

# *The foremothers in Vienna.* Women behind the Viennese urban quality of life

*Las precursoras de Viena. Mujeres detrás de la calidad de vida  
urbana vienesa*

**Dörte Kuhlmann**

Received: 2021.09.30

Approved: 2021.12.06

**Dörte Kuhlmann**

Vienna University of Technology, Austria  
doerte.kuhlmann@tuwien.ac.at  
She studied architecture at the  
Technical University of Hannover and  
at the Technical University of Vienna  
and she got her PhD at the Bauhaus  
University Weimar. Her research  
focuses on architectural theory,  
gender studies, organic architecture  
and design methods. She is the author  
of *Gender Studies in Architecture: Space,  
Power and Difference* (Routledge, 2013).  
Kuhlmann teaches at the Vienna  
University of Technology and has  
previously taught in other universities  
such as the University of Illinois at  
Chicago.

## **Abstract**

The city of Vienna is considered one of the best cities to live. To a large extent, its housing policies, public transportation system and the way urban planning is approached, are behind this high valuation.

This different perspective of Vienna towards architecture and urban planning has been characterized by the incorporation of the gender perspective and by a notable participation of women, in a very special way between the 1990s and 2000s.

This article reviews the last 40 years of architecture and urban planning of Vienna through some of the main female architects and urban planners who have contributed to its high quality of life. Women who, from the institutions, professional practice and academia, have been the foremothers of a urban planning approach that is sensitive to the everyday-life needs and to the specific experience of women in the city.

*Key words:* Foremothers; Vienna; Urban Planning; Women; Gender Perspective.

## **Resumen**

La ciudad de Viena es considerada como una de las mejores ciudades donde vivir. En buena parte, las políticas de vivienda, su sistema de transporte público y el enfoque de su urbanismo están detrás de esta alta valoración.

Esta mirada diferente de Viena hacia la arquitectura y el urbanismo ha estado caracterizada por la incorporación de la perspectiva de género y por una notable participación de mujeres, de manera muy especial entre las décadas de 1990 y 2000.

En este artículo se repasan los últimos 40 años de la arquitectura y el urbanismo de Viena a través de algunas de las principales arquitectas y urbanistas que han contribuido a su alta calidad de vida. Mujeres que, tanto desde las instituciones como desde la práctica profesional y el ámbito académico, han sido precursoras de una planificación espacial sensible a las necesidades cotidianas y la experiencia específica de las mujeres en la ciudad.

*Palabras clave:* Precursoras, Viena; Planeamiento urbano; Mujeres; Perspectiva de género.

The “public sphere” has always been a highly contested space, and of course, a gendered one. As Aaron Betsky has pointed out, the prestigious state buildings, or the open space of main plazas, grand avenues, and boulevards reflect with their iconology the fame and power of those who erected them, mostly pointing to male power. Women’s realm was generally attributed to the private sphere, a division that dates back to the Enlightenment and profoundly influenced gendered iconology of urban space. That was also true for Vienna’s first district in particular as the demolition of the former city wall in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century enabled its transition into a splendid metropolis.

As opposed to Betsky’s example of Paris, Vienna soon took a different path, however, focusing on social housing and welfare infrastructure since the 1920s. Many female architects among them Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky contributed to the development of innovative architecture and ambitious concepts in city planning with a great result, for several years now, Vienna has been ranked among the cities with the highest quality for living worldwide and it is usually referred to as key example for successful gender mainstreaming in city planning.

Like most major European cities, Vienna’s city center was strongly reshaped around 1900. The construction of the Ringstraße Boulevard with its new government departments, museums, theatres, opera house, the parliament building, or the new university was such a major transformation of the old city fabric that the time span between 1857 and 1914 is simply referred to as *Ringstraßenzeit*.<sup>1</sup> Those who could afford it preferred to live there, close to the emperor and the old noble elite. Yet it was the young bourgeois elite that financed and constructed the new city center and resided in luxurious apartments on *Ringstraße*, with symbolic references, representative architecture and street names referring to male power. The first women’s movement in Vienna, however, contested this pattern as women started entering the public “male” sphere and sometimes creating their own public spaces.

