

# Metropolitan Peripheries as New Urban Landscapes. Designing a Co-Creative Toolbox for the Integrated Development of the Vienna City Region

*Cédric Ramière, Claudia Staubmann, Flora Fessler, Mara Haas, Roland Krebs, Stefan Mayr*

(DPLG Cédric Ramière, MetroLab / CoCo architecture, La touille – BP 9, F-24250 Cénac et Saint Julien, cedric@metrolab.design)

(DI Claudia Staubmann, MetroLab / CoCo architecture, La touille – BP 9, F-24250 Cénac et Saint Julien, claudia@metrolab.design)

(BA M.Sc. Flora Fessler, MetroLab / CoCo architecture, Lenaugasse 2/4, 1080 Vienna, flora@metrolab.design)

(DI Mara Haas, MetroLab / Superwien urbanism, Lenaugasse 2/4, 1080 Vienna, mara@metrolab.design)

(ZT MSC (URB) MBA Roland Krebs, MetroLab / Superwien urbanism, Lenaugasse 2/4, 1080 Vienna, roland@metrolab.design)

(DI Stefan Mayr, MetroLab / Superwien urbanism, Lenaugasse 2/4, 1080 Vienna, stefan@metrolab.design)

## 1 ABSTRACT

Contemporary processes of structural change, such as growing regional disparities as well as pressing challenges of social and climatic change, permeate and shape many metropolitan areas worldwide. Moreover, in the face of continuous population growth and limited spatial resources, many cities have grown beyond their administrative borders, pointing to strong rural-urban interdependencies as well as necessary cross-border cooperation. With big cities as the dominant urban core, it is often the peri-urban municipalities of urban regions that have to deal with the consequences of extensive urban sprawl and lacking public transportation infrastructure. As the ongoing urbanisation trend transforms cities, towns and villages into fragmented hybrid urban landscapes, where the use of conventional planning instruments quickly reaches its limits, integrated and multidimensional development strategies for metropolitan areas are needed. The case study of the Vienna city region not only illustrates the negative effects of uncoordinated spatial planning that stops at administrative borders, but also shows alternative future-oriented development potentials.

The development of future visions for metropolitan areas and the moderation of complex regional planning and design processes are some of the many services provided by the MetroLab.<sup>1</sup> Building on the case study of the SuperWien Metropole<sup>2</sup> – a vivid vision for the greater Vienna region stretching from Vienna and Wiener Neustadt to Bratislava – the transnational and interdisciplinary team succeeded in initiating a discussion on metropolitan planning by means of innovative tools and approaches. The profound analysis and provocative-artistic visualisation of the spatial-functional development of this agglomeration as well as the launched International Dialogue on Metropolitan Planning are essential components of a comprehensive co-creative toolbox<sup>3</sup> specifically designed to discuss and tackle challenges of cross-border spatial development. Taking up the approach of translocal learning and drawing on international examples and the fruitful knowledge exchange between international and local experts, the first two MetroLab Forums have shown that settlement and mobility development must be thought of together more strongly than has been done so far. Sprawling peripheral conurbations and, in particular, their residents are thus included in further case study processing to reimagine and reshape development opportunities by translating metropolitan visions and strategies into local actions. The project aims to not only strengthen sustainable intra-regional growth by focussing on the multi-level and cross-border development of those new hybrid urban landscapes located at what is usually referred to as periphery, but also to explore the interplay between comprehensive strategy development on a metropolitan scale and the identification of place-based solutions on a local scale. Finally, this implies drawing further conclusions in terms of integrated multilevel governance considering horizontal networking as well as vertical connectivity as essential strategic levels.

Keywords: urban growth, sprawl, co-creation, cross-border development, dialogue-oriented planning and design, planning tools, metropolitan strategies, place-based solutions

---

<sup>1</sup> The MetroLab is a Think Tank and Consulting Service for the integrated development of metropolitan areas and city regions. It was founded in 2020 by the partner offices Superwien urbanism and CoCo architecture. and is currently supported by the Vienna Business Agency (“Vienna Calling: Creatives” funding programme): <http://metrolab.design/>

<sup>2</sup> The vision is presented in the book of the same name: Mayr, Stefan; Ramière, Cédric (Editors) (2018): SUPERWIEN METROPOLE. A New Capital for Europe. Bolzano and Vienna: Folio Publisher

<sup>3</sup> We build on previous experiences from our projects in Latin America and the Caribbean: KREBS, Roland; TOMASELLI, Markus: Urban Design Lab Handbook - Dialogue-Oriented Urban Transformation Processes and Practical Approaches from Latin America and the Caribbean. Jovis Berlin, 2019.

