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A Streetcar named Desire
On the redevelopment of
Jakominiplatz

The compelling reason for the redevelopment of the Jakominiplatz was the reorganisation of public transport. Due to recurrent insufficiencies, the positive attitude of the public towards environmentally sustainable city transport threatened to swing to the other extreme.

The new solution for city transport which, for political and technical reasons, could not be put off any longer, triggered a number of additional wishes concerning the design and use. And as is so often the case, this square, too, became a platform for the most various wishes:

- the gap between announcement and realisation had to be closed in local policy

- Grazer Verkehrsbetriebe would make huge progress in efficiency due to modernisation;
- local economy would gain from a more pleasant aspect of the square;
- the architects would have the possibility to prove their creativity in this well-known square;
- pedestrians and cyclists would have improved conditions;
- or disabled citizens it would become easier to use the square
- a new aesthetical living-space would be created, most advantageously by intertwining the picturesque image of the Old Town with high-tech elements;
- generally and according to the spirit of the times, everybody would be offered everything at the same time in the same place;
- Hence, from the first moment on, the operation at the tramway junction could be tagged "A Streetcar named Desire".

In the competition launched by the city of Graz in 1993, definite track routes, the useable floor space for the market stalls and for the Grazer Verkehrsbetriebe and the number and position of the stops were announced as set elements. The competition asked for the type and the special characteristics of the square and for a corresponding architectural response.

The result of our considerations was the following: the mixture of functions of the Jakominiplatz is an anachronistic but endearing continuation of a 19th-century principle, when the interaction of public transport, social encounter and economy in this way was the rule. Up to the present day, the Jakominiplatz was reluctant to defer to the tendencies of decentralisation and monofunctionalisation. In its physical form it was too peculiar to take over any kind of representational function, too small to permit generous trans-



port solutions and yet too important to be given up as a public space. Today it represents an amiable exception which should be sustained with the help of architectural means.

The hustle and bustle of people, heterogeneity of shapes and colours, and the dynamics of procedures required a visual "basso continuo". Therefore the three spatially limiting elements - walls, ground, ceiling were employed.

- three rows of trees embrace the square in the north-west, north and east;
- an unbroken ground design overcomes the interruptions due to the tram rails;
- a spill shield carried by densely placed poles spans the centre of the square;
- In full operation, Jakominiplatz was like a fastly displayed text without punctuation which is now represented by the field of poles. Furthermore, these poles send out a clear signal by the optical axes of the streets leading con-

centrically to the square: "This is Jakominiplatz"

The colour concept by Jorrit Tornquist corresponds in its own way to our quest for a visual coherence of a throbbing and perpetually newly created movement.

These tools selected for walls, ground and ceiling have great capacities for the incorporation of the otherwise bewildering optical signals and offer freedom for the specific, function-oriented design of the individual objects: market stalls, GVB-pavilions, shelters, furnishing ...

Everybody taking part in this redevelopment was asked to perform so-called open-heart surgery. Public transport should not be disturbed. Entrance and access to businesses were to be kept clear, only the market stalls could be relocated temporarily.

Until the project was concluded, mandators and planners were on permanent stand-by in order to be able to adapt

changes if required by further knowledge of problems and in order to be able to cope with the tricky and confined situation of the square.

Jakominiplatz has always been a special piece of public space. With the help of designers' tools, we have tried to highlight this special character.