## 1 “Vienna Ring Road Era”.

For example, the emergence of Vienna’s women’s clubs or newly funded schools for girls can be regarded as a counterpart to the traditional institutions of the male elite as they enabled the women to participate in shaping the city. Some few artefacts of female power or symbolism entered the city fabric such as the sculpture of Maria Theresia, the Elisabeth Bridge, or the sculpture of Empress Elisabeth in Volksgarten.

While the latter one was organized and financed by a private initiative, the sculptures for other members of the royal family were usually afforded by state authorities. As women gained more political power and were allowed to access education, some places changed in terms of their use, their name or their symbolic impact and, at some point, even architectural changes became visible.

The professional education of women in architecture started as early as 1900 at the *KK Kunstgewerbeschule*. While most female students joined master classes in the applied arts such as graphic design, some were accepted in the architecture class. Little is known about the architectural ambitions of first graduates but quite a few joined the *Wiener Werkstätte* and thus had a huge impact on Vienna’s design circles.

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky (1897–2000) who studied architecture under Oskar Strnad and Heinrich Tessenow at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Vienna (1915-1919) is still the most famous of Vienna's female pioneer in architecture. She is best known for her design of the "Frankfurt Kitchen", when she collaborated with Ernst May from 1926 onwards in the design of housing areas in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, but she actually started her career in Vienna working with Adolf Loos in 1921 for the *Siedlerbewegung* (dweller's movement), a social housing project where she demonstrated her amazing talent as planner.

In 1919 the Social Democrat city council of Vienna had initiated a radical program of reforms in order to reshape the city's infrastructure politically and architecturally along socialist lines.<sup>2</sup>

- 2 The programme entailed significant improvements of the living conditions. It aimed at turning away from the traditional hall *Gangküchenhaus* (kitchen houses), characterized by overcrowded apartments with poor lighting and ventilation. It also proposed a new tax strictly earmarked for housing provision.

The key achievement of so called "Red" Vienna period was the construction of many social housing projects, *Wiener Gemeindebauten*. Even by today's standards the efforts were tremendous: 400 communal housing blocks, that were distributed throughout the city, incorporated with kindergartens, libraries, medical clinics, theaters, cooperative stores, and other public facilities with about 64,000 units housed one tenth of the city's population. (Fig.1)



Figure 1. Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky together with Werner Faymann and Renate Brauner in 1997.

© Wemer Faymann.

Source: Wikimedia Commons.  
[https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Werner\\_Faymann\\_und\\_Brauner\\_1997\\_\(2721380957\).jpg](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archivo:Werner_Faymann_und_Brauner_1997_(2721380957).jpg)  
 (Accessed November 12, 2021)

The strong demand for new housing units was fueled by migration from the former KK countries to Vienna after the first world war, but also by an increased number of marriages. Yet this was not the original cause, as the roots of this problem were the lack of affordable dwelling for the growing number of industrial workers since the late 1900s.<sup>3</sup> The suburban barracks for the poor were very primitive and lacked running water and electricity. However, this negative experience was later shared by the better off people who lived in downtown Vienna during the war, without electricity, water or food.<sup>4</sup>

- 3 Eve Blau, *Rotes Wien: Architektur 1919-1934: Stadt-Raum-Politik* (Vienna: Ambra Verlag, 2014), 69.

- 4 *Ibidem*, 107.

The young Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky became besides the well-known architect Adolf Loos the leading planner of the newly founded Austrian *Verband für Siedlungs-und Kleingartenwesen*. The task was to help the dwellers with the enormous planning demand organization. Lihotzky had just returned from the Netherlands where she had been instructed by Melchior Vermeer and Hendrik Petrus Berlage as regards city planning and design of row houses.

Her earlier experience under the guidance of Oskar Strnad and her interest in social tasks qualified her for a leading role in her new position.<sup>5</sup> The new bureau for dwelling that was led by Adolf Loos offered loans and information but also sought to provide ambitious designs, for instance the *Friedensstadt* housing area in Vienna.<sup>6</sup> Schütte-Lihotzky created the innovative *Kernhaus* (core house) that started out as a tiny unit that would grow as the dwellers could afford more. Her plans show carefully designed row houses with self-supporter gardens and smart kitchen designs.

