



HANDS-ON URBANISM 1850 – 2012. THE RIGHT TO GREEN

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“The right to the city is like a shout and a demand“, wrote French intellectual Henri Lefebvre in the 1960s.

Ever since the modernisation shock caused by industrialization, cities have been confronted with profoundly difficult challenges. It is not only contemporary crises that place conurbations throughout the world under pressure and reveal approaches to a different kind of urban development from below, in historical terms, too, one can talk of crisis urbanism that leads to appropriation of land in the city, to self-organisation, and to informal urban development. In situations of shortage urban dwellers have always produced solutions. Settlements and vegetable gardens lead to different forms of social cohesion, neighbourliness and fair distribution. A different world can be planted, as communal gardeners today emphasise.

The spring exhibition in the Architekturzentrum Wien is devoted to a history of ideas of appropriating land in urban space and reveals potential for initiatives by citizens willing to take action in crisis situations. “Hands-On Urbanism 1850 – 2012” shows a critical history of ideas about the politics of space. Urban development from below leads to an informal and self-organised production of city, which, however never operates outside the system. Self-organisation has always been both a reaction to and an incentive for urban planning. Curator Elke Krasny introduces a different history of the city that raises pressing questions about the responsibility of architects and planners and about how we use resources.

What can be learned from this urban history from below and how do architects operate within these processes? Their role ranges from that of initiators to activists and researchers. How does urban planning react to developments of this kind? The spectrum extends from passive acceptance to the belated introduction of infrastructure measures and to supportive measures undertaken by the authorities or the introduction of new laws and legalisation.

Curator: Elke Krasny

Scenography: Alexandra Maringer

Exhibition graphic design: Alexander Schuh



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Based on many years of field research curator Elke Krasny shows a history of the city from the perspective of land appropriation and urban development from below. In the course of her international research work she conducted interviews with architects, planners, activists, researchers, settlers, allotment and community gardeners. In conceptual terms the exhibition is understood as a specific site of knowledge production about the history of hands-on urbanism.

“Hands-On Urbanism 1850 – 2012” offers an insight into self-organised, collective, informal urban movements in the form of projects initiated by self-help, but also by architects and activists and it shows the new spaces created as a result. Using examples in Europe, Latin America, the USA and Asia it is shown how often small projects can lead to major changes. Each project is analysed in the context of its specific historical circumstances. The connection of historical lines and figures of thought to current developments reflects the important movements that produce a history of the ideas that inspire this formation of garden space: informality, freedom, neighbourliness, responsibility, bottom up, top down, rules, boundaries, transgressions, illegality, participation, urban farming, eco-aesthetics ...

Scenographer Alexandra Maringer gives spatial form to the curator’s presentation of the history of urban development from below by developing an urban system as the basic structure of the exhibition. Construction site mesh fences as support elements directly refer to the qualities of transformation, the changing of the city, to the act of building, which in the case of urban development from below is often self-build. Contemporary and historical photographs, films, plans and sketches fixed to the mesh tell about the effects of hand-on urbanism.

The mesh fencing also provides a support for the main aspect of the exhibition: the right to green. Different kinds of useful, ornamental and wild plants are fixed to it. City and country, gardening in the city as a practical means of survival, of subsistence, of creating community and as an expression of delight in planting are directly transplanted to the exhibition space and evoked by the scent and texture of the plants. And, not least importantly, as is often the case in urban development from below recycling and intelligent use of resources play an important role: re-use and adaptation of found materials (mesh, bottles ...), urban resources (MA42, MA48), and seating cubes made of waste timber. And, potted in transparent containers, visitors see two further resources employed by urban farming and community gardens: earth and water.

The narrative of the individual case studies in this history of urban development from below is integrated in this urban structure. Visitors to the exhibition stroll through the stations of the case studies in a time frame spanning from 1850 to 2012. Views through the mesh provide a spatial translation of the varied and complex cross-references.

CASE STUDIES HANDS-ON URBANISM 1850 – 2012

The range of case studies examined by Elke Krasny during several years of field research extends from “Schreberplatz”, created in mid-19th century Leipzig, to current developments in Paris, London, Berlin, Hong Kong, Porto Alegre and Quito. The Viennese Settlers’ Movement, its cooperative legacy and the historic allotment garden movement, as well as allotment gardens and the informal garden culture of refugees and asylum seekers in Vienna today also play a role in this “other” history of the city.