## 2 “SUPERWIEN METROPOLE”

### 2.1 A cross-border Vision for the Vienna City Region

As unsustainable spatial developments in Europe and worldwide have reached a critical level, it is time to better understand and adequately address the lack of integrated multi-level responses to contemporary metropolitan challenges. New mobility demands, climate change impacts or uncoordinated urban growth do not stop at administrative borders. As the continuous urbanisation trend increasingly transforms our cities and their surrounding areas into complex functional regions that also break with existing administrative delineations, there is a high demand not only for coherent spatial development, but also for the creation of a common development perspective for all places within the extended urban area, including its periphery. Against this background, the SuperWien Metropole as a cross-border vision stretching from Vienna and Wiener Neustadt to Bratislava (see Fig. 1) was born. It enables the establishment of a new image and identity for the common living space and introduces a cross-border perspective pointing to unifying factors rather than differences and at the same time emphasizing the uniqueness of all involved places.

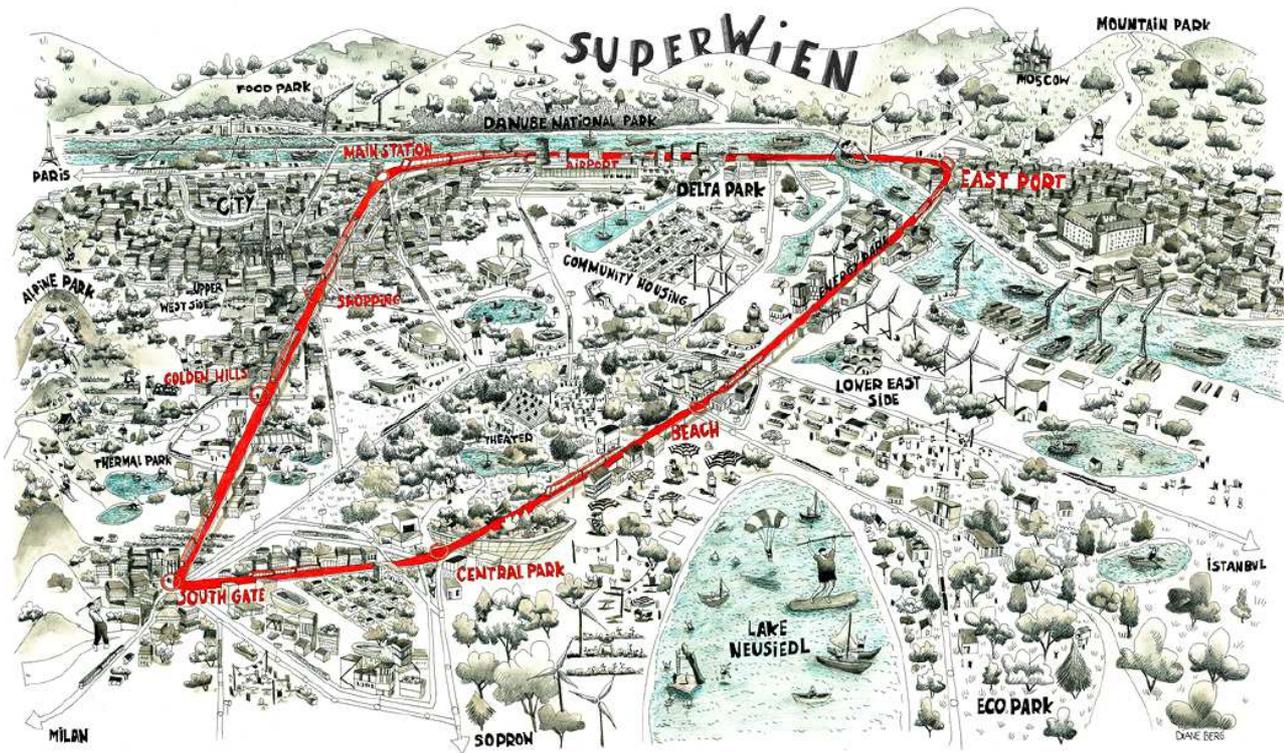


Fig. 1: SuperWien Metropole Vision (credits: Diane Berg).

