

Regional and Urban Planning Studies



Planning Society Annual Field Trip. Destination: Vienna and Bratislava

Essential to Regional and Urban Planning is the placing of principles learned in the classroom into practice. Each year the Planning Society of the London School of Economics and Political Science organises a study trip outside the UK to familiarise the students with planning policy and practice in Europe. After much delegation and debate, the Planning Society reached a decisive decision to embark on a study trip to Vienna and Bratislava. The society chose Vienna and Bratislava due to its regional growth between the two capitals, extensive urban projects, housing issues, transport, sustainable development, and urban design. The aim of the Planning Society's Annual Trip, *Vienna and Bratislava – Cross Border Metropolis*, was threefold:

- Provide an understanding of the regional functioning of Vienna and Bratislava, with regards to differences and similarities in history, governance and regeneration of the two cities;
- Provide an understanding of the external dynamics of these two cities, with regards to the potential for partnership and rivalry, for patterns of convergence and divergence;
- Get a feel for what it means to live in these two cities on a day to day basis, and how this may or may not change in the future.

A dynamic and highly international group of approximately 20 students and academic staff embarked on this study trip starting in Vienna (4-6 April) and ending in Bratislava (7-8 April). The visit also benefited from the support of the LSE Geography and Environment Department through the participation of Nancy Holman, RUPS Programme Director and Alan Mace, Lecturer in Urban Planning. The group networked with key organisations involved in the political and economic administration of both cities, was able to visit key projects sites in the region (including the largest construction project in Europe), and participated in a multitude of lectures covering key issues related to all aspects of Regional and Urban Planning.



Part I: Vienna

Our trip started with a visit to MA18, Department of City Development and Strategy at the Vienna City Hall. With gracious welcoming speech by the Director of the MA18, Dipl. Ing. Thomas Madreiter, we gained a brief overview of the opportunities and challenges facing the city and region. Next, Dipl. Ing. Kurt Mittringer, discussed urban development strategies and provided a strong economic understanding into the regional growth. In closing, the we discussed transportation planning with Dipl. Ing. Angelika Winkler and related more directly into the Centrope regional discussion with Dipl. Ing. Paul Grohmann.





In the afternoon, despite the stormy weather, the members were able to visit Aspern Seestadt with an architect of the project. After a discussion about the technical, political, and economic aspects which have made the project a success, the group participated in a tour around the construction site. Given its proximity to Vienna, the site will serve as a major development for the area, and is promoting all aspects of sustainable development along the way.

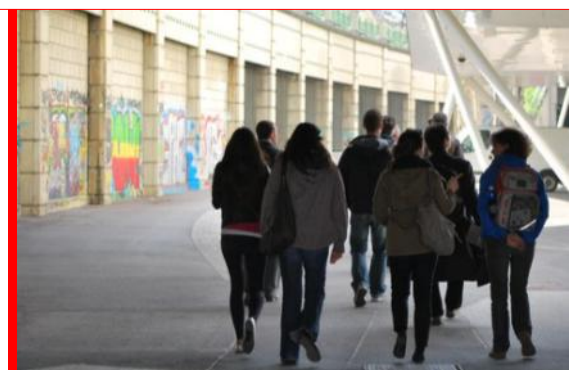
<http://www.aspern-seestadt.at/>

Closing our first day, we met with Dipl. Ing. Sabine Gretner, Green Party City Councillor in Vienna, who has taken a leadership role into the city's urban planning strategies. The presentation provided a unique view into the overlap between politics, planning, and environment, as applied to the context of Vienna. Mrs. Sabine Gretner spoke about some of the projects the party is currently undertaking, her personal experiences getting into the field of politics from an architectural background, and answered questions from the attendees.



Kicking off the second day, we had the privileged to have a private tour of Karl Marx Hof with representatives of the MA50 Department of Housing and International Relations of Vienna City Hall. The tour themed 'Vienna: history, institutions, and policy' was provided by Christian Kubesch and Christa Bresna who have both been heavily involved with housing issues in Vienna. Vienna provides a unique case for housing studies and allowed the students to get a first-hand view into the housing issues currently facing the city.

