

HUMAN CITIES II: Reclaiming public space

Workshop in LJUBLJANA, Slovenia, 26/27th May 2011

Hosted by Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, Trnovski pristan 2, 1000 Ljubljana



Figure 1: Detail from park Tabor, photo Matej Nikšič, 2011

On 26/27th May 2011 the meeting of the AESOP Thematic Group for Public Spaces and Urban Cultures was held in Ljubljana during the course of the “Human Cities Project Workshop”, hosted by Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia. Since one of the goals of the recently founded AESOP TG is bridging perspectives from players both rooted in practice and academia, it was important to promote the approaches from both spheres to complement each other. The intention of Ljubljana workshop was to present Slovenian initiatives that enhance the process of reclaiming the public space with their innovative activities as well as to discuss the scientific approaches in the field of urban design and urban cultures. The local initiatives were invited to represent themselves in one of Ljubljana parks - park Tabor. The workshop worked as a meeting point for the two different

European initiatives in order to prepare a future collaboration during the Brussels Human Cities Festival to be held in Belgium in March 2012. This transinstitutional incentive proposed by the colleagues from Ljubljana, particularly Matej Nikšič and Biba Tominc, resulted a very fruitful experience for the present members of the thematic group, among them Nikolai Roskamm (TU Berlin), Ceren Sezer (TU Delft), Aglaée Degros (formerly Vienna UT, Office Artgineering Rotterdam), Sabine Knierbein (SKuOR, Vienna UT). Besides the annual issue “Conviviality”, this workshop provided the experience of presenting the group to other European colleagues working on similar matters from different perspectives. While we were accounted for the “scientific” part of the collaboration, the Human Cities Team perceived themselves as “practitioners”. This was quite surprising as both groups aim at progressively connecting theory and practice regarding the topic of public spaces and urban cultures.

The European partners involved in the Human Cities Project are: La Cambre and Pro Materia from Brussels, Cité du Design from St. Etienne, Politecnico di Milano from Milano and Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia from Ljubljana and invited guests, like [Time Circus](#) from Antwerp. The two-days workshop was structured into three sections and held in different locations. The first-day-workshops were held at [Urban planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia](#) and in [park Tabor](#) and the second day was dedicated to the study tour to Slovenian Coastal region (see programme).

Park Tabor is situated at the eastern edge of Ljubljana’s city centre represents an awaked example of reclamation of public space with different activities under the joint venture of ProstoRož and other partners. The event held there was devoted to open-air presentations of local initiatives from Slovenia and to a public debate related to the role of such initiatives in reclaiming public spaces. Also the lunch was served in the open-air which enriched the participant’s experiences of being active users of open public space.



Figure 2: Working time at Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, photo Nina Goršič, 2011



Figure 3: Having lunch in park Tabor, photo Nina Goršič, 2011

In the course of the event, two local organizations presented themselves: Cultural contact point Slovenia (hereafter CCP Slovenia) and Institute for spatial policies (hereafter IPOP). [CCP Slovenia](#) is an office for Culture Programme, responsible for the promotion of the projects on the national level and the presentation were delivered by Ines Kežman and Maša Ekar. [IPOP](#) presentation was delivered by Aidan Cerar and Marko Peterlin and they pointed out the low level of public participation in spatial planning in Slovenia and stressed the importance of more and earlier public participation when (re)arranging public spaces.

Various approaches of public participation in public open spaces were represented by speakers from various associations. Maša Cvetko from [ProstoRož](#) presented their experiences in designing open public spaces by public participation in the case of park Tabor. Alma R. Selimović from [Bunker](#) highlighted how culture can support and help reviving open public spaces in the case of Tabor

neighborhood. The presentation by Urška Kranjc, Petra Vertelj Nared and Tanja Maljevac, [Pazi Park!](#), enlightened the positive impact of public participation with some other case studies in Ljubljana.



