

Austrian Pavilion
Biennale Architettura 2021

Curators: Peter Mörtenböck
& Helge Mooshammer

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We Like Platform Austria



La Biennale di Venezia

17. Mostra
Internazionale
di Architettura
Partecipazioni Nazionali

AUSTRIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE 17TH INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION –
LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2021

p. 1

PLATFORM AUSTRIA ON THE PHENOMENON OF PLATFORM URBANISM

The focus of PLATFORM AUSTRIA is *platform urbanism*. *Platform urbanism* marks a highly significant upheaval in the design of our environment and its architecture. It concerns the changes that the rise of digital platforms is bringing to all spheres of our lives – from living, working and learning to health, recreation and culture.

The pandemic we have been experiencing over the last months has clearly shown how heavily dependent we have become on platforms in our everyday lives and how much the use of platforms has changed our environment. Rather than an architectural history of heroes and villains, of good and evil, the contribution to the Biennale Architettura 2021 by curators Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer presents a series of analyses designed to inspire us to engage with and take part in these changes.

PLATFORM AUSTRIA sees itself as a platform of active engagement with the question of the future of the city and its architecture.

All arrangements and structures and thus the conventional organisation of cities are increasingly coming under pressure due to the rise of platforms. For the platform economy the city is interesting for two reasons. It provides a wealth of information in the form of data that can be processed and re-utilised by platforms. At the same time the city is the biggest market for the recycling of data. This means that for platforms cities are equally interesting as both resource and market.

The increasing diversity of data technologies and the increase of platform applications promising possibilities for the use of this data have fundamentally altered the goals of urban development. Urban life itself is now being recognised as a decisive mechanism of economic growth and asset accumulation. Large platform enterprises are accordingly expanding their business models and noticeably engaging in the development of cities in order to plan the infrastructure and services that are best able to supply them with data.

Platforms often present themselves as technology enterprises that are difficult to monitor, impenetrable and prone to fluctuations. However, their material grounding in everyday urban existence provides a good insight into how the interplay they steer between digital networks, people and urban space intervenes in living and working environments and in the process suggests a new communal architecture. Interrogating and co-designing this architecture in its built and lived form is what PLATFORM AUSTRIA is about.

In 2019 a discussion was launched involving almost 100 people from a wide range of disciplines and countries. At the time it was envisioned that this interaction would ultimately lead to a range of theorists, architects and artists from all over the world coming together as guests in the Austrian pavilion at the Biennale Architettura in 2020. Live weekly debates were planned with these *bloggers in residence*, who included Peggy Deamer, Teddy Cruz, Saskia Sassen and Slutty Urbanism. The goal of these interactions was a comprehensive survey of *platform urbanism* and wide-ranging recommendations for architectural praxis.

The advent of the pandemic necessitated a different approach to this project. From September 2020 to March 2021 the invited experts produced hundreds of blog contributions from their homes and workplaces. These texts can now be read online (www.platform-austria.org) and form part of the multimedia installation in the Austrian pavilion in Venice. In addition, all these contributions have been compiled in a comprehensive publication (*Platform Urbanism and Its Discontents*, nai010 publishers, 2021), which responds to the fleeting dimensions of digital platforms with a piece of material reality and will be available at the opening of the pavilion.

It remains a priority for the two curators to provide as many different ways as possible of engaging with our chosen theme. Apart from the presentation in Venice, these include a comprehensive online presence comprising blog contributions, videos and discussions (website), participative formats (social media and image bank projects will be launched in 22 May) and a satellite exhibition in Vienna (MAK FORUM) as well as a series of discussion events in Venice planned for the autumn.

Statement by Austrian Secretary of State for Arts and Culture Andrea Mayer

Finally, the Biennale Architettura 2021 in Venice has opened its doors to the public.

Given the uncertainties associated with the pandemic, we can be very pleased about this important event taking place.

A global crisis – like the current one – shows that the renowned Architecture Exhibition in Venice is much more than just a periodical showcase featuring the cultural achievements of various nations.

It is indeed more – it is in fact a platform mirroring international collaboration, a collaboration of the global arts community carrying out works based on highly relevant and crucial issues of our time.