During the so-called Red Vienna phase, only few women were allowed to officially participate in the design of the socialists housing blocks. Besides Schütte-Lihotzky, her colleague Ella Briggs-Baumfeld (1880-1977) was appointed, who was the first accredited female architect in Austria, and from 1921 to 1930 she was also the first female member of the *Österreichischen Ingenieur-und Architektenverein*. After practicing interior design in Vienna, she finished her architectural studies in Germany and graduated in 1920 from the Technical University of Munich. She spent some time abroad in the United States where she designed single family houses and returned to Vienna in the 1920s to plan and supervise the *Pestalozzihof* housing block at 2-4 Philippovichgasse, as well as a nearby home for single women (1926-1927). (Fig.2)

5 Mona Horncastle, *Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. Architektin. Widerstandskämpferin. Aktivistin* (Vienna: Molden Verlag 2019), 23.

6 Eve Blau, *Rotes Wien: Architektur 1919-1934: Stadt-Raum-Politik* (Vienna: Ambra Verlag, 2014), 121.



Figure 2. The Pestalozzihof designed by Ella Briggs-Baumfeld in Vienna (1926-27).  
Source: Wikimedia Commons.  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Pestalozzi-Hof>  
(Accessed November 12, 2021)

Before the Second World War several female architects were educated at the Austrian universities and quite a few could contribute to the ambitious architectural development before the outbreak of the political development and the war stopped this process abruptly.

Many female pioneers had to flee the country and emigrated to Israel, the United States or England to name just a few destinations. However, some of the female pioneers stay in the wounded city and helped to rebuild the badly damaged architecture. The best known is Helene Koller-Buchwieser born in 1912 as daughter of a building master. After her school graduation with distinction, she studied at the Technical University of Vienna before returning to her father's firm to work as a construction supervisor, which was highly unusual for a woman at that time. In 1940 she became herself the first female building master in Austria and in 1945 the first woman to obtain the permission to work as an architect. Together with Karl Holey she managed the most prestigious and challenging construction site in Vienna: the reconstruction of the partly destroyed St. Stephens Cathedral.

Just by looking at its amazing architectural transition from a small-scale capital town in 1850 to a modern metropolis, we can already identify some important female impacts in Vienna, particularly regarding arts and culture; however, this may not be sufficient as an explanation. The extraordinary consideration of the city in terms of life standards might have its roots in its unique mixture of welfare state amenities and bourgeoisie intellectual atmosphere, allowing the necessary fertile ground for innovative ideas in city planning. One example of this is that, unlike many other European cities, Vienna never really abandoned large social housing projects. This continuity allowed the emergence of some progressive architectural approaches in recent years such as “gender mainstreaming”, an approach aiming to ensure that women and men are accounted for equally in policy, legislation and financial allocation. Although, it was originally proposed as a global United Nations strategy in 1985, Vienna started this innovative approach in its public policies even before. In 2021 the city can refer to about 60 gender-sensitive pilot projects and a comprehensive strategy for any building measure whether new or dealing with adaption of existing structures.

The team of the city’s Women’s Bureau, dedicated to promoting architecture and urban planning addressing everyday life and women’s necessities, was mostly composed by women and was key in creating and consolidating the positive image of Vienna for the last thirty years. In the introduction of the initial publication *Guidelines for a safer city*<sup>7</sup> (1994), Eva Kail, Ursula Bauer and Jutta Kleedorfer explained that there is a connection between violence against women and spatial design. Insufficiently lit streets, squares, bus and train stops, twisted entrance ways in housing developments, and isolated spaces such as passages or parking garages would cause anxiety in many women.

