The aesthetics of public service (Vienna, 13-14 Feb 20)

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THE AESTHETICS OF PUBLIC SERVICE: ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDINGS, SCHOOLS, COURTHOUSES, AND SAVINGS BANKS IN CENTRAL EUROPE, CA. 1780-1918

The architecture of some public buildings exhibits a noticeable commitment to economic restraint and a willing subordination to an international aesthetic of dutifulness. Other public buildings exhibit a distinct sensitivity to place – to topography, architectural setting, and select cultural inheritances – frequently when they visualize specific groups' political ascendency.
The difference between public buildings that resound site-specific agendas and sentiments and those that refute them often appear to correspond to a given political system's different levels of administration. If town halls are thus more likely than other types of public buildings to claim, by way of their architecture, a prominent place in the urban environment and in the 'emotion-scapes' of its inhabitants, this is commonly due to the involvement in the planning process of local representatives in councils and juries. However, even infrastructures of public service that in modern times are generally under the authority of supra-regional governmental bodies, such as courts of justice, occasionally adopted in their architecture romanticizing forms at the expense of a more conventional classicizing austerity.
The decision-making processes that led up the implementation of many such projects appear to be insufficiently appreciated. To some degree, this is owed to the imprecise generalizing inherent to the term 'public building': it conceals that by far not all 'public' buildings were open to the general public at all times but served specific groups within which. Moreover, the term 'public building' conceals which of the (occasionally discordant) levels of government was 'speaking' in that specific case.
This conference solicits critical case studies on public building projects in the Habsburg monarchy. It also welcomes proposals for papers with a broader European perspective if relevant to the Habsburg problematic. The relatively long period covered is expected to facilitate the identification of structural changes owing to incisive events, such as the revolutions of 1848 and the Austro-Hungarian Compromise and December Constitution of 1867, as well as in recognition of the significant bandwidth of expression in the course of the 'long' nineteenth century.
Through comparison a better understanding is sought of the processes that led to the fruition of architecturally remarkable public buildings. The role played by individuals, interest groups, and institutions will be at the core of debate. To this end, four particularly relevant categories of public buildings are singled out: [1.] administrative buildings, most notably town halls and municipalities as well as buildings of provincial and state authorities, [2.] public schools and institutions of hig-

her education, [3.] courthouses, and [4.] communal savings banks. Even so, the organizers remain open to contributions on other types of buildings when pertinent to the problem addressed. This includes, for instance, municipality-funded cultural institutions or communal cemeteries of ambitious design.
In sum, the conference seeks to contribute to our understanding of the complex processes of negotiation that accompanied public building projects from idea to implementation. Rather than aiming to decrypt seemingly straightforward messages, its organizers solicit contributions that also disclose the conflicts and inconsistencies in these processes.

Please send abstracts (in English, max. 500 words) for twenty-minutes presentations along with a short CV to ajla.bajramovic@univie.ac.at by October 28, 2019. Applicants will be informed by the status of their application by November 11, 2019. The organizers endeavor to cover all or parts of the participants' expenses for travel and lodging from the conference budget.

The conference is organized in the context of the European Research Council (ERC) project no. 758099, hosted at the University of Vienna's Department of Art History, in cooperation with the Austrian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Art History and Musicology. The concept was developed by Maximilian Hartmuth, Richard Kurdiovsky, Julia Rüdiger, and Werner Telesko.

Quellennachweis:

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