

Intro:

We originally sent this text only in German, not in English. We're sorry about that - we know and understand that this creates additional barriers for many queer people living and visiting Vienna. We are aware that even though we translated the text to English now, for many there are still barriers, but we also must admit to ourselves that we don't have any energy left to continue further. If someone wants to translate this to other languages or media, you are welcome to do so.

Subject:

Wagenplatz AKW Lobau and transphobic behavior

Following recent events, we need to talk about how the Wagenplatz AKW Lobau deals with transphobic behavior.

CW: transphobic violence and how the left-radical scene deals with it

We also attached the following text as a PDF (Statement_EN.pdf):

Hi everyone,

We want to warn queer and other people about the way in which criticism of queerphobic and especially transphobic behavior is dealt with at the Lobau Wagenplatz (keywords: gaslighting, victim blaming/survivor-perpetrator reversal, attempts at intimidation). Specifically, we want to illustrate how the affected people were treated in the process following a transphobic assault. These problems with the Wagenplatz have been going on for months.

In the following text, we call the person who started the whole thing through their aggressive behavior person xy.

Last summer, xy, completely out of nowhere, went up to a queer trans person and made several queer- and transphobic statements. Xy clearly wanted to argue and be hurtful. In the course of this confrontation, they denied the right of the affected person, and of queer people in general, to exist as openly queer and trans and not hide this part of their identity.

Unfortunately, several people (marginalized in various ways) have had similarly bad experiences with this person in recent years and other housing collectives

where this person used to live. In addition to trans- and queerphobia, there was also racist violence.

People from this Wagenplatz, who were present in the situation mentioned at the beginning, played down xy's behavior and did not take the affected person seriously. What really annoyed us in dealing with the people from this Wagenplatz, was the constant attempt to reduce this obviously structural problem to an individualized conflict. Even though two trans people left the Wagenplatz as a result of the assault, there was only ever communication with one of them, no matter how often we pointed out that the assault affected several people and that dealing with it affected all (gender)queer people who might want to spend time at the Wagenplatz. When communicating with the one person they did see as affected, people from the Wagenplatz kept inferring that it was a private conflict between the affected person and the perpetrator.

This is a practice that those affected by structural violence are constantly confronted with. Assaults are downplayed as "a personal conflict" as opposed to being a problem of political practice.

After the incident, the affected person reported what had happened to the Wagenplatz. In addition to that, we formed a support group and made the following demands:

- It must be made publicly known that there was a queerphobic attack by a resident. Visitors to WaPla have to be able to make informed decisions about whether they want to go there and expose themselves to potential attacks. Xy's identity should not be revealed, we don't want public shaming. (Since several people who live at the Wagenplatz said after the incident that they knew about assaultive behaviors by xy in the past, these persons and thus also the community are partly responsible because they have tolerated and covered up such behavior so far).

- Before publishing a statement, it and the plan for further action/confrontation must be shown and agreed to by those affected.

- Responsibility for the incident and for dealing with it, needs to be shared more equally among the people living at the WaPla. (This seems to have taken place, we were just not informed about it).

- The affected people have to be informed of what materials the people at the WaPla, including xy, are using to learn more about trans topics.

Our reasons for not making the usual demands, such as an exclusion from the scene, are: We want the environment of xy and especially the WaPla community to deal with xy, as well as the violence caused and with the structure behind it. This does not mean that the violence was not hurtful to those involved, but that we would like to see a different approach to violence in general. We want the WaPla community to be confronted with this story by other people as well. There should be conversations about it, not a boycott of the space.

It is also important for us to warn people so that they can actively adjust to the situation. No one should be excluded, but xy should be actively supported and held accountable by their peers in their quest to hopefully try to behave differently in the future. Otherwise, in our opinion, the problem is only shifted into circles where the problematic behavior has not yet been addressed and assaults can happen again without warning.