The provocative term SuperWien Metropole<sup>4</sup> stands for a strong, compact and heterogeneously intertwined metropolitan area. It is part of three nation states of the European Union (Austria, Slovakia and Hungary) with more than 400 municipalities and an estimated future population growth of 50 000 inhabitants per year. In the European context it reflects on the region's global statute, its image and social concept to finally serve as a hub for trans-border collaboration connecting Vienna and Bratislava, which are only 50 km apart, making them geographically the closest capitals within Europe.

The principle objective of the SuperWien Metropole vision is to create a solid ground for the development of cross-border strategies for a well-balanced region. The functionally mixed and sustainable urban network allows for various lively centres interconnected by the “SuperRing” (see Fig. 2), a trans-border city transport system linking new centers and recreational areas, places of residence and business districts.

<sup>4</sup> The term was first used in the book of the same name: MAYR, Stefan; RAMIÈRE, Cédric: SUPERWIEN METROPOLE. A New Capital for Europe. Folio Publisher Bolzano and Vienna, 2018.

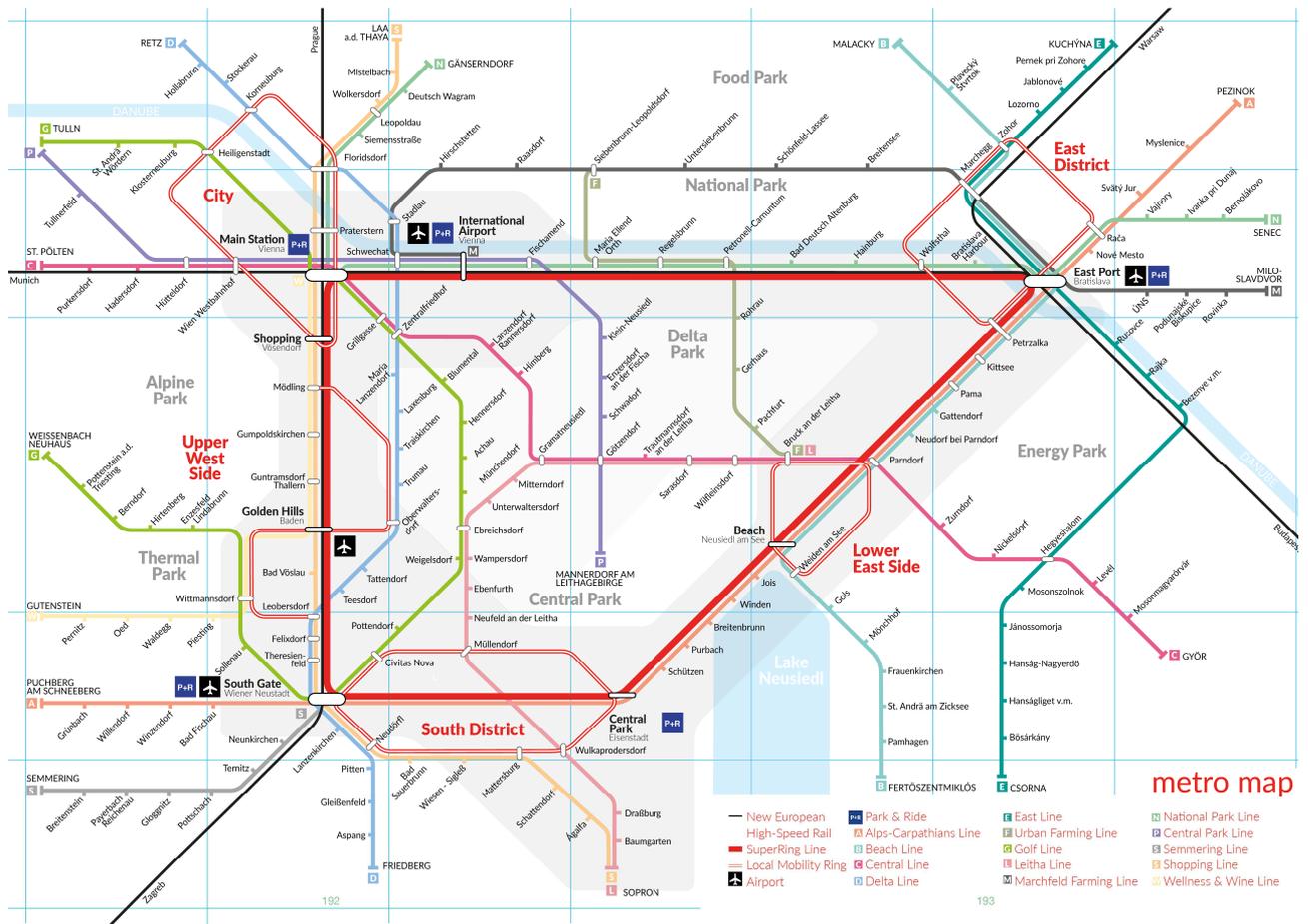


Fig. 2: SuperWien Metro Map showing the network of the SuperRing.