According to those authors, introducing gender perspective while assessing, planning and designing such spaces helps to identify the potential crime scenes of spontaneously acting offenders and mitigates unsafety perception. Providing wide fields of view would also enable women to react more quickly in response to a potential risk and, therefore, clear spaces contribute to more welcoming spaces. (Fig. 3)

7 Ursula Kose, Lilli Licka and Silja Tillner. *Richtlinien für eine sichere Stadt. Beispiele für die Gestaltung sicherer öffentlicher Räume. Vol 1. Schriftenreihe Frauen. Vienna: Frauenbüro MA 57, 1995.*

Figure 3. Eva Kail in one of the activities related to the exhibition “Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. Schwerpunkt Wohnbau in Wien”, host at the Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky Raum in Vienna between November 2017 and June 2018.

© Bettina Frenzel, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 License.

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/126936854@N05/> (Accessed November 12, 2021)



The idea was not completely new, these Viennese planners were familiar with the protest marches under the motto “Take Back the Night”, which started in the United Kingdom in the 1970s, and had become a movement concerned about urban and domestic violence against women. The spatial planning dimension of this focused on a particular problem: the fear factor, or the unsafety perception, that is mainly caused by a lack of social control, which can be achieved through a combination of certain spatial and social conditions.

The relevant work of METRAC<sup>8</sup> in the 1980s in Canadian cities like Toronto or Montreal regarding women’s safety perception in public spaces and transportation infrastructures was also inspiring for gender-sensitive urban planning pioneers in Vienna.<sup>9</sup>

According to this Canadian pioneering work, the most important factors to safety perception in public spaces and transportation infrastructures are related to lighting conditions, fields of view, visibility in general, and “frightening places”, which is a misleading term, since women generally are not afraid of places themselves but of becoming victims of crime while unobserved by social control measures.<sup>10</sup>

Inspired by such ideas the pilot projects of the Women’s Bureau dealt with similar issues and looked critically at some existing urban contexts in Vienna to evaluate their qualities for different female target groups. These gender-sensitive urban renovations included redesigning and enlarging sidewalks, organizing women’s parking lots and adding comfort to the public space in numerous ways. The gender mainstreaming dimension of widening sidewalks or adding park benches was unclear at first glance for some people, but Eva Kail argues that it was about ensuring equal opportunities in the right and access to the city. For example, for an elderly person, a well-placed bench might make the difference between participating in the city and remaining at home.<sup>11</sup>

The gender-sensitive work from the City Council also meant that more women architects and planners had the opportunity to work in different public initiatives.

The architect Silja Tillner was appointed to deal with the renovation of the *Am Schöpfwerk* housing complex, which was being perceived as unsafe by the women of the neighbourhood due mainly to its twisted access areas and the lack of lighting. Thus, Tillner’s goal was to increase women residents’ feeling of safety and to allow better social control. While this project was not completed due to high costs, Tillner was allowed to redevelop a high-traffic access belt along the former *Linienwall*<sup>12</sup> that had also caused social problems. With great enthusiasm, she pushed through a spectacular canopy structure over the Urban Loritz Platz, accomplishing a massive improvement and revitalization of this section of the *Gürtel*. Apart from new lighting design, she demanded to glaze in the historical transitway sections by Otto Wagner in accordance with an original idea to open them for business establishments.

Even this simple design measure caused numerous operators of red-light businesses to move away since they preferred to conduct their shady activities behind non-transparent walls. (Fig.4)

8 METRAC stands for Metro Action Committee on Public Violence against Women and Children. One of their most relevant works was the one undertaken at the High Park of Toronto.

9 Leslie Kanés Weisman, *Discrimination by Design. A feminist critique of the man-made environment* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 71.

10 This is related to Jane Jacob’s “social eyes” or “eyes on the street” ideas exposed in her *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). According to which more people and activities on the public space means safer cities and neighborhoods. Many of the Viennese pioneers introducing gender in spatial planning were influenced by Jacobs writings, among other authors.

11 Elle Hunt, “City with a Female Face: How Modern Vienna was shaped by Women”, *The Guardian*, May 14, 2019.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/may/14/city-with-a-female-face-how-modern-vienna-was-shaped-by-women> (Accessed November 12, 2021)

12 The *Linienwall* was one of the outer line of fortifications in Vienna. It was built in 1704 between the outlying villages and the suburbs of the city. In 1894 it was demolished to make way for a beltway (*Gürtel*).

