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Un/doing Displacement in Vienna: Tenants' Agency and Their Co-Produced Spatio-Temporal Experiences Under Economic Pressure

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Abstract

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the ongoing housing crisis has escalated for tenants in Vienna, Austria. Embedded in a welfare-state environment that hinders eviction, this article considers under-explored everyday forms of displacement and tenants' agency in "un/doing" displacement. It draws on interviews with tenants in the commodified private rental sector who experience displacement pressure through increasing rents and who have sought different forms of counselling or help in that regard. Results reveal the ways in which tenants enact adaptive and interventive practices. Not only do these practices contribute to or counteract the progress of displacement, but they also shape the spatio-temporal effects relating to various dispossessions. Attempts to alleviate these effects result in modes that "dictate" tenants' everyday lives through materialities, human bodies, mental activities, and spatio-temporal configurations. Overall, this article provides a relational understanding of subtler forms of displacement, which are co-produced by the affected tenants.

Keywords

agency; Austria; displacement; economic pressure; housing affordability; housing inequality; private rental sector

1. Introduction

As a symptom of the housing affordability crisis and neoliberal urbanisation, increasing rents continue to place urban tenants under enormous pressure (Wetzstein, 2017). Economic pressure has increased in European countries following the Covid-19 pandemic and other ongoing geopolitical crises. The limited body

of related research that has been done until now acknowledges the prevailing influence of economic forms of (gentrification-induced) displacement in European cities (Beran & Nuissl, 2024; Pull & Richard, 2021). This growing body of literature links displacement (pressure) and decreasing housing affordability to processes of globalisation, financialisation, and de- and reregulation (Madden & Marcuse, 2016). This qualitative study expands scholarship on the far-reaching effects of crisis-related dynamics, due to which tenants face experiences of economic displacement pressure because of rent increases (see Pull & Richard, 2021). By connecting the constructivist debate in gentrification scholarship (Baker, 2021; Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020) with the quantitative housing affordability literature (Haffner & Hulse, 2021; Lee et al., 2022), I close a gap by considering the under-explored connection between tenants' experiencing reduced rental-sector affordability and the formation of displacement pressure.

This contribution considers tenants who have sought formal counselling or (legal) assistance owing to the burden of sharply rising rental costs in the private rental sector (PRS) in Vienna, Austria. Research on Vienna's housing market has primarily emphasized its social housing provision and extensive welfare-state support (e.g., Litschauer & Friesenecker, 2021; Reinprecht, 2014). Recent studies on gentrification in Vienna have scrutinised the ongoing deregulation and commodification of the PRS as drivers of displacement pressure and gentrification-like transformations of the built environment (Banabak et al., 2024; Kadi, 2015; Musil et al., 2022). Qualitative studies on the implications for tenants in the PRS have remained scarce, both in Vienna and in urban scholarship generally (see Rinn et al., 2022). However, in Vienna, rents have continuously been exceeding incomes or social benefits since the 2000s (Tockner, 2017). Between 2022 and 2023, rents in the PRS increased by up to 24%, mainly due to inflation adjustments after the Covid-19 pandemic (Putschögl & Zoidl, 2023). Raising energy costs and Austria's high inflation rate (11.6% in 2022; Eurostat, 2024) have further intensified the pressure on tenants. In response, the City of Vienna introduced several new measures to counteract displacement pressure, including the state-funded *Wohnschirm* (umbrella for the house/home) to support tenants with rental or energy debts. These measures prevent evictions, which is reflected in the consistently low number of eviction notices, as tenants tend to move "voluntarily" before being served such a notice.

I address emergent (economic) displacement pressure relationally as the individually felt experiences of the "changing affective relation between time, space, [and the self]" (Baker, 2021, p. 10). In doing so, I expand Marcuse's (1985) work, which directly links neighbourhood upgrading and displacement with rent increases. While the connection between gentrification and displacement-as-mobility has overlooked notions of "place," I align with Davidson's (2009) argument that displacement is an ongoing and lived experience. Therefore, I focus on everyday displacements, which Stabrowski (2014, p. 808) refers to as the "loss of people's agency and place-making abilities." As tenants actively deal with displacement pressure, I argue that displacement is a co-produced process, in which tenants' agency (and lack thereof) contributes to heterogeneous efforts of "un/doing displacement." While previous qualitative studies have primarily focused on the most extreme forms of displacement, such as eviction or displacement-induced homelessness (Baker, 2021), my work explores how displacement pressure affects everyday life. This approach contributes to a better understanding of the often under-researched, subtle, and everyday forms of displacement.

Displacement pressure is shaped not only by welfare-state interventions but also by various other (exploitative) power relations, e.g., the landlord-tenant relationship (Rinn et al., 2022). These dynamics position tenants along markers of inequality such as class, race/ethnicity, or gender (Aigner, 2019). Tenants are reconfigured within housing economies depending on their social positionalities and resources, while

power relations dispossess them. Austria, like other European countries, is a shrinking middle-class society with increasing socio-spatial inequalities (Kadi et al., 2022). Economic displacement increasingly influences society and makes class boundaries permeable. Research on gentrification-induced displacement has mainly focused on low-income tenants and the urban poor (Baker, 2021). However, this article includes experiences of middle-class/middle-income tenants facing displacement pressure, a growing concern highlighted in the housing affordability literature (Haffner & Hulse, 2021; Winke, 2021).