The question of this year's Biennale about the future of our coexistence has become even more relevant due to the global crisis.

The inspiring and challenging motto *How will we live together?* shaped the core of the Austrian contribution PLATFORM AUSTRIA but has been adapted several times due to the Biennale's postponements.

PLATFORM AUSTRIA focuses on *platform urbanism*, it refers to a critical analysis of current developments and their wide-ranging effects. It examines the potential of future-oriented architecture and its impact on urban development. At the same time, it initiates a broad and continuous discourse on its potential for the future.

In this way, the Austrian pavilion is a physical space for an exchange of ideas on the potential of future architecture. At the same time, it transforms itself into being its own platform for dialogue.

Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer were selected as curators for the Austrian pavilion. Their profound expert knowledge in this field made this outstanding Austrian contribution at the Biennale Architettura 2021 possible.

I would like to thank them and the organisational team for their fascinating work – and especially for overcoming the additional hurdles caused by several postponements and thereby necessary adaptations.

Let us now look forward to numerous visitors to PLATFORM AUSTRIA, and a fruitful exchange of ideas, views, and perspectives.

May this experience at the Austrian pavilion be inspiring to ALL visitors!

Welcome everyone!

Statement by the curators Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer

One of the most striking phenomena in the architecture of the 21st century is the spread of a new type of *platform urbanism*. In the spirit of *disruptive innovation*, digital platforms like Airbnb, Uber, WeWork and Amazon are permeating ever more areas of our lives – housing, work, recreation, health, education, transport – and in the process dissolving old orders. Architecture is being impacted by this development in a dual sense. On the one hand, the relocation of human interaction to digital platforms is depriving the built environment of its status as a dominant force in the structuring of societies, and, on the other, the communicative, logistical and operative potentials of platforms are concomitant with new aesthetics that are also radically changing the design of architecture.

Our conception and design of the Austrian contribution to the Biennale Architettura 2021 responds to this fundamental intervention in the role of architecture by asking what should be the central focus of contemporary architectural discourse: contemporary buildings, architectural portfolios, the programmes of architectural schools or spatial installations with which current themes and future visions are artistically interpreted? In our project titled PLATFORM AUSTRIA we consider the complex starting point of digital transformation from the perspective of production (or users' *productive consumption*) and ask who is involved in these processes and in what way. Who are the winners and losers in *platform urbanism* and what constellation of actors, infrastructures and control systems are we dealing with here?

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the accelerated relocation of communication onto platforms (!) that it has brought with it, we had to rethink our approach in the middle of our work process. On the other hand, the postponement of the Biennale for a whole year gave us time to observe how platforms are becoming ever more important in the structuring of everyday life. This period clearly showed us how established cultures of dialogue – personal encounters, conversations, meetings and other markers of the quality of human relationships – were being suppressed by an increasingly rigid and authoritarian form of platform-based interaction. The most important resource of platforms is participation, but the scope for personal expression offered by this new type of participation is extremely limited – something that many people have had to experience since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, whether in the world of work, education or recreation. This state of affairs made it all the more important for us to establish an open forum for a dialogue on *platform urbanism* in the Austrian pavilion.

With our contribution to the Biennale Architettura 2021 PLATFORM AUSTRIA we are reclaiming, together with dozens of experts from around the world, the right to co-determine the framework conditions of the urban development driven by platforms, and we are hoping that many other people will join this initiative.

The world of *platform urbanism* in seven chapters

The curators have invited more than 50 national and international experts to produce images and texts, short videos and podcasts for presentation in the Austrian pavilion and on the website. These contributions deal with questions of who participates in *platform urbanism* and in what way, and of the alternative paths (beyond online shopping, gig work and dating apps) we could take with digital platforms in order to make life in the city fairer.

Together with the invited experts the curators sketch the new world of *platform urbanism* in seven chapters. With **Saskia Sassen**, for example, they explore how technology firms are drastically changing life in global cities; with **Edgar Pieterse**, the director of the African Centre for Cities, they track the advance of digital platforms into African cities; with the urban researcher **Vyjayanthi Rao** they study the self-initiated public platforms that support social life in the undersupplied areas of Mumbai; with the architecture studio run by **Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman** they try out educational platforms in the American-Mexican border region; and together with their many further guests they shed light on a wide range of facets of the convergence of platform technologies and urban development.

