



Monuments for the Good People of Volkertviertel, Monument No. 1/7. A biography of an anonymous retired construction worker who has lived in the neighborhood for the last 50 years. The text was written by Martin Braunstorfer and Sebastian Plöll, students of the local gymnasium.

MONUMENTS FOR THE GOOD PEOPLE OF VOLKERTVIERTEL

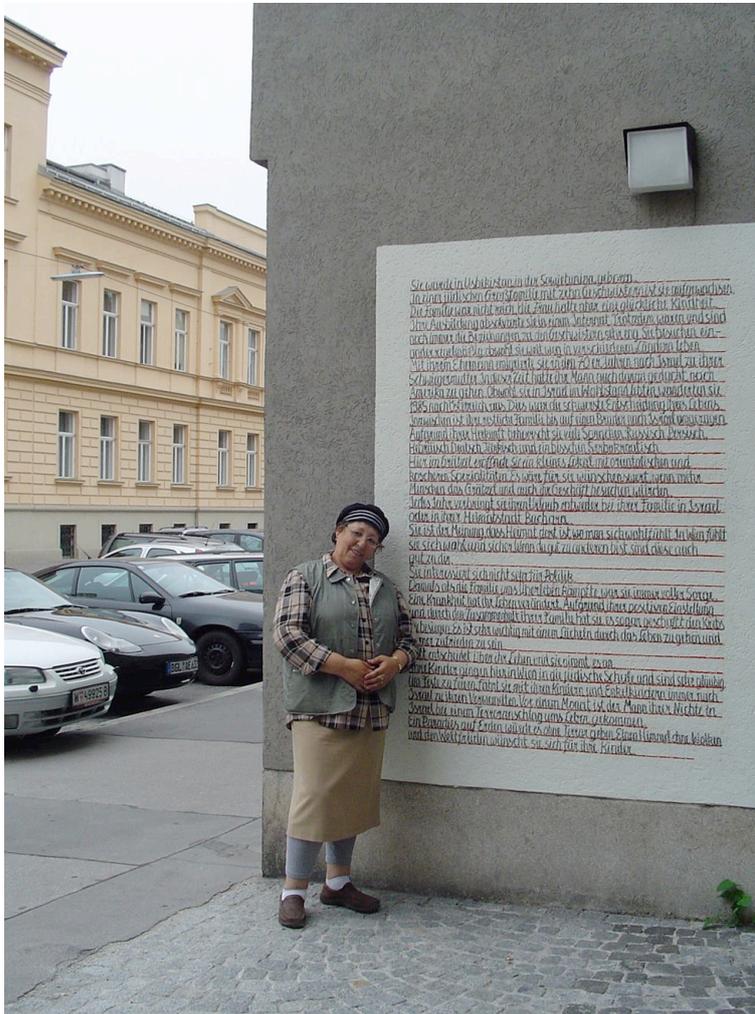
A Community Art Project and Public Art Installation by Kristina Leko
Kunst im Öffentlichen Raum Wien 2006

Seven biographies of workers and immigrants were written in cooperation with youngsters from the neighborhood and erected as written monuments on the walls of the buildings in seven locations in the neighborhood.

The biographies of workers and immigrants are significant documents of our times. The majority of today's societies are strongly marked by migrations and irregularities in the labor markets. Condensed in short and simple narratives, the biographies of working and immigrant people are subtle artifacts able to generate cultural and social identification and self-reflection.

The project documents the social reality of the neighborhood, but it also improves it. Following the idea that every individual or social group should be given a chance to influence the way he/she/they have been perceived in the dominant culture, this project documents life-stories of inhabitants while being produced *with* and *in* the community. The communication potential of the project within the community, and the working methods are as important as the final outcome. However, in its final form, the project needed to be appealing to the Volkertsviertel's visitors. Life-story telling of the people living around the corner were erected as written monuments spread throughout the neighborhood.

Project flow. In collaboration with three local schools six working groups of two to six youngsters were formed. Schools that took part in the project were: a vocational school for the handicapped, a local gymnasium and an elementary school. Young people were invited to take part in a "committee" which would find out about "the good people from our neighborhood" and document their life stories. They were invited to think, research, and suggest the people whose life stories can be instructive for the others. It was explained to them that we wanted to appreciate and honor them, and to produce together symbolic monuments for those good people. They might suggest their parents, relatives, neighbors, and people they have heard of to be included. The project wanted to put the elderly (age 45 +) in close contact with the youngsters. The elderly were invited to make their life stories public in order to transfer their valuable experiences to the youngsters.



Monument No. 477. Lea Niyatsov, next to her biography written by two students from the local gymnasium.

Over the period of three weeks I worked with the youngsters individually and in flexible small groups. We visited people in the neighborhood, audio recorded the interviews and then wrote down their narratives. At the end of this collaborative work process there were 7 texts of approx. 1200 characters, the compressed biographies of seven persons from the neighborhood written by their young neighbors.



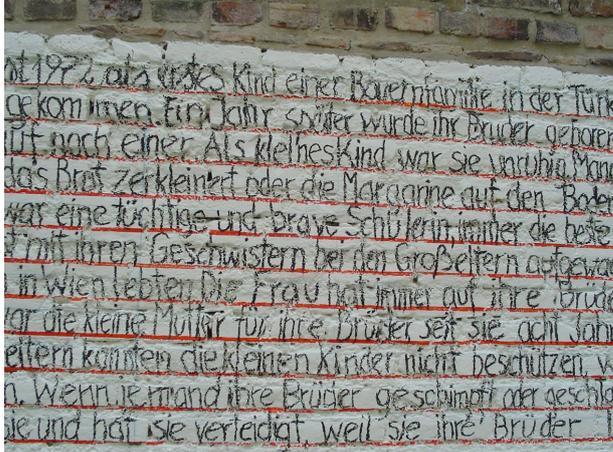
Monument No. 5/7. Biography of the owner of a near-by restaurant, a Serbian immigrant, written by two students. Students of the local gymnasium who participated in the project.



Monuments No. 2/7 and 4/7. Art students working on the wall writings. Below:

Communal and community benefits. The project was proposed together with a modus operandi with a wish that it would be completely produced within the community resources, within a neighborhood which suffers from economical depression and unemployment. Also, not only the production of the project empowers the participants creatively (interviewing people, writing biographical texts) but there is also a strong educational aspect to the whole process. As perceived by the inhabitants of the Viertel itself, it was supposed to be an urban story-telling aimed at encouraging their self reflection, social cohesion and feeling of togetherness of different national groups.

Erecting the monuments. The idea was that the erection of the monuments itself would be organized in a way that benefits the community and its members. The writing on the walls itself was supposed to be done through cooperation with other young people from the neighborhood. Due to lack of organizational resources, however, this was not realized. Instead, art students wrote the seven texts on the walls of the buildings.



Above: Monument No. 7/7. Biography of an anonymous Turkish immigrant worker written by her daughter and the daughter's friend. Below: Monument No. 2/7. Biography of a near-by hairdresser written by students of the local Vocational School for Handicapped Youths.