This article explores how the ongoing housing crisis unfolds in the everyday lives of tenants. It examines their agency, applying the following research questions: (a) How do tenants navigate (and ideally stabilise) their situation when subjected to economic displacement pressure? And (b) how do their continuous efforts to navigate the changing situation translate into their spatio-temporal experiences of everyday life? The aim of this contribution is twofold: first, to make a conceptual distinction between "adaptive" and "interventive" practices, as each contributes to "un/doing displacement" in their own way. Second, it will demonstrate how the interaction of these practices (while being subjected to power relations) co-shape tenants' experiences as specific modes of "dictating" space and time. Overall, this article presents a nuanced understanding of the ways in which tenants are central to co-producing their displacement experiences while being subjected to the ongoing dynamics of the housing affordability crisis.

2. Theoretical Reflections on Tenants' Agency, Displacement Pressure, and Housing-Affordability

This article centres around tenants' agency, reflecting the epistemological shift in displacement research towards analysing subjective experiences (Baker, 2021; Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). A constructivist perspective of "un/doing" displacement creates an understanding of the relational co-production of displacement through the ambivalent practices that tenants employ when subjected to increasing rents. Tenants continuously navigate economic displacement pressure by enacting, negotiating, or contesting power relations. In doing so, those facing displacement conceptually shift from being passive bodies that are socio-spatially repositioned to becoming active agents who shape their everyday lives. In the following sections, I will discuss the nexus of tenants' broader experiences of living under the threat of displacement, their strategies for addressing rising rents, and their reactions to decreasing housing affordability.

2.1. Tenants' Housing Experiences Under Power Relations

Qualitative displacement studies have focused on the traumatic experiences of residents when gentrification exerts violence against them and severs their connections to spaces or communities (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). Tenants experience feelings of loss, emotional distress, or rupture (Hubbard & Lees, 2020; Valli, 2015). Conceptually, these studies have expanded the understanding of displacement beyond the notion of mobility (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015), where the changing meaning of home leads to feelings of alienation (Madden & Marcuse, 2016). These feelings emerge because the extractive logic of commodified housing as an economic asset enters the phenomenological understanding of the lived, abstract space of the home (Davidson, 2009). In a similar vein, Atkinson (2015) described "un-homing" (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020) as the changing social, psychological, and symbolic effects of tenants experiencing rent increases in gentrifying neighbourhoods. Atkinson, however, views tenants as passive and powerless "victims" in relation to their changing neighbourhoods.

Home as a site of struggle and oppression stands at the core of qualitative displacement experiences (Atkinson, 2015; Porteous & Smith, 2001; Pull & Richard, 2021). When experiencing alienation or processes of un-homing, home and the security it should provide become destroyed. The dynamic aspects of home as an ongoing practice are reflected in "un-making" processes (Baxter & Brickell, 2014; Nowicki, 2014). Tenants act within the im/material components that make up the home and that become "damaged or destroyed" (Baxter & Brickell, 2014, p. 134). The degrees of violence and the temporality of this destruction differ (Sakizlioğlu, 2014), depending on whether the home is left behind voluntarily or by force. Home-making and un-making take place simultaneously. Although home is a scale-independent concept, it often overlaps with the physical dwelling unit as the main site of everyday life (Baxter & Brickell, 2014). Practices of home-*un*-making are situated in space and time. As they unfold, practices connect to materialities, mental activities, and tenants' bodies (Schatzki, 2001).

Dimitrakou and Hilbrandt (2022) have outlined the importance of material dispossession in displacement, e.g., giving up belongings that are central to practices constituting home. Material dispossession can foster agency, e.g., repairing broken things rather than replacing them. Materialities and more-than-human agents are assigned meaning, connecting to tenants' socio-cultural norms that constitute their homes. The loss of materialities and respective practices severs emotional relations to home spaces but also to the (class) identity and sense of belonging grounded therein. Feminist scholarship has connected home to bodies, which are intimate places of suffering and wounding (Philo, 2005). Dispossession phenomena such as grief or stress inscribe themselves into bodies, which in turn relates to tenants' (mental) health and well-being. Broader effects arise for tenants' loss of their spatialised subjectivities, expressed as the feeling of being "out of place" (Porteous & Smith, 2001). These overlapping dispossessions hinder tenants' social, cultural, or symbolic reproduction.

Among others, Kern (2016) has argued that gentrification is a process that "takes" both place and time or even destroys the spatio-temporal configurations of everyday life (Hubbard & Lees, 2020; Sakizlioğlu, 2014). In their study, Pull and Richard (2021) identified and detailed a series of spatial and temporal dispossessions from tenants living in Swedish neighbourhoods that were undergoing renewal. Spatial dispossessions refer to the shrinking sense of home and tenants' diminishing entitlements. Temporal dispossessions create a state of limbo by putting tenants' lives on hold and erasing their past and memories. Other scholars have argued that not only does displacement have an effect on spatialities, but a series of micro-events can also stretch time (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Sakizlioğlu, 2014). Agency relates to configurations of space-time, such as the duration and intensity of displacement and dispossession processes. As crisis-generated dynamics may gradually colonise everyday life, tenants rely on their ability to cope with and reduce the economic pressure they face.

