

**P2**

**Contested Sites of Making**

# Notes on a place unable to adapt

There is a difference to how artistic interventions are assessed socio-politically to how they are recognized within the field of art and architecture. What happens when architecture moves out of the office - into the city and onto the street?

Point of departure will be the artistic research Stadium NOWHERE, dealing with unfolding the story of the Bežigrad Stadium by Slovene architect Jože Plečnik, which is a place having difficulties in adapting to new circumstances. The research explored architecture as a nomadic thing and hereby challenged the perception of architecture as a static object. The paper will reflect this process by exploring the new and unforeseen questions that emerged on route. To be able to depict the Stadium as a place and to understand how it interacts with and affects society, the theoretical term “heterotopia” by French philosopher Michel Foucault is borrowed. (1) The current dispute around the redevelopment of the Stadium asks general questions about the collective behaviour, rationales and ideals of society and Stadium NOWHERE can be seen as a response no one has asked for, produced by an outsider in order to learn about a society and its mechanisms. By constantly crossing the borders between art and everyday life the aim is to be able to articulate what otherwise is excluded from the predominant discourse.

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## Observations about architecture, heritage, planning and land

Architecture travels internationally. International architecture, disconnected to local situations, is controlled by the forces of The Market. The Market is about economically driven development. Developments need to be attached to communities and places. Places and architecture from the past doesn't always meet the ideals and demands of present and future societies.

Lack of clear rules of ownership to land creates confusion, insecurity and conflict, since boundaries and limitations become blurred. Blurred boundaries and confusion could perhaps be an opportunity to question the current planning principles?

### The conflict

I was having coffee at the City Pub in Bežigrad with a local resident, whom I had asked for directions when on my way to visit the Bežigrad Stadium by Slovene architect Jože Plečnik a few days earlier. She told me about the conflict of the Stadium, which I found abandoned and fenced off, like many other building sites in Ljubljana. I was interested in experiencing Plečnik's work, since he played an important role in transforming Ljubljana into one of three Capitals in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the beginning of the 20th century. Plečnik was commissioned by the Catholic Church to build the Stadium in 1925 and it has been operating as a Stadium until 2007, where it was fenced off and since then only open to the elements. The majority of Plečnik's works in Ljubljana are timeless, still in use and having survived big changes in society without losing their integrity, (2) but not the Stadium. It is torn between different planning interests, cultural heritage values, understandings of the law and blame for the blocked situation.

One of several disputes in the Stadium conflict is the question of the protection of the cultural

heritage. A group of residents have formed "The Local Initiative" and are fighting for the protection of the Stadium in its original form, whereas an investor wants to update the Stadium to new commercial standards. Between these two opposites the Institute of Cultural Heritage Protection is positioned and expected to protect the work of Jože Plečnik, since the Stadium got status as a monument of National Importance. According to the people I have discussed with, the Stadium is considered a shameful place that is not up to date in function and without a clear support regarding its status as heritage. It didn't help that the Stadium was used as a backdrop when the Homeguard and the Slovenian Anti-Communist militia swore loyalty to Nazi Germany on Hitler's birthday in 1944. Another dispute in the Stadium conflict is a court case about the legal right to a piece of land, which, since the nineteen thirties has been functioning as allotment gardens for the social housing community, the Fond Houses, situated just outside the Stadium wall. According to the Municipality, the names of landowners got wiped out during communism; the gardens became no man's land and the Fond residents became squatters. As said by the "The Local Initiative", there was no initial dialogue between the residents and the investors before everything got fenced off and there is still no dialogue about the redevelopment plans for the Stadium, which includes the land where the gardens are situated. (Fig. 1).

Several attempts to add on to the Bežigrad Stadium have been made over the years. In 2007 a Swiss company was commissioned to come up with a proposal for an up-to-date football stadium, but the Municipality of Ljubljana rejected the scheme. As a result of an international architectural competition in 2008, the investor presented his intention for the renovation of the Stadium to the press in 2012: an overall vision consisting of pretty images for the future. A lot of dimensions seemed to be missing in the proposition: the question of ownership to the piece of land where the housing

community have their allotment gardens and the risk of reducing the historic monument to decorative elements within the proposed large scale building complex, to mention a few. None of the involved parts seemed to have questioned the premises for the renovation of the Stadium; neither those who wrote the programme for the competition, the heritage protection reports nor the architects who created the design proposals. The Stadium became an escalating uncomfortable piece of heritage as the pile of documents and reports grew on the table of the authorities and the grass grew at the physical site in Bežigrad.

