

INTO THE WILDERNESS: Am Heidjöchl as a New Urban Ecosystem

A brief introduction to the theoretical foundations of the project.

It is only possible to realize new urbanism by being critical of how the new peripheries are articulated nowadays. The project begins with some clear research guidelines, bounded by the infrastructural understanding of the project as a determination to solve the conjunction of current problems between the anthropized natural landscape, the capacity of urban development of new cities, and the logical conditions of mobility.

It is necessary to question the given conditions from an analytical position, which puts the origin coordinates of the project in crisis. In this way, "Into de Wilderness" avoids the common conception of the urban layout as a strict formal entity that responds to the interests of an individual designer, introducing transversally a range of issues that are part of the context in which the exercise takes place: a political, aesthetic, socioeconomic, technological, and philosophical context.

The matters surrounding the initial approach to the infrastructural landscape and its relationship with the domestic are introduced by actively reading contemporary theories and techniques to implant the process with propositional content that builds a valuable proposal for our times.

Thus, factors related to ecology and the relationship between human beings and nature are introduced into the equation, derived from the thinking of Timothy Morton and Donna Haraway; perspectives on the capacities of objects as organic entities, which draw from the ideas of Bruno Latour or Graham Harman; socioeconomic conditioning factors on the link between the development of our cities and the productive interests of institutions; approaches to the aesthetics of objects, performativities, identities, and their connection to the contemporary world, while thinking about the (not so) speculative futures towards which our society is drifting in the texts of Deborah Danowski and Viveiros de Castro.

The introduction of this cloud of current thinking on the urban project enriches the construction of a complex system, which is gradually configured through movements guided by these ideas while trying to balance some answers to the questions of the statement. Only in this way will we be able to develop a project capable of reflecting on the role of the design of cities nowadays, and more specifically, on the need for hybrid thinking with a solid ecological base and focusing on all the agents that intervene in them.

Why must we re-think how we shape urban planning: from the car city to the wilderness urban life? How can we build the basis for an everyday life focused on the goals of our future? What strategies will lead us to develop urbanism that takes care of the soil we live in?

Sustainability, conciliation, and respect are our new urban tools to enhance a unique habitat where multiple species will take care of each other, growing in harmony. Four strategies are designed to move from the car-city to the wilderness urban life.

1. Ecological Sprawl: Nature as the main suprastructure

(A) Changing the infrastructural basis: we start by planning the green soil to ensure everything is surrounded by an earth-friendly environment. The green central spot works as the common lung, spreading its cells towards the rest of the area until it covers it entirely with different grades of wilderness. The goal is to create a smooth transition in terms of density and to plan the green spaces as the central infrastructure of the neighbourhood.

(B) Becoming terrestrial: The soil is a living species by itself. These ideas must alter the way we design urban space. The streets are no asphalt and concrete surfaces but open strata for the green life to grow and for all the species to live. All the paths are porous, even as we need to leave them planned for ease the mobility and deliveries, the inner lung is connected via green corridors to the perimeter where the in & out points are located and to the areas reserved to urban facilities. This way the park is dislocated from the center and spread consciously.

2. Responsive cohabitation

(A) Promote the cohabitation between Am Heidjöchl and its surrounding communities. The center of the neighbourhood works not only as a lung for the project site, but also as a park that can hold special events during the year to enhance local economies and urban workshops. This green infrastructure spreads towards the already developed urbanism and the new to come.

(B) Performative urbanism: the density is projected to enable a strategy that relates the borders with its surroundings while decreasing in scale towards the center. Internally, the site is segmented into administrative divisions related to urban management; the whole area is planned as a continuous fabric linked to a human and non-human perspective, taking special care of the ground floor areas, which become transitional spaces that balance living units and facilities. The density relates to the ground floor scale and the idea of a completely green space. The volume variations of the buildings are settled according the GFA indications and designed to answer the climate preoccupations. The singular volumes are located in order to structure the areas as semi-autonomous fields, improving the life quality of its inhabitants and articulating its surroundings to build a molecular fabric.

3. Liquid infrastructures

(A) Change the way we move daily: as public transportation is present in many ways inside the site, the focus should be connecting the nodes (metro/bus/tramway) and setting comfortable paths to walk or ride to get to them. The nearest zones to the stations are provided with safe spaces to leave bikes, electric scooters, and personal mobility devices. There is a graduation in the design of the width and capacity of the corridors. The whole area is walkable and open to eco-friendly transports, the fast-lanes are reduced to the perimeter to achieve a green mobility.

(B) Create a peripheric buffer to sieve the context: next to the peripheric green belt, we locate some volumes which are conceived as evolving hubs that will gather all the parking spots needed for the housing in our area. These pieces should be flexible and open, willing to be transformed as car mobility is reduced in the following decades. The main paths will be drawn across the site from these parking spots to ease the daily transport, completing the matrix that structures the whole area. The gateways enhance the connections between Am Heidjöchl and Wien. The urban design improves the goals of the 15 minute city, with sustainable travelling. The link hub to Aspern Nord works both as a transport station and mixed-use building, renting the spots near the inner square to local business and gathering public equipments.

4. Generative Politics

(A) Create a strategic grid for urban planning, housing and architectural development: a suitable and well-measured grid that allows the site to grow as flexibly as possible. This grid allows the mechanical infrastructure to be built within the green one, no matter how the architectural volumes are precisely located. The proposal is designed to fit the proportions that define social housing blocks, streets, and public spaces. The site is filled using a tetris-like strategy, following a set of rules defined in the urban planning stage to maintain the green base as the common ground.

(B) Stimulate conscious housing developments: engaging in collaborative meetings with the different agents involved; institutions, developers, technicians, baugruppen, landscapers, and the local residents. The urban fabric also gives a tool for association and progressive building of the area, setting the starting rules define not just the wildlife-like identity of the neighbourhood but ensuring that as the buildings begin to rise there are some conditions to be considered.

Wildlife management and eco-active tools

The sinuous paths change the way we think about infrastructure, leaving the hard-drawn lines from the car urbanism to a new soft one that immerse pedestrians into the wildlife. The green carpet is designed by linking medium scale gardens to each building. This way, as a community, the inhabitants must take care of a small part of the ground they live in. Each volume has to measure a ground space surrounding that will be planned as community areas. The urban gardens, placed to buffer the transitions between wildlife and architectural volumes are linked directly to the use of the ground floors. This way we ensure the housing located on the lower floors can have a private garden that is a small part of the whole terrain, but also this interstice spaces could be managed commonly by the associations of the inhabitants. As the community gardens are sheltered from the more crowded paths, near the main lines there are planned to be small scale business that will feed the everyday needs.

Next to the considerations about the ground we live in we must not forget about answering the climate conditions concerns. The planned wildlife space cannot be developed without an active design of the public and private energy management. To achieve a climate friendly area and an eco-sufficient neighbourhood there are considered to be architectural strategies such as power-generative rooftops with greenhouses, gardens and green energy productive gadgets. The urban fabric is responsive to the grid, not in a strict way but in a balanced one, dislocating the volumes and setting the main orientations to obtain wind comfort. As sustainable principles are applied to the entire neighbourhood, there is in addition an eco-energy plant devised in one of the gateways to further improve urban-power efficiency.

Into the wilderness

Am Heidjöchl is a New Urban Ecosystem, which is committed to the coexistence of human beings with a natural environment. An ecosystem that looks to a conciliatory future, that actively cares for the health of its inhabitants. An ecosystem that opens a dialogue with all the agents that make it possible. An ecosystem that creates a new model of city in which the green spaces emerge as the main infrastructure. An ecosystem that invites you to get lost into the wilderness.