Figure 4. View of the Urban-Loritz-Platz, renovated by Silja Tillner, from the upper entrance of the *Büchereien Wien* building.

© Manfred Wemer, CC by-sa 4.0.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Urban\\_Loritz\\_Platz\\_Wien\\_2019-10-18.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Urban_Loritz_Platz_Wien_2019-10-18.jpg)

(Accessed November 12, 2021)



A milestone was established in 1992, when Eva Kail, the former head of the “Guidance Centre for women —and everyday— oriented architecture” (that later changed its unfortunate name to *Women’s Bureau of the City of Vienna*) initiated the housing project called *Frauen-Werk-Stadt* (Women’s Work Place) which —with its 360 housing units— was for a long time the largest housing project in Europe taking into account women’s everyday life necessities in its design. In early 1990s, Vienna was a fast-growing city and it faced an enormous need for social housing which led the City to plan the construction of about 10.000 social housing units per year. Because the larger project had to be commissioned via architectural competitions, hardly any female architect or planner had got the chance to sign a significant work of this kind. Kail was convinced it was a structural problem and she convinced the local government to launch a housing project whose commission was limited to female professionals.

An unusual architectural competition was launched, it addressed only female architects and planners and the programme focused on women’s housing necessities. The jury was composed only by women including Kerstin Dorhöfer as a chairperson and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky as honourable chair. The winning architects were Franziska Ullmann, responsible for the master plan and one of the blocks, Elsa Prochazka, Gisela Podreka and Liselotte Peretti, who developed the rest of the buildings, and Maria Auböck who planned the open-air spaces. The objective of the project was to create an everyday-oriented housing complex by the incorporation of women’s particular experience and requirements from the master plan scale to the housing unit one. This approach was inspired by the work of Myra Warhaftig in Berlin since the early 1970s. Apart from this, the City Council was also aiming at creating public interest and recognition to the work made by women architects and planners.

The general layout of the project designed by Franziska Ullmann offered high-quality outdoor spaces, particularly its semi-public interior courtyards. One of the most interesting aspects of the *Frauen-Werk-Stadt* is the layout of the housing units design by Elsa Prochazka, whose flexibility and versatility allows the adaptation of the house to the changing necessities of the households and the diversity of family structures.



Figure 5. Central outdoor space of the Frauen-Werk-Stadt housing complex in Vienna.

© Dieter Henkel.

Source: Open House Wien, Creative Commons License.

In an interview in the year 2000 conducted by Gerfried Sperl she elaborated on her work at Frauen Werk Stadt project and pointed out, that

*It wasn't intended as a counter-position. The project was not overloaded ideologically. There were, however, intense discussions—with the politicians, the client, the investor, as well as with the construction firms and the future occupants. Almost all these roles were filled by women, which was novel for most of those who were involved.<sup>13</sup> (Fig.5)*

Prochazka emphasized that marginal changes made the difference.

*For example, daylight for otherwise dark and underground parking garages. Or transparent elevators. Or, that heating, washing and playing spaces are not relegated to the basement, but are on the roof instead. That is a new amenity for subsidized housing.<sup>14</sup>*

Prochazka explained that they offered rooms in which the use had not been pre-determined, with different options to divide rooms, or to create larger rooms by removing partition walls.

The idea was to address the changes that most families experience over a longer period of time as the children grow older and leave the home, for example.

*Because a family's profile changes corresponding to different life phases, it shouldn't be organized hierarchically. Some apartment seekers approached us with extremely rigid expectations. We were able to dislodge some of those preconceptions.<sup>15</sup>*

Prochazka's floor plans are still used today as key examples of flexible flat structures and made it clear that the gender approach can improve general housing qualities if it is properly implemented in architecture and planning. While demonstrating that she took women's preferences seriously Prochazka was able to convince her male colleagues that such concepts could lead to higher architectural qualities for everyone in social housing projects.

