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Our professional background is, actually, related to those areas. We have had the opportunity to make some projects, not all of them are built though, in the Basque Country and Northern Navarra in Spain.

That is why speaking with professionals of different fields related to architecture working nationwide or with a broad knowledge of the general situation has been very helpful. They have let us catch some glimpses of what is going on in Austria. And that is how we have drawn a picture of the problems and difficulties here, some of which we share because they are pan-European, and also of the good initiatives.

We wanted to get together these opinions. Throughout these pages you will find some talks we had with Barbara Feller, Petra Eichlinger, Reinhard Seiß and Renate Hammer.

*MID estudio are Maier Vélez Olabarria and David Serrano Amatriain*

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# Baukultur<sup>h</sup>r

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THE TIME FOR BUILDING CULTURE  
*- A personal research on architecture in countryside -*

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MID

artist in residence  
**AIR**  
niederösterreich

**ORTE**  
ArchitekturNetzwerk Niederösterreich

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# The Austrian way



MID estudio

Maier Vélez Olabarria and David Serrano Amatrian

They were both graduated as architects by the University of Navarra (ETSAUN) in 2003 and 2000, especializing in Urbanism and Landscape architecture.

They founded MID estudio in 2004 and are registered architects by the COAVN. They work, on open competition basis, on a wide range of topics but always in small scale public projects, having awareness for construction, history and culture and they also explore the audiovisual language applied to architectural communication. Their work has been awarded, among others, at the XI Spanish Architecture and Urbanism Biennial, The 2011 FAD Architecture and Design Awards, The Arquia/proxima Young architects awards 2010 and 2012 and published in several spanish and international magazines and exhibitions.

## MOTIVATIONS

When we came for our residency period in Krems during July and August 2013, awarded by ORTE-Architecture Network of Lower Austria, our initial intention was to research about architecture in rural areas and settlements as an excuse to look deeper into architecture in general terms.

Our professional background is, actually, related to those areas. We have had the opportunity to make some projects, not all of them are built though, in the Basque Country and Northern Navarra in Spain.

Landscape there, which can remind some alpine regions, is hilly, humid and green, with many small towns and villages spread throughout it. Those settlements are usually well preserved and have a rich historic heritage. And a traditional building typology, very powerful in terms of shape, is present in the landscape as well as in the people's mind.

A dual conflict happens when building on these contexts: sometimes contemporary architecture is not well understood nor even appreciated and some others, the results are not sensitive enough to the existing reality and its values.

In our region, planners have very often regulated every single aesthetic feature of new buildings, theoretically based on the traditional typology, but with absolutely superficial reflections about it. This misleading image has also established deep in collective mindset. The result is an architecture that has nothing to do with the traditional typology in terms of location on the territory, use, constructive logic and materials, etc.

The writing from Adolf Loos called "Rules for Those Building in the Mountains" (Regeln für den, der in der Bergen baut. Jahrbuch der Schwarzwald'schen Schulanstalten) was written in 1913, a hundred years ago. It deals with a topic very similar to ours, with picturesque and with the values in vernacular architecture. It still sounds very

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contemporary. But we ask ourselves if we are yet part of the same debate or if we have overcome it.

We were educated in the 90's. Our architecture school in Navarra, had already said goodbye to postmodernism and modern architecture's principles were recovered and reclaimed by our teachers. But, has modern architecture become a tradition itself?

Sometimes we can see the so called "modern architecture" completely decontextualized in its surroundings. We refer to an architecture that under the "modern" label uses a language full of clichés with very little interest lying behind. Actually, the terms "Modern" and "Contemporary" have been so overused that maybe new words are needed to enunciate the questions correctly.

But other concerns were also underlying when we came: we can not avoid talking about the current economic, social and, as architects, professional crisis that Spain is undergoing.

The huge economic crisis has derived in a high rate of unemployment, especially among the youngest generation. We are also living a social and institutional crisis. People are denouncing the great distance that separates politic elites from citizens, who do not at all feel represented by the ones holding power. People are asking for a regeneration, a concept that was also very much used in our country starting in 1898, when the last colonies were lost, and during the first decade of the twentieth century. And it makes us wonder: Which is our identity? What can we do now? What are we, as a country, good at?

The years before crisis, urbanism was used as a mere economic tool by the capitalist liberal system. We can now see large city developments abandoned and also the bad quality architecture that was built... by architects. A recent book by architect Julia Schulz-Dornburg, "Modern ruins: a topography of lucre" (Ruinas modernas. Una topografía del lucro. 2013), shows it crudely.

The construction market stopped and very little dwellings are being built now. At the same time, state and regional governments have completely cut inversions on public work. We should realize that the number of architects is very high, around 50,000 all over the country, and recent studies indicate that there is place for no more than 15,000 designing or project architects, in a context out of the crisis. Others should therefore dedicate to other areas of the profession.

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In addition to this, our government is planning a modification of the Professional Services law, on behalf of productivity, which may introduce other professionals into the architects' traditional working fields.

In short, the word that we believe best defines what is now happening is change.

#### DISCOVERIES

During our first research before coming to Austria we faced with the "Baukultur" concept and immediately caught our attention.

This concept as it is understood in Austria and in other German speaking countries, covering aspects from planning to participation, building (of course), education or public perception, does not really exist in Spain where the prevailing architectural vision still highlights the product, the building itself, above everything else.

This is, for sure, very tempting because, along with the mentioned major disasters, really high quality architecture is built. Indeed, that is why Spanish architecture is internationally acclaimed. Nevertheless, interests and awareness are now also shifting into other areas.

Regarding the crisis, very little public self criticism has been done so far about our collective responsibility and we lack, at least in our region, a socially oriented public attitude. We think that our profession is a service to community. And as a professional service and being part of society, we feel compelled to tell not only what we believe that could be improved but also what challenges we should address to.

Thus, building culture reports that were given to Austrian government, coming from the Austrian Platform for architectural policy and building culture (with members from the professional organisations, education and research fields and also the architecture mediation organisations), are, in our opinion, an important step towards into raising awareness about the problems that society is facing.

In this image era, some architecture looks as if it was made by architects for other architects. Sometimes we do not seem to be conscious that it is also the era of communication, information and engagement with the people, partly thanks to the IT tools, which could help us reach more people with a message interesting and important for them.

When looking for examples of good quality architecture in rural settlements we discovered "Landluft" association and alongside, we learned

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about the participation efforts that are being made here. Especially in those countryside areas, participation is an effective mechanism for engaging people with their built environment.

In Spain, people are increasingly demanding it, as part of that regeneration process. Young architecture teams are trying some initiatives growing bottom up at small scale projects.

Participation is not in many politicians' agenda though, except for very specific ones. From what we have experienced, which is not very broad, usually two different things can happen. On one hand, many municipalities think that publicly showing the results of the competitions or just complying with the legally established ways to get information or arguing projects is more than enough and it can be considered participation. And on the other hand, there are some others that misuse the participation concept politically and get stuck in the process, saying how they are going to do things but not making decisions, because they lack a proper methodology.

So participation, which is really important, should not be linked to a political option, like it is today in our country, and it should be regarded as a useful socially improving tool and it should be used with the help of appropriate mediators and professionals. It should be implemented at early stages of the projects.

But "Landluft" is just one of the many associations, working groups and initiatives we have found in Austria.

Implication of people in Austria, which is a small country compared to ours, is surprisingly high. It is quite opposite to the situation in Spain - changing now - even if the first years after dictatorship, not so long ago, were said to be very socially active periods.

Concerning to the architects, traditionally professional Chambers were quite active in defending the profession, also in cultural matters, but they are now being criticised for their bureaucratic structure and performance.

In big cities like Madrid, Barcelona or Sevilla, though, people are much more hands-on than in smaller cities. There is quite a big number of small architecture collectives working in areas of their interest, which differ from previously seen ones; ranging from sustainability, self construction, participation and discussion processes to open innovation in architecture. And the internet is also changing this phenomena for better, enabling a connection never seen before.

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As we say, there are many people doing really interesting things, but as architects, we have been educated in a tremendously competitive environment, which has led to collaboration between us not being the usual situation and contact sharing being an oddity. In fact, professional circles are quite closed.

We think that it is necessary to experience networking on a basis of achieving common goals, which we find inspiring and simply intelligent.

Finally, through our research we wanted to see how these goals, consisting mainly on achieving a good quality built environment, were transmitted to society in general, in addition to the mentioned building culture reports. And here we found a dense network working.

Over the last decades people have lost their emotional links to the cities they live in. Built Environment Education, with lots of initiatives all over Austria led by "Architekturvermittlung für Junge Menschen", is a pedagogic tool that can help us make an impression on youth about how built environment can influence their lives, and introduce them into discussing and having their own well founded opinions.

Likewise, the Houses of Architecture, organisations who are independent from professional associations, seem to us very useful and interesting in the attempt of influencing and gaining attention from the people, with a broad and varied program of open activities.

But besides all this joint social effort, we believe that in the end, the personal work of each and every one of the architects is essential. Responsibility is in our hands.

## RESEARCH PROCESS

Our research during our stay in AIR Krems residence started by travelling around the Wachau valley because it was an area small but interesting enough for us to cover and handle. Looking and experiencing architecture directly is important to make an image of the local situation.

One could argue, of course, that this is a very specific point of view, that ours is a traveller's insight and that the area selected is not representative enough. It may be true. That is our work's main limitation and we accept it.

That is why speaking with professionals of different fields related to architecture working nationwide or with a broad knowledge of the general situation has been very helpful. They have let us catch some

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glimpses of what is going on in Austria. And that is how we have drawn a picture of the problems and difficulties here, some of which we share because they are pan-European, and also of the good initiatives.

We wanted to get together these opinions. Throughout these pages you will find some talks we had with Barbara Feller, Petra Eichlinger, Reinhard Seiß and Renate Hammer.

Another parallel lane of our investigation consisted on finding examples of interesting architecture built nowadays in countryside and historical settlements. We have filmed those places, along with the conversations we had with the owners or people who use them, because they can give us a contrasted viewpoint to that of architects.

It has not been possible to us to have access to all examples we would have liked to include in our work. Evidently, it must not be considered a overview of the Austrian architectural panorama.

In brief, this is some kind of a “good lessons learnt” written and visual catalogue. This period here has basically been a time for observation and deep questioning for us, but no clear conclusion can be reached in just two months, except for the conviction that we should each learn from the positive accomplishments in each others’ country.