ACCESS: ACCESS IS THE NEW CAPITAL

The question of access is central to digital platforms: Who gains access to the possibilities offered by a platform and who is denied these services? Are we heading for a new class society in which differently equipped variants of urban space can be rented with different subscription packages?

SERVICE CITY: CITY ON DEMAND?

Thanks to their capacity to synchronise data across large networks and numerous devices, platform-steered cities promise their residents optimal services. But what wasteful service worlds have to be developed so that everything is available on demand?

SCALE: THE COLLAPSE OF SCALE

Platforms are increasingly replacing scale – a basic constant of architecture – with logistics, infrastructure and circulation. But can the finely tuned interplay of scaling, positioning and distribution in space really so easily be changed into a new form of living independent of social conventions, institutional frameworks and political traditions?

EMOTIONS: THE PLATFORM IS MY BOYFRIEND

Platforms seduce us with a promise of proximity, intimacy and community. Affective computing and the personification of tech gadgets motivate us to form close ties to intelligent objects and platform environments. All this turns platforms into personal companions that help to communicate, record and evaluate our emotions – while extracting considerable profits. Can we really trust likes, followers and smileys to the same degree that we can trust our loved ones?

CIRCULATION: MONUMENTS OF CIRCULATION – “I” IS EVERYWHERE

Platforms need clear signs of activity – tweets, comments, clicks and data traffic – in order to prove their success and their potential for investors and users. And in the urban space we see such activators, which seem like monuments to circulation: fleets of e-scooters at tourist sites, colourful slides in office environments, and DIY furniture in public space that are intended to promote activity. Doesn't being permanently in motion also mean never arriving anywhere?

DATA: DATA IS A RELATION NOT A PROPERTY

The generation, recording and analysis of data are central to *platform urbanism*, and for this reason we have seen a rise of staged encounters that help to generate data – informal lounges in company environments, low-threshold meeting points in corridors and lobbies, relaxed roof terraces, free coffee bars. Who does the data belong to when it is generated by our relationships?

THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE FUTURE IS PUBLIC

Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram are means of mobilising and steering public communication. They stimulate our emotional and cognitive capacities in order to transform them into an informational commodity and use them privately. Can the city and its architecture withstand this attack on the public sphere? What is needed to make the quality of future living spaces a public matter again?

The bloggers chosen by the curators come from different generations and disciplines and represent different approaches to the theme of *platform urbanism*. They live and work in places that include Austria, Colombia, Estonia, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and the USA.

Ross Exo Adams, Tom Avermaete, Lucia Babina, Jochen Becker, Daniel Cardoso Llach, Ofri Cnaani, Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, Peggy Deamer, Fairwork Project, Pedro Gadanho, Benjamin Gerdes, Stephen Graham, Orit and Tal Halpern, Owen Hatherley, Gabu Heindl, Leo Hollis, Into the Black Box, Andreas Kofler, Bernadette Krejs and Andrea Börner, Maros Krivy, Peter Lang, Mona Mahall and Asli Serbest, Jonathan Massey, Sandro Mezzadra, Louis Moreno, Gerald Nestler and Sylvia Eckermann, Edgar Pieterse, Heidi Pretterhofer, Vyjayanthi Rao, Scott Rogers and Susan Moore, João Prates Ruivo, Saskia Sassen, Manuel Shvartzberg Carrio, Slutty Urbanism, Douglas Spencer, Matthew Stewart, Ravi Sundaram, Tiziana Terranova, This Machine Kills, Ignacio Valero, Matias Viegner, Alan Wiig

EVENTS IN SUMMER AND AUTUMN

Midissage: Saturday, 28 August 2021

On 28 August 2021, halfway through the Architecture Biennale, a programme of events will be presented in collaboration with the curators of the individual national pavilions and the new *Curators Collective* they have created. This programme will form the prelude to the subsequent events in the Austrian pavilion.