13 Elsa Prochazka, "Elsa Prochazkas diskrete Architektur". Interview by Gerfried Sperl. *Konstruktiv 197* (October/November 1996): 18-21. Source: <http://www.prochazka.at/interviews/sperl.html> (Accessed November 12, 2021)

14 *Ibidem*.

15 *Ibidem*.



Another activity by the Women's Bureau of the City of Vienna was to develop new ideas for the gender-sensitive design of parks and public squares. In 1997, the Women's Bureau published *Verspielte Chancen* (Missed Opportunities) edited by Ursula Bauer and Eva Kail. It demonstrated that boys and girls have different requirements and needs regarding the design of open-air spaces, especially since

*Practice has also shown that boys appropriate much more public space, while girls often allow themselves to be displace.*<sup>16</sup>

16 Cheryl Benard and Edith Schläffer, *Verspielte Chancen? Mädchen in den öffentlichen Raum!*, Vienna: MA57 Frauenbüro der Stadt Wien, 1997.

One of the innovative solutions from the Women's Bureau was to add volleyball and badminton facilities that countered boys' dominance over the caged basketball courts. The latter ones were also changed sometimes by adjusting the shape, sometimes by complementing them with areas addressing groups of girls or younger kids so they could sit down, observe and communicate with others. Some of the most important initiatives in these pilot parks were related to the improvement of the orientation and the lighting, the addition of new footpaths and illuminated walkways aiming to improve people's sense of security and encouraging them to stay.

This urban renovation initiative originated a set of examples of public spaces in Vienna that succeeded in addressing gender differences in spatial behaviour and interests, but also in giving response to different social and age groups. The renovation projects for the *Einsiedlerpark* and the *St. Johann Park* were approved in 1999 as a result of a juried competition for "gender-sensitive renovation" of public spaces in the city. All these parks were considered pilot projects that provided valuable experience on how to implement gender mainstreaming in urban planning and design. In fact, this experience led to the formulation of general gender mainstreaming planning guidelines for the municipality. With a didactic approach, this toolkit explains that

*If parks are to be used by girls and boys on equal terms, they need to be planned and designed in ways that gender equality is guaranteed. Much depends on additional features, such as park supervisor teams trained in leisure time management and social pedagogics.*<sup>17</sup>

17 The brochure *Stadt fair teilen. Gleiche Chancen für Mädchen und Burschen in Wiener Parks* (Sharing cities fairly. Equal opportunities for girls and boys in parks) contains more detailed advice on implementation.  
Source: <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/administration/gendermainstreaming/examples/parks.html>  
(Accessed November 12, 2021)

The renovation of the *Yppenplatz*, in 2000, can be included in this line of pilot projects.

18 *Tilia-Technisches Büro für Landschaftsplanung* was composed by Rita Mayrhofer, Susanne Staller and Heide Studer; *KoseLicka* was composed by Lilli Licka, Ursula Kose and Ulrike Krippner.

As part of the gender mainstreaming approach of the City Council in urban policies, women professional were also behind the renovation of these three public spaces. The *Einsiedlerpark* project was designed by *Tilia-Technisches Büro für Landschaftsplanung*, and *KoseLicka* was responsible for the design of the *St. Johann Park* and the *Yppenplatz*.<sup>18</sup> Women's safety perception was always a cross-cutting aspect in all this gender-responsive housing and urban renovation projects. (Fig.6)

As a result of its wide experience and strong commitment during the 1990s and 2000s, Vienna is globally considered the leading city in the field of practice-oriented gender research in architecture and urban planning. However, the City has kept on looking for innovative urban planning experiences, particularly regarding residential areas.



Figure 6. The *Einsiedlerpark* in Vienna, designed by Tilia Büro.