*We would like to thank Barbara Feller, Petra Eichlinger, Reinhard Seiß and Renate Hammer for their more than kind help. And also Peter Ojo, Peter Holzer, who finally couldn't be there and Roland & Gordana Gruber.*

*We would like to express our gratitude to the people who made our video interviews possible: Stefan Schauer, the Schauer family and friends and Heinz Hackl from Velux; Michael Malat from the Malat Winerie & Hotel; Provost Maximilian Fürnsinn and Herr Ulrich from Herzogenburg Monastery; Jo Aichinger, artistic director of the Lower Austrian Festival; Uli Böker, mayor of Ottensheim, Klaus Hagenauer and Johann Rabeder.*

*Evi Scheipl and very especially Heidrun Schögl, from ORTE Architecture Network in Lower Austria, encouraged us and gave us the needed contacts, which was no the easiest part. Heidrun has been a great support!*

*Sabine Güldenfuß and Stefanie Proksch-Weilguni made our daily life at the AIR organization be a pleasure.*

*And the whole bunch of artists in residence with us during this time: Irina Botea, Jon Dean, Ruth Margraff, Nikos Brisco, Ana Pepelnik, Rully Shabara, Wukir Suryadi, Olivia Mihaltianu, Dainius Liškevicus, Jolita Liškevicienė, Andy Graydon and Kieran Boland; who shared their concerns, impressions and good moments with us, during July and August 2013.*

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## SPAIN

506.030 Km<sup>2</sup>

46.815.916

93 POP/Km<sup>2</sup>



AGRICULTURAL AREA 253.514 Km<sup>2</sup>

ARTIFICIAL AREA 10.146 Km<sup>2</sup>

4.614 POP/Km<sup>2</sup> URBANIZED

2.01% URBANIZED

47.411 ARCHITECTS

1 ARCHITECT / 987 PEOPLE

The land occupation data comes from the CORINE land cover project of the European Environment Agency. The number of architects are the active and registered ones in the Official Spanish Architectural Chambers and in the Federal Chamber of Architects and Consulting Engineers of Austria respectively. In the case of Austria this number includes the architects and consulting engineers.



## AUSTRIA

83.855 Km<sup>2</sup>

8.393.644

100 POP/Km<sup>2</sup>



AGRICULTURAL AREA 27.171 Km<sup>2</sup>

ARTIFICIAL AREA 4.085 Km<sup>2</sup>

2.055 POP/Km<sup>2</sup> URBANIZED

4.87% URBANIZED

5.710 ARCHITECTS

1 ARCHITECT / 1.470 PEOPLE



## NAVARRRE & BASQUE COUNTRY

10.390 Km<sup>2</sup> + 7.230 Km<sup>2</sup>

640.129 + 2.185.393

62 POP/Km<sup>2</sup> + 302 POP/Km<sup>2</sup>



AGRICULTURAL 4.812 Km<sup>2</sup> + 2.244 Km<sup>2</sup>

ARTIFICIAL AREA 129 Km<sup>2</sup> + 251 Km<sup>2</sup>

4.962 POP/Km<sup>2</sup> U + 8.707 POP/Km<sup>2</sup> U

1.24% + 3.47% URBANIZED

3.306 ARCHITECTS

1 ARCHITECT / 855 PEOPLE



## LOWER AUSTRIA

19.186 Km<sup>2</sup>

1.612.000

84 POP/Km<sup>2</sup>



AGRICULTURAL AREA 10.194 Km<sup>2</sup>

ARTIFICIAL AREA 1.148 Km<sup>2</sup>

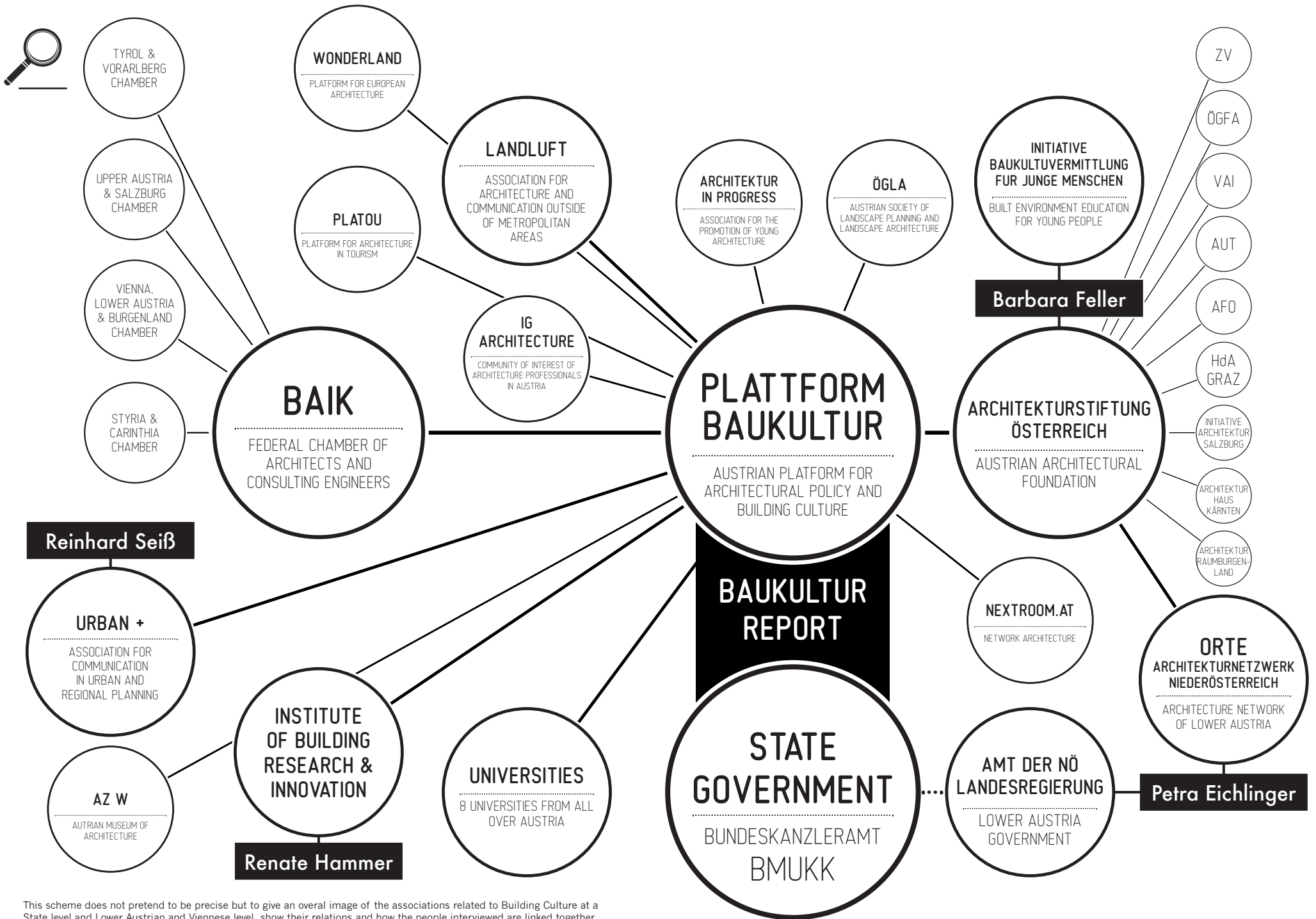
1.404 POP/Km<sup>2</sup> URBANIZED

5.98% URBANIZED

652 ARCHITECTS

1 ARCHITECT / 2.472 PEOPLE\*

\*1 ARCHITECT / 1.312 PEOPLE  
CONSIDERING ALSO THE POPULATION AND THE  
ARCHITECTS WORKING ON THE CITY OF VIENNA



This scheme does not pretend to be precise but to give an overall image of the associations related to Building Culture at a State level and Lower Austrian and Viennese level, show their relations and how the people interviewed are linked together.



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# Barbara Feller



Barbara Feller, Mag. phil, Dr. phil.

Studied History and Pedagogy at the University of Vienna. Since 1996 director of the Austrian Architectural Foundation (Architekturstiftung Österreich), since 2001 responsible for “architecture” at KulturKontakt Austria, since 2010 chairwoman of “BINK · Initiative Baukulturvermittlung für junge Menschen” (Initiative Built Environment Education for young people).

Key activities: built environment education for children and youths; cities and living in the 20th and 21st century; author and curator.

*MID estudio: You are not an architect. You studied history and pedagogics at the University of Vienna. How did you end up working in topics related to architecture?*

Barbara Feller: My studies took me some time, about ten years, because I always worked in order to finance them. By chance I started working as a secretary in an architecture office and I was there for these ten years. It was the architecture office of a viennese architect, Karl Mang, who was 90 last year. Besides planning and building, he was also concerned about exhibitions and wrote some books, so that is how I got in contact with architecture.

Actually during my school time and through my parents I had no previous relation to architecture but through this work I came in contact with architects, books and exhibitions, and one thing led to another.

*What interested you about architecture? Where do you focus?*

From my scientific background I’m concerned about Building Policies. I’m not an art historian, but an historian. Art historians mostly are interested in what buildings look like and their iconography but I focus on why they have been built and the political background. I am specialized in 20th century architecture in Vienna and in that area I have done a lot of scientific research. So I did and do some research for the City of Vienna about buildings of the “Gründerzeit” (the period of app. 1860 to 1900) as well as for the “Zwischenkriegszeit” (the period between the two world wars) and currently for the period after the Second World War.

Here in the Austrian Architectural Foundation my work focus in management and organization. I very much like team work and I have been working with some colleagues for more than twenty years.

But I also studied Pedagogics and did my dissertation on a specific topic: “School in the period of “Nationalsozialismus”, so I started

combining these two interests, History and Education, 15 years ago, in 1998. I started with this project series called "RaumGestalten" or Designing Space which facilitates the implementation of school projects focussing on various aspects of architecture and building culture in close cooperation of students, architects and teachers. These educational projects are now a big part of my work. I do not develop them myself personally, I am responsible for fundraising and network and do scientific research also in this area.

As you can see, I did a lot of different jobs, and I can always take something from one into another, so I felt it was a natural evolution from my studies into architecture.

*Which is your work at the "Architekturstiftung Österreich" or Austrian Architectural Foundation?*

I am the General manager at the Austrian Architectural Foundation, which is a common public platform for Austrian architectural initiatives. Along with statutory professional associations and educational faculties, independent architectural initiatives constitute an important third pillar for upholding our building culture.

The network of architectural initiatives is dedicated to high-level architecture and to furthering the understanding of contemporary architecture among individuals in the fields of politics and administration, as well as in the general public. Our goal is to arouse people's enthusiasm and make them knowledgeable and exacting partners in the planning and design of our built environment. Networking strengthens cooperation between architecture's most important players - builders and users, architects, planners and engineers, contracting companies from industry and trade, as well as those responsible in politics and administration.

In Austria we have nine federal provinces. In each of them we have an Architecture House and they are the founders of the Austrian Architectural Foundation. Most of them were founded in the late eighties and early nineties when architectural mediation was a hot topic. We have "HDA- the Haus der Architektur" in Graz, which is the oldest one, it was 25 years in June, and "Initiative Architektur" in Salzburg will celebrate its 20th anniversary in September. We also have "Orte" the Architecture Network in Lower Austria, "afo" the Architecture Forum in Upper Austria, "ArchitekturHaus Kärnten" in Carinthia, "aut" in Tyrol, "vai" the Vorarlberg Architecture Institute and "Architektur RaumBurgenland". They all lobby and give architectural information in their areas and get funds from the Federal Provinces and also from

the Federal State. Two of our older members are the ZV, the Central Association of Austrian Architects which was founded in the beginning of the 20th century; and the ÖGFA, the Austrian Society for Architecture, founded in 1965, almost 50 years ago.

*But are they independent organizations?*

Yes, they are small independent associations. It is really typical for Austria, specially compared to Germany, which I know quite well, to have lot of initiatives coming from grass root development, created directly from the people.

If a group of people thinks that it is necessary to do something about an specific issue they meet and it is really easy to establish a small association (Verein) and look where they can get money from. At the federal state level, the Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture gives fundings for projects, so people and groups can apply with their idea if they want. Then there is an advisory board which gives recommendations for sponsorships... that is how so many initiatives come bottom up. In Germany, it comes more top down.

