

Architektur im Ringturm



MARIBOR

Architectural Panorama

From 11 July to 19 October 2012

- Concept:** Adolph Stiller, Uroš Lobnik
- Exhibition venue:** Exhibition Centre in the Ringturm
1010 Vienna, Schottenring 30
- Opening hours:** Monday to Friday: 9 am to 6 pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays)
- Press tour:** Tuesday, 10 July 2012, 11.00 am
- Speakers:** Adolph Stiller, Uroš Lobnik
- Official Opening:** Tuesday, 10 July 2012, 6.30 pm (by invitation only)
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MARIBOR: An architectural panorama of the 2012 European Capital of Culture

Laid out along the banks of the River Drava and surrounded by green hills and vineyards, Maribor is not quite the idyllic town that it appears to be at first sight. It is in fact a dynamic, productive city that has become an important centre for industry, agriculture and trade, with a focus on the mechanical engineering, textiles, construction and winegrowing sectors. Maribor is also a thoroughly modern cultural and university town, which has embraced the newest and most diverse developments in science, music and art. But Maribor's prosperous present-day appearance conceals a history plagued by war and destruction, a defining feature of the city's character. To mark Maribor's selection as a European Capital of Culture for 2012, the "Architektur im Ringturm" series – which is supported by the Vienna Insurance Group's main shareholder – is dedicating an exhibition to Maribor's architectural diversity, with a panorama of Slovenia's second-biggest city. Located just 15km from the Austrian border, Maribor shares a host of cultural, historic and economic ties with Austria. The Vienna Insurance Group has had a presence in Slovenia since 2004, through a branch office of Wiener Städtische Versicherung.

The stamp of history

The city's character and its urban fabric can only be understood in the context of its historical background – tightly interwoven with the history of Austria – as well as the extensive architectural and urban planning initiatives of the 20th century, right up to the latest developments. Long before postmodernism discovered and commandeered the term "context", Slovenia's second city had a much more pragmatic approach to the concept. Preserving valuable building stock, and making carefully considered additions after the city was all but destroyed during the Second World War, have always been high on the list of priorities for the dedicated architects who have spent more time putting contextual relevance into practice than discussing it.

Another key factor is the grid system, laid out over roughly 500 meters, which has formed the basis for the town's construction for centuries. The city wall, completed in 1275, was far too large for what was then a relatively small town. This formed a benchmark for urban scale comparable to that of Ljubljana, which has survived to the present day, and a girdle around the city – an urban structure that stood the test of time for over 300 years.

Industrialisation: an architectural driver

Maribor has been acknowledged as Slovenia's most important industrial centre for almost a century. The city profited from its location on the route of the Vienna-Trieste railway, which opened in 1846. From the mid-19th century onwards, the city implemented an increasing number of modernisation projects. Roads and lanes were paved and healthcare infrastructure was modernised and improved. The general hospital was built in 1855, boosting hygiene standards significantly. Another pioneering initiative was the 1869 expansion of the men's prison, with 800 inmates, to include the first ever young offenders section in the Austrian part of the Habsburg Empire.

Numerous public edifices were erected, making Maribor an important centre of state business and public services by the beginning of the 20th century. These included the circuit court, municipal savings bank, the new district court buildings, gasworks, town poorhouse, the public bathing facilities on the Drava and a slaughterhouse. Military buildings followed, such as the infantry barracks and the army garrison, as well as important, prestigious schools, and in 1901, Maribor's water supply system was built.

The city's progressive industrialisation demanded considerable investment in transport infrastructure and road construction. One symbol of this progress was the Old Bridge or *stari most*, opened by Archduke Frederick in 1913.

Post-war Slovenia

In the decades following 1945, Slovenia – a part of what was then still Yugoslavia – became known as a testing ground, socioculturally and architecturally. The westernmost part of Communist Europe offered a pleasant contrast to the grey-on-grey of the Eastern Bloc. Whilst Ljubljana, with its star architect Edvard Ravnikar (not to mention Jože Plečnik, a leading light in architecture who worked up to the mid-1950s), was the main focus of international attention in the years after the war, Maribor also became a centre for experimental work. An arts and culture scene sprang up in the city – although on a much smaller scale than in the capital – and its legacy includes a number of noteworthy contributions to modern architecture.

Contemporary Maribor

The political framework changed out of all recognition when Slovenia declared independence in 1991. The effect on architecture and urban development was almost immediate. Previously, architects had worked together in large offices. In the newly independent Slovenia, they began to form their own workshops and small firms.

A new urban development plan for Maribor was put together between 1995 and 2001. In 2006, the University of Maribor's Faculty of Civil Engineering began offering a two-tiered study programme in architecture. Architects have become more involved in society, and the significance of architecture has grown: since 2006, *Večer*, a daily newspaper, has published a weekly supplement entitled *Arhitekturna beseda* (The Architectural Word). The Maribor House of Architecture was established when the city was selected as a European Capital of Culture. Maribor will be represented at the Slovenian pavilion at this year's Architecture Biennale in Venice.

Icons

In the mid-1990s, the city's first iconic works of architecture appeared in Tezno, Maribor's urban industrial quarter – perhaps naturally, as the district is sufficiently far away from the heritage-protected medieval town centre.

The *Menerga* building by architect Nande Korpnik is a prime example of iconic architecture in an industrial setting. With its use of colour and gentle curves, the building pioneers the introduction of outstanding architecture in areas where it has not previously played a role. Situated on the edge of the city's largest industrial zone, the Menerga building's amorphous form and its technical infrastructure showcase new development trends (new forms, technologies and knowledge) and the proposed revitalisation of the district. During the design phase for the structure and the facade cladding, the architect worked with engineers from industrial businesses that were in decline.

The result of an international competition, Njirić's *Baumax* building is one of the first hypermarket designs to be elevated to the status of a Balkan architectural icon. The original plans for the building were unfortunately not fully realised, as the client exerted pressure on the local authority to modify one of the building's key motifs – a green roof with parking space over the entrance area to the store. A number of new shopping centres have since been built, but none come close to matching the powerful iconography of this construction.

Exhibition

The exhibition is divided into themes, mainly based on the distinctive time periods that make up the city's recent history: general cultural history, key buildings in the historical periods of 1920-1930, 1950-1960, 1970-1990, contemporary building techniques using new materials, and a view of the future with ideas for developments up to 2022. Local experts analyse each thematic thread and trace developments using texts, pictures and maps. This includes profiles of the most important players on the architectural scene, covering their background and education and how these influenced their work, their regional significance in terms of schools of architecture, citing international reference works, and investigating the debate over the continued existence of buildings worthy of preservation. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition includes texts on the various themes, and short descriptions and studies of the most significant buildings. A map showing where they are located means the catalogue doubles up as an architectural travel guide.

Catalogue

Architektur im Ringturm XXIX. Marburg – Maribor: An architectural panorama of the 2012 European Capital of Culture. Published by Adolph Stiller; contributors: Uroš Lobnik, Eva Sapač, Igor Sapač, Andrej Šmid; approx. 150 pages; German/English; fully illustrated.

Price

EUR 25; students, schoolchildren, military and civilian service, senior citizens (with valid ID): EUR 15