Questions such as “Where does our food come from?”, “How to manage growth?” or “Is there a centre?” serve as a guideline to understand the respective area as a functional urban region with multiple layers that fulfill different purposes but show a high degree of interconnectedness. Typical spatial patterns and phenomena are recontextualised through atypical images such as the Metro Map (see Fig. 2), leading to a new understanding and a striking re-branding of the metropolitan area and its hybrid urban landscape. SuperWien Metropole thus becomes a radical idea generator for planners and municipalities as well as their residents who inhabit this common living space.

### 3 THE METROLAB APPROACH

#### 3.1 From Creative Vision Building to initiating a Metropolitan Dialogue

The creation of this alternative vision for the SuperWien Metropole followed the intention to provoke a discussion about metropolitan development across administrative borders and beyond entrenched institutional structures and planning approaches. This ambition gave rise to the MetroLab<sup>5</sup>, which serves as a common starting point from which interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral connections are spun onwards and a broader process of integrated metropolitan development is envisioned. As a Metropolitan Think Tank and Consulting Service, the MetroLab advocates for a new type of metropolitan planning, which as a discipline of practice promotes a co-creative and dialogue-oriented urban planning and design approach.

As a first step, our team has launched an International Dialogue on Metropolitan Planning – a series of public events, so called MetroLab Forums, each of which is devoted to a specific topic of metropolitan planning and development and offers a varied program of interactive and discursive formats. Taking up the approach of translocal learning, an exchange of knowledge on best practices and instruments of metropolitan planning and development takes place by means of international lectures. Whether and to what extent the various

<sup>5</sup> MetroLab is a cooperation between the partner offices Superwien urbanism and CoCo architecture, was founded in 2020 and is currently supported by the Vienna Business Agency (“Vienna Calling: Creatives” funding programme): <http://metrolab.design/>

approaches and innovative tools presented can be transferred to the Viennese context of city-regional development is then discussed in panels with local experts.

The first MetroLab Forum #1 METRO on the topic of the future of metropolitan mobility was kicked-off in autumn 2020. The presented international examples, such as the transformation of Barcelona's Metropolitan Avenues into a sustainable mobility network or the Grand Paris Express, Europe's largest infrastructure project establishing multimodal hubs in the Paris region, showed that cross-border cooperation is key to drive urban transformation along mobility links. Especially when it comes to creating new metropolitan centers within a polycentric network, mobility is an essential part of the integrated development of a city region. However, transforming our mobility system and rethinking mobility infrastructure is strongly linked to processes of social change, and, thus, awareness building is an important component of a transition towards an ecologically just city region.

Also the second MetroLab Forum #2 GROWTH, which was dedicated to the question of how to manage urban growth, gave valuable insights into international good practices and reflected on how to use them in the context of the SuperWien Metropole. The contents were deepened by the Urban Design studio "MetroLab Growth" organised in cooperation with the Urban Design Institute of the Vienna University of Technology. Examples from the Netherlands, France and Switzerland (among others) highlighted the importance of metropolitan narratives and intra-regional strategies that must be followed by place-based solutions in order to coordinate urban growth. Moreover, the need to integrate (more) co-creative approaches into metropolitan planning practices was discussed among international and local panelists.

These first MetroLab Forums<sup>6</sup> will be followed by two more events (in autumn 2021) on resilient metropolitan landscapes and the question of how to establish cross-border governance structures and create a common metropolitan identity.

### **3.2 From International Dialogue to Local Action**

Building on the valuable experience gained from the International Dialogue on Metropolitan Planning and learning from various projects in different metropolitan areas all over the world, the next step will be to get to the heart of the vision of the SuperWien Metropole and translate it into sustainable local strategies and actions. The central findings of the MetroLab Forums serve as a basis for focusing more strongly on the case study of Vienna and concretizing this overarching vision at the local level. Thus, the MetroLab aims not only to remain on a theoretical level and discuss among experts, but, to initiate a direct exchange with residents as well as decision-makers from different municipalities within the metropolitan area.