*Actually we were quite surprised with the rich atmosphere of associations here in Austria. Being here we have met people working at so many different topics. For an small country like Austria, compared to the size of Spain, we think that you have incredible architectural life here...*

I think that a lot of people are doing different things in Austria but several of them are just on an honorary or altruistic basis. For instance, it is almost impossible to find money for these educational projects I mentioned before, but I keep doing them because I am concerned about them and I am engaged to them. So people carry on for a time and leave when they get tired.

*And what kind of activities do the Houses of Architecture and the Austrian Architectural Foundation carry on?*

The Houses of Architecture are small associations and they get money from the federal state, from regional provinces, sometimes from the cities, some also have members and all earn money from co operations with firms. There are differences between them because architecture in Burgenland is not as important as in Vorarlberg. In Vorarlberg, you can see how important architecture is when you travel around the country. In Tyrol it is also becoming more and more important but the situation is very different in other regions.

They were founded during the last 25 years and they decided to create the Austrian Architectural Foundation in the year 1996 for the national level activities. I came to the Foundation after the founding process, I was not here in the beginning, but I have worked here for 15 years now.

As I said the Austrian Architectural Foundation makes all these activities that are on a national level. The biggest one is the so called "Architekturtag" or Days of Architecture, held every two years throughout Austria. They invite a wide circle of interested individuals to personally experience the enhanced quality architecture can lend to daily life. Open house sessions in architectural ateliers, guided architecture tours and lectures are held, presenting the occasion to learn about architectural tasks and achievements first hand and gain insight into the architects working world. The initiative strives to expose a wider public to the broad field of architectural activity and to convincingly showcase the added value obtained by good architecture.

Last time it was held in 2012, and next time will be in 2014. It takes almost a year to prepare because they are so intensive two days all over the country. The colleagues in the regional houses are responsible for the local program and at the federal level, in cooperation between the Chamber and us, we are responsible for the marketing, the media coordination, for having a common corporate identity etc.

Then we have the projects together with schools which are shown in the "RaumGestalten" brochures every year, since 1998. Within this framework practicing architects, teachers and pupils of different ages and various diverse school types are given the opportunity for a whole semester to deal intensively with the theme of architecture. The array of topics is colorful and sensual perception, the recognition of spatial effects on one's own body and pleasurable experimentation are as important as the gaining of knowledge with various types of architecture. It also informs young people about their responsibility with regard to environmental planning and teaches them how important space is for one's well being.

We, in the Foundation, are also responsible for the content and the organization, every 2 years, of the the Federal Award of Architecture granted by the Federal Ministry of Economy, focusing alternatively in different topics like "Tourism and Recreation", "Industry and Trade" and "Workspaces in Administration and Commerce".

And we are doing some activities with firms or trade organizations to improve the understanding for architecture in this area.

And finally we are concerned about the Architectural Policies. Contact with politicians and public administration officials has played an important role in The Architectural Foundation's work since the very beginning.

*This is a topic we are very interested in, since architectural panorama is now in a process of profound changes in Spain. We read about that huge milestone, the parliamentary inquiry in March 2004, and both "Baukulturreport"s or Building Culture reports as a result of it. Can you please tell us how your activities related to architectural policies began?*

There had been activities related to this topic during the sixties when society changing movements started. But more concentrated work and activities for architectural policies started 10 years ago, in 2002. We had Federal Parliament elections that year and in the time before the elections we saw the importance of speaking with politicians about architecture.

I think that the important thing is not to speak as architects but to speak as society, because when you speak as architects they may think you want to build something or you want to get a commission or to earn money... so it was really a good idea to have all these actors working together, representatives from Universities, from the Chambers, from the Houses of Architecture... because then it was clear that we were speaking about the social value of architecture and building culture and not about architects. This is really a great difference.

So a network of people coming from different fields was established, under the "Plattform Baukultur" or the Austrian Platform for architectural policy and building culture, and we decided to concentrate on what was important for all of us. The Architects' Chambers, the Universities and the Houses of Architecture, they all had their areas but there was a field in which they were all interested in, and that was good quality in built environment. We decided to work together and concentrate on this common goal. Therefore we had some working meetings where we found out the common goals on which we focused.

Afterwards we got in contact with politicians who said they did not know very much about architecture and it would be good to know more about it. It was important to keep in contact with them, and it was also necessary, it always is, to find out, within politicians and throughout Ministries, the people who were really interested in the topic and to speak with them. That is how it went like a snowball and they ended up saying that it would be interesting to have this topic on the agenda of the parliament, so this inquiry was celebrated in the Austrian Federal Parliament in 2004.

But politicians change so fast, they come and go, so you have to speak with newcomers about the same topics again. It is like Sisyphus' punishment as told in the Odyssey. We now have a Minister of Education, Arts and Culture. When she entered government it took almost a year to have an appointment with her and after she has been working for three years and that we have a good relationship maybe another person will come. In politics people are changing continuously and they also change responsibilities and themes they are in charge for very fast, so you have to speak over and over the same things.

I did the job as speaker of the platform together with Roland Gruber and Volker Dienst for 7 years - when we gave the relay to new people.

*And what about the Baukultur or Building Culture reports?*

The first Building Culture Report was structured in Recommendations, Responsibilities, Public, Sustainability, Economy and Production sections and there were a lot of different authors. Because it was the first time we made a look from different viewpoints to architecture. It was hard work to put all those different people working together. I was responsible for the redaction with some other colleagues.

This word "Baukultur" was used for the first time in the beginning of the 20th century in the context of Secession in Austria and Werkbund in Germany and for a time this term was not used very much but during the last 15 years it is living a renaissance, coming a lot from Germany. They use this term a lot and now we use it too.

The term Architecture is mostly used with the meaning of built houses (or other buildings), but "Baukultur" is really hard to translate, it also involves planning, construction, participation and it is a wider term, it cannot be translated exactly with the english Building Culture, it means something different. There is an essay from Volker Dienst in the first "Baukulturreport" explaining its different meanings. The product (the building) is, of course, important... but for a good "Baukultur" the discussion should not only be about the product but also about the process.

In the second "Baukulturreport" we decided, after all the work we had done for the first one, to concentrate in three topics which were very important for Austria at the moment. The selected topics were sustainability, building in small communities and education. Next "Baukulturreport" is planned for 2016 but we still do not know which topics will be important then, even if "Baukultur" does not change thoroughly in five years.

*Since the those first reports has anything changed? How?*

A little bit. There are some initiatives that now have a place in the mind of the politicians and civil servants.

In Austria Music and Theatre are the most important art fields. We had Mozart, Beethoven and many other musicians and have a lot of theatre and both of them are really important for the cultural feeling of the country but nearly nobody used to have an idea about architecture.

But when you see our current art production, Austrian Architecture is really internationally known and the new musicians are not so well known so I think that architecture should become a more important topic for the cultural presentation of the country. Even for tourism it is important because people come, for example to Vorarlberg, because they are interested in architecture. That way there is a link between the architectural production and the economic situation of the country.

And the other aspect is that of participation. It is becoming more and more important and it is not easy to make anything without participation because people are more concerned and they want to bring in their meaning and ideas, so it is a big topic for the future.

*At the same time you also work at the "Initiative Baukulturvermittlung für junge Menschen" or Built Environment Education for Young People. Which are the main goals of the association?*

I have been working in this field for 15 years. The first project was that "RaumGestalten" series project I already mentioned and during these 15 years a lot of colleagues all over the country were concerned about this topic of Built Environment Education (BEE) for young people. And so we strengthened the cooperation within the last 5 years in a better way.

In the beginning we used to have loose meetings once a year to have an exchange but it changed in 2010 when we were asked by the Austrian Civil engineers to make a project called "Impulswoche >technik bewegt<" or "Technology in use". It was then the 150th anniversary of the term "Civil engineer" (because first there were Military Engineers), and for that anniversary we were asked to do something for the young people.

First I should explain that in Austria we have a Chamber for Architects and Civil Engineers together, which is not common in Europe, where mostly they have separate Chambers for both professions. We have these two very different kind of professionals in the same Chamber: the Architects often with the self-perception as artists and the Civil

Engineers that understand themselves as technicians. They work together a lot but they have different approaches. There are a lot of people studying architecture but civil engineers really have problems to find young people to follow this technological education.

We had that first “Technology in use week” in 2010 and it takes place again every year in November. Different workshops on different topics are held all over the country for youngster of 14 and 15 years, where they can get in contact with Civil Engineers as living books. Civil Engineers come into the schools and explain what kind of work they do and young people can learn in a practical way too.

So, as I said, the Civil Engineers wanted to make something in order to make young people more interested in what they do. For that we created this association “BINK- Baukulturvermittlung für junge Menschen” where there are colleagues from all over the country. We are doing lots of projects, everybody on its own, and if necessary we meet and do it together. For me it is partially a honorary work that I do because I believe it is important to do something for the young people.

*You speak about architecture as a cultural discipline, so people can be educated into it... Why is it so important?*

All these projects’ output and Built Environment Education’s goal is not that people become “little architects” but that they get to know that planning is something where they can bring their own meaning and that they get an impression of what architecture can do for them. Therefore they must learn to speak about it and they also have to learn to see that when they want to build a house there are specialists that can help them doing so.

*What values do you think that can be taught and shown through Built Environment Education?*

I think it is important and necessary, when a new building or some transformation or renovation in a city or a country is planned, that people can involve themselves in these processes and bring in their own ideas.

But they also have to be able to see that, for instance, when a new park or green area is being planned young people may want to have a place for rollerskating but older people may want a place for silence. So they should learn that there are all these different needs that have to be brought together. Buildings and city planning are processes with quite different interests, and they should be able to bring their own

needs but also to see the needs of others and try to find solutions that can fit all different needs.

It is all about respect for others and dialogue. This way they can see how architects look at problems and why buildings look like they look. Architecture is also a media for social transformation because through it you can see how society is structured.

*Is architecture and built environment in the curricula of schools? How do you help teachers and government to achieve this?*

I did a survey and had a deep look at all that curricula. The word architecture is not so often used and our curricula is a frame curricula, which means that there is a small core curricula that has to be taught and then there are a lot of topics the teachers can choose from. In fact people should get an idea of architecture during school time but often the teachers don’t feel sovereign themselves on these topics.

I believe, and it is very important for me, that architecture is not only a topic on art education but also, for example, on geography because city development and how settlements are structured are part of it and this part is much more important for me than only an aesthetic aspect.

In art it is important to get an impression of what Gothic and Baroque are and to have an idea of why it looks like it looks, to know Jugendstil and Modernism, to have an idea of how different styles developed. But for me, as I have said, it is much more important to know and discuss about settlement structures and to get an idea of its influence in one’s own life: facts like small shops being in the city center or not, every city having this similar structure where you have shops you have to reach by car, how it will be when they get old and have no car to go there and what it all means for their personal life.

*So how do you teach all these topics?*

I do not teach them myself. I try to make it possible that people can work with children in these different topics, so I try to find money and try to make these teams exchange their experiences and to find more public interest on that theme.

