

# BLUEPRINT

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From modest beginnings in Austria, the Wonderland exhibition could be the start of something that will shape the future of European architecture, says *Gian Luca Amadei*



'Think big is the motto and that's worked well for Wonderland, so far,' says Elisabeth Leitner at noncon:form architects. This travelling exhibition has completed a long journey, coming back to St Veit an der Glan in Austria, after touring through eight countries around Europe: Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Netherlands, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Wonderland is a show presenting the work of 99 young European architectural practices. It began in 2002 in the Austrian region of Carinthia, when architects from the firm Spado were asked to exhibit their work by Fundermax, a company that manufactures interior and exterior laminates.

'We could never have filled the hall with our two or three projects. So each of us brought in five other groups of architects,' say Helmut

Rainer-Marino and Harald Weber from Spado.

The result was an initial group of 11 practices showing their work over the course of a year in Graz and then in Vienna. After its success in their homeland, Austrian architects from noncon:form and SHARE decided to spread the project across Europe. These days, Wonderland is best described as a group photograph – a snapshot of the young architectural community in Europe as is today.

The Wonderland exhibition is composed of 440 album-sized panels called 'pixels'. The space available to each practice has been decreasing as the tour has moved to each new country. In the final exhibition, the teams will have just four 'pixels' each.

The work on display is a selection of completed projects as well as projects submitted to previous and current competitions, all of them

responding to a pressing political or environmental issue in the architect's home country.

For example, The Poppy Flower Project by Legu, a Dutch firm, consists of an open square reached by a bridge in the village of Zwanenburg near Schiphol airport. When a plane takes off the space unfolds like a flower to become an acoustic shelter.

Another is a housing programme in Dakovo, Croatia, that provides affordable housing in a country where this type of project stopped because of the decade-long war.

'Circumstances' was the title of our theme in Wonderland, because circumstances, most of them of created by economical and political transition, are what young Croatian architects are forced to work in,' says Dafne Berc from Croatian firm Analog.

But does this network of young architects share a common philosophy? Not according to Matthias Lehner at Legu, 'There is no aesthetic or theoretical vision behind it. There is no Wonderland School, or design movement. We believe that

architectural practice changes rapidly, and that national borders are of decreasing importance. An informal network such as Wonderland can be a base for cross-national collaborations,' he says.

This informality makes it more useful than bodies such as the Architect's Council of Europe (ACE), which represents the interests of about 450,000 architects.

'ACE seems to be a pure representational organisation, so is the Dutch BNA (Board of Architects). There is an urge – a void to be filled – by today's generation,' says Lehner. 'Wonderland, but also Young European Architects, whom we collaborated with for the Dutch edition of Wonderland, are an alternative that could be promising.'

Although Wonderland began informally, there is a sense from

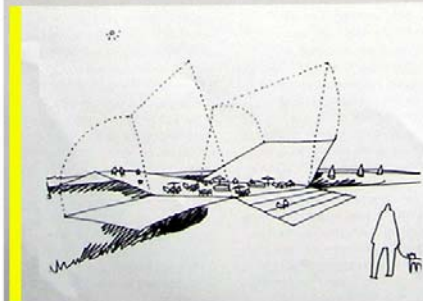
those involved that it could become a new body to represent new European practices. For Tore Dobberstein at Complan from Germany 'If Wonderland should emerge as a trans-European lobbying institution for architecture, it would be positive to work on the harmonisation of the distinct regulations, on overall marketing for our field of business and create platforms for regular exchange on an international level.'

The absence of British projects from the exhibition shouldn't be seen as the product of national rivalries. The network has been growing very organically and it just happened that the network developed mainly on the continent,' says Austrian Leitner.

With a large network now in place, one wonders how Wonderland will develop. As the exhibition project comes to an end, a new initiative, Wonderland magazine, was launched in May. The project has drawn positive responses so far from

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its participants, but the magazine has also raised concern about its future: 'Wonderland developed as a process that didn't have defined goals or pretensions from its start. In that sense it could be only successful. The interesting thing is what happens next – the magazine, doesn't seem to be enough by itself,' says Analog's Dafne Berc.



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Left: PDS residential building in Dakovo, Croatia by Rainer Lehner, Harald Weber and Harald Weber from Spado. This was a programme promoted by the Ministry of Public Works of Croatia.

Below left: The Poppy Flower by Legu, a project to resolve the noise pollution in the Dutch village of Zwanenburg. It was developed in collaboration with Sabine Heine and Leo van der Bliek.

Below right: Visitors to the touring exhibition examine the many pixels.

For more information on Wonderland visit [www.wonderland.nl](http://www.wonderland.nl)