



## Foundations of Democracy A New Perspective on Austrian Architecture

27 June to 14 September 2018

---

- Press tour:** Tuesday, 26 June 2018, 10am
- Speakers:** Otto Kapfinger and Adolph Stiller
- Official opening:** Tuesday, 26 June 2018, 6.30pm (by invitation only)
- Curators:** Otto Kapfinger and Adolph Stiller
- Venue:** Ringturm Exhibition Centre  
Schottenring 30, 1010 Vienna
- Opening hours:** Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm, free admission  
(closed on public holidays)
- Enquiries to:** Romy Schrammel  
T: +43 (0)50 350 21224  
F: +43 (0)50 350 99 21224  
E-mail: [presse@wst-versicherungsverein.at](mailto:presse@wst-versicherungsverein.at)

*“Foundations of Democracy” marks 20 years of Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein’s Architektur im Ringturm series. The first show took place in June 1998 in the Ringturm Exhibition Centre, which was designed by Boris Podrecca.*

*The current exhibition dovetails with the 2018 commemorations of the 100th anniversary of the First Austrian Republic, focusing on the socio-political role of architecture in the last century. It covers fundamental aspects ranging from architectural drivers of the country’s transformation to architecture’s contribution to society as a civic project, both today and in the past.*

*The focus is on the role of architecture in Austrian society’s transition from a historically outdated set-up to a modern republic. The development of new building types, particularly those used in education, culture and social services, shaped the public, which played an active part in building the new state.*

*The exhibition pays tribute to nine Viennese buildings which were closely linked to the political and cultural reforms seen in the early 20th century. Nine projects from the new democracy’s early years and before – from 1900 to 1930 – give a fascinating insight into Austria’s architectural development during this time of upheaval. In addition, 100 other constructions, including present-day examples, provide a striking illustration of our country’s architectural history.*

*The selected constructions in the Austrian capital, which made a significant contribution to the emancipation of society as forms of spatial organisation and a means of enhancing material well-being, include: the legendary **Arbeiterheim** “people’s house”, a cultural and political centre in Vienna’s Favoriten district; the **Urania**, a public educational institution and observatory; the **Vorwärts** printing and publishing house; the **Heilig-Geist-Kirche** (Church of the Holy Spirit) in Ottakring; the **Eugenie Schwarzwald school**; the visionary **Rauchfangkehrergasse** residential complex in the Sechshaus district; Friedrich Kiesler’s interior design for the **Konzerthaus**; the kindergarten in the **Goethehof apartment block**; and the expansive **Kongressbad** open-air pool in the city’s Sandleiten area.*

---

## I. Focus on social transformation: Arbeiterheim Favoriten

The Arbeiterheim in Vienna’s Favoriten district can be seen as a central project in the emerging transformation of construction techniques and organisational concepts.

Verein Arbeiterheim Favoriten, the association behind the “people’s house”, bought the property at Laxenburgerstrasse 8-10 in 1898 – the year of Emperor Franz Joseph’s golden jubilee. When commissioning the project, Victor Adler – who in 1901 became the first social democrat to take his seat in the Lower Austrian provincial parliament – took his inspiration for the Arbeiterheim from the Maison de Peuple, a complex designed by Victor Horta, one of Europe’s leading art nouveau architects. The Maison de Peuple was built in Brussels between 1896 and 1899. A public architecture competition was held for the design of the new building in Favoriten. 39 plans were submitted, and the jury unanimously selected the project put forward by architects Hubert and Franz Gessner.



**FOCUS OF SOCIAL CHANGE**  
Worker’s Centre Favoriten 1902  
Hubert Gessner  
Photo: Haller & Haller

The first section of the property was completed in 1902, and an extension as far as Jagdgasse was added in 1912. In terms of construction techniques, form and function, the structure was innovative and groundbreaking. Its initial heyday came to an end in 1934 with the establishment of the Federal State of Austria (or Ständestaat, also dubbed the “Corporate State”), and the building became defunct in 1984, when it was sold for financial reasons and the main hall was demolished. The site was redesigned as a hotel, which flourished for only a few years. From 2015, it served as emergency accommodation for asylum seekers.