I think that when you make different projects and you are talking with young people about what they want from a city and what is really important for them, they start thinking about how they can get to places, whether they have to take a car or a bus or if they can go there

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by their own, what kind of spaces the malls are and that they have to get money with them because they have to consume ... This way they get an impression of what kind of life they would like to have.

But I don't like the idea of telling them what is good and what is not because I think what really is important is to know what architecture can do for their life. I have to decide afterwards by my own.

*In the "Baukulturreport 2011" Competence and Education were a main concern. It basically centers on the importance of the design of school or learning spaces. You make a call for the renewal of school architecture referring not only to the "hardware" (ie, better organized and designed spaces), but also to the "software". Can you explain this a little bit further to us?*

You can see this through the Austrian award called "Bessere Lernwelten 2013" or Best Learning Spaces 2013. This award was first held this year, it was an idea of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and I was responsible for the organization. Six cool buildings were awarded on Primary and Secondary level. These are school buildings where hardware and software fit together, I mean the buildings fit the new requirements in pedagogics.

But also projects in Built Environment Education were awarded, like a book for small children written by a colleague from Tyrol and another living in Berlin, for children as young as 4 years. To bring the children in contact with the topic they have two characters called Archi and Turi who are discovering their environment.

The jury was composed by architects and professional related to the fields of pedagogics and architecture and the Minister herself gave the awards to the winners at the end of May so it had a lot of publicity. We made this little publication about it and now it is going to be published in two other magazines.

*When one hears about different education models, such as Montessori schools, Reggio Emilia, Forest Kindergartens, there are many different educative and pedagogic models...How do they influence architecture or vice versa?*

Different pedagogic models need different environments. But it is not so easy for teachers and architects to speak together, because they have so different approaches to the world. But it is really necessary that when a new school is going to be built the teachers are involved early in the process, before the architects start with the design. Because architects do not know how school is today, in fact, they just have an

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idea of how it was when they were there, but in the last 30 years a lot of things have changed. It is necessary that teachers tell the architects what they need, what kind of environment and space they need.

When you speak with children they always say they need, on one hand, place for silence where they can retire and be by their own, and on the other one, they also need space where they can run freely and speak loud... but current school buildings are not having both of them. So I definitely think that is necessary to have a dialogue between architects and teachers.

*How can that be applied to public schools when there is just one educative model, like in public schools?*

I think it is the same here. There is a program written by government that says that a school classroom must be 63 m<sup>2</sup>, and it comes from the 19th century when people were sitting in a row and 36 children where in each class. But today when you look at these new schools (showing the "Bessere Lernwelten 2013 brochure) they look quite different.

There is now some discussion about the strict program not fitting the needs of modern education. So they are more flexible now as you can see from some of the schools that have been built and awarded and I hope there will be some discussion about this publication and this award. For example in this "Bundesrealgymnasium in der Au", which was awarded at the Secondary level schools' category, you have classrooms that can alternatively use this common space or they can use it all together. It is a kind of cluster model that teachers like, they can work on small and big groups. So architecture makes different models of education and teaching possible.

*As a last question, which future challenges do you foresee?*

I believe that a big challenge in the school building area is the dialogue between these two disciplines, architecture and pedagogics, as I explained before. I know that it is not simple nor easy to have this dialogue, not in a personal level and in an structural level neither but I hope it will grow, because it is so important for school building that these two professions learn to speak at the same level.

Generally, I think it is important to find solutions in which we use resources in a more precise way, that is the discussion in sustainability and city planning. These are the topics that are important for me in my work and which I try that people learn more about.

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# Petra Eichlinger



Dipl. Ing. Petra Eichlinger

She was born on 28th August 1971 in Vienna. She visited the monastery school "Mater Salvatoris" and made her graduation in 1990.

After finishing her study of architecture at the technical University in Vienna she worked for several architect's offices in design, detailed planning and construction.

Since 2010 she is the head on the division -Ortsbildpflege- in the building department of the Office of the Provincial Government of Lower Austria.

*MID estudio: What is and what do you in Niederösterreich GESTALTE(N) do?*

Petra Eichlinger: Our main goal in Niederösterreich GESTALTE(N) is to bring architecture to the people. We try to do so in four different ways.

First we have a service to advice people who calls us because they want to build a new house or renovate an old one. We try to find out what their needs are and then we contact one of our independent architects that collaborates with us in a contract basis. He meets the client and visits the building ground and gives advices, ideas and feeds the client with all kind of information he needs to do the next step. You can describe this as giving an "architectural input". We have 40 architects, 4 landscape architects and artists too collaborating with us.

We also do this kind of service for communities and have lectures about topics they are dealing with.

There are also some other lectures for private clients, held 6 times every year in different locations, so that anybody who's interested can sign up and attend. Topics are usually related to renovations, new buildings and garden design.

We also have the GESTALTE(N) magazine. It is a tool to educate architectural taste. It has been 30 years since it started. We try to show high quality contemporary architecture like one-family houses, renovations, more-family houses, public buildings, etc. so that awareness rises.

The last thing we do, in our function as surveyors in the department, is writing expert reports if asked so by town mayors. Sometimes mayors ask us for an expert report about the suitability of a project that is proposed to the town. We assess the project in relation to the place and advice the mayor whether we think the building should be built there or not. Anyway the mayor has the last word and decides.

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*So public workers in NÖE GESTALTE(N) are asked to have their own opinion to advice and write those expert reports, not only based on application of written regulations. That's surprising! and, in our opinion, very different from the Spanish public administration.*

Yes, but sometimes those reports are asked in case of controversial issues, in order to avoid making a decision at another administrative level which is closer to the people affected.

*For what we understand about NÖE GESTALTE(N)'s work, is it a political goal in Lower Austria to educate on high quality architecture?*

Yes it is. We have a budget for doing so, for increasing awareness on good architecture. Dr. Erwin Pröll, the governor of Lower Austria, promotes this kind of service and assistance, which is the only one in Austria and in many other european countries.

*Could you please explain us the reasons and the objectives of the Lower Austrian Declaration for Building Culture 2012, promoted by the Lower Austrian Government and the Chamber of Architects and Engineers for Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland?*

The Lower Austrian Declaration for Building Culture 2012 can be described as a guideline for positive and desirable regional and structural development. It gives advices for the future, summarizing topics like high quality in planning, resource-efficiency or sustainability.

*In Spain, in addition to spatial planning which is promoted by the government, each town must develop a regional plan (zoning, etc.) which is afterwards assessed by government, who has to authorize it. Is it the same here? How does regional planning work in Austria?*

Spatial Planning exists all over Lower Austria but just about 50% of the communities are equipped with zoning map and structural development plan. Without a structural development plan you can't regulate strict regulations for buildings because such restrictions need an authorized plan. When there's no zoning map the architect or planner has to analyze the surroundings by himself and continue and realize the buildings height and buildings form (open, closed, coupled, etc.) that exist predominantly.

Concerning to the architectural design, it is just written in the Building Code very generally – buildings and physical structures have to be in

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harmony and balance with the already existing buildings and landscape that surround them.

The municipal administration and the mayor represent the building and planning authorities of first instance.

*Then what steps must be taken in order to build a, let's say, a house with a garden in a small town?*

Houses can be designed and planned here in Austria by different people, either any of these agents: a carpenter, if the house is mainly built on wood structure; a Baumeister or Building master or an architect. It can also be a prefabricated house that is sold by firms that build them. A lot of those houses can be looked up in the "Blaue Lagune" - a kind of park where all these houses are exhibited - where you can choose and buy the one you like most.

I can give you some facts. Architects just make about 5% of the new buildings. A lot of people believe in carpenters and building masters, more than in an architect, unfortunately. And customers can choose the most convenient option for them and, in many cases, a pre-designed house is enough to fulfill their desires.

Projects and plans for a building license have to be submitted to the mayor in any case.

So the situation is such that sometimes problems like integration with the surroundings and the topography appear and can not always be solved properly. In other words, not always a high quality architecture is achieved.

*In our wanderings we have seen lots of buildings, not specially old, some still under construction, that look alike each other and that somehow resemble a certain regional style. For what we have read they have nothing to do with traditional typologies...*

No, they do not have anything to do with traditional typologies here in Lower Austria. But it's based in our social and cultural background. When you ask a child to draw a house that is what he draws. You have to know, you have to see different things in order to appreciate new architectures. That is what we do with the magazine.

It has to do with education on built environment. Otherwise that fake or "look alike" architecture arises.



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*We have our own regional pastiche in Northern Navarra and The Basque Country too. Many buildings are built based on regulations that describe materials, forms, measures and proportions of windows and roofs very accurately, supposedly based on traditional typologies. But the fact is that if you know how the traditional typology is and why it is like that, you realize that those regulations are real nonsense...*

Yes. Traditions and construction techniques, materials and our demands and needs have changed so architecture has to change too. Gable roof had a determined slope because they did not know how to do it in another way, but nowadays we have the technique for flat roofs to be built!

*Then, do you think that aesthetic regulations help getting better architecture?*

No, they do not help, not in any case. It is not a guarantee for a better architecture. Regulations do not really help because even if a project complies with those regulations it is not a guarantee for good architecture.

Such kind of regulations just can be found in a few historical cities.

*Has it always been like that?*

For what I can remember we have never had that kind of aesthetic regulations. But the Building order before 1996, made in 1976, had such regulations.

*We can observe that Austrian society is much more liberal than the Spanish one in that sense. Both the freedom and the responsibility of deciding how the future towns and the built legacy will be lies in the citizens' hands...*

Yes, that is it. It is liberal.

*For our experience, ironically where no such regulations exist we do not get any better architecture and there is a tendency to chaos. Is building homogeneity desirable?*

There is not an easy and clear answer for that. It depends on the sensibility of the acting persons - planner & client and building owner.

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*But are there, like we sometimes see in Spain, people who are completely against modern architecture?*

Here there are, of course, people who react against modern architecture. They describe it as brutal, cold, sterile and impersonal. Sometimes I receive awful reviews about some of the projects we publish in our magazine but there are nice opinions too.

*In an article you wrote for the GESTALTE(N) Magazine you talked about a certain desired type of life for lots of people, based on owning a house in the countryside with a garden, and the problems it generates...*

I was talking about sprawl, which is a major problem in Austria and still increasing. With our magazine we want to show people alternatives to one-family houses with garden. Publishing only one-family houses would increase the desire for such a way of living.

*Very large areas are occupied by buildings each year. It is one of the 2011 Building Culture report's concern too and they conclude that a cutback in land use would directly derive on sustainability. How are communities and government working on it? Do you think that there's an alternative to this huge land occupation?*

Land occupation is a great problem in Austria and it is growing everyday. That is why, for example we try to show other possibilities to the people, like the multifamily housing block in Maria Enzersdorf by X42 I Jell-Paradisier, or a renovation in the center of a town. When people see that different things can be done and that they look great they can get convinced that there are other ways of good living possibilities... and they will not sprawl.

*One of the problems we are facing now in Spain is that, often small towns promoted large scale built developments or extensions because it was a funding system for them. They were in fact careless about that being right or not, there was not a long-term realistic planning behind it. Has something like that happened here?*

Yes, the same happens here. But, of course, mayors will not tell anything because they get voted from that people and the more population the town has the more money the town receives from government - so growth of population is more than positive.

