

Land for Us All

Exhibition: 19.11.2020–03.05.2021

Opening: Wed 18.11.2020 (Information on the course of the opening will follow!)

The earth's surface is a finite resource, and soil is our most precious commodity. Careless or capital-driven treatment of this resource has massively changed the shape and function of our towns and villages in recent decades. In view of the threat of a climate catastrophe and rising housing prices, the question arises as to whether the current path, with maximum compromises and minimum adaptation, is still sustainable. An extensive and courageous land policy is called for, where is it?

The progressive urban sprawl of the countryside has been the subject of discussion for decades. Meanwhile, everybody in Austria could be housed in the single-family homes that already exist¹, although yet more land is still being approved for building on, new shopping centres are going up on greenfield sites and whole chalet villages in the Alps. Progressive sealing of the surface is contributing to the climate crisis and endangering food security. Speculation with land is increasing housing prices and leading to a creeping privatisation of public space. Weak or unenforced spatial planning regulations, a partly misguided tax law and subsidy system, and a despondent policy perpetuate the status quo instead of developing a vision for the future.

The exhibition explains the political, legal and economic background clearly and vividly, critically and sometimes inadvertently absurdly. How does rural land become building land? Why is the price of land rising? What does all this have to do with our lives and dreams? Case studies and explanations of the relevant terminology bring light into the thicket of responsible agents involved. International comparisons illustrate strengths and weaknesses, international examples of best practice show alternative approaches. A collection of existing and feasible new tools points the way to spatial planning that conserves land as a resource, mitigates climate change, helps with housing issues and facilitates good architecture. We are all being called upon to think and act along new lines – and this exhibition is preparing the way.

Curators: Karoline Mayer & Katharina Ritter, Az W

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¹ With an average of 4.16 people per house (8,837,707 inhabitants in 2,123,597 detached and semi-detached houses). Source: Statistik Austria, status 2018