2.2. Tenants' Strategies Towards Increasing Rents and Decreasing Housing Affordability

Agency has been a key factor in resisting gentrification (Lees & Robinson, 2021). Few gentrification studies, however, have addressed the topic of rising rents and tenants' reactions to them. Newman and Wyly (2006) distinguish between low-income renters' "private strategies," (e.g., overcrowding) and "public interventions" (e.g., installing public housing programmes when facing rent increases). They argued that low-income renters can become spatially trapped as they struggle to stay put without affordable alternatives. In the European context, Baeten et al. (2017) have investigated the effects of displacement pressure on low-income renters

in the context of large-scale Swedish housing renovations. They outlined the pressuring tactics of landlords to force tenants to move out by creating anxiety, e.g., through spreading rumours about rent increases. Their study established a link between upgrading dynamics and rent increases, as tenants were willing to pay more for increased quality (see Beran & Nuissl, 2024, for Berlin). Bengtsson and Bohman (2021) adapted the consumer-related exit-voice-loyalty concepts (which are equivalent to the outcomes: relocation – protesting or negotiations – staying put) to tenants' reactions to housing renovations. Some strategies rely on solidarity from affected neighbours and them forming a collective. Meuth and Reutlinger (2023) have distinguished between multiple strategies of tenants whose rental contracts have been cancelled (e.g., making compromises) and modes that underly them (e.g., strategic vs. spontaneous practices). Although their study did not focus on displacement, Rinn et al. (2022) outlined four tenant strategies in response to rent increases in gentrified neighbourhoods in Berlin. These include de-problematisation, unwilling consent, changing the field of action, and seeking confrontation. The strategies consider tenants' normative evaluation and available options. While these studies provide valuable insights into residents' experiences when responding to neighbourhood gentrification or housing renovation, they often overlook smaller consequences for tenants' everyday lives.

The effects of rising rents on renters' everyday lives have been extensively discussed in housing affordability literature, with scholars controversially debating the measurable connection between rent burden and poverty. This quantitatively oriented body of research seeks to establish normative and objective standards for housing costs and their burden (see Anacker, 2019, for an overview). Scholarship has agreed that housing stress arises when a household's rent-to-income ratio exceeds 30%, whereas severe stress emerges beyond 50%. When households suffer from housing-cost overburden, research suggests that they compensate by reducing non-housing-related expenses (Haffner & Hulse, 2021; Newman & Wyly, 2006). Tenants may reduce their expenses, for example, by altering their consumption habits or generating additional income, e.g., working increased hours (Anacker, 2019). These trade-offs between quality and affordability affect essential expenses such as food, energy, and transport. The adjustments are either temporary or permanent. However, the impact on health, social reproduction, and educational outcomes is severe (Rosen et al., 2023). Scholars have argued that households are unevenly rent-burdened along markers of inequality, such as racial groups, immigration background, and socio-economic status (Lee et al., 2022; Rosen et al., 2023). Winke (2021) has suggested that low- and middle-income tenants possess differing abilities to absorb rent increases, which affect their access to housing options and relocation patterns. These quantitative debates offer important insights into how rent burdens affect tenants' everyday lives. Affordability relates to the living standards that households seek to maintain, yet that which is considered satisfactory, and the extent to which compromises can be made, remain highly subjective. Discussions on housing affordability have overlooked tenants' cumulative strategies (or lack thereof) relating to personally felt and embodied experiences of displacement pressure.

3. The Unlikely Case of Vienna

Vienna is a city of tenants (76% of the population), with a large de-commodified housing stock (21% limited-profit housing associations and 22% council housing; Reinprecht, 2014). About one-third of the population lives in the commodified PRS, which is divided into two subsectors: the historic-regulated (22%) and the unregulated sectors (11%). The historic housing stock of the PRS dates back to the *Gründerzeit* (1840–1914) and is largely concentrated in the city centre. This sector is regulated by rent caps and is

subject to the tenancy law (*Mietrechtsgesetz*), which enforces fixed-term contracts and only allows rents to be adjusted for inflation. The unregulated PRS (de jure since 1945, de facto since the 1990s) operates under civil law, allowing for free-market rents that are deemed "appropriate," but with less tenant protection (Tockner, 2017).

The repositioning of the historic PRS has increased commodification and has posed challenges to housing affordability since the 1980s. First, ongoing housing-market liberalisation began with the Viennese Soft Urban Renewal programme (1985) to counteract decades of disinvestment in the historic housing stock, which was caused by high tenant protection with rent caps (Kadi, 2015). Although this intervention was intended to prevent the displacement of sitting tenants, many landlords renovated cheap substandard apartments and withdrew them from the housing market once the mandatory, yet temporary, rent cap ended. Second, rental deregulation of the historic stock changed from categories to a fictional reference-value system in 1994 (Kadi, 2015). This new system allowed for time-limited contracts (minimum 3 years) and regular inflation adjustments, making it easier for landlords to adjust rents after leases expired. Within this system, landlords can add location premiums to the reference value, leading to non-transparency and overcharging, especially in inner-city areas. Currently, about two-thirds of the PRS contracts are time-limited (Tockner, 2017). Third, following the geopolitical repositioning of Vienna, the city has experienced continuous urban growth through immigration, creating an excess demand for flats. Fourth, since the 2000s, Vienna has experienced a house-price boom due to low interest rates, making the historic PRS a lucrative investment option and commodified product. Investors have developed two strategies to circumvent strict rent regulation and exploit value or rent gaps (Musil et al., 2022). They either legally transform apartment buildings from rental to home-ownership units, or demolish historic buildings to construct new, smaller apartments, regulated under the reference-value-system. Fifth, the PRS has relatively increased, driven by commercial actors amidst an ongoing construction boom. The City of Vienna ceased building council housing between 2004 and 2018 and shifted the responsibility of de-commodified housing provision to limited-profit housing associations (Litschauer & Friesenecker, 2021).