*In your articles you say that this kind of life can work for families with small children but when they grow up problems start. Looking further something alike will happen when those inhabitants grow old...*

It works when they people have little children but then children grow and leave and the parents stay but they get old. The result is a big house where two old people are living.

So the social density is decreasing and the effort and costs for maintenance - private and public - stay the same. In the settlement where my parents live it is the same - all young people, we all were in the same age, are gone.

*This kind of desired life we talk about comes from an idealization of life in the country. It exists here and in Spain too. But the built results of that desire, have very little or nothing to do with traditional villages urban structure or the traditional building typologies either. They completely forget about creating high quality public spaces, facing the street, generating compact urban organizations, which we regard as interesting urban values of the villages.*

Yes. They do not have those values. In such settlements it seems that there is no need for such public space, because everyone has its "own space" - his own garden and that is enough for most of the people.

In former times public places had a complete different value and importance. All good and bad news were broadcast in the streets, people met there and all the social living took place there. Today it is complete different - you get news and sensations on TV, radio or in the world wide net, also social relations.

*But does it have any sense to grow as those towns used to hundreds of years ago? What form should new developments have? Going a little bit further, do this towns really need to grow? Isn't there a possibility to grow within the actual limits of the built town?*

There is a new catchphrase that is called - closing the gaps and inner growth. In the meantime, because of the "uncontrolled" development to the outside, the order for spatial planning does not allow further growing if there is space in "the middle".

*What must small communities do in order to result more attractive?*

I do not think that wishes change easily. There are many empty city centers and only the people who can not afford living in a single family

house would live there. I am afraid it is a matter of financial background, not of sensibility for resource-efficiency or sustainability.

What we in GESTALTE(N) try to do is increasing people's awareness and convincing them about the advantages of living in a different way. We have published examples of attractive houses in the centers of the towns such as the Haus Schedlmayer in Loosdorf by Wolfgang Huber, which is a new house in an atrium hof, or a renovation of an old Weingut into a family house in Poysdorf by Martin Rührnschopf.

*Is renovation an option? Are there financial subsidies for encouraging that?*

Yes it is an option but, again, people have to be convinced because otherwise they will not consider it. There are subsidies but they are not very high. It is always easier and cheaper to choose any other type of new house so unless people are convinced they will not even consider moving back to the centers.

*In an article in GESTALTE(N) magazine you talk about creating links in architecture. You say that "[...] It is understandable that architecture often causes resentment. New architectural forms, to which there are still no personal connections and therefore no identity forming components, are difficult to be socially accepted. Beautiful or ugly is therefore not just a matter of taste. Rather, it should be examined, what architecture internally achieves and if it fulfills the human desire of identification with the surroundings[...]" What kind of connections or links are you speaking about?*

I am speaking about materials, typologies, etc. but mostly I am referring to materials which assure a continuity with what is already built, regardless of the form. I have just come back from holidays from a place here in Austria where wood is very commonly used in facades. Many new buildings use it too and in a very short time it will get old and integrate really well with the surroundings.

*We as tourists have visited towns and villages in Lower Austria and they look beautiful to us. But we are aware that the Wachau valley has been named Unesco World Heritage, which has helped, together with wine culture, increase of tourism. What is the relationship between architecture and tourism?*

Two phenomena take place at the same time.

Lots of buildings are fake or "look alike" houses, built like the ones nearby. They are built in that way to attract tourism too.

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But on the other hand, modern architecture is demanded, for example, by wine producers because they know that it can help them selling their products. A fine product needs a fine place to be sold.

*Has this naming derived in any more esthetic or planning regulations?*

We are now in the process of writing rules for the Wachau area. Those rules have more strict execution rules so more knowledge will be need to comply with them, knowledge about building materials, history, technology, details, etc so a higher architecture quality will be accomplished. We hope it works.

*Is there an economical alternative to that of tourism in rural settlements?*

I think that rural settlements can benefit from people who earn their money with creative working and occupations for what they do not have to be in places somewhere else – the quasi “new creatives”. I know such people, working as designers, writers or planners and they are staying at their homeplace and inspiring their environment.

*We read the summary of the “Baukultur” Report 2011 in the topic “Burgernäh” or Focus on the citizens where is said that the local authorities have a central role in building culture and so that building culture should be a culture of dialogue. Could you please explain how dialogue is integrated in planning and building in Austria?*

Participation and negotiation are applied in several projects.

We have the “Dorf - und Stadterneuerung” or village renewal organization which is composed by a group of citizens who work together in a participation process to develop special projects for the town.

I also heard of “citizen council” - 50 citizens are chosen randomly by computer methods and they are asked about topics that are important for the towns, such as planning, schools, hospitals... - but this was not in Lower Austria, it was Switzerland I think.

As a consequence of being asked and listened, people accept the built result better, they feel it is of their own. But participation is not valid for everything - in my opinion architectural design should not be discussed.

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*What are your challenges for the coming years for Lower Austrian building culture?*

It is necessary that the juridical parameters and orders, also bases for taxes and dues are modified in a way that a positive development can be reinforced and empowered.

Concerning the juridical parameters we will not stop trying to convince the policy.

On the other hand, people who treasure good architecture and sustainable structures of settlement and buildings will sooner or later demand all this and imply a bottom up effect.

Niederösterreich GESTALTE(N) will hold on creating awareness!

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# Reinhard Seiß



Dr. tech. Reinhard Seiß

Study of spatial planning at Vienna University of Technology, Dr. techn.; work as an urban and spatial planner; film and publishing activities in the field of urban development and spatial planning; TV and radio productions; international teaching and lecturing activities; member of "Plattform Baukultur" (Platform for Building Culture); member of Deutsche Akademie für Städtebau und Landesplanung (German Academy for Urban Planning and Regional Development).

*MID estudio: You studied spatial planning and regional planning at the Technical University of Vienna. In Spain architecture and spatial and regional planning are studied altogether as a unique grade. How do you find the relationship between planning and architecture and where do you think that the limit between both of them should be?*

Reinhard Seiß: In my opinion, architects in Austria are very much focused on aesthetics and they usually bring their opinion and personality to their work. I sometimes ironically call them facade designers. But on the other hand, even if planners do a good work on analyzing what is going on in a certain territory, they have a lack of understanding of the third dimension and are not used to designing quality urban spaces.

So, I think that education should become more systematic or less detached, as you want to call it. There is a missing link between the architects' working scale and that of planners. This link is called Städtebau, or urban design, in Germany, which is concerned about spaces with a bigger scale than an architects' usual work and a smaller one than a planners'. It cares about the livable spaces in a city.

This education is one of the origins of the problems we are suffering now in Austria. Buildings, cities, towns and villages are the result of our building culture.

And we have many problems we should think about, such as no erected mixed use buildings. Mixture of uses is decreasing day after day and the originated monofunctional areas derive in non livable areas. Those areas bring the construction of superstructures created for the car, leading to urban sprawl, a degradation of the city centers and thus, more traffic and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

*In our opinion, regional planning has sometimes in Spain been used as a tool for making some people really rich. Actually, the real motivation of*

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*some plans has been only economical and it has also been used as a funding way for some villages. Has something like that happened here?*

The same has happened in Austria. I am not opposed to investors earning money but politicians have to arrange a compromise between money, investors, inhabitants and the next generations. And politicians do nothing to control that, so of course, there is corruption.

*We have been told that, even if there are regional regulations, the mayor is the first planning and building authority. Can you tell us about this?*

Lower Austrian government passes its own regional planning and building laws, and in villages the mayor decides yes or not to what has been asked building permission.

Zoning plans are made by the villages too. They have to send them to government of the province so that it is approved. But there is very little done against bad zoning plans. People working at government say yes to almost everything.

It is a political problem that we have. The region's parliament is composed of the mayors of the villages from all Lower Austria so they will press for their zoning plans to be approved.

Furthermore, there is egoism in some of the villages' decisions, whose budget comes partly from the government and partly from the so called "communal tax". The "communal tax" is a tax that must be paid to the villages for every employee in the village. Therefore, many retail and other projects are authorized easily on behalf of the job creation, because the villages will get money from that!

That usually means building a huge building with a big parking area in the outskirts of the town, so that everybody will go there by car. This empties the city centers. In fact 51% of all shopping fields in Austria are at the village outskirts, whereas only 17% of them are in Germany. There's a big difference!

That is, in my opinion, the real source of the bad rural planning.

*By saying so, do you mean that almost any promoter proposals are built if you promise job creation? Is it all open to negotiation?*

Yes. There are some regulations about what can be erected but there is nothing said about how much can be constructed, so, as I said,

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on behalf of job creation, existing zoning plans are often changed to allow such buildings.

Here in Austria we have a rate of 1.9 m<sup>2</sup> retail area/inhabitant. It's the highest rate in Europe. Germany has a rate of 1.4 m<sup>2</sup> retail area/inhabitant, which is the second largest and Great Britain, which is average, has a rate of only 0.7 m<sup>2</sup> retail area/inhabitant. So look how big the problem is.

Lots and lots of land areas are being "consumed" without almost any limit. For instance, there is a minimum amount of parking places that a shopping center should have, but there is nothing said about a maximum limit, so huge areas are being urbanized for doing so, with more places for cars to come and park and so on. In order to correct this problem, a city in Vorarlberg has recently limited the maximum number of parking places but I do not know any other legislation like that in Austria.

And planners do nothing to increase awareness about this problem.

*So we are speaking about some kind of corruption and speculation...*

Corruption and speculation exist, but there are tools to control them if politicians decide to do so.

For example, there is a tax called "Socially Fair Land Use" which could be used. In Munich they do, and 2/3 of the benefits of a big urban operation are reverted to the city and 1/3 goes to the investor. This could also be implemented here, but Vienna, as an example I know well, does not use it. Instead of that, they change all zoning plans to comply with what the investors ask for.

*Where do you think the idealization of country life, based on owning a house with a garden, comes from? How does spatial planning cope with the problem of sprawl that it has generated?*

I think that everyone has wishes, everyone wants to live in the best way of life for him as long as it is financeable. And a house in the countryside with its own garden fulfills lots of those wishes.

I believe that planners and politicians have to let people be happy but not without any borders or limits. Those limits are energy consumption, nature and what our next generations will be able to live, what they will get as a legacy.

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*In addition to sprawl, lots of houses are built in a way that look alike each other and that somehow resemble a certain regional style, but are, in fact, real architectural fakes. What do you think about it?*

Well, for me the main problem is not aesthetic, it is in first place a problem of lack of sustainability, where there is no ecological consideration, where there is huge land use and consumption. In second place it is the social costs of all these sprawled buildings. They cost the towns money to maintain those infrastructures we built.

And yes, there is a problem of bad housing and a lack of quality in architecture with those prefabricated houses. But an ugly 250 m<sup>2</sup> house is better than the best architecture in 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>. What should be asked is whether a house is 100 m<sup>2</sup> or 400 m<sup>2</sup>, whether it can be constructed around the town or everywhere throughout the territory.

What is offered in terms of housing is a problem too. Actually, it is cheaper to buy one of those prefabricated houses than an apartment in the center of the town.

*Do you think that a planning which is not based in growing, even in decreasing is possible? Is it an utopia?. Can planning not be linked to the capitalist concept of continuous growing?*

In reality it is. Look, there is a place in Styria called Eisenerz. It used to be a mining city, they got the iron to make steel. But after the mining crisis its population went down from 30,000 inhabitants to 4,500 inhabitants. It was a shrinking city, so they had to redesign their building structure to adapt it to the new situation.