*What kind of questions is it possible to ask in public?*

*Is it possible to challenge and disturb a temporarily sleeping public opinion and enable a dialogue?*

## Time and space

The Stadium can be read as a heterotopy (3) – a marginalized place unable to adapt to society that appeals and upsets at the same time. It is a real space among well-known and ordinary spaces, but it keeps a distance to the surroundings. It reflects the reality of the environment and challenges the ordinary at the same time. Thus the heterotopy is a place for ambivalence and the inadaptability. The Stadium began its life in an abandoned gravel pit; a heterotopy itself, where the specific geographical location is disrupted by a vacuum, everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It can be seen as a specific place or a general place that could be situated in various locations.

Looking at the Stadium as a heterotopy, the specific geographic location becomes less important than the inherent characteristics of the Stadium. It is a piece of architecture that connects to other pieces of architecture – to other Stadiums and to other events.

*What happens to the local context and the surrounding neighbourhood then?*

## The use of architecture to investigate something

Stadium NOWHERE aimed at challenging the blocked situation between citizens and authorities and their lack of dialogue through unfolding the history of the Stadium. In order to explore history making as a participatory experience, I invited students from The University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture to contribute. When working outside one's usual cultural and geographical setting it is important to maintain a larger level of self-doubt than usually, since it is difficult for an outsider to comprehend the complexity of a situation. When you don't understand the situation you can try to understand the logic behind the aspects of the conflict. So I decided to unfold the story of how Bežigrad Stadium got made and un-made by visualizing history as a dynamic series of situations. Behind this process there is a system for investigation, collecting, collaborating, building, recording, editing and exhibiting. I searched for material in the local community, institutions, libraries, on-line, museums, archives, books, films and TV broadcasts. I discussed with people who work politically and critically with urbanity in Ljubljana and with people directly involved in the conflict: the citizens, the investor, the Municipality and the Institute for Heritage Protection. To be able to incorporate uncertainty and the unforeseen on route, the project was developed from these meetings parallel to a workshop with the students.

Stadium NOWHERE is portraying history as an observation of both "historical moments" and everyday occurrences. Beginning with Jože Plečnik's vision for a Capital Ljubljana, the story continues up to the present conflict and the abandoned stadium that is taken over by plants. The unsettled present is seen as a motion from the events of the past to the hope for the future. "Historical moments" with architectural visions, religious ceremonies, military ceremonies, sporting events, commercialization, cultural heritage issues and environmental/ neighbourhood issues, built as physical structures, manifest the passage of time. Time is turned into space, revealing history as a story of unfolding time.

I met the students with a timeline of historical



1. Bežigrad Stadium and adjacent  
allotment gardens.

Photo: Ana Skobe



facts and a diagram of seven different structures related to seven different aspects of the history of the Stadium and invited them to develop the diagram into built structures from their own interpretation of history. Some groups dealt with the transformation of the use of the Stadium over time. Some dealt with the specific history of the Stadium. Other groups related to the environment outside the Stadium wall by pulling it into the space and thus exceeding the boundary between what is outside the space and what is inside.

**(Fig. 2, 3).**

- House of Landscape is an enclosed space visualizing the Stadium as a loop beginning in a gravel pit and going back to nature.
- House of Architecture & Urbanism presents the Stadiums connection to Plečniks plan for Ljubljana as a "New Athens". In 2015 Slovenia proposed a series of Jože Plečniks buildings in Ljubljana for Unescos tentative lists, but the Stadium was not among the selected component parts.
- House of Religion is bringing the religion out of the institution and onto the street – like a small Chapel.
- House of Military tells the story of how the Stadium in 1944 was draped in Nazi flags and used as a backdrop for political ideologies parallel to several other Stadiums in Europe during the Nazi period.
- House of Sports & Commercialization is connecting to other stadiums and games and sees the Stadium from the view of the spectator.
- House of Conflict is a mirror of the administration and documents the on-going battle of the Stadium and shows a model of the Stadium built of elements.
- House of Nature is a spatial open wall structure offering a herbarium of the wild plants growing at the Stadium and cultivated plants from the Fond Gardens on the other side of the Stadium Wall. - A common garden where wild plants and cultivated plants are sharing the same space.

