

**Future
Architecture
Platform**



Archifutures

The Site



**A field guide
to the future
of architecture**

Edited by &beyond



Common Places

By Felipe de Ferrari,
Kim Courrèges,
Diego Grass
& Thomas Batzenschlager

An aerial architectural rendering of a city street scene. The drawing is composed of fine lines and cross-hatching, creating a textured, wireframe-like appearance. A large, rectangular area in the center of the street is highlighted with a dense, dark green cross-hatch pattern, indicating a public greenhouse. Surrounding this area are various buildings of different heights and styles, some with multiple windows. The street is shown with lane markings, and several small cars are depicted driving along the roads. The overall style is technical and illustrative, typical of urban planning or architectural visualization.

**Plan Común's
public greenhouse
for Graz**

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Plan Común's public greenhouse for Graz

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“The goal is to offer alternatives, which reaffirm the public value of architecture as the way of thinking and building our cities.”

Critiquing the economic impulse behind the construction of urban spaces, Chilean office Plan Común take an actively political approach to reclaiming the right to the city with a public greenhouse proposal for Graz in Austria.

Common Places takes a critical position towards what is happening around us.

Common Places draws on the behaviour of people, buildings and things.

Common Places comes out of a critical understanding of specific contexts and programmes.

Common Places has a disregard for the status quo, including commissions and clients.

Common Places proceeds from an active engagement with ordinary demands and needs.

Common Places follows a clear strategy to maximise collective space in every project.

Common Places exhibits an economy of means, a radical understanding of resources such as time.

Regardless of the usual pragmatic aspirations that many of us may have, it is impossible to strip off the ideologies of our cities. In many countries (in our case Chile) we live under a neoliberal model, one in which cities are understood as mere devices to increase the market value of private property.

At the same time, our cities are also victims of the conceptual inability and lack of vision exhibited by local authorities, urban experts and decision-makers. This has provoked the proliferation of indeterminate terrains,