But there are many shrinking areas, like the north of the Waldviertel since the 60's in which nothing is being done in that direction. Actually the government has been subsidizing the building of new houses there.

We, as planners, should think in terms of changing our settlements' structure to adapt them to decreasing population but also to the energetic crisis and the climate change. But it all happens to be an illusion, because in the end it is all driven like economy.

*When building the majority of the houses nowadays, the influence of the buildings in public space is not taken into account. Houses used to face streets and now most of them don't, etc. There is a lack of high quality public spaces in rural contexts. Can planning do something about that?*

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There is not a culture of public space, there is no sense of quality. This is all lost. The only exclusion may be the place in front of the church in villages. They care about those places.

But public space is mainly regarded as a space for traffic. In rural places streets are only seen as mere infrastructure carriers, they are not seen as places for community life.

It all comes from that "my home is my castle" mentality. People do not care about the space outside their homes, there is no sensitivity for the Common Good.

*In Spain some of the regional plans, mostly in rural towns, completely regulate buildings features, to make new houses look like the traditional typology. That is made to achieve homogeneity in the town's image, but only building pastiches are generated. What do you think about it?*

I think that when there is a communal awareness for the values of certain architectural traditions building regulations could be used, not to regulate taste or construction details, but to maintain the general features which are generally the form of the volumes (e.g. long and narrow) and the material they are made with. It is not a matter of conservationism but of maintaining certain values in sensitive areas.

I am not talking about forbidding to build in a modern way. In Münster, Germany, their traditional buildings were built in brick, so according to regulations now every new house has to be made of bricks, whether you build modern architecture or old looking one.

See, until the 19th century there was not such thing like an international style. Every place had its unique way of building. But nowadays awareness of a building being part of a greater whole is lost. And awareness of the typical material used in the area is lost. So it is understandable to discuss that topic of tradition.

But of course form should follow function, as it is said.

*Another of our concerns is the influence of tourism in rural areas, which can, of course, bring some benefits. But has tourism also brought some kind of idealization and a kind of frozen image of the towns, not only to foreigners' minds but also to locals'?. Has it an effect on architecture?*

I am not an expert so I might be wrong but I think that tourism ruins authenticity. It is a necessary income for some villages, as industry was 100 years ago but it is bad. It ruins the surroundings of the

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towns. I mean there is also a soft tourism, mostly the cultural one, which does not act that way, but summer tourism in Austria is a pass-town tourism, tourists come and leave, so I don't know if it works.

*Which other urban problems do you think that Austria faces?*

Some villages, very few, are in a better situation than the ones I have described, there are some successes and there are people that take their job seriously, but against those small places of hope, there is a big jungle. So I want to denounce the bad conditions of democracy and culture in Austria, which are a mirror of society.

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# Renate Hammer



Dr. tech. Renate Hammer

Graduated in architectural studies at the Vienna University of Technology and took part in a postgraduate program at the University of Tokyo as well as in Solar Architecture at the Danube University Krems. For years, she was key researcher and executive director of the department's research activities and in 2011 she became dean of the Faculty of Arts, Culture and Building at DUK. Since 1999 she runs her own architectural office. In 2013 she founded the Institute of Building Research and Innovation in Vienna.

*MID estudio: We would first want to know some of your background. What made you work, research and specialize in sustainability topics?*

Renate Hammer: I think it was quite a natural development. First thing I wanted to learn was stage design, because I am also a dancer. I have an education in modern dance and at the moment I am working with a group of dancers on a project called "Concave". I work on form and body. This was, for me, an intro to architecture because I discovered that most of stage designers had a background education on architecture.

That was what brought me to architecture. But very quickly I found out that the concentration on form and body, that came out from dance was not enough. The next step was to realize that as an architect you are using up materials and landscape and that you are working for and with people, and that form, is for sure something important, but it is not the only thing.

So I was always skeptical when architects became designers only and this was not the easiest approach during my studies because it was so trendy to be the best designer. But after you have a great design you have to think about how to make it real and livable and how to account for what you have done. So for me the question was really how we can be responsible for what we are doing as architects.

*So you are talking about responsibility and a more holistic approach to architecture...*

I was missing that very much during my education phase so I started Philosophy studies in parallel. I did not finish them but I started asking myself about the ethical background of acting. As soon as you start studying philosophy you are driven into these questions of how you can make a decision, how you can go forward on science and things like that. This is the third part of my background.



There was the body movement on the one hand side, the formal question on the middle and there was the question of what we can do, what we should do on the third hand; and with all this crazy mixture together nobody knew what I could end up doing.

Of course, I wanted to build houses and I founded my own architectural office in Germany 15 years ago. I did some buildings, very often together with colleagues, and I think they are not a sensation but some of them work quite well.

Then, after my studies, I went to Japan just to look at something totally different. I was trying to fit in somewhere else where I could test all that I had done and learned before. It was very interesting and necessary and it was for me the first time I was learning not from teachers but just usual people. I went to Kobe's destroyed districts, where they had had a heavy earthquake, and just talked a lot to the people about what they would really need, how things should be rebuilt, if they should be rebuilt, what had been there before. They had a picture of what had been there or how it should be but after the earthquake there was nothing, it was all part of their imagination... so what to do. This was really an interesting experience.

Then I came back and had this dual way of working. On one had as an architect trying to erect buildings and talking with the building owners, and on the other hand, I started to look at the idea of sustainability. What I found out, and was confronted with, 15 years before, was the idea of energy efficiency. And for me it was interesting because it had something to do with thinking about what we can take out from the environment and what we can bring in. But for me this just was one thing and often represented a heavy violation of the idea of form.

*Why? what do you mean when you say it was a violation of the idea of form?*

There is for instance a real contradiction when it was said that you have to build compact buildings and should open them only, or more or less only, the south. What happens to the north? Questions like this were not answered. Well, it is a constant in my life, because when I had a question and nobody would give me an answer I would always get interested in the topic, because I thought that there might be something wrong.

And for me there was something wrong with that because, for sure, we have the sun as an energy input and we have to use it but it is much more than that. I had the feeling that we had a movement that made people inhabitants of energy collectors. I could not stand this so I tried to think about a different approach.

For me daylighting is a fascinating topic but it shows a conflict with the energy collector culture if you really start working with it. There is a tradition that works with light as a definition of form, there is another tradition that works with light for health and well being and there is this new tradition that works with light as a thermal energy and electrical energy provider.

Everybody expected me in for this energy movement or new tradition only, but it was not enough for me. It was difficult sometimes and I had to fight against the idea of assuming that daylighting is energy only. As soon as you have the word only, then it has nothing to do with sustainability.

At the moment we are working on a kind of catalogue, we try to find topics and look at projects and ask ourselves what this certain project would need to be really sustainable. Often the very first answer is it should not be built.

So we would be very proud if we were invited to involve ourselves in a project before the first ideas of space are established, when just the needs are there. People have a lot of needs for space but the questions are what is there already and how can we work with that, can we adapt what is there or not, where are the spaces that could be used if you take care about people and environment, etc.

We have been involved in a very interesting project for old people in the far north of Austria, in a very rural and difficult area, where people are moving out. We were invited to support a project for elderly to live together, which is a really nice project, but we were invited when the building grounds and the idea of the building shape were fixed. We developed the form with the architects further on but, actually, I am not sure if this building plot has anything to do with this rural place, with the needs of the people and with the idea of getting old... Anyway I like the project because I think we can learn a lot and maybe find out how to improve and do better next time.

*When you say that you want to be there before those decisions are made ... is sustainability in planning what you are talking about? I mean you have a sprawl problem in Austria, most of all at rural settlements where one family houses are built, that do not match traditional rural settlement structures and have brought, a higher land occupation, an increase in greenhouse gas emissions...*

It is one aspect and what is lying behind is that very very strong wish of the people to have their own house and an own patch of land. On a legal basis, here in Austria the mayor, who has to be elected by the

people, has to give the allowance to build or not, and it is clear that if he denies the allowance he will probably not be elected once again. But that is just one part of the story because we have also some mayors in Austria who really try to have a conversation with the people in the process and try to show them what is happening... but who are the mayors?

The mayors are for instance farmers or teachers, or... and have no idea about building mostly. So this is the base problem I would say. But another reason why things are not changing is because in these settlements, where you have your single family house and a patch of land, you get a very stable group of conservative electors.

On the other hand in Vienna there was a strong Social Housing tradition. There the left wing party erected huge social building complexes in some districts, like the 13th and 19th, which were single family cottage style housing settlements. It is about bringing the right electors to the right political districts to get more influence!

*So nothing to do really with sustainability... there is no thought or consideration about territory behind those decisions.*

That is often the very sad truth. There are these very formal and old ideas of having electors that always vote for the same party so there is no movement or discussion going on in the settlements. And this is why there is no political drive to change this and the result is that we have political agreements to reduce land use but not a political will to change.

*Then what about the recommendations of the last "Baukultur" or Building culture report? what has been done afterwards?*

That is a typical situation. It is a step forward and it is good that we have the possibility with the Building culture report and the Building Culture Advisory Committee to bring recommendations to the parliament that have to be looked at. That is something useful but it is not more. So you can recommend to do A or B and parliament has to discuss it, but then it is often left with the discussion.

*So is there any decision made about it?*

No, not really. So we have some recommendations that the government gives but often to say "it is a federal affair" is the way to slip out of responsibility. We have strong federal states here and parliament can say that as a national state we should do this and that, but the federal states are the ones who execute decisions or do not.

Anyway, I think that there is some development. We want things to go fast and they usually do not. But sometimes things happen suddenly if you constantly repeat the same things. For instance, some years ago, there was a real need to build new houses and thus is why the government gave funding exclusively for this matter to the federal states. But the clear dedication was skipped because of political trading, and nobody exactly knows how much of the money is effectively used for buildings. Everybody said "if you open up a legal possibility like that for the federal states to use the money more or less like they want they will never step back from their right". In our pressure groups and the Building Culture reports, we say that this is a wrong direction, a wrong development, because if you give money which comes from taxes and everybody pays, intended for good building then this money needs to be used for this and not for something else.

And now we face a kind of turn around and the federal states are saying that they will take the money that was given for building again for building only. Everybody thought this would never happen and it seems like it is going to happen.

So it is sometimes depressing constantly talking about things like the necessity of keeping rural settlements in compact shape and trying to prohibit sprawl and seeing that nothing happens. But if you say it again and again and again and line out developments clearly, maybe things can change.

I think the most important thing is to have pressure from both sides, from the government side as well as from the base of people, and therefore you have really to work with the people and try to show them what happens to their surroundings, if they do this or do that. In Austria the many small real estate owners are the decision makers and they have the money and are the ones that say, "I have a need and I want this or that".

Here emerges the role of the architect. If she or he is an educated architect, she must be able to draw pictures in the mind of the people before they come with their models and plans. Afterwards it is really late to move a formal idea that has grown, that is difficult, something that really needs power. But to ask people before they start with forms what their desires and needs are, that should be meaningful.

We try to work on that basis. That is why it is sad if you are introduced to a project too late. Then you can try to make things work better but to have a really good solution you have to start before. In fact you have to start not on the base of a single land ownership but on the base of the commune and the mayors.