In Vienna's unitary housing market, financial, social, or regulatory access criteria differ across sectors, making permeability between the sectors difficult. In the PRS, access barriers to other housing segments are comparatively low. Landlords decide whom they would rent to, charging them a deposit and, until 2023, also a mandatory real-estate agent fee. Due to its flexibility, low-income tenants are overrepresented in the PRS, which might lead to their becoming trapped there (Banabak et al., 2024). The quality of the PRS is heterogeneous, ranging from insecure and precarious low-quality options to units in the luxury segment. In 2006, council housing was opened to non-Austrians. Interest in accessing council housing has increased, resulting in long waiting times (Reinprecht, 2014). Access criteria for people of legal age include income limits, and having lived at the same Viennese address for at least two years. Limited-profit housing is relatively accessible, but tenants need an average down payment of €500/m² (Litschauer & Friesenecker, 2021). Housing market segmentation and increased rents contribute to the exclusionary displacement of tenants.

4. Methods, Sample, and Data Analysis

Between 2023 and 2024, interviews were conducted with 18 self-identified tenants who have been affected by economic displacement pressure across both PRS sub-sectors in Vienna. Participants (referred to

as “IV”) had to meet the criteria of living in the PRS in Vienna, having experienced rent increases that affect everyday life, and seeking some form of help or counselling, i.e., advice on tenancy law or rental debts, access to council housing, support in securing flats in the PRS, etc. For their participation, the tenants received shopping vouchers. To access potential interviewees, I used the help of gatekeepers: NGOs, associations, and (public) institutions in the field of housing. Some gatekeepers handed out flyers while others let me approach their clients in their waiting rooms before or after their appointments. Twenty-seven short impromptu talks (referred to as “IVN”) were recorded in field notes with those who had no time or energy to participate but were willing to talk while waiting for their appointments. Interviewees had experienced rent increases over time, with some facing gradual increases and others encountering them more abruptly. The duration of displacement pressure experienced by individuals ranged from years (in the historic PRS) to a few months (in the unregulated PRS). Although I attempted to include individuals who had not sought any form of help/counselling, gatekeepers informed me that these individuals were unwilling to participate in the study.

I used maximum variation sampling to explore the range of everyday forms of crisis-generated displacement and to identify commonalities among affected tenants. The sample included tenants between the ages of 21 and 83. Twelve were identified as female and six were Austrian natives. The sample varied from marginal-middle-class individuals with medium-sized incomes to highly vulnerable and marginalised tenants living below the poverty line (for a one-person household in 2023: 1592€). Most participants have been subjected to high rent burdens from the beginning of their tenancy, which ranged from 50% to 100% of their income at the time of the interviews. The household composition of the interviewees was as follows (number of interviewees in brackets): single persons (10), single parents (2), single earners (3), and multi-child families (3). Some interviewees faced additional challenges, such as job loss (1), separation (2), or former roommates moving out (2). Tenants were living across Vienna in both subsectors of the PRS: 10 in the historic sector (3 with fixed-term contracts) and 8 in the unregulated sector.

All tenants faced comparable issues because once the rent became unaffordable, the distinctions between market sub-sections became irrelevant. While the transition to more severe forms of displacement may occur more quickly, vulnerable tenants also experience everyday forms of displacement. Similarly, middle-class tenants carrying a high housing cost burden can accumulate rent arrears and face eviction. However, tenants living in the historic stock with fixed-term contracts are often willing to make greater sacrifices to stay longer, which can, in turn, lead to more severe forms of displacement. At the time of the interview, only one participant had transitioned to living with her family because her landlord threatened her regarding rental arrears. The limitation of the study was that people with a migration background were more inclined to participate, while the most vulnerable Austrian natives, as well as the Turkish community, remained inaccessible. Due to a lack of funding, I, as a privileged white researcher, could only include those who spoke German or English. For one interview, a colleague assisted with translation. Those who had been denied institutional help, such as council housing or rental allowance, were the most willing to participate.

This research is based on narrative-biographical interviews lasting two to three hours each. This open form of interview relies on the narratives that the participants provide and on whether they revealed their experiences in-depth. Each participant was given the same prompt: to speak freely about their experiences of housing/renting in Vienna throughout their lives with a focus on displacement pressure. Follow-up

questions would clarify ambiguities in the narrations and help participants to explicate further. The transcribed interviews were coded following the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). While the overall life story was important for understanding the emergence of participants' housing situations, episodes in which participants talked about displacement pressures were crucial for reconstructing their agency to deal with their changing situation and the unfolding of their displacement experiences. The first round of open (inductive) coding was linked very closely to the spoken words. Thematic categories were derived from inductive coding. Here, the meaning-marking process and the agency of tenants were analysed within the unique life and housing situation (e.g., dissatisfaction with changing situations). Categories were coded axially to determine their relationships to other categories, as well as the contrasts between them. Lastly, theoretical coding of these categories aided the identification of common yet grounded patterns throughout the empirical data. Using the circular process of abduction, I generated and reassessed hypotheses about "un/doing displacement" from the interviews, e.g., contributing to/or counteracting the process. In particular, I investigated participants' agency while under displacement pressure, the effects deriving therefrom, as well as the consequences for space and time. By using abductive hypothesising, I reconstructed an understanding of "un/doing displacement" at the nexus of tenants' agency and the changing affective relations between space, time, and themselves.