**(Fig. 4, 5, 6, 7).**

**2 (right page).**

***Discussion with student about the relation between the timeline of historical facts and the seven different structures. Photo: Gitte Juul***

**3 (right page). Discussions on the student's interpretation of history within the physical structures.**

***Photo: Gitte Juul***





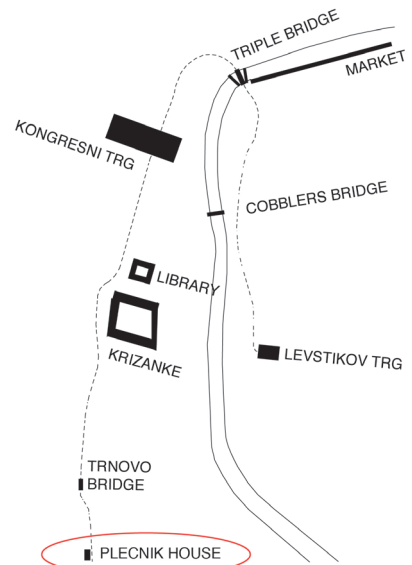


4. Presentation of Stadium  
Nowhere at the University of  
Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture.  
Photo: Gitte Juul

5. Walking route for Stadium  
Nowhere in the city of Ljubljana.  
Photo: Gitte Juul



6. Walking in the city.  
Photo: Gitte Juul



The walk starts here  
at 11.am on June 12.





7. Crossing Trnovski most / Trnovo Bridge (Jože Plečnik: 1929-32)  
Photo: Gitte Juul

Paper



8. Stadium NOWHERE exhibited at MAO –  
Museum of Architecture and Design in Ljubljana. Photo: Gitte Juul

## The action

Stadium NOWHERE unfolded the story of the Stadium via the act of seven nomadic physical structures walking around among Joze Plečnik's static buildings in the city centre of Ljubljana, aiming at questioning social and legal norms in dialogue with everyday urban life. It was an interaction between materials, physical urban space and people using the space, in order to create a dynamic and open-ended presentation of the future for people to discuss.

By which parameters should a redevelopment of the Stadium be defined? - And what could add value to the Stadium and its neighbourhood as a place in Ljubljana?

A building is contested territory and cannot be reduced to what it is and what it means. (4) Stadium NOWHERE worked on revealing the existence of the Stadium by exposing its disputes and performances over time: how it had resisted attempts of transformation, challenged city authorities and mobilized different communities of actors. The project was brought out to the public through action in motion and time rather than through static image production.

It wanted to visualize the democratic exercise of power, the legal system and its administration, language and execution and to move these things from a distanced bureaucratic space to an open space in direct relation to people.

Being presented by seven physical structures walking in a row and a chronological timeline showing historical facts, Stadium NOWHERE crosses the borders between abstraction and reality. It opens questions more than providing any solutions to the Stadium conflict. While revealing the boundaries between language and action, administration and construction, institution and public, it relates to the specific history of the Plečnik stadium in Bežigrad, but also to the Stadium as a type of heterotopia; a space which is neither here nor there and have more layers of meaning and relationships to other places than

immediately tangible. (5)

The artistic research reveals the difficulties in working with a rolling conflict situation in public. Since it is impossible to act neutral in public space, the question is if it is possible to create a platform for people to make the decisions themselves without imposing your own personal view on the situation.

*Is the proposed Stadium NOWHERE open for the imagination to flourish and capable of challenging a public discussion?*

To extend the platform for discussion, Stadium NOWHERE moved out to MAO – Museum of Architecture and Design in Ljubljana. The seven physical structures are exhibited in the open museum courtyard in order to invite the public to share memories and built up a dialogue about the future of the Stadium. Earlier, political systems and strong ideologies made dialogue difficult because of polarization and the determinate solutions embedded in these ideologies. With today's complex reality a dialogue that comes before political decisions is fundamental. **(Fig. 8).**

## Footnotes

1. Foucault, M. (1967) *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* October, 1984; ("Des Espace Autres," March 1967 Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec)
2. *The timeless, humanistic architecture of Jože Plečnik in Ljubljana and Prague*: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5968/>
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4. Latour, B., Yaneva, A. (2008) *Give me a gun and I will make all buildings move: an ant's view of architecture*, in Geiser R. *Explorations in Architecture: Teaching, Design, Research*, Basel, Birkhäuser.
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## References

- <http://gittejuul.dk/stadium-nowhere/>
- <http://gittejuul.dk/stadium-nowhere-pa-mao/>