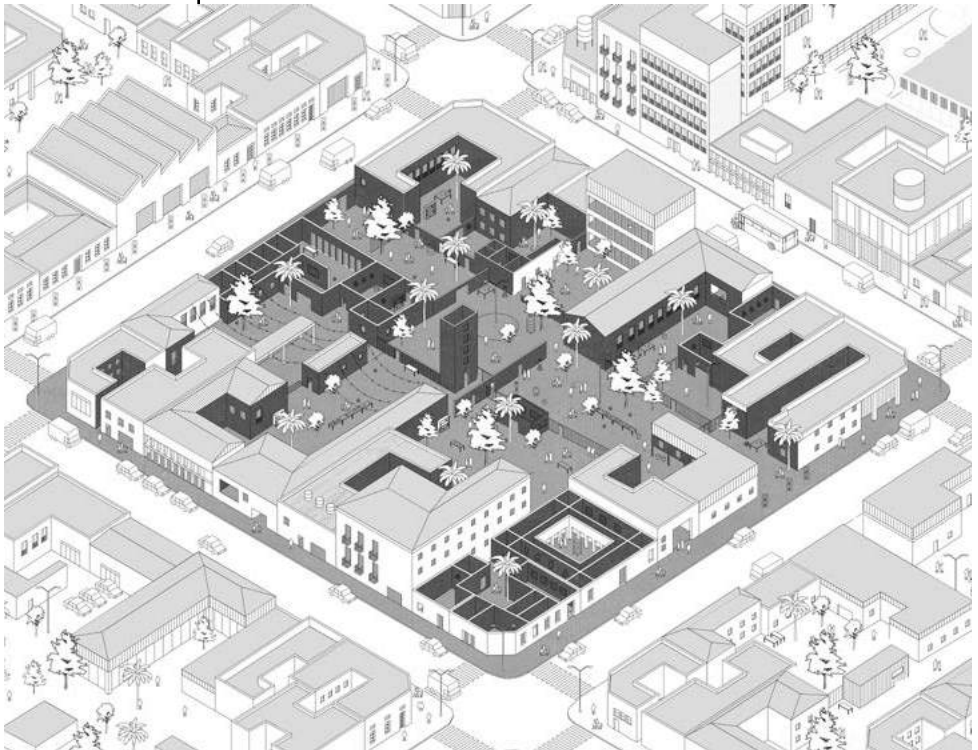
Plan Común

Plan Común has been developing *Common Places* since 2012: strategies to maximise and strengthen public and collective space – understood as a key aspect of architecture, regardless of its scale or programme – using the means of simple architecture tools: critical discourse, research, design and building. We are convinced that radical, basic – even silent – forms are more likely to be relevant and universal, and serve as a support for collective use and imagination. “We use a critical and strategic approach towards briefs and commissions, in order to question and transform spatial hierarchy and uses. We intend to work within an ethic of the collective, aiming at relevance and usefulness for the many.”

Previous page: Proposal for a public greenhouse in Andreas-Hofer-Platz in Graz, Austria, 2016. Isometric drawing © Plan Común

Common Places

the generic (in the pre- and post-Koolhaas sense) and “common” places, in the worst sense of the word.

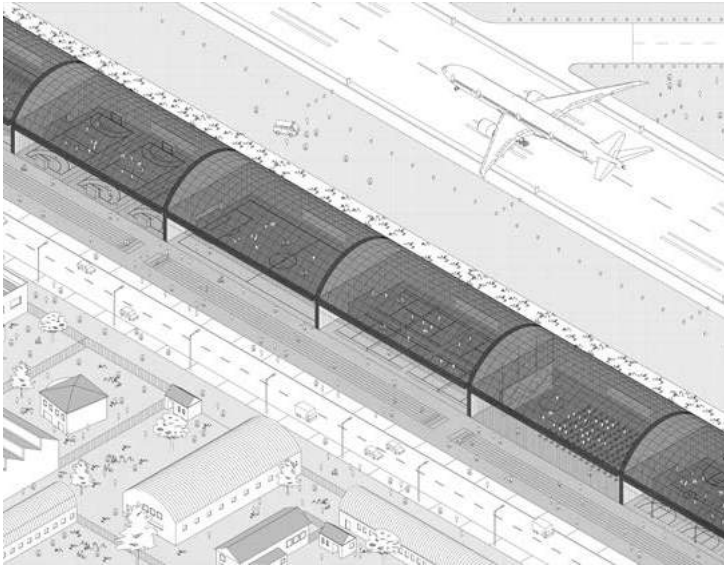


Common Places research:
public interiors. © Plan
Común

In reaction to this and other related issues, we can see how communities and societies around the world are now mobilising against the consequences and iniquities of the system: recent demonstrations in Chile, Spain, Brazil and the United States are just the tip of the iceberg of reaction against the many inconsistencies within our models of development, distribution of wealth and lifestyles. Citizens are aiming to reclaim the public sphere. This has also been an important stimulus for our practice: we try to engage our work within a framework of radical transformation in opposition to the neoliberal context within which we operate.

Archifutures

As architects, designers, authorities and citizens, we must reclaim our common rights to the public realm in the city. The city is controlled at present by the ups and downs of the market economy. We believe our discipline could counteract this process by creating collective public spaces that hold no value for the market economy – ones that are even sometimes detrimental to private or individual interests – by taking a strategic approach to architecture and thus producing new ways to inhabit the world.



Common Places research:
continuous sheds.
© Plan Común

Common Places is a collaborative research project initiated and promoted by the Chilean architecture office Plan Común, founded in 2012. Its focus is on research and the production of strategies and projects for maximising public and collective spaces. This began through questioning the validity of current operative models – whether ideological, economic, cultural or normative – in order to produce new and fertile public spaces using our own design skills and architectural tools. The goal

“We propose demercantilised, political and strategic projects for the public and society at large.”

is to offer alternatives, which reaffirm the public value of architecture as the way of thinking and building our cities. Within this are all kinds of interesting themes and issues, from the urban to the intimate private scale. The potential of architecture to help generate these spaces is unlocked using disciplinary tools such as text and drawings utilising canonical architectural elements. We propose demercantilised, political and strategic projects for the public and society at large: 50 strategies designed by a network of collaborating architects around the world, that should be activated by a community mobilised to shaping our future cities. The catalogue of strategies, due to be published soon, is just a first phase of the research. We are interested in finding a real context for them and to deal with a real network of actors in order to pursue further the feasibility of each case.