In the framework of a traveling exhibition along the "SuperRing", presenting striking visualizations of the idea of an integrated SuperWien Metropole, the vision is to be spread within the cross-border city region Vienna – Lower Austria – Burgenland. Stopping in several municipalities, the goal is to jointly reflect on questions of which role the respective place can play within the metropolitan area and what potentials, as well as risks are being expected from such a visionary image of an intertwined city region.

The interactive exhibition provides insights into the morphological and functional development of Vienna's metropolitan region and raises forward-looking questions – e. g. "What is the limit of growth and how can it be managed?", "How are decisions made?", "How will we move in the future?", or "How can natural space be integrated into our daily lives?". Using an online survey, visitors are invited to relate to their current lifestyle and answer these questions from their own perspective.

By presenting the traveling exhibition in public spaces near train stations, its provocative visionary images not only encourage people to imagine what future cross-border spatial development could look like, but also point to the importance of a coherent transportation network as the backbone of metropolitan development. In combination with the exhibition, co-creative workshops will be conducted onsite focussing more on the local situation and breaking down the overarching, visionary future image of the SuperWien Metropole. Against the background of current spatial developments, the main focus will be on the question of what significance and role the respective municipality will have within the overall city-regional context and to what extent it can benefit from inter-municipal cooperation. For example, what does the vision of the

---

<sup>6</sup> Their main results are documented and deepened in the printed and online editions of the MetroLab Magazines which give valuable insights, for example through interviews with local experts from the fields of urban planning, sustainable mobility and transport planning or housing etc., the magazines are available on the website: <http://metrolab.design/>

SuperWien Metropole mean for the spatial, social, economic and ecological development of the municipality? Under what conditions can it take advantage of this cross-border perspective and where do the concerns lie? And to what extent can the overarching vision be integrated into local planning policies and processes?

Fully aware of the fact that the vision of the SuperWien Metropole is somewhat provocative and utopian, we pursue the intention of spreading the idea of an intertwined and strongly connected agglomeration to gain a better understanding of the extent to which the image of a cohesive urban region can be anchored at the local level. By putting a strong emphasis on the close cooperation of disparate partners, we aim to not only break with existing administrative borders, but also with divisions of competences. Therefore, representatives of politics, administration, planning and civil society are invited to discuss the role of their municipality within the metropolitan area and create their own image of the future, taking into account the overall metropolitan vision. In this way and with the help of different co-creative tools, incentives are to be provided to initiate inter-communal projects.

### 3.3 Creating a Toolbox for Metropolitan Development

The specific MetroLab approach outlined in this paper using the SuperWien Metropole case study aims to explore the interplay between the development of comprehensive visions and strategies on a metropolitan scale and the identification of place-based solutions on a local scale. This goes hand in hand with the idea of strengthening cross-border cooperation within a well programmed polycentric network, shaped by the unique potential and special role of all spatial units. Therefore, multi-level governance structures based on horizontal networking and vertical connectivity are key to strengthen intra-regional synergies.

To meet common challenges of sustainable development in metropolitan areas and to support integrated multi-level governance mechanisms, the MetroLab works with an elaborated Toolbox for integrated metropolitan development and planning that can be applied to different metropolitan areas affected by similar transformation processes. This expandable MetroLab Toolbox results from the experiences of previous projects<sup>7</sup> and is constantly tested and extended in the context of current projects. It is a very flexible set of co-creative and dialogue-oriented planning instruments and builds on a generalized planning process which can be divided into three phases, each followed by a specific outcome (see Fig. 3). Depending on the needs, different tools can be used in one or more phases.

#### 3.3.1 Phase 1: Creative Vision Building - understanding metropolitan phenomena to create a new image of the functional area

Creative vision building aims to understand and reinterpret metropolitan phenomena. It creates the basis to develop cross-border strategies and a new image and identity for the metropolitan area. The outcome of this first phase is the visionary representation of the functional urban area through various forms and media such as art installations, printed media, exhibitions etc. To enable a new understanding of the space a set of research, analysis and presentation tools supporting the collection, interpretation and visualisation of data can be applied.

#### 3.3.2 Phase 2: Metropolitan Dialogue - discussing metropolitan strategies by initiating a dialogue between stakeholders

Taking the creative vision as a starting point, the aim of the metropolitan dialogue phase is to collectively discuss and develop a comprehensive metropolitan strategy including the identification of emerging topics. By initiating a dialogue between decision-makers, planning authorities, city administration, urban researchers and designers as well as external (international) experts, a creative knowledge exchange is established. In the long term, this platform can continue to exist as a wider cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary network.