During the communication with the WaPla, we were informed that the incident had triggered many processes and conflicts in the group. Among other things, it was promised that the Wagenplatz would now collectively deal with "the topic" (trans* and queerness, structural violence, Definitionsmacht (who gets to define what counts as an assault)...?). We were not told which materials or sources people had used to "deal with" the issue, even after repeatedly requesting this. Who reads, hears, or spreads what information/opinions about trans*ness and queerness, is extremely relevant. Saying "we are dealing with the issue" is not enough and sounds to us like words without inherent meaning. This is also a typical way of dealing with structural violence: stalling and making vague promises until those affected run out of energy and stop asking.

But not only has nothing been done as far as we can see - matters were made even worse: instead of publicly commenting on the incident, people from the Wagenplatz decided to write individual statements (they are actually more like private letters). These were sent to a single affected person without anyone filtering them first. A letter from xy was also included, without asking whether we wanted that. But this letter at least included an apology.

Some of the "statements", on the other hand, were extremely hostile and again transphobic. The person they were sent to received no prior warning about this. These letters were so awful that we saw no way around re-editing this text you're reading right now and addressing them since they put the whole situation in a completely different light. One of the letters is an anonymous attempt at intimidation. In it, the person who spoke out about the attack mentioned at the beginning and our criticism and demands are referred to as "insolent". Any responsibility for ensuring that people who are at the Wagenplatz should not be subjected to violence is rejected - in general, but even more so when it comes to "guests". Finally, the letter personally attacks the affected person.

Another letter, this one at least signed, reads like a more detailed version of the same message. In addition to the "insolence" that makes another appearance, it is now also about "defamation". In addition, the person brings up "Definitionsmacht", but argues that the decision about what is a violation of someone's boundaries and how to deal with it should not lie with those affected, but with the Wagenplatz community. Being drunk is cited as a legitimate excuse for violent behavior.

The trans person concerned is denied the ability to define what behavior counts as transphobia. Being openly queer and/or trans is described as "constantly emphasizing differences". Ignoring queer existences, on the other hand, is called an attempt to "see others as equals". And finally, the author of the letter claims that to criticize or defend oneself against attacks means "putting one's own opinion above that of others". They say that for communities, it would be better to "just leave others alone", i.e. to just shut up about being wronged. We hardly want to imagine what this means for communal life at the AKW Wagenplatz.

For us, this way of dealing with criticism shows an inability (or unwillingness) to deal with it. Instead of accepting it sincerely and seriously, learning from it, and supporting those affected, our criticism was perceived by the letter writers as impolite and disturbing to the harmony of communal life. So they decided to write texts attacking the affected person, going off in all possible directions, but constantly missing the point (these derailing and whataboutism strategies are also a typical way of dealing with structural violence). Such behavior serves and leads to the silencing of marginalized people.

So instead of actively confronting their own transphobia, individuals have preferred to throw even more transphobia our way. We are so very angry! We are so very tired. This process is highly draining, which is nothing new when it comes to how those affected by structural violence are often treated.

One reason for us going public with this now is that our demands were not met and the responsibility toward those affected was not taken. This means that we as a solidarity group had to keep reminding the WaPla about their responsibilities, which was extremely draining for the group, especially for those affected.

The Wagenplatz community does not take responsibility for the overall situation because individuals actively veto the process. Collective acceptance of responsibility does not work and the refusal of individuals is apparently reason enough for the group not to speak out publicly.

Sending hostile and violent letters to a person directly affected instead of responding to our demands, was the icing on a big pile of shit.

That is why we are now publishing this statement.

We have given the WaPla community many months to position themselves and let the public know that and how they are dealing with the incident. The damage to their reputation that some people living there were afraid of, they can now have. We will continue to behave insolently ourselves - openly and without shame! We will continue to insolently defend ourselves when someone tries to attack us or our friends! And we will continue to insolently be in solidarity with those affected by violence, to support them and their demands!

The transtifa solidarity group