The autumn programme includes live discussions with the bloggers represented in the exhibition. The precise schedule will be organised in the coming weeks.

Presentation in the pavilion

The exhibition in the Austrian pavilion presents – in different media and formats – a comprehensive analysis of *platform urbanism*. The spectrum of works extends from architecture-theoretical positions and urbanist manifestos to studies of spatial typologies and fantastical collages. While the exterior space of the pavilion focuses on the visitor's own participation in platforms, the interior space invites engagement with the theme guided by the bloggers. This installation, which extends through all the pavilion spaces, places a great deal of emphasis on visual impressions and presents complex analyses in a clear form.

To the left and right of the vestibule two colourful monumental objects can be seen suspended from the ceiling – large-scale slogans – which feature the titles of the work displayed in the main gallery: *Access Is The New Capital* and *The Platform Is My Boyfriend*. The two slogans address the scope of the material presented in the exhibition: from the political economy of *platform urbanism* to the emotional and social needs that are spatially negotiated with platforms.

Two extensive multimedia installations have been placed in the two wings of the main gallery. These two sculptures made of metal brackets are fitted with large monitors showing highlights of the blog contributions in the form of video animations. A soundscape composed to accompany these animations also serves to accentuate a series of large-format photographs displayed on the four walls of the main gallery. These photos were for the most part taken by the bloggers themselves. They offer a wealth of personal observations of the everyday experience of *platform urbanism* and are accompanied by short statements by the photographers.

The two lateral pavilions behind the main gallery take a look behind the scenes of *platform urbanism*. On the one hand, they deal with new spatial elements and typologies which have been generated by *platform urbanism* as *components* – hot desks, street furniture, looped corridors, self-service stations, nests, meeting pods, lounge rooms, safe meeting spots, pop-up shops, shared warehouses, etc. – and the endeavour to patent these *components*. On the other hand, they present wall-high, fantastical collages, which consist of thousands of individual photos and suggest the landscapes *platform urbanism* could generate in the future. The left lateral pavilion (*Onstage*) presents an image of the bustling activity on the marketplace of *platform urbanism*, while the right lateral pavilion (*Offstage*) portrays the shadowy world of *platform urbanism* with its mushrooming networks of services, service areas and infrastructures. Information texts on the wall introduce these works and present the current state of research into this topic.

As on the terrace in front of the pavilion, which greets the public with a stacked formation of wooden stools and the words *We Like*, seating is also available in the pavilion courtyard along with an area for discursive formats. Starting halfway through the Biennale (September – November 2021) this area in front of the wall bearing the slogan *Data Is A Relation Not A Property* will be used for discussion events in which many of the bloggers whose work can be seen in the exhibition will present their ideas.

Near the exit a short film shown on a large-format monitor will encourage exhibition visitors to reflect again on their own participation in *platform urbanism* and to help shape an ideal of the architecture of the future by contributing their own images to the web platform of the Austrian contribution.

PLATFORM AUSTRIA SATELLITE IN VIENNA

For visitors from Austria who, due to the current pandemic, are unable or do not wish to travel to Venice during the Biennale Architettura 2021, Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer are organising an accompanying exhibition in the MAK FORUM (Museum of Applied Arts) in Vienna. Using video installations and an interactive online platform, a dialogue will be established with the Austrian pavilion in Venice and the shared theme of *platform urbanism* will be subjected to a critical analysis. The exhibition can be viewed during the Vienna Biennale from 27 May to 29 August 2021.

→ www.mak.at

PLATFORM AUSTRIA ONLINE

PLATFORM AUSTRIA offers different online formats which facilitate location-independent access and dialogue for all those interested in this topic:

WEBSITE

Along with current statements, information and video recordings, the website collects all contributions made by the bloggers, creating a comprehensive archive on the theme of *platform urbanism*.

→ www.platform-austria.org

“WE LIKE” IMAGE BANK

On 22 May the *WE LIKE* image bank is being launched and will provide the public with an opportunity to upload photographs of architecture *that we would like to see more in the future*. The image bank will be made public in the pavilion and via

www.platform-austria.org.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The bloggers will be introduced and excerpts from their contributions made available on Facebook and Instagram. Visitors will be invited to contribute comments, postings, etc.