Next, the group took a tour of the Donaukanal Project. The Danube channel is currently undergoing extensive regeneration work, quickly becoming a major attraction to the city. Over coffee on a floating restaurant, the students were able to ask questions with Dipl. Ing. Bernhard Engleder from the MA28, Department for Streets and Street Maintenance about the projected works. The location also serves as a docking point for river connections to Bratislava, which ultimately fit into the theme of the trip.



Ending the second day, the group attended a lecture by Dipl. Ing. Christof Schremmer from the Austrian Institute of Spatial and Regional Planning who has been extensively working on the Vienna and Bratislava cooperation. The lecture was a unique view into the spatial understandings of the city. In addition to the highly technical advances being used by the institute, the presentation allowed a fitting closing to the day and what advances will be used to contribute to the city's planning and spatial success.

Our final meeting in Vienna was of the Hauptbahnhof Project, the largest construction project in Europe. The tour was head by Dipl. Ing. Andreas Schwab and allowed the students an inside perspective into the project. Closing the tour, the students saw the project from the information point tower site built for the public. The view not only provided a great perspective into the scale of the project, but allowed the students to better understand where the project fits into the city and region as a whole.

www.hauptbahnhof-wien.at



Part II: Bratislava

Less than 60 km down the Danube from Vienna lies its 'little sister', Bratislava. The geographic proximity of these two closest capitals in Europe has made them plan for future under a common cross-border metropolis framework, under a broader Centrope Region project. Our meetings helped us explore the opportunities of this collaboration as well as the challenges still posed by the political and cultural divide caused by the different political regimes of Austria and Slovakia in the second part of the XXth century.



Our trip in Bratislava started with a visit at the City Hall, hosted by the Chief Architect Prof. Štefan Šlachta.

We have learned about Bratislava's stages of urban development and expansion as well as had an overview of its current challenges and priorities. We have also gathered valuable insights into some of the current initiatives of the City Hall, such as the waterfront developments and Danube channels environmental projects.

<http://www.bratislava.sk/>

A walk through the city has been the best continuation for our visit at the City Hall. Architect Michal Sladek has guided us through different sites of Bratislava, representative for its past and present political regimes and architectural styles.

With its charming historic centre, heritage fortress, massive socialist housing estates and recent poorly regulated office development boost, Bratislava can be well considered a live book of urban planning history of post-socialist Europe.



Our meeting with People in Need organization has presented us with civil society response for tackling challenges posed by socially excluded ethnic minority groups. Arch. Michal Sladek introduced us to one of the organization's housing support programmes targeted to marginalized gypsy communities in Slovakia, based on traditional building techniques and construction materials. Presentation material available [here](#).

The visit at the UNDP Regional Centre for Europe and CIS has provided us with an overview on the wider context of post-socialist European countries.

Among the issues discussed by Andrey Ivanov, Human Development Advisor and Oksana Remiga, Local Development Expert were the particularities of the housing stock, overwhelming proportion of home-ownership in the region, limited experience / use of associative structures in housing development and maintenance.

<http://europeandcis.undp.org/>



For the end of our study trip, we have been warmly welcomed at the Bratislava Self-Governing Region offices by its chairman, Ing. Pavol Frešo.

Mgr. Barbora Lukáčová, Director, Strategy and Project Management Department and Mgr. Ladislav Olekšák, Department of Spatial Planning and Regionalism, have shared with us valuable insights on the development prospects of the region. Among the issues covered were transport interconnections with neighbouring countries, cooperation along the Danube and prospects for the CENTROPE Region. Presentations available on the intranet.

Acknowledgments:

We thank our hosts and speakers for contributing with their time and knowledge to our study trip. We also acknowledge the invaluable support of Mr. Juraj Silvan, Prof. Peter Jordan, Mr. Alexandru Calcatinge and the MA18 Department of the Vienna City Hall, for helping us get into contact and establish meetings with the above mentioned organizations.

All documents and presentation materials kindly prepared for our group by the host organizations have been collected in the RUPS library in STC.S400 (St. Clement's Building) and electronically on the intranet RUPS page.

Organizing committee:

Aaron Davis, Max Kintish, Marina Neagu, Lizzie Derooy, Victoria Pinocely;
Accompanied by Nancy Holman, Regional and Urban Planning Studies Programme Director and Alan Mace, Lecturer in Urban Planning