*In the "Baukultur" or Building Culture report 2011 sustainability was a main concern. You speak about a "The three-pillar model [...] based on the consideration of three dimensions of ecology, economy and socio-culture and states that sustainability is ensured only if the expansion of choices these three dimensions equally taken into account". Can you explain us that viewpoint?*

It is the usual model. You have to work with this three columns because it is something you can transport to people because everybody knows a little bit about economy or a little bit about ecology or says building has something to do with culture or with social aspects, but, in fact, these columns can not be separated. We think a lot of a way we could work better with these columns. For us, at the moment, one centre of our research is to enhance these three columns model.

Therefore when we start working on the idea of a building we try to slip into as if it would be a person and then we ask, how should this person be, inviting, friendly or not, does it fit in here or not, how much ground should it need... So we try to personalize the building and, as a first approach, think about how its character is. Then we go into a more abstract phase and ask ourselves which aspects of this character may belong to social qualities, which to the economic qualities... the more you work like this, the harder it gets to separate columns; but it is only a model. It depends very much on the project and on the question you are working on which of the columns or topics is the one that is really critical in behalf of sustainability.

*The report focuses on thermal rehabilitation, life cycle costs and the economic sustainability of buildings and Innovation. Why did you select those specific topics? Were they the most critical?*

The challenge was to select topics of interest for the political partners so they could bear them in their minds, and of importance for sustainability.

Of course, it was a selection. In the first Baukultur or Building Culture report in 2006, we had hundreds of topics and authors. It was interesting because it gives you a puzzle of the situation and it was good for the first report but for the following reports, which are supposed to be written every 5 years this would be of no use. We had to focus on specific topics.

For me the central question was the one of how far we have to protect our cultural heritage and how far this can be matched with aspects of sustainability and the massive energy challenge we have. We are energy importers and therefore it is a question of importance for the

government. They think about energy consumption and production and they give lots of funding for thermal renovation.

For us, there was this question of what this massive pressure on, especially, renovating facades and its influence on the building culture of Austria. I really could not answer this question before. What would happen if we do not isolate all the buildings' facades? What will happen if we take alternative measures with buildings of definite cultural importance? So that was what the report told.

The government red it but they were not very happy with the outcomes. I was surprised because the result is that we have more possibilities to work with, it is much easier to protect places like the 1st district of Vienna and make it sustainable knowing that it is not absolutely essential and necessary to isolate all the facades. Think of a historical building with an externally isolated facade. No way, that would be a real loss of culture.

And I was expecting the political parties to appreciate that but their reaction was different. Our Minister for Ecology was so happy to sell these blocks of isolation to the people because it was an easy message and now the scientists were coming with alternatives that were not as easy as that one.

It is a matter of taking some other things into the equation... maybe we do not need to have a 250 m<sup>2</sup> house per family maybe only a 160m<sup>2</sup> one.

The discussion about the results was so intensive. It was really hard and this is the reason why the Building Culture report, was published not in 2011, the year it was named after, but the next year on February 2012.

*Talking about renovation, we think that this is one of the most important issues in rural settlements, in order to improve ecological sustainability, instead of building new houses renovating could be a solution.*

The interesting thing that happens in Austria is that the quality and the richness that could lie within old building structures - I do not want to draw a romantic picture of old buildings because some are really hard to use - is seen by people who do not have a rural background. It often happens that people from the cities buy old houses and renovate them in a very good manner to have them for holiday use and the ones who grew up in these buildings say they would never want to go back to something like that because it was cold or tiny or whatever.

For them, the quality would be to have much space, own space, to be able to walk around their house. Maybe it has something to do with rich people having villas and villas stood alone. It usually takes one generation in between to make it possible to see the qualities of the houses that have a traditional shape or functionality.

What is really interesting is that even the firms that work in the field of renovation often know that the old houses have their quality but they do not even try to bring them to the builders any more. Peter Holzer, my business partner, has a very old farmhouse in the Wachau and tried to renew the plaster on the facade and contacted a firm. The firm said they would do it with a modern net and resin plaster system. Peter said he did not want that, he wanted the facade in the structure like it was, but he only needed new plaster where the old one was falling down. They had a long discussion and at last the firm said that they knew how to do a traditional adobe plaster and where the material could be bought but they never told because nobody ever asked. Actually he was the first one.

*A lot of traditional knowledge is getting lost in the way.*

That is something I am really really afraid of. I think that, in a global view, one of the most critical and frightening aspects of education and bringing up our youngster is that they have a very interesting way of gathering abstract knowledge, but it is so abstract! They have absolutely no idea about how to do something by hand! That is amazing for me. I have two kids and I look at how they solve the assignments they are given at school and they do it and they can draw with the computer and much more but if you ask them to fix up a blank sheet... that's the end of the world!

It is something quite hard for us to understand. I attended the last class at my university to draw the final examination by hand, so I know what a pencil is and what you can do and what making a decision or changing it would mean. But now they make their decisions totally different because they have these redo, renew, reprint possibilities... but they must be able to come to a final point and to be responsible for it, and to be able to fix a sheet for sketching. There is something missing and for me it is really frightening.

Perhaps I am too pessimistic about that, but I think that this unbelievable huge cloud of possible chances you could take if you did this or this... has to be condensed into "what are we going to do now and in

reality?" What we have to do is something real, not something virtual and not something abstract. It is something we have to be able to build.

For me that is to some extent a reason for poor architecture. We can have computer drawings that look amazing... but you never know if the sun in this rendering is standing in a possible angle to the house. And then we have buildings that look so poor and that have absolutely nothing to do with the place and the soil they are standing on. For me it is a strange development.

It would be really necessary and very worth trying to build a house by hand just as an experience for students. Saying, "this is the plot" and nothing more, what are you going to do now? cut a tree? dig a hole? collect stones?

*Something that amazed us is that in Germany they have that "Berufsausbildung" or education in a job, where it is very usual that people get an education on a manual profession before going into university.*

This is a very interesting aspect, to get contact with what you are really doing and not only doing things in your mind. This is a critical point, because what you have in mind is a picture you create for yourself but you are not the center of the world. The center is outside of yourself so you have to think about it and then bring something out to the world. We are not spaceships.

But that is the way architecture looks a lot like in the moment, often in rural areas if no one really takes care and coordinates the things, this is not so common. Design architects often exclusively concentrate on the forms they have in their heads and they want to see them in reality. But this is something really egocentric.

*Do you mean that the materials that are already there should be taken into account...*

Of course, if you talk about sustainability you have to ask about where the materials come from. In the moment they come from all around the world, what a craziness!, and this is something we can not afford in any way. We need the materials that are next to us, whatever next means. It could be thousand kilometers away maybe, but not more than necessary. But this is something we do not do.

And think about the change of rural buildings' quality if we just ask ourselves which material would be sustainable on this site. You would

have to look at old buildings because they had not chance, they did not have the energy, to bring in plastic from China or India or elsewhere.

*But therefore you have to make the owners and clients understand and believe, you have to convince them, that bringing materials from far away places, even if they are cheaper, is not the best solution.*

This is something that shows the really close contact with the question of economy as a single column. It is not a single column, it is a question of what are things worth really. We are now always or often taking the cheapest chance because we cannot afford more, but the sustainability question would be that if we can not afford more maybe we are not rich enough for a project.

In former times people kept in a tradition of housing because it was just not affordable, you didn't have so much wealth. It was not only a question of money but a question of materials and energy to build a house and, in fact, this has not changed because money is not growing on trees, but we are taking things out of poorer parts of the world and this is not balanced.

*So it is also a question of education. One has to be responsible for the decisions that one makes. How can for example, the responsibility that many consumers in Austria have with the bio and eco products, be translated to architecture?*

It implies money. Architecture is much more expensive than anything you can buy in a supermarket. The decision we have to make is whether we can manage our life with less, that's the only key. Nobody likes to be confronted with the idea of having less but it is the only truth. We are talking about having less.

*Can we talk now about what building regulations you have in Austria in order to improve sustainability?*

We have regulations on assessment of the effects to the environment. This is the law you have to stick to for big projects like wind turbines. It could be a good instrument but it has to be powerful and true and it has to be used in a proper way. The most important thing about laws is how you use them.

Last week I read in the news that a step forward in sustainability was that this assessment has been made easier. I would like to know why this is a step forward into sustainability? Maybe it is because it is

quicker and you can use it for more projects? But in fact what does it mean? It lowers the qualities...

*We do also have that regulation in Spain. In Spain has recently been passed a law, as a transposition of the European law, for which every existing house that wants to be sold or rented has to have an energy certificate (new buildings already had to have it since 2006). Our house selling market has suddenly stopped because of the economical crisis so some citizens think that this new requirements are just barriers that do not help at all. It's seen like a new government imposition. In the other hand, some of those who work in sustainability development think that the only way to make people aware of sustainability is with more regulations and with the increase of the energy price, so that people are conscious of its real price...*

The intro would be to say that we need a truth of costs for everything, we need a truth of cost in energy, in space, for car driving... and then the idea of just using less would be easy to sell. So in the moment most of the things we use do not have their real price, they are, in fact, much more expensive.

What we do see in Austria is that the energy certificate for the houses works because we have this thing called energy poverty. We have the phenomenon that people can not warm up their houses during the winter and it can get really dangerous... For instance, city government in Vienna, always thinks about which will be the more clever decision, to pay an additional amount of money for the very poor so that they can afford the heating or to improve their houses. In the moment you still have to support the ones that need the money for the heating for sure, but to make better houses would be a much more sustainable and future oriented decision.

With the energy certificate you can just guess how much you have to spend on energy because most of the certificates are done roughly. Just working with default figures the certificates show a higher need of energy than detailed ones. So this should encourage the contractors to do better calculations, so that they can show that their buildings are good. This is something I hope it works.

We often have the funniest results if we see what is standing on the certificate and compare that to the result of a measure.

For us the interesting results we had in the recent years were really in monitoring buildings in operation, when seeing the difference between calculations and measurements. We were involved in this, maybe you know something about the Velux Sunlight house by Hein-Troy Architekten,

with calculations that go far beyond of what the law asks for. It was very correct and we took into consideration everything thinkable and then the house was running and we had exciting moments...in that moment we did not really know what was happening and it was a work of investigating the house, checking every pipe that was in and everything you had previously done again and again, to see if the system runs or not. And how many buildings, specially high technicised building are checked? 2%? 1%? and the rest? I do not want to know. Every building we monitored had really a difficult start for the first one or two years. We were only looking for the mistakes... because calculations are all right and necessary but not the truth.

*That can be done with big building but not most of the times with the small houses...*

That is true. For small houses the really interesting question is about how much technology we need and how much technology we could omit.

We are again back looking at the traditional buildings and looking at their qualities and how they worked but, you always have to take into consideration that former buildings were built for people working outside specially in rural areas.

So, for instance, their need for daylight and for sun was probably covered by the time working in the fields or in the woods, playing and working outside, because the only not flickering light was sunlight so you had just sit outside for brightness and fresh air and they go inside just for sleeping. We live a totally different life and therefore you have to put the old building concepts on the test, so if you look at old farm-houses in Austria they work thermally perfect but they are conceived for outside living society. Maybe they feel well in temperature but not in light.