In order to test one of the strategies in a real context, the House of Architecture (HDA) in Graz and ISSS research&architecture, invited Plan Común to propose an alternative transformation of Andreas-Hofer-Platz – a historical plot in the centre of the city – in the context of the *Form follows...* exhibition held at the HDA in 2016.

Originally the site of a Carmelite church and monastery – and known as *Karmeliterplatz* – the earlier buildings were demolished to make way for a fish market. The plot was then sold by the Graz Municipality in 1913 and today contains a subterranean parking garage – one of the most important in the city centre – and a service /bus station. Although the site – now called Andreas-Hofer-Platz – is now private property and not a product of specific urban planning, local citizens continue to call it a “square”.

Context

In 2012, a competition was organised by Acoton Real Estate, which bought the site from Shell AG in 2008 for 12.5 million euro. The brief was to build commercial stores, offices, restaurants and housing over the maximum allowable area of 13,500 square metres. At that time the budget for the whole project was 50 million euro and the winning proposal was a design by Atelier Thomas Pucher. For us, the results of the competition were not good enough. Our critique is not just of the design approach taken in the different proposals but mainly of the attitude of the participating architects in the competition. All the proposals we reviewed lacked critical awareness and they all fell short of the demands of the brief. According to the curators of an exhibition at Haus der Architektur (in which this proposal was included), the public demand was for more green space rather than office space. Four years since the competition, the status of the square still remains unclear.

Plan Común saw an architectural counter-proposal as the best way to move on from this stasis. Our proposal therefore is to build a public greenhouse of 2,100 square metres, defined by a double-pitched roof form. The greenhouse responds directly to the demands of Graz citizens, offering a volume of air warmer than outside, the humidity perfect for growing different plants, a pool to collect rainwater from outside and a garden to colonise the plinth and polycarbonate walls of the greenhouse's interior. In its centre, the existing bus station will be updated to allow space for small shops and workshops related to agriculture; its roof will be reinforced and converted into an open terrace for different uses with views towards the garden and surroundings. The existing

Proposal:
Public Greenhouse



DIE GRÜNE





Previous page and this page: Interior of the public greenhouse proposed for Andrea-Hofer-Platz, Graz. © Plan Común

subterranean parking could be updated to contain complementary facilities for future stages of the project. This new public “void” provides a unique spatial condition in the context of Graz. It will act as an experimental field to be appropriated by citizens of all ages.

Message: “Die Grüne Alternative”

The political reference of the text on the billboard that forms part of the proposal is straightforward: *Die Grüne Alternative* (The Green Alternative) – the slogan of the Green Party in Austria which has been relatively successful in containing the steady rise of the extreme-right in the country, setting an example – from our perspective – for the rest of the world. Architecture can also contribute towards disrupting the logic of the extreme right in Austria, Europe and abroad and helping counteract its rise.

The slogan: *Die Grüne Alternative* also relates to a different possible future for Andreas-Hofer-Platz: one that is not decided by private interests but oriented towards the public realm and aligned with a more sustainable and simple lifestyle. It will be a specific type of greenhouse designed to behave in an urban context and the third recognisable new intervention along the Mur River, after the Kunsthauus and the Murinsel, albeit one less iconic and more humble than its predecessors.



The façade of the proposed public greenhouse across Andrea-Hofer-Platz. © Plan Común

Why should we abandon our hopes regarding public space? Are we condemned to have residual public spaces defined by the market all the time? We call for all the interested institutions, authorities, civic associations and citizens to recover this plot for the city. ■