5. Results

5.1. Tenants' Agency Under Economic Displacement Pressure

I shall now distinguish tenants' efforts towards un/doing displacement into "adaptive" and "interventive" practices, which are intertwined and constrained by power relations. To establish agency, tenants experience economic displacement pressure as they become emotively aware of their changing situation (Baker, 2021; Valli, 2015). Respondents have described their feelings about rent increases or steeply rising energy costs as being "surprised" (IV-15), "cornered" (IV-08), or feeling that they "did not expect to pay so much more" (IV-02). One elderly tenant, who had been living in the historic PRS for decades, described how the shock of price increases "came gradually, as there was less and less left [which eventually turned into a moment] where it clicked for me: it's impossible [to sustain payments]" (IV-05). Some tenants in the unregulated sector described the increases as being "hefty" (IV-17). They added that the cost-benefit ratios became "exorbitant" (IV-06) and that they felt "swamped" (IV-07) because the increases "came so suddenly, one month after signing the contract" (IV-17), or because costs "have become more every month" (IV-23), "it came so fast" (IV-04), or that "you don't know when it will stop" (IVN-001).

The ways in which feelings related to these changes translate into agency vary significantly. Un/doing displacement is a gradual and continuous negotiation process that operates at the level of everyday life through smaller "adaptive practices" while tenants consider their limits. It describes a set of practices that tenants can enact by themselves, with household members, or using the resources, skills, and knowledge at their disposal. Tenants negotiate by deciding where to cut back expenses (IV-42) to manage the increased rent, since "you can't control the expenses for the flat" (IV-17). Examples of these practices include lowering living standards by reducing expenses (cf. Haffner & Hulse, 2021), such as not heating the flat (IV-05), eating lower-quality food (IV-10), organising expenses (IV-20), or selling off valuable assets, like cars (IV-04), to gain economic leeway. This may impact support for others; some reported reducing financial assistance, such as alimony (IV-29), to ensure their survival. Adaptive practices are immediate responses to economic pressure

faced by tenants. However, adaptive practices have a defined endpoint, either when the landlord issues an eviction notice, when the lease ends (IV-02 and IV-13), or when tenants determine the endpoint themselves. The limits of adaptive practices are influenced by tenants' social positionality and their perceptions of their changing situation. Adaption possibilities fade when all resources have been exhausted or when they never were available in the first place. Willingness to adapt depends on how "forced" the process feels (IV-19), the expected duration of the situation (IV-23), and the severity of the adaptive constraints (IV-29). In worst cases, vulnerable participants reported self-exploitation, such as severely rationing food (IV-23) or resorting to stealing (IV-28). Adaptive limits involve "untouchable" expenses (IV-03), e.g., medical and educational expenses, including tutoring and private doctors, or smaller "luxury" expenses (IV-08), such as smoking (IV-02) or children's entertainment (IV-16 and IV-28). These practices lead to altered everyday life situations that must be "endured" (IV-07) over varying periods.

Un/doing displacement also operates as larger "interventive" practices that require the help of other actors and depend on their willingness to assist in resisting financial erosion. Experiencing varying degrees of agency loss beyond their control can make tenants feel unable to survive alone due to a lack of resources, skills, and knowledge. Feelings related to the changing situation intensify, highlighting the importance of agency, as reflected in one tenant's statement: "I have to act, not just talk" (IV-05). In contrast to adaptive practices, interventive practices require tenants to interact beyond the household and unlock resources while involving third parties. Interventive practices typically start with low-threshold-options, such as shifting energy plans (IV-03), asking the family "whether they could advance some money" (IV-02, IV-16, and IV-31) or negotiating with the landlord to pay rent in instalments (IV-08, IV-15, and IV-20). Tenants in the historic PRS avoid negotiating rent increases because they are aware of the higher rents their neighbours pay for similar flats under newer contracts (IV-03 and IV-05). Formal or institutional interventive practices are determined by the urgency and necessity perceived by tenants. Unlike adaptive practices, interventive practices are less dynamic and involve more time-intensive commitments. Whereas some tenants wanted to remain independent as long as possible, vulnerable tenants rely on various interventive practices, such as using rent allowances or social benefits, to circumnavigate eviction or even homelessness.

While interventive practices aim to achieve long-term outcomes (cf. Beran & Nuissl, 2024; Meuth & Reutlinger, 2023; Rinn et al., 2022), including staying put or relocating, they are embedded in wider socio-political processes, e.g., the unfolding of racialised and discriminatory power relations. Apart from proactively claiming rights, such as contesting overcharged rent or seeking legal help (IV-06), interventive practices involve a shift in power relations and social positionality. Tenants adopt a "defence position," finding themselves in a "subjugated [situation], where you cannot support yourself" (IV-20). Participants described a discrepancy between their realisation of the situation and their belated reactive interventions: "I was so shocked that I didn't act immediately" (IV-05) or "I had already realised it, but only did something about it much later" (IV-02). Some middle-class tenants find themselves in such a situation for the first time. In contrast to tenants who already depend on social aid, a lack of institutional experience can delay the interventive practices: "I had no idea where to go for help" (IV-07).