*Our traditional typology also looks a little bit like that, very similar. And sometimes regulations still want the buildings to look like that and it seems a contradiction to us.*

That is something difficult to solve but I am sure we can add very good new architecture to traditional buildings if we understand their structure and combine it with the possibilities of the materials we have today.

I think one really amazing step forward was the development of glazing. It is tremendous what can be done if you use the right glazing and

I am really sad because we always use the standards on the market and we could do so much more if we were really sensitive about glazing.

We work a lot with the glazing developers and they say that they move if their competitors move, but they have a lot of knowledge about fillings, layers, the glass itself, the mixtures. We are working together with the Fraunhofer Institut für Silicatforschung in Würzburg, who work with the the material composition itself, and there are really interesting ways to make the panels thinner and let more light through and select what you really need inside.

Building openings, which are today glazed, really need a modern and up to date view on building. We can talk about traditional buildings. In historic tradition we had no glass and as soon as it came it was something admirable because it was expensive and it had enormous qualities, today it is the same, so we are staying in a tradition.

So, on one hand, we have this tradition to think about the shape, the form and orientation of the building openings, and it is something we really should learn and try to understand how and why they did it that way because it was intelligent. And on the other hand, if we really take care of what kind of glazing we choose, we now have a different and better material, and we have the technical development this is something we should not deny. If the old ones would have had this material imagine how their houses would have looked like!

To say "I want everything glazed" for me is not an approach just because we can do it...

*You also talk about comfort, not only energy saving, you introduce that idea too when you talk about daylighting it is a main concern...*

We talk about comfort and we talk about health a lot. Here we have again this column mixture. What we are doing is establishing an indoor climate that is amazingly constant and we define the comfort zone which is getting smaller and smaller. We have gone too far in this direction. It is not about having in winter 17°C inside and in summer 30°C but we are getting too far reaching the point in which we have to have it cooler inside in summer than in winter. For me it is a craziness whether you look at the energy consumption or at the technical support we need to reach these conditions. And as human beings we are not used to spend a living in the comfort zone!

At the moment I am reading tones of books about the human evolution and I am learning a lot about chimpanzees because I want to

know which climate we are constructed for and feel well and comfortable. We have only been in this “always the same soup” of indoor climate for two generations.

And if you think about the night swing so even in tropic regions they have a night swing of 5 degrees at least, but we stay in constant temperatures through the whole day facing 40% of our grown up population can not sleep the night through..interesting uh?...

There is a movement coming mainly from Great Britain talking about “adaptive comfort” and their model says that if our buildings are built in a way that we are mentally connected to the outside, our body will fit in a way to the natural climate outside. So if it is hot outside like today, we have 40°C, and the building code says 27°C, it is of no use.

Our body says it is absolutely hot so we sweat... but coming in from outside to an artificial climate leads to adapting problems... The adaptive comfort model says that even in a fully conditioned building our body remembers what is happening outside. It would save energy, for sure, it would reduce technical stuff we need and it is up to our opinion, at the moment it is an opinion but we are working on stabilizing scientific base for it, it would be really good for us not to live in this perfectly conditioned indoor space...

In this context we have problems with a pure passive house concept, especially with old people because if they want to have a stable sleep they need a lot of light in the afternoon and a cool surrounding during the night. This is difficult to have in passive houses, which do not work very quickly with the change of indoor temperature, and it is complex to establish an inner zoning. You have to be able to cool sleeping spaces because your core temperature has to fall down in order to sleep, so if the surrounding is too warm.

There are so many medical studies that say that to stabilize our circadian rhythm we need clear awake and sleep phases triggered by light. Thus we need much more light than we have in our buildings. We need a clear day-night swing. For me the craziest thing is to give them more artificial light at night and it is happening at the moment. At hospitals, or nursing homes we are increasing artificial light level to help people find their way... well they should not be finding their way, they should just not be disturbed from sleeping.

*In Spain we hear a lot about passive houses now. From our professional experience we are not experts in the topic at all, but some of the things you told us sound new to us...*

I am quite critical with the definition of the standards if you move at the climate zones. We have to look at the aim and the aim of the passive house where it was created, here in central Europe, was to reduce the energy need in winter to reach the aim of reducing the carbon emission. And for Spain we have to ask how to reduce carbon emission under its climate conditions. If it is a passive house concept that works it is fine, but I am not convinced. We have to be climate sensitive. The question of how much technical stuff we want to bring into our buildings is very important because if we decide to use a house concept then it is the way it is and we need all this technical stuff the building asks for.

We always try to ask if our buildings would run, if suddenly, for instance, the electricity supply would fall out. For us a building that collapses without electric energy in a way that you can not stay inside is not sustainable. Some office buildings have this problem, you have to evacuate them. In the United States, during one of the last heat waves, when electricity supply broke down, people were dying in their houses because it was too hot. We do not need more air conditioning, no! we need more intelligent houses.

*We believe that as architects we should focus in the passive measures we can take. Look and learn about vernacular architecture and get some lessons and apply them in our buildings.*

The question again is how can we reduce and solve the problem with less. I do not know why there is a panic about living with less, we have too much and everybody knows it.

*But existing building regulations make us have to plan and design lots of technical stuff inside, really much more than necessary. They are asking for more and more machines inside and it is usually one of the highest parts of the budget in a building.*

We architects are really asked for input to this discussion. This is something we talk about in the supporting group of the building culture report. There is really a force coming from standards, codes and laws to do more than necessary and it is something that makes building expensive and so often inadequate. I think that this is a topic for architects to tell and to show it again and again and point out that we could save much money and we would not lose quality if we reduce. But, for sure, you have to consider what and who is standing behind this codes. Lobbies, the ones who sell, very powerful people...

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*What about wood? It is a material that is very much used in Austria, with a very strong industry and important clusters. It is also said that is ecological because of the neutral CO<sub>2</sub> production. What do you think about using this material in buildings? What advantages does it have?*

With wood you can really do something for the global aspects of sustainability by reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

In a country like Austria, where we have a lot of wood but not tremendous too much, we have calculations made that show that if we have a sustainable forest development even the material wood is a limit source. So we have to think about how much of it we can use for heating, how much we can use for building, for paper,... It is really a decision about which need we should use the wood for. We are convinced we cannot use too much more for biomass heating because the balance of regrowing would get lost otherwise.

The problem we see in our climate with light weight materials is could be a proper mass balancing. We have problems with storing the heat or the cold in the material so we often use combinations of mass carrying materials and wood as a good solution.

But even materials like clay or stone need to be in our focus because there are so many materials that can be used in a sustainable way. We just have to look around and what has traditionally been used. Often it is a very clever solution. For instance, to have this combination of massive fundaments and basements with additional wood construction above which is quite cleverly done.

*It is unusual that architects talk about sustainability in scientific terms. Sometimes architects are only regarded as professionals who bring aesthetics to the projects. Do you think that maybe a more technical vision will help architects restore their lost prestige?*

I think we have a massive problem of education in architecture, because we educate future architects in the manner of superstar designers, and that is what they admire and want to achieve. You just have to have a look at the publications for architects. They are all about form and who created the form. And for sure it is about form but it is about responsibility for the form although.

Thus everybody could find its way. I am not of the opinion that it has to be the connection of a technical approach and form only, it can be a connection of social aspects and form and building, it can be a connection between ethical aspects, sustainability aspects and building and so on.

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I think that, as architects, we have to bring an idea of ethics in building into education and then everybody would be able to find his own direction. But to reduce ourselves to designers only, leads to problems. If one does not want to ask himself about what the results of his form shaping are, then he should become sculptor or stage designer. But as soon as you get an idea of what responsibility is, you are responsible and if you deny that, you are part of the crisis.



CASE STUDY

With our series of Case Studies, which are 5 short video interviews, we try, hearing to the owners and users of specific buildings situated in those settlements, to show the path we would like to see architecture go through: full of respect for what is already there but still having its own language, conscious about resources, history and the impact it can have on people's life.

The series consists of the following projects:

CASE STUDY

## VENUSGARTEN HAUS

<https://vimeo.com/72721820>

The Venusgarten Haus, with its delightful wooden construction, is an example of respectful relation with the traditional architectures of the surroundings from a clear contemporary attitude. The sensitive preservation of part of the preexisting building and the communication between old and new made architecture talk about the relation of a son with his mother.

*Case study Venusgarten Haus, with an interview to Stefan Schauer, owner, talking about his house in Willendorf, designed by Volker Dienst in cooperation with Christoph Feldbacher.*

CASE STUDY

## MALAT HOTEL

<https://vimeo.com/71154192>

Malat hotel is an interesting example of the relation between architecture, wine and tourism in the Wachau valley. The project integrates an old building and reuses some materials that already were there. The new courtyard, based on the preexisting one, is opened to the beautiful vineyard landscape that now seems to be part of the hotel.

*Case study Malat hotel, with an interview to Michael Malat, owner, talking about his hotel in Palt, designed by Tm architektur*

CASE STUDY

## STIFT HERZOGENBURG

<https://vimeo.com/72549964>

The Herzogenburg Monastery is a great example of Baroque and Classicist architecture. In this strong traditional context the Osterkapelle, a new chapel built on 1999, uses the modern architectural and artistic language to transmit the religious message in a poetic way, playing with few and simple elements.

*Case study Osterkapelle in Stift Herzogenburg, with an interview to Provost Maximilian Fürnsinn, talking about the Easter Chapel, designed by Ernst Beneder and Anja Fischer.*

CASE STUDY

## MINORITENPLATZ

<https://vimeo.com/73230908>

Minoritenplatz is an example of transformation of an old church and monastery into a cultural centre in a small town where the culture, in all its forms, is a very important manifestation of their identity.

*Case study Minoritenplatz, with an interview to Jo Aichinger, artistic director of the Lower Austrian Festival, talking about cultural facilities existing in Krems and about Minoritenplatz cultural complex designed by Fritz Göbl and Reinhardt Gallister and Fritz Göbl, Lukas Göbl and Alexander Bolecek.*

CASE STUDY

## MARKTGEMEINDEAMT OTTENSHEIM

<https://vimeo.com/72919230>

The need of a new Town hall, and the commitment to keep it in the town's core is the beginning of a new citizens' candidature to election. The idea of revitalizing the town center extends to other projects where participation of citizens in the design process plays a decisive role.

*Case study Marktgemeindeamt Ottensheim, with an interview to Ulli Böker, mayor, talking about city projects and the Town hall building project by SUE Architekten.*

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If you want to know a little bit more  
you should not miss the following links:

**Plattform for architectural policy and building culture**

<http://www.architekturpolitik.at/>

**Building Culture reports 2006 and 2011**

<http://www.baukulturreport.at/>

**Austrian Architectural Foundation**

<http://www.architekturstiftung.at>

**ORTE Architecture network of Lower Austria**

<http://www.orte-noe.at>

**Initiative Built Environment Education for young people**

<http://www.baukulturvermittlung.at/>

**NÖE GESTALTE(N) Magazine**

<http://www.no-e-gestalten.at/>

**Increasing Automobalisation and Urban Life.**

**Presentation by Reinhard Seiss at Sir J.J. College in Mumbai, India.**

<http://www.viddler.com/v/b9fb93a7>

**LandLuft – Association for the Promotion**

**of Building Culture in rural areas**

<http://www.landluft.at>

**Institute of Building Research & Innovation**

<http://www.building-research.at/>