

PRESS RELEASE

»BALKANOLOGY«

New Architecture and Urban Phenomena in South Eastern Europe

Exhibition Project & Symposium at
S AM – The Swiss Architecture Museum, Basel (04.10. – 28.12.2008)
in cooperation with the Architekturzentrum Wien

Curated by Kai Vöckler

Press Preview October 3, 2008 at 10am

Vernissage October 3, 2008 at 7pm

In the western Balkans, the collapse of the socialist economic system in Yugoslavia and Albania has given rise to extensive informal building activity that represents a new form of urbanisation. The question is: how far do such urban transformations indicate patterns of future development for European cities in general? The exhibition uses examples from projects in Belgrade, Zagreb, Kotor, Prishtina and Tirana to illustrate the way architects, artists, urbanists and activists are dealing with these rapid new transformation processes. The outstanding yet hardly known buildings of socialist modernism in Yugoslavia are compared and contrasted with contemporary architecture.

»Balkanology« opens a new field of architectural discourse in Switzerland –the little-known architecture of the post-socialist period and the result of unregulated, uncontrolled urban planning in the countries of South Eastern Europe. The exhibition focuses on the impact of recent socio-political changes on architecture and urban planning.

The situation in South Eastern Europe is prototypical for urban development in transitional and post-conflict situations, from Prishtina to Belgrade, where weak or missing institutional structures make it impossible to achieve the regulation of construction processes. The wild, volatile spread of informal building structures is the aftermath of the kind of urban crisis that follows social upheavals or wars. At the same time, independently of regional particularities, these urban developments display a new kind of urban form that is quite different from informal settlements in countries outside Europe. Their specific forms result from a new intermeshing of spaces through visual worlds communicated by the media, migratory movements and cash flows.

»Balkanology« brings together leading architects and urban planners from South Eastern Europe and shows their approaches to these fundamental urban transformations. The exhibition will show the cultural, social and political dimensions of the urban phenomena of the region. The key question here is to what extent unregulated, informal urbanism develops new typologies and urban forms, and how these forms could also emerge under the banner of neo-liberal de-urbanisation in the rest of Europe.

The exhibition presents research projects and concrete interventions, architectural analyses and planning strategies. »Balkanology« deliberately avoids trying to achieve a picture of urban development that would be valid for the whole region. Instead, it uses selected examples from different locations to highlight specific local influences on architecture and urban construction, thus critically examining the potentialities for a re-qualification in urban planning.

The term »Balkans« is generally synonymous with South Eastern Europe, a region with varying geographical definitions. This vague term for the area is a 19th-century invention. In the European, or Western European imaginary, the word »Balkan« stands for ambiguity, hybridity, or a state of transition; it is a concept that can be used positively or negatively. »Balkanology« goes beyond the clichés to draw a differentiated picture of urban development in the region and the forces that determine it.

Using selected examples, Maroje Mrduljaš, the editor of the Croatian architectural magazine *Oris*, and the Serbian architectural historian Vladimir Kulić will show how Yugoslavian architects and planners have tackled "modernity" and "internationality". Alongside chosen topics, the co-curators will set up an interrelation between historical and contemporary buildings and projects, and comment on them with reference to the phenomenon of "interrupted modernism" in Yugoslavia.

Exhibition participants

Vladimir Kulić & Maroje Mrduljaš (Kokuratoren / co-curators); Platforma 9,81, Zagreb; Co-PLAN, Tirana; EXPEDITIO, Kotor; Archis Interventions, Prishtina; Katherine Carl & Srdjan Jovanović Weiss, Novi Sad / Philadelphia; Dubravka Sekulić & Ivan Kucina, Belgrad amongst others.

Kai Vöckler, exhibition curator – short biography

The Berlin based freelance urban researcher and publicist Kai Vöckler is a founding member of Archis Interventions, which has cooperated since 2005 with local initiatives in Prishtina, Mostar, Beirut and Kabul to explore the problems of urban development in post-conflict situations. He is programme director of the "Archis SEE net" that grew out this cooperation, a network of independent urbanist initiatives in South-Eastern Europe. Kai Vöckler's book, *Prishtina is Everywhere. Turbo Urbanism: Aftermath of a Crisis* (Archis Publishers, Amsterdam), will be published to coincide with the exhibition. This research work is supported by the ERSTE Stiftung.

ERSTE Foundation – exhibition sponsor

ERSTE Foundation is active in the Central and South Eastern European region. The Foundation develops projects independently and in collaboration with partners within the three programmes Social Affairs, Culture and Europe. Being the major shareholder of the Erste Group, ERSTE Foundation is one of the largest foundations based in the region. This makes the ERSTE Foundation along with its historical roots accountable for social and cultural engagement as well as civil society development. It draws its mandate from the tradition of the savings banks, which were founded 190 years ago to serve the common good.

Associated local and national events

"From Belgrade to Istanbul: Illegal Construction and its Impact on Urban Development"

A Symposium in cooperation with this year's culture festival „Culturescapes 2008“ – focussing upon Turkey.

Saturday, 1 November 2008, 10am – 4pm, Theater Basel

S AM is linking up thematically with this year's Culturescapes Festival in Basel, which focuses on Turkey, creating a conceptual bridge to »Balkanology«. The symposium will examine informal construction and unregulated urban planning, and discuss the relevant urban phenomena in South Eastern Europe, as well as the 'Gecekondu' architecture and typologies in Turkey.

Amongst others with Kai Vöckler (Berlin), Dritan Shutina, Direktor Co-PLAN (Tirana), Vedran Mimica (Zagreb), Orhan Esen, Urbanist (Istanbul), Dietmar Steiner, director Az W (Vienna) and Film Screening „X Daireler / X Wohnungen“ ** (Tarlabaşı 2008)

S AM No. 6 – The publication accompanying the exhibition

»Balkanology – New Architecture and Urban Phenomena in South Eastern Europe«

Francesca Ferguson & Kai Vöckler (Eds.)

92 pages, german / english

Christoph Merian Verlag, 2008

19 CHF/ 12 €

ISBN 978-3-85616-377-8

With essays by: Vedran Mimica, Srdjan Jovanović Weiss, Markus Schaefer, Marko Sancanin, Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrduljaš, Kai Vöckler et al.

Partners and additional sponsors of the exhibition

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S AM Schweizerisches Architekturmuseum

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Tue/Wed/Fri 11am – 6pm // Thu 11am – 8:30pm // Sa/Sun 11am – 5pm

10 CHF / red. 6 CHF

Guided Tours in the exhibition (german & english): dates and information on www.sam-basel.org

Registration

Press Preview: Friday October 3, 2008 at 10am

Location : S AM Swiss Architecture Museum, Basel

Steinenberg 7, 4051 Basel

_____ I will participate in the press preview.

_____ I cannot attend. Please send me the press kid.

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Please contact us for images, interviews and further information.