Literature (all German only):

Robert Misik: *Ein seltsamer Held. Der grandiose, unbekannte Victor Adler, Vienna* (2016)

Felix Czeike: *Historisches Lexikon Wien, Bd. 1, Vienna* (2004)

Otto Kapfinger: *Denkmalschutz in letzter Minute. Das Arbeiterheim könnte vor dem Abbruch gerettet werden*, in: *Die Presse*, 27/28 August 1983

Werner Schubert: *Favoriten. Von der Siedlung zur Großstadt, Vienna* (1980)

---

## II. Urania – space for public education

Vienna's adult education centres (Volkshochschulen) played a trailblazing role in Europe, and became the largest organisation of its kind in the German-speaking countries. Their roots go back to Sunday lectures in the city in 1887, which from 1895 were held at the University of Vienna under the title "Volkstümliche Universitätsvorträge" ("popular university lectures"). From 1897, the lectures were supported by the Urania society, which was based on a template devised in Berlin and focused primarily on natural sciences and astronomy.

Designed by Max Fabiani and located alongside the Danube Canal, the Urania building opened in 1910 and remains an iconic feature of Vienna's urban fabric to this day. The draft designs date back to 1905. Plans were also drawn up for a second Urania in the city, but they never came to fruition. Fabiani's blueprint was not beholden to Viennese Secessionist design principles or Otto Wagner's "Nutz" or utility style. The exterior irritated Fabiani's contemporaries with its freely arranged collage of historic elements, which in itself could never be classified as historic. An innovative construction technique featuring reinforced concrete allowed for the creation of a complex interior on the small plot where the building stood.



**A SPACE FOR ADULT EDUCATION**  
Wiener Urania 1910  
Max Fabiani  
Photo: Wien Museum

Literature (all German only):

Wilhelm Petrasch (ed.): *100 Jahre Wiener Urania. Festschrift, Vienna* (1997)

Marco Pozzetto: *Max Fabiani 1865-1962. Ein Architekt der Monarchie, Vienna* (1983)

Felix Czeike: *Das Grosse Gröner Wien Lexikon, Vienna-Munich-Zurich* (1970)

---

## III. Modern mass media – Vorwärts printing and publishing house

At the start of the 20th century, Vienna was Europe's fourth-largest city. Between 1890 and 1912 large new print works and publishing houses sprang up – there were about two dozen of the latter, all of them featuring the very latest in architectural design.

The property on the Rechte Wienzeile was purchased in 1909 and the existing building significantly remodelled. A state-of-the-art printing house took shape in the courtyard, and by 1910 it was firmly established as the centre of media operations in the capital. The *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and *Arbeiterinnen-Zeitung* (newspapers aimed at male and female workers respectively) were printed here, and later in the 1920s titles such as *Das Kleine Blatt* and *Die Frau* appeared, as well as weekly publications, printed materials published by the Social Democrats, and district newspapers.



**MODERN MASS MEDIA**  
Vorwärts Publishing House 1909–1910  
Hubert und Franz Gessner  
Photo: Robert Newald

Literature (all German only):

Kurt Paupié: *Handbuch der Österreichischen Pressegeschichte 1848-1959*, Vienna/Stuttgart (1960)

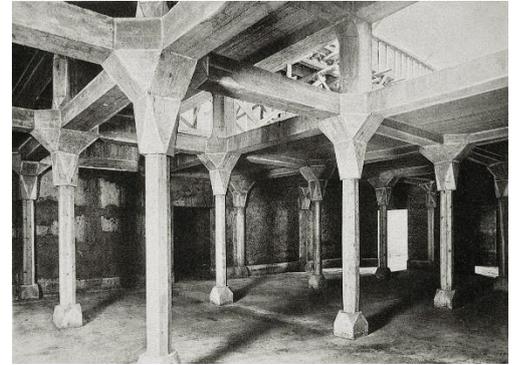
Peter Pelinka, Manfred Scheuch: *100 Jahre AZ. Die Geschichte der Arbeiter-Zeitung*, Vienna (1989)

---

#### IV. Church reform – Heilig-Geist-Kirche, Ottakring

The construction of local pastoral care centres was instrumental in the reformation of Austrian architecture after 1945. The Church of the Holy Spirit in Ottakring is one of the early precursors of these structural and design innovations. The driving force behind the church in Vienna's Schmelz area was Father Franz Unterhofer, who set up the related support association and building committee in 1908 and selected a suitable piece of land. Josef Plečnik was commissioned to provide the architectural design.