Tenants in the historic PRS often want to keep their flats as long as possible, underestimating the situation and its effects: "I thought that maybe it would get better again, all this whitewashing, but it didn't get any better. It just became worse" (IV-05). Consequently, tenants make significant adaptions:

> At first, I thought that I could manage, but now it's a bit tight. It's increased a lot, you could say by around €100 in two years. It's hard for me to afford the rent now because my salary is €1,500, the rent is €950 and electricity is €300, so it's actually difficult to get by on a day-to-day basis. (IV-08)

Middle-class tenants in the unregulated PRS relate their expenses to what they get in return when expenses exceed their monetary thresholds: "And I knew I could go up to €700 because otherwise, it would be really difficult. I really can't afford it now and don't want to. [After three increases, I'm paying] €1000 just for the flat. For 47m², that's no palace" (IV-10). Thresholds relate to tenants' savings, which had to be used for purposes other than intended: "For food and gas and electricity [the savings] were not intended" (IV-05). Tenants with time-limited rental contracts relate their situation to both the landlords' willingness to compromise and the perceived quality of the flat:

> [The landlord] said at the last second, "No, that's too little now, I need €750." I said, "Your flat is shit, always dirty, the windows are always leaking. I pay €1000 a month with electricity and gas. What is little?" (IV-14)

Socially disadvantaged and ethnicised tenants reflect on their position of having to accept the changing situation and wait it out: "You just can't negotiate with the landlord. Well, because we have no choice. We need to stay somewhere. So we take it like this" (IV-29). Confronting landlords often emerge out of tenants' relatively privileged situation, either when they are moving out soon (IV-06) or have the support of a social network (IV-02 and IV-31).

Tenants seek formal or institutional interventive practices based on the degree of urgency or threat they perceive in their changing situation, or when adaptive practices reach their limits of alleviating the changing situation. These practices include using services such as the *Wohnschirm*, accessing council housing, or finding other more affordable accommodations. They feel that they have "no other choice" (IV-23) or that "something has to happen because it can't go on like this" (IV-05). Before reaching a perceived state of absolute necessity, other formal or institutional interventions tend to be circumvented or they "get lost in everyday life" (IV-41). Participants have stated that they have "no nerves, energy, or time" (IV-02 and IV-07) for the administrative effort required or to create additional sources of income, e.g., due to fulfilling childcare responsibilities (IV-29) or due to the limited size of the flat, which makes subletting impossible (IV-10). When tenants find themselves in these tight situations, they need free-of-charge help, whereas some tenant protection associations create barriers due to their membership fees. However, moving flats within a tight housing market does not seem to be a viable option. Within the PRS, "you simply pay more when you move" (IV-02), and "you can't get much cheaper [in a comparable quality in the PRS]" (IV-32). Alternatively, moving from the historic sector to the unregulated PRS "I could only reduce the size" (IV-03). This lack of willingness to move "unnecessarily" carries the risk that tenants may no longer be able to afford a move (IV-23 and IVN-001) unless they can access council housing, which does not require a deposit. Regarding formal or institutional help, applications for council housing or rent allowances are desired options because they are not only socially accepted but also open to broad sectors of society. However, they require tenants to meet certain access and eligibility criteria. Less vulnerable tenants or those experiencing displacement for the first time may only require isolated (monetary) intervention to alleviate economic pressure. In contrast, tenants who are more vulnerable or facing more severe situations often depend on continuous institutional support to survive. This may include monthly aid payments (IV-29) or psychological consultations (IV-05).

When tenants rely on continuous interventive practices, their dependencies can become entrenched in their daily survival (IV-16 and IV-29). Marginalised tenants (IV-13 and IV-28) often have to rely on their social networks because institutional gaps cannot provide support. For instance, a landlord made a young woman with a migration background and no German skills a target of exploitation. When this minimum-wage sole earner was unable to pay her rent due to medical expenses, she was threatened by the landlord and sought help from an NGO, but was unsuccessful: "They asked for the contract [to help me] and I told them I don't have it, I cannot prove that I'm living there" (IV-28). Overall, tenants place their hopes on resolving their situation through (formal/institutional) interventive practices, depending on the success of these measures. If these interventions fail, the pressure may intensify, worsening the situation, and causing them to feel "left alone" (IV-15 and IVN-001). However, if these interventions succeed, tenants regain control over their lives while displacement pressure becomes suspended at least for a while.

5.2. Modes of Dictating Space and Time

Tenants' efforts towards un/doing displacement do not solely relate to material dispossession but they unfold into modes of "dictating" spatio-temporal experiences. As such, adaptive and interventive practices contest the spatialised powers that "take" from them (Kern, 2016). In the following, I provide some examples relating to how tenants negotiate displacement pressure through materialities, homes, and their bodies or mental activities.

Tenants shift to a lifestyle of spending more time at home, covering basic necessities only (IV-15 and IV-31). They "give up [their] quality of life, meet fewer friends, or enjoy only free leisure activities" (IV-17). Adaptive practices dictate the material configurations at home (cf. Dimitrakou & Hilbrandt, 2022). When two participants invited me to their homes for the interviews, showing me their flats, they talked about how they arranged their furniture so that the places where they spent the most time, the living-room couch or the dining table, were situated close to the windows in order to save money by using natural daylight. In another case of a long-term resident, the absence of fish in her aquarium served as a constant reminder of her situation, where material dispossessions dictate the atmosphere of her home: "The fish are getting fewer and fewer in the aquarium because I don't buy any new ones. I've had it for about 20 years and it's never been empty. Now it's getting empty. It's sad" (IV-03).

