustrijskih lokacij. Študenti so si v skupinah ponovno zamišljali te prostore ter poudarjali posege in pristope majhnega merila: skupnostne centre za ljudi v prehodnih življenjskih okoliščinah, socialna stanovanja in popravljalnice, medgeneracijska skupnostna središča, lokalne storitve namesto korporativnih sedežev ter večplastno revitalizacijo območij. Njihovi predlogi so nasprotovali investicijsko usmerjenim pristopom in izpostavljali prostore podpore ter javno usmerjene prakse. Druga delavnica je vključevala doktorske študente vizualnih umetnosti. Štirje doktorski raziskovalci so samostojno protikartirali izbrane lokacije in ustvarili pretežno utopične vizije: tropsko zdravilišče kot zatočišče za eksotične vrste in eksperimentalne skupnosti, odprt prostor za izražanje mnenj in družbeno kritiko, zeleno kotanjo, v kateri industrijske ruševine postopoma prerašča vegetacija, ter prostor svobode, ki se razvija iz lastnih ostankov in se lahko preoblikuje v nekaj novega. Te reinterpretacije so se upirale načrtovanju, usmerjenemu v rešitve, ter odpirale prostor številnim alternativnim možnostim. Študenti so izrecno poudarili, da ne načrtujejo prihodnosti, temveč vizualizirajo utopije. Tretja vaja je vključevala magistrske študente predmeta Antropologija družbenega spomina, ki so se s tematiko ukvarjali skozi celoten semester. Proces se je zaključil s tridelnim sklopom dejavnosti: teoretskim predavanjem, poldnevnim terenskim delom na treh lokacijah in sodelovalno delavnico protikartiranja. Osrednje mesto je vseskozi zavzemalo vprašanje spomina – preizpraševanje razumevanja ruševin kot praznih prostorov in spodbujanje njihovega prepoznavanja kot alternativnih krajev spomina. T. i. protizemljevidi so razkrili notranjo pozicionalnost študentov kot prebivalcev mesta, saj so njihove vizije odražale neposredne potrebe in vsakdanje izkušnje. Domišljijske intervencije so bile konservativne (niso izzivale prevladujočega družbeno-ekonomskega reda), kreativne (igrive reinvencije prostora) in korektivne (preoblikovanje krajin ruševin v krajine spomina oz. *memoryscapes*, ki opozarjajo na zamolčane in marginalizirane spomine).

Avtorice se posvečajo tudi metodološkim izzivom, ki so se pojavili med protikartiranjem, zlasti napetostim med notranjim, lokalnim poznavanjem prostora in sodelovalnimi perspektivami zunanjih opazovalcev. Te napetosti razkrivajo, kako lahko poglobljeno kontekstualno razumevanje hkrati omogoča in omejuje spekulativno domišljijo. V zaključku izpostavljajo, da se je protikartiranje iz enkratnega eksperimenta razvilo v trajnejšo prakso, ki kot oblika večnačinske pedagogike omogoča pretresanje uradnih narativov ter odpira prostor za ponovno zamišljanje krajin ruševin in njihovih možnih prihodnosti.