Originally the church was planned as a social centre, with a large parish hall and a wing for rental apartments. Plečnik came up with various proposals, but ultimately there was not enough money to implement them. Using new, cost-effective reinforced concrete, Plečnik achieved a radically pared-down form and came up with a daring architectural innovation: the reinterpretation of the standard basilica layout to create a modern and egalitarian space that turns the focus on the altar area – which did not have a pulpit – and emphasises the vertical axis in a firmly grounded, novel type of crypt which harks back to a different age and replaces the illusionary transcendence of a dome. Although only partly finished, the church remains a fascinating structure thanks to its elementary design and its aura, although it is now surrounded by a number of run-of-the-mill outbuildings.



**ECCLESIASTICAL REFORM**  
Church of the Holy Spirit Ottakring 1910 –1913  
Josef Plečnik  
Photo: ÖNB

Literature (all German only):

Otmar Lowitzer: *Kirchenbauten in Österreich 1945-1970. Studien zum Kirchenbau im Spannungsfeld von Architekturströmungen, Liturgischer Bewegung und kirchlicher Kunstauffassung*, doctoral dissertation, Vienna (2007)

Friedrich Achleitner: *Der „Aufbau“ und die Aufbrüche 1945-1975*, in: Anette Becker, Dietmar Steiner, Wilfried Wang (eds.): *Österreich. Architektur im 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich. New York (1995)

---

#### V. New schools – Eugenie Schwarzwald school

As women were still barred from Austrian universities at the time, teaching reformer Eugenie Schwarzwald studied at the University of Zurich from 1895. She was one of the first Austrian women to receive a degree when she graduated in 1900.

After returning to Vienna, she took over a girls' school which she gradually expanded. She went on to set up Austria's first grammar school for girls, at Wallnerstrasse 9 in the first district, in 1911/1912. The teaching facilities at the newly built block bordered by Herrengasse, Regierungsgasse, Wallnerstrasse and Fahnengasse took up the entire top floor, and large parts of the interior were designed by architect Adolf Loos. The plans for the concrete construction and building contours were changed during the application for planning permission to make way for an all-round rooftop terrace that could be used for breaks, exercise and play. Schwarzwald was forced to emigrate in 1938 and the school was closed after the National Socialists had come to power.



**NEW SCHOOLS** Schwarzwald School 1912 –1914  
Victor Siedek  
Photo: Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv – WStLA, Sammlung Hans Deichmann

Literature (all German only):

Wilhelm Hubatsch: *Probleme des Schulbaus, Vienna (1965)*

Walter Chramosta (ed.), *Kammer der Architekten und Ingenieurkonsulenten (publisher): Das neue Schulhaus in Wien 1990-1996. Schüleruniversum und Stadtpartikel; Vienna-Berlin (1996)*

---

## VI. Social housing construction – Rauchfangkehrergasse complex

Vienna's outstanding achievements in social housing construction between 1919 and 1934 are still widely recognised to this day. The visionary and compact residential block on Rauchfangkehrergasse in the Sechshaus area of the city is an impressive example of the architectural output of "Red Vienna" in the inter-war years.

Brenner's success in bringing the building fabric to life "from the inside out" thanks to the functionally flexible and multi-layered use of space "in line with the times" is unmatched in the local area and attracted huge media coverage. Many design elements were adopted on a grand scale by the city of Frankfurt in its housing construction drive, in which Anton Brenner also played a part. He was unable to build on his outstanding architectural achievements in Vienna, which ultimately led him to move to Frankfurt.



**SOCIAL HOUSING** Residential Complex  
Rauchfangkehrergasse 1924 –1925  
Anton Brenner  
Photo: Wien Museum

The so-called Brenner apartment, designed in line with his proposals down to the last detail, survived the passage of time, and was renovated and became heritage-protected a few years ago. The apartment – Vienna's very first council flat – serves as a museum which is open to the public.

Literature (all German only):

Architekturzentrum Wien (publisher), Wolfgang Förster, Gabriele Kaiser, Dietmar Steiner, Alexandra Viehhauser (eds.): *Wiener Wohnbau – Innovativ. Sozial. Ökologisch. Vienna (2009)*

Bernhard Steger (ed.): *Themen der Architektur. z.B. Ottokar Uhl, Vienna (2011)*

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

---

## VII. Upheaval in theatre and the arts – "Raumbühne" at the Konzerthaus

In 1924, Friedrich Kiesler curated and designed the International Exhibition of New Theatre Technology at the Konzerthaus. The event was opened by the city's mayor Karl Seitz and met with astonishment in the domestic and foreign media. Alongside an exhibition of modern art held in the same year, for several months this turned the Austrian capital into the focal point of a Europe-wide discourse that looked at new approaches to topics ranging from urban and housing construction to the design of stages, posters and stamps.

