

report: February 2008

## **“On the sunny side of the Alps”**

**Maja Lorbek is an architect who works on research projects in the area of school building and innovative renovation. She has lived in Vienna since 1982 but does not feel entirely at home in either her new or her old country: "At times certain aspects of the Austrian mentality, such as not expressing criticism openly and objectively cause me to suffer."**

**My view of Slovenia is nowadays more of a view from outside. I notice that the mood in the country is far less depressed than in Austria, even though there are many who have lost out in the modernisation process. The wage level is moderate but food prices are almost at the Austrian level. Apart from the politically committed subculture there are hardly any critical voices raised about consumer culture, capitalism, the unworthy treatment of the "eliminated" and refugees, or the accession to NATO.**

**Slovenia sees itself as part of Central Europe, and draws a clear border between itself and the Balkans. One of the most familiar advertising slogans in the country is: "On the sunny side of the Alps". However in pop culture an amount of Yugo-nostalgia is evident, certain pop and rock groups from the countries of the former Yugoslavia fill the concert halls.**

**Scepticism towards the EU is far less pronounced than in Austria. On the one hand the EU supported Slovenia's path to independence and on the other, due to the "Yugoslav experience" from 1918 to 1991, Slovenia is used to being part of a federation of states. The extension of the Schengen boundaries in December 2007 was welcomed, without any sense of fear.**

**The Slovene approach to life is somewhat more "laissez-faire". People are definitely more fun loving, less grumpy and morose. One often encounters helpful civil servants and train conductors who do not necessarily stick to the principle that "a rule is a rule". Behind Trieste, in the country of Commissioner Proteo Laurenti, in the karst landscape where all signs were in two languages, that is where I feel at home.**

**It is good thing that there is a very strong subculture scene, which self-confidently appropriates and occupies spaces, for example "Metelkova" a former barracks and "Rog" a factory site in the centre of Ljubljana. The groups of young architects, also a positive aspect of life in Austria, play a very important role. The modernist tradition of architecture, combined with regionalism, was typical of the post-war era in Slovenia. The young generation of Slovene architects, groups such as Sadar Vuga, Bevk-Perovic, and Ofis build on this tradition. A great deal is possible because regulatory and legal restrictions are not so strong. The orange balconies in the residential building in Izola by Ofis architects, built without thermal separation and thus with a heat bridge, have been widely published: the building authorities in Austria would never allow something like this.**