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NEW URBANITY IN THE ALPS

The picturesque mountain scenery of the Tyrol may not be the most obvious place for a new urban landscape to emerge. But YEAN, a group of young architects and planners, is presenting a new concept: TirolCITY. For DAMn° the Rotterdam-based members of the collective, Pia Kronberger and Kersten Nabelek, outline this new perspective where the region is viewed as one continuous city.

All photos, images and diagrams by YEAN, unless mentioned otherwise.

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National borders in Europe are disappearing and competition between regions is increasing. Some regions will be able to benefit from these developments while others will become more peripheral. As people, households and businesses are free to settle anywhere within the European Union, and demand for leisure time and improved standards of living grows, regions with high recreational qualities are obviously at a substantial competitive advantage. In Europe we can expect this trend to lead to a spectacular expansion of the built-up areas along coastlines and in Alpine regions. More specifically, in some Alpine valleys such as the 'Inntal' in Tyrol, the population density is already comparable to the densities of the most highly populated regions of Europe. While many economically-weak regions in Europe are struggling with problems such as a shrinking, ageing population, and consequently have to deal with the maintenance and transformation of existing urban structures, Tyrol is still blessed with strong economic growth. As a result, the region has remained attractive, both for businesses and people.

TYROL: A REGION OF CONTRASTS

Tyrol is famous for its unspoiled nature, magnificent Alpine landscape and traditional farming. But in fact the agricultural sector today employs no more than 5 per cent of the working population, and more than 60 per cent of the Tyrolean population live 800m below sea level in the densely populated 'Inntal'. The amorphous structure of the settlement area spreading along the 150 km-long 'Inntal' and its adjoining valleys is home to 636,000 people (7.8 per cent of the total Austrian population). The main characteristics of the region are the limited amount of usable land (only 13 per cent of the total area can be used for settlement due to the extreme topography), mass tourism (8 million visitors every year) and impressive traffic flows. Every year, 10.8 million cars cross the Brenner Pass, and the Tyrolean ski lift network can transport more than 1.3 million people per hour, which is comparable with the capacity of a metropolitan public transport network such as the Tokyo subway system. The importance of the 'Inntal' as a significant transit corridor is translated into a tightly knit pattern of roads, motorways, railway tracks and power lines, which are meandering, ribbon-like, along the River Inn. New trading estates and industrial zones are being set up at the major traffic junctions and slowly but steadily they are filling up the vacant areas

between local communities with small-scale businesses, shopping malls, petrol stations, leisure parks, etc. The ongoing decentralisation is dissolving administrative boundaries between the communities, and new functional and social contexts are emerging that can only be understood within a larger context.

ELASTIC CITY

Since the end of the 19th century the Alps have taken a special position in the European leisure landscape. The former 'wilderness' at the heart of Europe has been transformed into one of the most important touristic areas in the world. Tyrol has benefited from this development. Its wide range of leisure facilities, together with the vast amount of visitors every year, have led to the transformation of the urbanised area into an Elastic City that expands and contracts according to seasonal fluctuations. In winter and summer, numerous sports-minded skiers and hikers populate Alpine villages, whereby the settlement area in the adjoining valleys is stretched to its limits. Off-season, when there are fewer visitors, the city shrinks down to its infrastructural backbone: the 'Inntal'.

TirolCITY

The research study TirolCITY - New urbanity in the Alps (Vienna/Bozen 2005) carried out by YEAN, describes and analyses the urban potential of the region, and presents new strategies for its future development. YEAN has produced a 'TirolCITY map' that presents the urbanised areas in the 'Inntal' and its adjoining valleys as one continuous city. While other cities have evolved ring-like around an already existing centre, TirolCITY is growing together steadily, beginning to form one long linear pattern. Separate municipalities are becoming urban quarters of one city. Their historic centres, which have long stagnated as pedestrian precincts, today seem more rural than they ever really were. In contrast, a mixture of trading, leisure, industrial and residential zones takes up the space in between. A new urban landscape is embedding itself in the mountain scenery.

The past few years have brought forth a series of new concepts regarding the modern city. Several studies have shown that the traditional approach - involving compact cities, untouched villages and an in-



tact countryside - is incapable of describing contemporary urban developments in an appropriate way. Today's cities are made of many cities. Urban elements and features can be found in many forms and at many locations. Alongside the historically grown cities, a new kind of city has come into existence: the Network City. In the Network City, urban settlements constitute nodes that are connected with each other thanks to a dense transport and communication system. YEAN understands TirolCITY as a Network City, in which the thread-like urban landscape is tightly connected and functionally decentralised. It consists of many centres that exist next to each other.

CITY BRANDING

'Nowadays, "city branding" is associated primarily with the economically inspired desire to position cities more positively in the midst of a scaled-up, more mobile and flooded market of locations and destinations. Cities have to be shaped more emphatically, thematised and brought to the attention of the more mobile and less location-dependent companies, inhabitants and visitors.', wrote Hans Mommaas in City Branding (NAi publishers, Rotterdam 2003). TirolCITY is the label for Tyrol's new urbanity. The term 'city' may be viewed by some as provocative, but it is meant as a tool which should help to establish a single entity instead of the current competition between municipalities. Furthermore, YEAN wishes to initiate discussion, instead of denial, about the urban dimension of the Tyrol. If municipalities openly collaborate, the region will have a greater potential to position itself in the European context.

YEAN is pursuing various lines of action in order to brand the TirolCITY concept, and along with a publication, new logo for the city and the TirolCITY map, it has also collaborated with Dutch filmmaker Rob Gijssbers to produce a 20-minute video documentary. Presentations of the book and video were recently made at the Tiroler Landesausstellung 2005 in Hall, Austria, and at the 3rd Architectural Market (eme3) in Barcelona, Spain. #



YEAN, photo by Marcel Bosch.

TirolCITY - New urbanity in the Alps (English/German) is published by FOLIO Verlag (Vienna/Bozen 2005). The book explores on the new image of the Tyrol in texts, graphics and photographs, and provides external contributions from Yona Friedman, David Hamers, Winy Maas, Wolfgang Pfefferkorn and Arno Ritter.

About YEAN YEAN is a collective venture of European architects and regional planners based in Bordeaux (Claudia Staubmann and Cédric Ramière), Rotterdam (Pia Kronberger and Kersten Nabielek) and Vienna (Wolfgang Andexlinger and Stefan Mayr). YEAN investigates current spatial phenomena at the local, regional and international levels and develops innovative research methods for a more dynamic approach to planning. The members of YEAN have been working on different regional planning projects in Pakistan, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Chile, Thailand and in several European countries.

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