Material dispossession relates to the changing practices by which tenants perform home. A 55-year-old secretary in the unregulated PRS makes her home as cosy as possible. "You come home, make the most of every free second in your expensive flat. Feeling good means dwelling. Yes, because where else….Where else, if not in my flat? That's why I deliberately do positive things" (IV-10). As she has nowhere else to go, she has to make the most of her flat. She explained buying "cheap" lights and "lots of" blankets to make her home intentionally extra cosy, helping her relax after a long day of work. The blankets serve to keep her warm while not heating the flat. She further adapted her home practices by not using all of her kitchen appliances "I used to love cooking, now I'm doing it in the microwave. I'm forced to do it, again because it's cheaper" (IV-10). By finding a compromise while keeping the flat comfortable, she tries to maintain control over the changing situation that she has to endure. Material dispossessions challenge the desired performance of a home. Home, as a fluid practice, allows tenants to adapt their performance of the home by dictating the kind of materialities and how they can be used, sometimes leading to forced practices of homemaking. This could also mean shifting certain home practices to spaces outside of the flat. Many

interviewees resort to communal laundry rooms because they cannot afford a washing machine or a flat where it would fit (IV-17 and IV-23), an unemployed 42-year-old migrant (IV-13) even spatially outsources his daily showering. He explained that he kept his gym card because it was cheaper to shower there regularly than at home. Material dispossessions gradually invade homes and tenants try to establish certain practices that remain untouched. Tenants' practices do not un-make homes (Baxter & Brickell, 2014), but these practices remake homes differently, altering everyday life spaces while material dispossessions dictate their available options. By preserving and adapting practices of home, tenants aim to counteract feelings of un-homing. While tenants try to retain control over the changing situation, they must compromise by changing or even relocating the practices that have constituted their home life. Consequently, tenants may compromise with self-created spatio-temporal dispossessions.

Tenants' advanced efforts of un/doing displacement take a toll on their physical and mental health (cf. Philo, 2005; Rosen et al., 2023). Tenants have mentioned their increased bodily exhaustion, regardless of the amount of physical labour already incorporated into their day. A social worker who is constantly on the lookout for a cheaper flat for his family of five reported: "I just collapse. I come home and fall into bed" (IV-20). Adaptive and interventive practices affect tenants' experiences of displacement pressure, as respondents have reported an impact on mental and physical well-being, i.e., perceived stress or dissatisfaction. A 50-year-old caregiver experiences exhaustion and mental stress because:

> I've increased my working hours, three times so that I can afford it all. I have insomnia. I can't sleep any more. When I do sleep, I wake up every two hours. Then you have so many thoughts in your head. Then you're exhausted. But then you have to get up, you have to go to work so you can earn money. (IV-04)

Furthermore, she actively decides against taking the necessary sick leave, dictating her body through work because "otherwise I would lose all my bonuses" (IV-04). A 53-year-old copy-shop employee cancelled her household insurance to free money while awaiting a decision on her council housing application. This situation left her in uncertainty about her current flat's condition: "I'm somehow developing fear. What do I do if something breaks [in the flat]?" (IV-08). While some tenants adapt by using coping mechanisms such as staying busy (IV-08) or thinking positively (IV-23), others struggle with the emotional toll, feeling distracted at work (IV-14), trapped in their homes (IV-34), or paralysed by displacement pressure. Displacement pressure and related agency dictate tenants' thoughts as they experience a loss of control over the changing situation.

Un/doing displacement affects tenants' spatio-temporal configurations, usually dictating their time away from home. Adaptive practices such as plasma donations (IV-16), strategic shopping (IV-07 and IV-29), interventive practices, like working on public holidays for bonuses (IV-02 and IV-31), or earning money on the side (IV-17) might give tenants some control. However, other interventive practices, such as relying on aid organisations (IV-10) or guarantors (IV-38 and IVN-001), can limit tenants' autonomy as their spatio-temporal configuration becomes dictated by others. In severe cases, such as that of a retired woman whose rent consumed her entire pension, tenants lose control over their living situation and are left waiting for bureaucratic decisions, while the symbolic power entrenched in bureaucracy can prolong experiences of pressure. She felt the trade-off between her autonomous agency and relieving the pressure:

> And then you hang there. And you actually just wait, because it all takes ages….And then they invited me to a viewing and you can only say yes anyway, for if you say no, you're through. You have no chance of anything [else]. (IV-05)

In these cases, only successful interventive practices can provide new affective space-time configurations that will relieve tenants from experiencing severe forms of displacement. However, as seen in this example, formal interventive practices can limit or even suspend tenants' right to determine where and how to live. The psychological and financial effects of these practices can extend into the future, as seen when one tenant cancelled her pension plan for immediate financial relief (IV-03), risking future instability and redirecting spatio-temporal dispossessions.

6. Concluding Remarks

Throughout this article, I have argued that tenants co-produce their crisis-generated displacement processes. I have drawn on the experiences of tenants in the PRS in Vienna who have sought help or counselling regarding rising rents while being subjected to external power relations. This article aimed to construct an understanding of experiences of economic displacement pressure through tenants' agency or the lack thereof, thus adding to the emergent constructivist displacement literature (Baker, 2021; Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). This contribution provides a more nuanced reading of everyday forms of displacement (Stabrowski, 2014), exploring how and why tenants are "un/doing" displacement. I have connected the quantitative housing affordability literature on tenants' everyday economic trade-offs (Anacker, 2019; Haffner & Hulse, 2021) with the emergent urban displacement literature (Hubbard & Lees, 2020; Meuth & Reutlinger, 2023; Pull & Richard, 2021; Rinn et al., 2022), which focuses on tenants' broader strategies and their experienced effects.