© Peter Gugerell.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, CCO 1.0 License, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wien\\_05\\_Einsiedlerpark\\_d.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wien_05_Einsiedlerpark_d.jpg)

(Accessed November 12, 2021)

### *Aspern Seestadt*. The city of the Ladies

Vienna is developing a new residential area, the *Aspern Seestadt*. It is an explicitly family-oriented and gender mainstreaming related design that was closely watched by the Women's Bureau of the City of Vienna. With the size of 240 hectares, the new town of Aspern on the outskirts of Vienna is one of the largest urban developments in Europe. It will be completed in 2028, and it is supposed to house 20,000 people in addition to an estimated 20,000 workplaces. The concept is based on applied gender mainstreaming and women oriented design. An artificial lake in the center is meant to provide the new city with a unique identity that is also emphasized in the wording like "Vienna's Urban Lakeside" or "Lake Town *Aspern*". (Fig.7)

While there are many new towns or city quarters that are built from scratch or designed just on paper, Vienna is trying to set up *Aspern* as a model city that follows the key ideas of gender mainstreaming on several levels. The new residential area is building upon the experience of the earlier projects, enhancing the impact of gender perspective in spatial design since there are not limiting pre-existences. One example of this, beyond the spatial planning design, are the street names. Some planners pointed out that there were indeed very few female names that refer to specific sites in Vienna, but previous experiences proved how difficult is renaming streets or other public spaces in consolidated areas of the city because people tend to prefer the names they are used to.

In *Aspern*, this lack of female presence in urban space was to be repaired and so all the streets and public spaces are named after a woman. *Aspern* includes public spaces such as the *Hannah Arendt Platz*, the *Janis Joplin Promenade*, or the *Ada Lovelace Strasse* among other international female celebrities that were selected by 30 experts. The aim is ensuring that "*Aspern* has a female face", as the official city brochure states.

Some critics may argue that this is a quite radical approach and that it implies a discrimination against men. But apparently planners wanted to create a counterpoint in a city like Vienna where about 3,750 streets and squares are named after men. The intention is clear and seems to emphasize that there are numerous women who actively contributed to recent history and whose fame is seldom conserved street names.



Figure 7. *Hinweistafel*, *Yella-Hertzka-Park*. © Linie29.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, CCO 1.0 License, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Yella-Hertzka-Park#/media/File:Yella-Hertzka-Park\\_Tafel.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Yella-Hertzka-Park#/media/File:Yella-Hertzka-Park_Tafel.JPG) (Accessed November 12, 2021)

However, many of the male names in Vienna are lesser (or better) known individuals who helped to shape the city of Vienna, in some way or another, and we may conclude that many of these figures were already embedded in the real history of the city. As international female names dominate the streets and squares of Aspern, there might be a slight artificial note to this approach. (Fig.7)



Figure 7. *Aspern Seestadt*.

© Andrew Nash.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, CCO 1.0 License, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Asperner\\_See#/media/File:1220\\_Seestadt.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Asperner_See#/media/File:1220_Seestadt.jpg) (Accessed November 12, 2021)

Nevertheless, this initiative is highly appreciated by international planners who regard this as an important statement. From that perspective, Aspern is considered a unique example of feminist city planning and a testing field applying the concepts of gender mainstreaming. These ideas include careful design approaches that address different needs of various target groups but also to ensure a “fair share” of tax money as it is distributed equally to male and female related issues.

Universal accessibility is also key for Aspern’s planning and design. It aims at responding the needs of any type of person, regardless of its physical or cognitive autonomy. One solution is to offer a lot of public space as opposed to the densely packed street grid of historic Vienna. In comparison, Aspern offers half of its total surface as public space to its residents, proving that the design strategies that were developed during the past three decades in Vienna’s planning office can actually work.

As Florian Urban points out

*Aspern embodies the goals of sustainability, bicycle use and community building.*

That is to say basically rather idealistic and politically moderate left values inherent in all of the previously mentioned examples.

It was clear that the new town had to explore new financial concepts to move a bit away from the traditional public funded welfare solution or neoliberal capitalism.

Hence, a typical German model was tested: the *Baugruppe* (building group), where a group of people teams up and finances the site and the building to keep costs low. Such a shared ownership with a time consuming bottom up exhausting planning process requires shared values and expectations to work in the long run.