- “Schreberplatz”, Leipzig. A self-organised association grouped around educationalist Ernst Hauschild founded the first Schreberverein in 1865 and subsequently initiated a self-governing garden.
- Hull House, Chicago, from 1889. Jane Addams, feminist and later recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize initiated the Hull House Settlement in a poor district of Chicago with a high immigrant population.
- Allotment gardens, „The Future on the Schmelz“, Vienna. During World War I the first vegetable gardens were laid out informally on this site that today is Central Europe’s largest allotment garden complex.
- Settler movement Vienna. From 1918 onwards informal, so-called “wild”, settlers and gardeners organised themselves in cooperative associations.
- Living on lots, Bremen, from 1945. After World War II this self-organised, informal settlement and subsistence farming developed on allotment garden lots.
- Ma Shi Po Village, Hong Kong, from 1947. After World War II informal squatter cottages were erected in self-build. Today Becky Au, initiator of the Ma Po Po Community Farm, is attempting to save the fields from pressure being exerted by developers.
- The Cook, the Farmer, his Wife and their Neighbor, Amsterdam. In the urban district Nieuw West that was planned after World War II as a rationalised garden city, the group Wilde Westen (architects, designers, culture producers) and the artist Marjetica Potrč carried out a communal garden from 2008-2009.
- Macondo, Vienna. Refugees from different countries arrived here from 1956 onwards. An informal garden culture developed. When its continued existence was threatened, the artists group Cabula6 began working here in 2009 and made a recycle garden.
- Sarigöl, a Gecekondu, Istanbul. Informal urban expansion began in Istanbul After World War II. Today Gecekondu are threatened by pressure from developers.
- Bowery-Houston Community Farm and Garden, New York. Liz Christy, local resident and artist, initiated this garden in 1973. Under Mayor Giuliani many of the Loisaida gardens were destroyed.
- Mexicali Experimental Project, Mexico. In a participatory process Christopher Alexander realised this settlement from 1975 onwards. In the 1990s, Ana Laura Ruesjas explored the informal changes to the Mexicali Project undertaken by its residents.



- La Quebrada Navarro, Quito. Andinos erect informal settlements and farm in the rainforests of Quito. Since 2010 Pablo Molestina and Catherine Venart have been working on plans to preserve the complex ecological system and its use.
- Organopónicos Havana. Urban farming, which started informally after the break-up of the USSR and was then introduced throughout Cuba, was examined by Bohn and Viljoen Architects as an exemplary continuous productive urban landscape.
- Centro de Educação Ambiental da Vila Pinto, educational centre and recycling complex, Porto Alegre. In this favela Doña Marli Medeiros initiated a cooperative recycling complex in 1994. In 2010 she asked architect Felipe Hernández to work on a joint design for the outdoor space.
- What will the Harvest be? London. A group of residents known as the Friends of Abbey Gardens, and the artists group Somewhere (Karen Guthrie & Nina Pope) have been running this public neighbourhood garden with an “honesty stall” since 2006 in the face of developer and gentrification pressure caused by the planned London Olympics in 2012.
- Prinzessinnengarten, Berlin. On an area of urban wasteland in Kreuzberg left unused for decades Robert Shaw and Marco Clausen have been operating this mobile urban farm with garden café since 2009 as a neighbourhood hub but also for tourists.
- More than Shelters. On the basis of the self-help ideology of John Turner, artist Daniel Kerber has been working since 2010 on a concept for mobile modular emergency shelters for acute crisis situations and homelessness.
- R-Urban, Colombes / Grand Paris. Since 2011 aaa atelier d'architecture autogérée (Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu) have been working on a pilot project that is based on closed local circuits and combines urban farming, a recycling plant, and a cooperative housing project with the right to the city and to future resilience.

In conjunction with the exhibition a book is published in German with Turia + Kant Verlag, Vienna and in English with MCCM Creations, Hong Kong.



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The press release and high resolution photos are available for download at www.azw.at/press_therighttogreen.

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