

Land for Us All

Exhibition: 09.12.2020 – 03.05.2021

Opening day: Wed 09.12, 10:00 – 19:00

Digital opening, lectures: Wed 09.12, 18:00 www.azw.at

The earth's surface is a finite resource, and land 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 minimal adaptation, is still sustainable. An extensive and courageous land policy is called for, where is it?

The world might appear flat and endless, but it is and remains round — with a limited surface. The land that we need for our survival is a resource that cannot be reproduced. It is astonishing how often this fact can be repeated while still triggering an 'Aha' experience. The progressive urban sprawl of the countryside has been condemned for decades. Meanwhile, everybody in Austria could be housed in the single-family homes that already exist¹ while yet more land is being zoned as building land: new shopping centres are going up on greenfield sites and whole chalet villages in the Alps. The progressive sealing of the surface is contributing to the climate crisis and endangering food security. The hoarding of and speculation with land is increasing the price of housing and leading to a creeping privatisation of public space. Apartments are being built in many places whose function is not as homes but as investments that accrue value even when left unoccupied.

"We all want good food, attractive villages, an unpolluted environment, a flourishing economy and thriving towns and cities. We want affordable spacious housing, mobility and independence. Most of these wishes are understandable but there are massive conflicts of interest involved," say the curators of the exhibition Karoline Mayer and Katharina Ritter. With the exhibition 'Land for Us All', the Architekturzentrum Wien aims to analyse the various forces tugging at the land. As the exhibition shows, we have created a system that requires the use of land: "We all seem to profit from it while overlooking the long-term consequences of this activity," warn the curators. Poorly applied or unimplemented spatial planning measures, a partly misguided tax law and subsidy system, and despondent policymaking continue to perpetuate the status quo instead of developing a vision for the future.

"The key to an environmentally friendly, just and beautiful world lies at our feet. A deeper understanding of the context for spatial planning and a broad public discussion are crucial if land policy is to change," says Az W director Angelika Fitz. The exhibition explains the political, legal and economic backgrounds vividly, in concrete terms and critically, and sometimes inadvertently absurdly. How does open land become building land? Why is the price of land rising? What does all this have to do with our lifelong dreams? Case studies and ex-

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

planations of the terms involved bring light into the thicket of competencies involved. International comparisons between countries illustrate strengths and weaknesses, international examples of best practice show alternative approaches. A collection of existing and feasible new instruments points the way to spatial planning that conserves land as a resource, mitigates climate change, prevents speculation with land and facilitates good architecture. We are all being called upon to think and act in new ways – and this exhibition is intended to prepare the way.

The Exhibition Structure

As soon as they enter the exhibition, visitors are confronted with the harsh reality of land usage in Austria: How many hectares of soil are being sealed over per second? How many single-family homes are being built per hour? How many metres of road are being laid per minute?

What is land? This question is examined from a wide variety of perspectives, and shows how many disciplines are affected by issues of land and soil. In addition to spatial planning and architecture, also taken into account are economics and the law, agriculture and soil science as well as the key disciplines of ecology and climate research. The soil profiles by the Vorarlberg soil scientist Walter Fitz allow a view into the depths that would otherwise not be possible in this form. Human influence on soil quality is clearly shown in the succession of different types of soil samples. The Erdenbürger*in in turn presents soil as a building material. Made of rammed earth, this prototype for street furniture was designed by Lehm Ton Erde Baukunst GmbH especially for the exhibition. Erdenbürger*in invites visitors to take a seat, linger and study individual exponents in more detail.

Interesting context is provided by a historical timeline of the basic development of land ownership in Austria, which is juxtaposed with the history of land reform movements internationally. The emergence of spatial planning as the discipline responsible for the planned design of our built and unbuilt environment is traced from the first urban planning regulations in individual building codes to the institutionalisation of spatial planning under National Socialism, and from the disastrous excess zoning of building land from the 1960s to the 1980s, up to endeavours to repair the harm done.

Oh Thou, My Austria

Perhaps exaggerated or seemingly absurd scenarios in comic-style photo stories show how a focus on the common good does not necessarily prevail in the clash of the various vested interests involved. They provide a tool for reflecting self-critically on our own lifestyles. Personal desires and proactive decisions related to much discussed types of buildings are subjected to scrutiny: single-family homes, shopping centres, chalet villages and high-rise housing. Satirically of course! But isn't there at least a grain of truth in satire?

What spatial planning could achieve, if it were allowed

An animation pursues a number of issues relating to land consumption, and uses vivid imagery to tell the story of the wasteful use of land. Opposite is the Wall of Tools, which includes both such long in use, like time-limited zoning of building land, and more recent tools, such as regulations for second homes. But the significance of the informal, personal

level for successful spatial planning is also addressed here. And finally, a number of visionary ideas serve as inspiration for discussion — such as rethinking the division of responsibilities between the federal, state and local governments.

All in all, the state of our land is in our own hands, as are the tools for improvement. We just have to use them!

Land as Commodity, or Why Land Is Not Yogurt

The title of this section is based on a quotation from the Swiss politician Jacqueline Badran's book *Boden Behalten — Stadt Gestalten* (keeping the land — designing the city). In dealing with land as a commodity, questions arise such as: When did land become a commodity? What do land prices depend on? What role does our tax system play in this? What influence does zoning have on land prices? What impact do excessively rising land prices have on us all?

Other Countries, Other Customs

Looking beyond the national borders to Austria's European neighbours, six comparisons are made to explore the ways other countries deal with similar challenges. Even though direct comparisons are often difficult due to differences in the cultural contexts involved or different legal systems, they provide valuable inspiration for possible ways to fine-tune one's own system. The subjects of comparison range from the protection of property in the constitution, to the skimming off of individuals' zoning profits in favour of the general public, to the protection of agricultural land from development to safeguard food security.

Putting Good Things on the Ground

However more is needed than just criticism and warnings. 16 positive examples and projects from around the world promote a different approach to land. Examples for the revitalisation of town centres with private initiatives or the densification of existing land-intensive settlement areas. Examples of maintaining soil quality for agriculture and protecting green spaces from being sealed over. But it is also about the consistent unsealing and re-naturation of infrastructure that is no longer used or can be dispensed with, be it an urban motorway or a former limestone quarry. And examples of projects are presented that pursue different commercial routes: Models that have proven themselves with alternatives to the private ownership of land, or 'revolutionary' concepts, such as the skimming off the profits from land-use reallocation. As a reaction to the lacking transparency of large scale land acquisitions, whether for urban housing or in the agricultural sector in the global South and East, we present platforms that are committed to transparency and whose research work makes the extent of global commerce visible. As a whole, these projects should provide inspiration for our further development, for our daily work and for decisions concerning our personal lives. Because there are alternatives!

The 'Land for Us All' exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive and lavishly illustrated catalogue with essays by: Saskia Sassen, Gerhard Senft, Vandana Shiva, Robert Temel and Gerlind Weber. Available at the Az W Shop, or may be ordered directly from eshop@azw.at
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The press release as well as high-resolution, rights free press photographs are available for download at www.azw.at.

Press contact: Ines Purtauf, +43-1-522 3115-25, purtauf@azw.at

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