

Vienna October 2012

AESOP Thematic Group on Public Spaces and Urban Cultures

REPORT on the group's working meeting in Vienna, AT

held within the framework of the EURA 2012 Conference in Vienna,
organized by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space
(SkuOR) of the Vienna University of Technology

21 September and 22 September 2012 at Vienna University of Technology

The working meeting of the Thematic Group took place during the EURA Conference 2012 in Vienna in September 2012. It was organized as a bridge between the group's workshop held in Ankara in July 2012 and a workshop planned for December 2012 in Lisbon, which all conclude the group's annual theme 'Conviviality'.

The meeting in Vienna had two sessions:

Friday 21 September 2012, 17.00 – 18.30 (Workshop)

Saturday 22 September 2012, 14.00 – 17.00 (Excursion).

The workshop meeting on Friday was open to all participants of the conference and aimed in part at introducing the Thematic Group to interested external actors. It attracted more than twenty participants from various disciplines and cultural backgrounds. The workshop was opened by a 30 minute presentation given by Tihomir Viderman, which introduced the group's scope of activities to newcomers. The overall group's goal of bringing together colleagues investigating different roles planning practice and theory may play in the production of urban (public) space was detailed. The three main topics of the group's research were also presented:

- artistic-intellectual practices in urban planning (culture-led urban regeneration)
- integration of everyday life practices in planning and production of public space
- (trans-disciplinary) understanding of the production of public space and the outcomes of its planning.

Following the presentation, group's members reflected on the preceding workshops in Ankara and Naples in the form of an open discussion with valuable inputs and information from Gabriella Esposito de Vita.

In continuation, Sofia Morgado, Joao Rafael Santos and Ines Lopes Moreira from the Technical University of Lisbon, on behalf of the organizers of the next thematic group's event, gave a 30 min presentation about the forthcoming conference 'Ambivalent Landscapes: Sorting out the present by designing the future' and the accompanying thematic group's workshop 'Not for tourists walk' in December 2012 in Lisbon. The presentation gave an overview of the program foreseen for the conference and the workshop, introduced keynote speakers and thematic tracks, as well as invited all interested participants to further join in the group's activities in Lisbon.

The body of the workshop was devoted to an extensive round of introductions, during which all participants were given time and space to present themselves and their research. The ensuing informal part of the meeting allowed the participants the possibility for networking and discussing modes of future collaboration within or outside the framework of the thematic group. Of special was an offer of support for a joint publication made by Renate Bornberg, the executive editor of *the Journal of Comparative Cultural Studies in Architecture*, who expressed interest in dedicating an issue to publishing articles dealing with the group's field of research. This also concluded the events on Friday, 21 September 2012.

The excursion on Saturday under the title 'Creating urban microcosms – establishing a link between strategic planning and Vienna's neighborhood', took the participants to *Hernals*, a neighborhood not part of the city's central spaces, and introduced them to local planning actors and practices. The excursion organized by *Tihomir Viderman* and *Johanna Aigner* provided an insight into how diverse interests, initiatives and strategies negotiated at different planning levels shape the planning culture of the Vienna's neighborhood, as well as how (both institutionalized and informal) local actors' work has been embedded into the City of Vienna's planning hierarchy. Vienna's planning culture has been historically marked by significant involvement of city's governments, reigned by social democrats, in the production of city's space. Although nowadays the city's administration positions itself as a manager or a networking partner, the planning remained a fairly centralized mission in the hands of the city's administration, and Vienna's residents accept if not suppose that the city provides for a big portion of their *urban* needs. The question that was discussed at this excursion was how local planning actors

merge firm regulations of the city's master plan with communication-based planning at the local level, in order to support and encourage local initiatives, everyday cultural practices and local economies.

The planning activities in many of Vienna's neighborhoods have to a great extent been marked by the work and interventions of *Gebietsbetreuung* (district support management) offices. These offices, which are managed by private contractors and financially supported by the city's planning administration, were created with the mission to maintain the urban flair of their respective districts, and to more actively engage residents in districts' urban renewal.

The visited neighborhood, *Hernals*, has developed at the turn of the century. The fast expansion of the city beyond its historical perimeter took place in the form of dense blocks of tenement houses organized in a grid plan. In order to improve poor housing conditions in a huge portion of the building stock the city government decided in the 1970s to undertake a so called soft renewal approach instead of a radical intervention into urban fabric. *Gebietsbetreuung* offices took over the task of advising tenants on matters pertaining to housing and urban renewal, as well as of supporting communication to and with residents, and finding out the specific needs of individuals and groups in the district.

The excursion took participants to the office of *Gebietsbetreuung 17/18*, which represents Hernals. The hosts *Amila Sirbegovic* and *Sabine Gehmayr* introduced their office's work, explained how they in their everyday work get in contact with the local community and how they operate participation-based planning at the local level. In the ensuing walk through the neighborhood they showcased aspects of the district's urbanity which lie in their focus: ranging from small-scale re-designs or interventions in public spaces (square in *Geblergasse*), over the organization of events which seek residents' active engagement (Guidebook *Balkanmeile* developed for *Ottakringer Strasse*), and support of local cultural practices and local economies (*Werkzeughalle*, providing space and networking opportunities for local artists and entrepreneurs), to bringing new spaces to (temporary) public use (opening of the historical great hall *Gschwandner* to public events for a period of one year before its reconstruction). The walk illustrated the scope but also limitations of interventions undertaken by *Gebietsbetreuung* and attempted to portray to what extent its work encourages everyday urban practices in district's public spaces. The walk was wrapped up with an informal getting together at a typical neighborhood's café bar.

Although this workshop and the workshop in Lisbon conclude the group's annual theme 'Conviviality', thus far there were no proposals directed towards shaping the annual working theme for 2013. Therefore all the thematic group's members are kindly invited to communicate their ideas and proposals for the new annual theme,

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as well as interest in organizing the group's forthcoming events. By communicating their proposals about determining standards, character and locations of future group's workshops before the next meeting in Lisbon, they will certainly contribute to the successful outcome of the last meeting pertaining to the annual theme 'Conviviality'.

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