It is no coincidence that it may work best for particular groups; for instance, the B.R.O.T. Building Community, an interreligious *Baugruppe* committed to spiritual values. This six-storey building with stepped terraces and balconies on all sides consists of forty-one units and it provides high-quality extensive common spaces for its inhabitants. About 40 percent of the total surface is devoted to shared spaces for the housing community. The group claims that their values extend beyond Christianity, although name and symbolism of the building are taken from Christian symbolism:

*“Brot” (bread) alludes to the Eucharist and the acronym stands for “beten, reden, offen-sein, teilen” (pray, talk, be open, share).<sup>19</sup>*

This successful group operates two more buildings in Vienna.

## Conclusions

The presence of women has proven to be key in the current high-quality living conditions of Vienna. Current Viennese housing policies and urban planning initiatives bear the mark of a number of women architects and planners.

From Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's personal commitment to improve every-day life necessities through architectural design to subsequent current institutional initiatives led by different women, Vienna has achieved international recognition as a city where urban planning policies put people at its centre. Names such as Eva Kail, Jutta Kleedorfer, Franziska Ullmann, Ursula Bauer, Silja Tillner, Maria Auböck, Elsa Prochazka, Gisela Podreka, Liselotte Peretti or Rita Mayrhofer, among many others, are key to understand not only the successful initiatives involving architecture, housing and city planning in Vienna and other Austrian cities and rural areas, but also the solid consolidation of gender perspective in spatial planning fields<sup>20</sup> in some other European countries. (Fig.8)

19 Florian Urban, “Vienna’s Resistance to the ‘Neoliberal Turn’ Social Policy through Residential Architecture from 1970 to the Present”, *Footprint Delft Architecture Theory Journal* Vol. 13 n° 1: Issue #24 (Spring/Summer 2019): 91-112.

20 Inés Sánchez de Madariaga and Inés Novella, “Gender and urban planning in Spain: experiences and perspectives”, *Ciudad y Territorio* vol. LII, n° 203 (2020): 5-120. <https://doi.org/10.37230/CyTET.2020.203.01>



Figure 8. Franziska Ullmann in a lecture on gender in housing architecture with Inés Sánchez de Madariaga in Madrid in April 2018. Source: UNESCO Chair on Gender in Science, Technology and Innovation, UPM, with permission. © Ana Amado.

## Bibliografia

- Blau, Eve. *Rotes Wien: Architektur 1919-1934: Stadt-Raum-Politik*. Vienna: Ambra Verlag, 2014.
- Benard, Cheryl and Edith Schläffer. *Verspielte Chancen? Mädchen in den öffentlichen Raum!* Vienna: MA57 Frauenbüro der Stadt Wien, 1997.
- Horncastle, Mona. *Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. Architektin. Widerstandskämpferin. Aktivistin*. Vienna: Molden Verlag, 2019.
- Hunt, Elle. "City with a Female Face: How Modern Vienna was shaped by Women", *The Guardian*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/may/14/city-with-a-female-face-how-modern-vienna-was-shaped-by-women>
- Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House, 1961.
- Kose, Ursula, Lilli Licka and Silja Tillner. *Richtlinien für eine sichere Stadt. Beispiele für die Gestaltung sicherer öffentlicher Räume. Vol 1. Schriftenreihe Frauen*. Vienna: Frauenbüro MA 57, 1995.
- Prochazka, Elsa. "Elsa Prochazkas diskrete Architektur". Interview by Gerfried Sperl. *Konstruktiv*, Nr. 197 (October/November 1996): 18-21.
- Sanchez de Madariaga, Inés and Inés Novella Abril, "Gender and urban planning in Spain: experiences and perspectives", *Ciudad y Territorio* vol. LII, nº 203 (Spring 2020): 5-120. <https://doi.org/10.37230/CyTET.2020.203.01>
- Stadt Wien. *Stadt fair teilen. Gleiche Chancen für Mädchen und Burschen in Wiener Parks*. Vienna: Stadt Wien, 2005.
- Urban, Florian. "Vienna's Resistance to the "Neoliberal Turn" Social Policy through Residential Architecture from 1970 to the Present". *Footprint Delft Architecture Theory Journal* vol. 13 No. 1: Issue # 24 (Spring / Summer 2019): 91-112
- Weisman, Leslie K., *Discrimination by Design. A feminist critique of the man-made environment*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994.