

Editorial:

The 2006 Austrian Report on Building Culture

Hartwig Chromy and Volker Dienst

The 2006 Report on Building Culture: Genesis, Scope, and Objectives

On March 30, 2004, a one-day parliamentary conference on "Architectural Policy and Building Culture in Austria" was held in the plenary hall of the Austrian Parliament. Calling in experts in the field from Austria and the EU, Austrian National Parliament launched a discussion process with the objective of improving conditions for a contemporary culture of planning and building and providing a basis for comprehensive and intergovernmental architectural policies to secure the quality of life in Austria.

As a result of this conference, the resolution no. 91/E (XXII GP) was passed unanimously by all parliamentary parties on March 2, 2005. It states that

Architecture is designed environment and of great importance for our society. Architecture creates, defines and informs human spheres of living and human relationships. Hence is it a determinant factor of our quality of life as well as an important cultural factor. In addition, architecture as part of the creative economy also provides important impulses for a number of industries.

Building culture concerns everybody: architects, engineers and urban planners, clients, and citizens. The quality of building culture is more than the outward appearance of a building, but is results from the interplay of usability, economic efficiency, and sustainability in an ecological, social and economic sense as well as from objectifiable procedures.

Federal and other regional administrations have a special responsibility for the development and the value of building culture. This relates to all places and spaces of work, living, education, and recreation, to traffic infrastructure, to urban and rural landscapes including coordinated regional development.

A thoroughly conceptualized, committed intergovernmental architectural policy is of great cultural, political and economic interest. Such policy should aim to

- *secure appreciation of a well-built environment in the population and thus muster public support of quality planning and building;*
- *point out the special responsibility of clients and building owners;*
- *strengthen Austria's international competitive position;*
- *preserve the cultural heritage and utilize resources of existing buildings;*
- *increase public awareness of the significance of contemporary architecture and building culture*
- *secure high and future-proof standards of planning and building.*

The Austrian National Parliament has resolved:

1 The Federal Government is asked to develop, in cooperation with provincial and municipal administrations, professional chambers and interest organizations concerned, with the industry and culturally interested sponsors, a workable platform for the establishment of a continuing dialogue on building culture.

2 The federal government is asked to commission, in consultation with interest organizations concerned, the making of a report on building culture to be submitted to Parliament for further decision within a year.

3 This report is to provide a comparative survey of Austrian developments in a European perspective and to suggest specific measures for the promotion of building culture for the federal, provincial and municipal administrations. In particular, the report is to focus on the following aspects:

- the improvement of legal conditions*
- the improvement of fiscal conditions*
- possibilities to incorporate the principle of building culture for public clients and developers*
- the improvement of conditions for young architects*
- measures for the improvement of ecological, economic, and social sustainability*
- measures to build public awareness of the significance of contemporary architecture and building culture*
- measures to be taken by federal and other public agencies to promote architectural competitions.*

In late December 2005, the Federal Chancellery, the State Secretariate for Art and the Media, and the Federal Ministry for Economy and Labor, with the Federal Real Estate Agency as co-financer, commissioned the "ARGE Baukulturreport", represented by the Platform for Architectural Policy and Building Culture and the T. C. Developers Ltd., with the compilation of the first Austrian Report on Building Culture; the stipulated deadline for completion was the end of October 2006.

Due to the short working period available and the limited contract amount, the 2006 Report on Building Culture had to be compiled on the basis of existing statistical data. Possibilities to commission representative nation-wide opinion polls were as limited as were those to collect missing statistical data. Thus, for example, the data available from the Austrian Central Statistical Office did not permit any concrete statement to be made on the share, or existence, of qualified planning in building investments. Similarly, small and very small enterprises are not included in the statistics on architectural and planning businesses and the construction industry, although these small enterprises account for the major part of building culture activities. Professional and interest organizations frequently do not have sound and continuous data, since data collection and evaluation has been increasingly curtailed due to budgetary constraints ever since the late 1980s. Hence we see it as integral to this Report on Building Culture to point to these gaps and to suggest the funding and commissioning of the necessary studies and data collecting. It is only on the basis of continuous and sound data that reliable evaluation of steering measures, keeping track of current tendencies and developments, and implementation of precise measure are possible. For commitment to architectural policies necessitates continuous qualified and accompanying observation of activities pertinent to building culture.

Nevertheless, the great commitment of the authors contributing and the editorial board made it possible to provide, for the first time ever, a broad and comprehensive survey of the conditions that inform building culture in Austria, however, with no claim to completeness. The 2006 Report on Building Culture is not only an account of the status quo, but also places building culture in a wider economic and social context.

This is to counteract the basic problem, which is a lack of awareness that building culture is a cross-sectional issue, particularly with political decision-makers and at certain levels of the public administration. Hence necessary activities in different fields and at different political levels have been pointed out and recommended. In doing so, it was a major concern for us not to base the recommendations given on individual expert opinions, but on a broad consensus so as to provide policy-makers with a sound decision basis. The necessary range of opinion was, for one thing, warranted through the installation of an "Editorial Board" of knowledgeable specialists, which, as an important forum of discussion and expertise, substantially contributed to the contentual fine-tuning of the issues worked out by the ARGE Baukulturreport. Moreover, important decision-makers from areas relevant to building culture were invited to contribute, in workshops, or in interviews or statements, their view of things to this report, from a practical perspective, so to speak, complementing the contributions by the

authors.

This networking and the communication process initiated between different “players” by the project of the Building Culture Report provide a good and fertile basis to continue and expand the dialogue on building culture. In the center of the Report on Building Culture, to be sure, was not the question of how to generate more commissions for one professional group or another; rather, it was the question of the benefits that building culture brings for the economy and for society. In the center of interest were the users, that is, the people in this country, whose quality of life is substantially impacted by intelligent planning and design or, otherwise, a haphazardly organized environment. It is only by expeditious implementation of consistent and quality-oriented architectural policies and by anchoring an awareness of building culture in society that it will be possible to secure the quality of life for coming generations.

In order to facilitate this, the 2006 Austrian Report on Building Culture, in accordance with the parliamentary resolution of March 2005, indicates perspectives and formulates concrete recommendations and measures, not only for decision-makers in federal, provincial, and municipal administrations, but also for educational institutions and professional organizations.

In conclusion, we recommend the periodical continuation of the Report on Building Culture at intervals of no more than two years so as to be able to keep track of medium and long-term developments, providing a solid basis for decision-making on, or evaluation of, possible (legislative) steering measures. In this sense we see the 2006 Report on Building Culture as a first step in a continuing process aiming to establish a sustainable architectural policy with a model character in the EU as well as a forward-looking and quality oriented culture of building in Austria. We wish to thank all contributors whose wholehearted commitment the successful completion of this first Austrian Report on Building Culture is owed to in the first place.

For the ARGE Baukulturreport management
Dr. Hartwig Chromy
DI Volker Dienst

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