Figure 4: Working time in park Tabor; Figure 5: Goro Osojnik from Ana Monro Theatre with the presentation in park Tabor; Figure 6: Library under the treetops, photo Matej Nikšič, 2011

Goro Osojnik from [Ana Monro Theatre](#) presented his view of reading and using open public spaces for the street theatre performances. He revealed that the space should meet everyone's needs more and that this is why urban design (and urban furniture) really matters. Tina Popovič and Mateja Kurir from Divja misel presented the project [Library under the Treetops](#) and showed that reading a book under the treetops can be inspiring and catchy to the people. Ina Šuklje Erjavec from Urbi Studio/Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia highlighted that open public spaces should provide a challenge for use and provoke people to use them in their own imaginary way. Presentation explained a persistent and comprehensive urban planning and design process that was needed for the implementation of a new Ljubljana's Northern city park - [park Navje](#). Finally, Apolonija Šušteršič and Polonca Lovšin from Kud Obrat presented the project [Beyond construction site](#), which is trying to present the potentials of degraded urban areas as well as possibilities to redefine them with temporary interventions together with close collaboration of local people. They also presented it as a learning field for spatial practices and spatial policies towards improving the quality of people's lives in a neighborhood.



Figure 7: Northern city park; Figure 8: Impression from meeting in park Tabor, photo Matej Nikšič, 2011; Figure 9: Discussion at Beyond the construction site, photo Nina Goršič, 2011

During the afternoon session also the ideas from coincidental users about their wishes and visions for the park's future were collected. The responses showed that people do care about their local public space and want to see it as prospering and attractive. At the end of the day a walk to Ljubljana subcultures-area of [Metelkova Mesto](#) was taken. An extraordinary youth hostel [Celica](#) that was established in a building of an ex-prison was visited. All the interesting stories related to the venue were told by architect Janko Rožič, who was deeply involved in this creative project.

The second day of the workshop was reserved for a study tour to Slovenian Coast, where the examples of public spaces were presented and discussed with some of their designers. [Tito Square in Postojna](#) was presented by the group of the architects (I. Debevec, A. Leban-Meze, M. Mahnič, R. Mašera, D. Zaviršek-Hudnik) who won the invited competition for its re-design. In Koper the representatives from the local municipality explained some vision's of city's future development. An inspiring meeting was hold by Tanja Plešivčnik and Marko Zelenko from Kvart association which is active in the field of visual culture and art and gives a special attention to reclamation of open public space in the local towns and villages. At the end of the day the magical Piran was encountered and discovered in a walk together with Andrej Preložnik from the Institute for Mediterranean Heritage UP SRC.



Figure 10: Youth hostel Celica; Figure 11: Study tour in Koper; photo Matej Nikšič, 2011

The two-day meeting offered a great opportunity to get to know more about the local initiatives and their endeavour of reclaiming public spaces in Ljubljana and Slovenia and discuss them within a broader European context, particularly under the topic of “conviviality”. The lively discussion clearly

showed that public spaces are not to be understood only as a physical form, but also as a social relation to be established between users, designers, politicians, between practitioners, activists and scientists.

As a result of the workshop both European Institutions agreed on a collaboration in the course of the Human Cities Festival in March 2012. The members of the AESOP Thematic Group were especially requested to become involved as members of the Scientific Board of the Human Cities Conference (that was integrated into the festival) and as organizers of one local workshop.

Internally, the group decided on the following future decentral organization: As Matej Nikšič and Sabine Knierbein have been the local and groups responsables to organize this group meeting in Ljubljana, the Naples meeting will be organized by the Gabriella Esposito de Vita as local host in collaboration with Nikolai Roskamm (TU Berlin, Germany). For the Brussels Festival Organization, Aglaée Degros will be the AESOP TG contact person, collaborating with Rafaella Houston-Hasaerts from the Human Cities Local Brussels Team. For the forthcoming AESOP Annual Conference 2012 in Ankara, Turkey, Ceren Sezer will take the lead in cooperation with the local organizers. Here, a new annual issue shall also be defined.

Further meetings to come might be scheduled in the course of the European Urban Research Association (EURA) Annual Conference in Vienna 2012 (20th to 22nd September 2012) and during a potential workshop organized in Lisbon (december 2012, to be confirmed). Contact persons for the Vienna Event are Tihomir Viderman (SKuOR, Vienna UT, local host) and Sofia Morgado (Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, AESOP TG partner) and for the Lisbon event Sofia Morgado (see before, local host) and Matej Nikšič (AESOP TG partner). The group further seeks proposals for forthcoming events in 2013.

Thank you!

In Ljubljana, June 2011

