
TO SPREAD OUT

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Humming radios, marks drawn with chalk or a political re-interpretation of a sound-track might not exactly be what visitors expect to see in the small touristy town of Innsbruck. Yet, if they happened to walk through the city centre in autumn 2011, they were most likely disturbed by similar interruptions.

Situated somewhere between art in public space and street art, different ephemeral artworks disrupted the usually neat and tidy public realm of the city. But how is it possible to realise public art in an atmosphere which resembles an open air museum, is there any space left for new artistic productions at all? With *Sprawl* we aimed at finding ways to deal critically with the surroundings of a place which is usually concerned with preserving an image of a traditional, nature loving and historical city. The main question connected to all the interventions carried out within the frame of *Sprawl-Festival* was to find out how temporary interventions in public space can be more than a short irritation or possibly even a practical joke, but rather add additional value or reveal information about the condition of a city.

Why Sprawl?

The expression *sprawl* means to expand, grow and spread or in architecture urban sprawl describes uncontrolled development or extension of metropolitan areas. The small-area urban region of Innsbruck experienced sprawling in a distinctive way: Because of the dominant mountains, which restrict the area suitable for building, the sprawling of the city happened in a way strongly shaped and directed by nature. At the same time, the city centre itself is almost transformed into an open air museum

inhabited mostly by tourists. As Axel Borsdorf points out in his report on outskirts developments: "The Innsbruck agglomeration seems to offer a good example for tracing the one and a half century long history of suburbanisation and outskirts transformation."¹ Just like in many other European cities, shopping malls and the service sector mostly moved to areas outside of the city centre. Yet, the festival was not only interested in the exploration of changing outlying areas but also in their effect on the centre. How does the development of sprawling areas influence traditional culture and cultural spaces of cities? Can cultural institutions, public art and festivals generate innovative ideas out of this development? Sprawl aims at temporary reoccupying new spaces, exploring possibilities and restructuring urban areas temporary. Thereby artistic positions dealing with specific situations as well as expanding, recurring and spreading interventions lay within the focus of attention of the festival. Our intention was not only to analyse the current state of the city and the urban phenomena of sprawl, our target was to appropriate the term and to transform it into an artistic context. Sprawling artworks occupy public space, they are spread around the city, they appear unordered and withdraw all striation, creating a smooth public space.

The focus of the festival lay on different aspects of urban sprawl, like suburban and post-suburban structures and places. The large number of different terms for areas of urban sprawl like Zwischenstadt, commuter belt, outskirts area, etc. shows the ubiquity of the phenomena and its ever-changing development. The intention of the Festival was not to comment on positive or negative aspects of sprawling areas, like as e.g. inclined in the terms suggested above, but to analyse those places with artistic means. Monuments that impose an ideology or stand as "landmarks or signifiers of places"², in outskirts regions differ vastly from those built in city centres. Outskirts areas materialize as chaotic structured "urban perforations"³ – the landmarks of these regions are shopping centres, industrial buildings or warehouses but hardly ever cultural monuments such as newly-built museums, listed buildings or more or less ancient architectural treasures.

In a town with a protected, never-changing city centre like Innsbruck, the attributes of urban sprawl as places of ongoing, intensive transformation and dynamic developments seem especially interesting for artistic examination. Thereby the chosen spaces, their appropriation, design and change lie in the centre of attention of the festival.

Monuments and Ideology

In contrast to the historical centre, areas of urban sprawl are usually not built for eternity. A shopping centre might imitate elements of historical sites⁴ but is mostly constructed in a functional way and is not built to last into eternity. The architecture and materiality is temporal rather than permanent – so are the ephemeral interventions realised during the Sprawl-Festival. Monuments as well as sculptures, opera houses or memorials usually do serve a specific political ideology, they help to establish and preserve the cultural identity of nations⁵. In this sense, temporary interventions seem to be the perfect means for a critical analysis of the developments of a touristy city which fosters a symbolically charged cultural heritage. Installations made of tape, cardboard and chalk don't claim solitary validity, but rather suggest alternative options. They participate in a discourse, remain for a limited period and in this way provide space, after a while, for new opinions.

Public art, visible only for a limited time, resembles sketches and suggestions rather than allegations. The aesthetics of such interventions result from the circumstances of their creation⁶, they are often realised with simple and common materials and are easy to remove. They use the misappropriation of materials of every day life, as a way to camouflage, but in the same way fit in their surrounding and are perhaps only identified as pieces of art at second sight. Yet, in a time where budgets for critical artistic production suffer severe cuts, realising anything apart from such (inexpensive) temporary interventions has become almost impossible for independently working artists and curators, like those involved in Sprawl-Festival. In this sense, even critical and temporary interventions risk to serve a political development

which tries to concentrate on preserving established cultural traditions and aims at protecting it from new and possibly critical influences. But – do we really want to go back to building monuments and permanent manifestations? How can art be critical, non-monumental and still sustainable? How can we escape political influence and still finance our artistic production?

We hope that some of the works realised during the festival provide an answer to this question. All the interventions carried out within the frame of the festival followed a critical and exploratory approach. With Flagge Marlene Hausegger questions representations of nations and reverses the traditional use of a flag. Winkler/Köperl strongly oppose the concept of public-private-partnerships and set a courageous statement against a tendency which is strangely still praised as prosperous rather than dangerous. Tao G. Vrhovc Sambolec carries an abstract composition into the urban area, his sounds spread and sprawl through the soundscape of Innsbruck. Marianne Lang and Matthias Klos realised nearly invisible guerrilla-interventions in public space and Nikolaus Gansterer analysed the structure of postmodern cities.

All this interventions remained visible only for a short period, but still provided ideas for alternative ways of perceiving a city. The additional documentation (this publication included) hopefully provide means to integrate the interventions into a further discourse about the city and its cultural development. The interventions might have been temporary, but the topics addressed are still relevant and hopefully inspiring for those who aim to analyse the city by artistic means in the near future.

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¹Borsdorf, A. 2004: Innsbruck: From city to cyta? Outskirt development as an indicator of spatial, economic and social development. In: Dubois-Taine, G. (Ed.): From Helsinki to Nicosia. Eleven case studies & synthesis. European Cities. Insights on Outskirts. Paris, S. 75-96, viewed June 2012: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/ep/research/costc10/findoc/findoc.html>

²Miles, M. 1997: Art Space and the City – Public Art and Urban Futures, Routledge New York, p.47.

³Borsdorf, A. 2004: Wenn Städte "geformter Geist" sind, wofür steht dann Postsuburbia? - Spurenlesen im ruralen Raum. In: Borsdorf, A. & Mayer, V. (Ed.): Konvergenz und Divergenz der Kulturen in den Randzonen der Städte, viewed March 15, 2012: http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/03_7/borsdorf_mayer15.htm

⁴The shopping centre PlusCity in Upper Austria would be one example for this. One main meeting place in the shopping centre resembles the Piazza San Marco in Venice and is called MarkusPlatz following the name of the original square. Viewed June 28, 2012: <http://www.pluscity.at/de/architektur/>

⁵see: Miles, M. 1997, p. 36.

⁶see: Havemann, A. & Schild, M. 2007: 'You Can Use My Tights' or: The Phenomenon of Temporary Solutions, In: Landscape Research, Vol. 32, No. 1, February 2007, Routledge, p.47.