The concept of "un/doing displacement" highlights the extent to which tenants (can) shape the process of displacement. In contrast to other studies outlining tenants' broader strategies (Bengtsson & Bohman, 2021; Meuth & Reutlinger, 2023; Rinn et al., 2022), the outlined distinction between adaptive and interventive practices provides a novel perspective on how agency (and lack thereof) contributes to or counteracts displacement processes. Dynamic adaptive practices relate to tenants' everyday lives and their available resources, skills, or knowledge, whereas larger, interventive practices require the involvement of others—either privately or formally/institutionally—in pursuing long-term strategies, such as staying put, relocating, etc. While scholarship has acknowledged various strategies, this research has shown that being subjected to economic displacement pressure involves a continuous negotiation process that demands constant and adaptable agency rather than isolated strategies. Adaptive practices are established more or less automatically and tend to be more gradual. In contrast, tenants rely on their feelings of loss of agency and control over the changing situation when engaging in different forms of interventive practices. As such, tenants engage in long-term commitments toward sustaining successful interventive practices, as they can create or reinforce dependencies on social networks or public institutions.

Results have further shown that tenants, through their practices, relationally co-produce the unfolding of experiences of the changing affective relations between space, time, and the self. In analysing tenants' agency and nuancing their experience under displacement pressure, I extend the work of scholars who had focused primarily on the most violent forms of displacement as absolute states that dominate tenants' lives (Atkinson, 2015; Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Madden & Marcuse, 2016). Tenants shape their displacement experience by

either contributing to or resisting its violence. Un/doing displacement unfolds in distinct modes that "dictate"—either gradually or abruptly—tenants' experiences that are anchored in space and time. Through their agency, tenants have engaged in various strategies toward slowing down the spatio-temporal dispossessions that "take" from them. They negotiate the gradual unfolding of displacement through dispossessions which dictate their materialities, home spaces, bodies, and mental activities. While striving to minimise the impact on their everyday lives, tenants make incremental changes in their practices. These self-dictating trade-offs involve the remaking of practices and experiencing space and time differently. However, the production of spaces becomes a forced process, transforming home into a challenging "achievement." Results have also shown that spatio-temporal dispossessions are not limited to the present or past: Tenants' co-production can extend these effects into future configurations and influence accessible housing options. As displacement pressure intensifies towards more violent forms, tenants' everyday lives and spatio-temporal configurations—including their displacement outcomes—become increasingly dictated by and dependent on external actors, e.g., social networks or institutional actors.

Un/doing displacement and its effects are related to the complex constellations of tenants' social positionality vis-à-vis actors in housing markets, the feelings of urgency and insecurity they develop, as well as the temporality of practices related to their success. The diversity of tenants participating in this research highlights how displacement dynamics extend various segments of society and seemingly secure housing-market segments. Once under pressure, tenants must negotiate displacement along lines of class, gender, and race/ethnicity (see Aigner, 2019). Only those in a relatively privileged position may be able to transform the affective relations between space, time, and the self. Since un/doing displacement relates to emergent feelings, interventive practices often emerge too late, consolidating various forms of dispossession. However, this complex interaction between actors in housing markets and tenants' agency does not establish a causal relation between rent increases and socio-economic status (cf. Rinn et al., 2022). Instead, it highlights relational forms of crisis-generated displacement with gradual shifts between subtlety and violence.

This qualitative study on Vienna provides insights into housing inequalities emerging within an extensive welfare-state environment. Despite the presence of a large social and subsidised housing sector, the repositioning of the PRS over the last few decades and the ongoing loss of low-income housing contribute to the unaffordability of housing and intensified competition among renters (Kadi, 2015; Kadi et al., 2022). While welfare interventions may prevent eviction, they predominantly manifest through everyday relational displacement and displacement pressure. The Viennese welfare-state context provides tenants with a specific context, where displacement pressure and practices dealing with it may predominantly produce everyday forms of displacement. This research highlights the increasing complexity and diversification of displacement and dispossession, where context-bound yet individual agency ultimately diversifies forms of displacement.

This research stresses the importance of studying the intersections between housing affordability and displacement, which is crucial to addressing tenants' needs and informing policy. For instance, in Vienna, policymakers need to prioritise awareness-raising concerning the insidious and invisible nature of economic displacement pressure. Tenants, particularly in the seemingly "secure" historic PRS, holding unlimited contracts, tend to underestimate the effects of the housing affordability crisis. Reducing the stigma associated with seeking institutional help (often linked with homelessness) and establishing a one-stop-shop

for housing affordability services could remove institutional barriers and enable tenants to address their needs more efficiently. Providing transparent information about the Viennese housing market and available services or benefits would help tenants navigate the complex institutional structures and prevent the overburdening of public services, including council housing. Additionally, implementing regulations such as rent caps in the PRS could help prevent the deepening of inequalities in the context of the housing affordability crisis. Overall, this research conceptualises displacement as a broader relational and emotive process, where the diverse roles and needs of different tenants must be acknowledged and understood.

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