“The central question posed by this year’s Biennale Architettura in Venice as to how we will live together in the future has gained enormously in relevance in the face of the current global crisis. With its focus on “platform urbanism”, the Austrian contribution PLATFORM AUSTRIA, curated by Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer, facilitates engagement with the potential of future-oriented, state-of-the-art architecture and urban development. PLATFORM AUSTRIA offers a shared and globally networked basis for reconsidering and reimagining the city. Anyone interested in this issue is warmly invited to take part in this dialogue.”

– Andrea Mayer, Austrian Secretary of State for Arts and Culture

“The term “platform urbanism” in essence denotes the intersection of digital platform technologies with the development of urban space. Today that intersection point is the site of important interventions which are shaping the future of our coexistence. In contrast to the smart city approach, which aims to optimise the systems of the city with the help of a recalibrated interplay of “smart” technologies commissioned by the state and developed by private enterprise, “platform urbanism” goes all out. Changing the framework of urban interaction is no longer a side project for platform enterprises but a fundamental element of their business plan.”

– Peter Mörtenböck

“The change from “architecture as a good” to “architecture as a service” is also producing a decisive shift in terms of the goals of architectural design. Values such as durability, diversity and local referencing are being sidelined in favour of simply registered visual messages, compatibility with global cultures and rapid reproducibility.”

– Helge Mooshammer

“The exhibition in the Austrian pavilion at the Biennale Architettura 2021 demonstrates what can be achieved with platforms: the production of a space of communication catering to multiple voices makes it possible for us both to trace different experiences of an urban life increasingly shaped by digital technologies and to establish a direct and tangible expression of the collective sensibility of our digital age.”

– Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer

Peter Mörtenböck is Professor of Visual Culture in the Architecture Faculty at the TU Wien and a Research Fellow at Goldsmiths College, University of London. His current work focuses on urban speculation, global resource consumption and new data publics.

Helge Mooshammer works on urban and cultural research at the TU Wien and is also a Research Fellow at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has initiated numerous international research and exhibition projects around issues relating to (post-) capitalist urban economies and urban informality.

Both curators are founding directors of the **Centre for Global Architecture**, an interdisciplinary platform for the study of planetary changes in the contemporary production of architecture and cities. Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer live in London and Vienna.

→ www.global-architecture.org

Team

Commissioner:	Republic of Austria, Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport
Curators:	Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer Centre for Global Architecture www.global-architecture.org
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Research assistance:	Christian Frieß, Pieter de Cuyper, Lovro Končar-Gamulin, Julius Bartz, Ruth Köchl, Centre for Global Architecture
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Design wooden elements:	mostlikely sudden workshop www.mostlikely.at
Design installation:	Pretterhofer Arquitectos www.prearq.at
Visual communication:	Christof Nardin, Bueronardin www.bueronardin.com
Online platform programming:	Philipp Daun www.philippdaun.net
Video production:	RAUM.FILM www.raumfilm.at
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PRESS MATERIAL

<http://presse.artphalanx.at/en/architecture-biennale-2021/>

SOCIAL MEDIA

www.instagram.com/austrianpavilion
www.facebook.com/AustriaAtVeniceBiennale
#platformaustria #austrianpavilion
#österreichpavillon

OPENING OF THE AUSTRIAN PAVILION IN VENICE

The official opening of the Austrian pavilion will take place during the preview days on 20 and 21 May 2021 at the Giardini della Biennale in Venice.

→ www.platform-austria.org

PRESS CONFERENCE

20 May 2021, 1 p.m.

Accreditation: www.labiennale.org/en/press

BIENNALE ARCHITETTURA 2021

17th International Architecture Exhibition

Exhibition Duration: 22 May–21 November 2021

How will we live together?

Curator: Hashim Sarkis

→ www.labiennale.org

Current information on COVID-19 regulations during the Biennale Architettura can be found here: www.platform-austria.org/en/info/visit

With the support of



Many thanks to our partners of the Biennale Architettura 2021



Many thanks to our co-operating partners in the opening events



We Like