Kiesler's designs for the remodelling of the Mozartsaal and Schubertsaal at the Konzerthaus had wide-ranging implications which were subsequently applied in Paris in 1925 and New York in 1926. The outstanding feature was the delicate integration of the spiral-shaped gantry into the Mozartsaal's empty stalls, where Kiesler paid close attention to the room heights, curves and axes, as well as the connecting walkways that formed part of Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer's rational architectural design.



**CULTURE, THEATRE AWAKENING**  
Space Stage in the Konzerthaus – Model 1924  
Friedrich Kiesler  
Photo: Adolph Stiller

The temporary reshaping and the use of the existing architecture points to a level of ingenuity which nowadays is more sought-after than ever before: resource-conscious situationism aimed at breaking down old conventions and hierarchies in favour of the true-to-life, improvised development of a unique contemporary appeal.

Literature (all German only):

Dieter Bogner: *Wien 1920-1930. „Es war, als würde Utopia Realität werden“, in: Alte und neue Kunst, H. 190/191, Vienna (1983)*

Barbara Lesák: *Die Kulisse explodiert. Friedrich Kieslers Theaterexperimente und Architekturprojekte 1923-1925; Vienna (1988)*

---

## VIII. New approaches to teaching – Montessori kindergarten, Goethehof

The Montessori method of pre-school childcare and education had been adopted in many countries before the outbreak of the first world war. In 1922, Lili Roubiczek founded the Haus der Kinder (“Children’s House”) at Troststrasse 98 in Favoriten. The facility’s success was down to the training provided to the staff, as well as the in-house amenities, which included specially designed equipment and teaching materials.

Concepts such as the Montessori method were also increasingly implemented at the city’s newly built full-day public kindergartens, and following a reorganisation of existing facilities which began in 1919. One of the most successful examples of this was the kindergarten set up in the Goethehof between 1930 and 1932 by Hedwig Schwarz, Franz Singer and Friedl Dicker. It was originally due to be pulled down in 1934, and was completely destroyed in 1938.

Literature (all German only):

Philipp Frankowski, Rosa Liederer: *Die Kindergärten der Stadt Wien, Vienna (1932)*

Maria Montessori: *Das kreative Kind. Der absorbierende Geist, Freiburg i. Br. (1972)*

Helmut Heiland: *Maria Montessori, Reinbek bei Hamburg (1991)*



**NEW PEDAGOGICS**

Montessori Kindergarten Goethehof 1932

Friedl Dicker & Franz Singer

Photo: Wien Museum

---

## IX. Health and fitness – Kongressbad

Of the various sports facilities built in the 1920s, the Kongressbad open-air swimming pool in the Sandaiten area of Ottakring, Vienna’s 16th district, stands out for a number of reasons. Designed by architect Erich Leischner, the Kongressbad opened in 1928, pulling in visitors with what was then Europe’s largest swimming pool, measuring 100m by 20m.

This open and spacious recreational area was situated in the heart of Austria’s largest and poorest working-class district. Embedded between Vienna’s built-up areas and the green spaces on its outskirts, the arena was open from May to October, and was a place for sport, recuperation and socialising. During the Fascist era the facility was transformed into an important centre of individual and organised resistance.



**PUBLIC HEALTH · PERSONAL HYGIENE**

Kongressbad 1927–1928

Erich Leischner

Photo: Haller & Haller

Literature (all German only):

Hans Hovorka: Republik „Kongé“. Ein Schwimmbad erzählt seine Geschichte; Vienna (1988)

Doris Byer: „Um die Leiber legt ein neuer Friede sich ...“. Über die Aufklärung des Körpers, in: Die ersten 100 Jahre. Österreichische Sozialdemokratie 1888 – 1988; Vienna-Munich (1988)

Architekturzentrum Wien (publisher), Erich Bernard, Barbara Feller, Karl Peyrer-Heimstädt (eds.): Amt macht Stadt. Erich Leischner und das Wiener Stadtbauamt; Salzburg (1999)

---

**Catalogue**

Architektur im Ringturm LI: Foundations of Democracy. A New Perspective on Austrian Architecture Published by Otto Kapfinger and Adolph Stiller. 250 pages, with numerous previously unpublished illustrations. Müry Salzmann Verlag.

Price: EUR 28