<sup>7</sup> For example, we build on experiences from our projects in Austria as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean: KREBS, Roland; TOMASELLI, Markus: Urban Design Lab Handbook - Dialogue-Oriented Urban Transformation Processes and Practical Approaches from Latin America and the Caribbean. Jovis Berlin, 2019. ANDEXLINGER, Wolfgang; KRONBERGER, Pia; MAYR, Stefan; NABIELEK, Kersten; RAMIÈRE, Cédric; STAUBMANN, Claudia: TirolCITY. New urbanity in the Alps. Folio Verlag Bozen und Wien, 2005.

### 3.3.3 Phase 3: Local Action - translating metropolitan visions into sustainable local strategies and actions

Translating the metropolitan strategy into local action is the goal of the third phase. In addition to the stakeholder involvement during the Metropolitan Dialogue, it aims to strongly engage the local community to co-creatively develop Local Action Plans. This should not only stimulate the implementation of first temporary interventions, but also give long-term perspectives. This results in identifying with the overall metropolitan vision and at the same time contributes to local empowerment and capacity building.

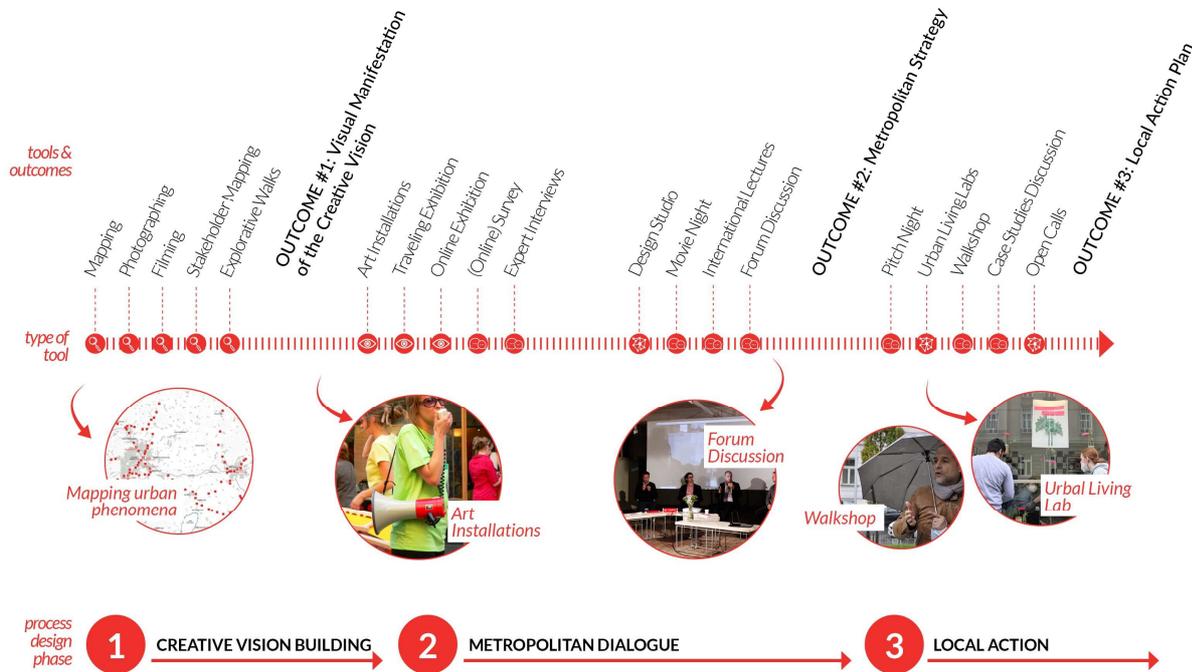


Fig. 3: MetroLab Toolbox in action

The different tools included in the toolbox can be flexibly combined in various ways and are roughly clustered according to these three phases of process design, although some tools can also be applied to all phases. The multifunctional Toolbox, which is an integral part of MetroLab's research and application-oriented approach, consists of research and analysis tools, presentation tools as well as interactive and dialogue-oriented tools. Accordingly, the different types of tools are used for various purposes: researching and analysing, presenting as well as stimulating dialogue and co-creating metropolitan visions, strategies and actions.

Finally, the MetroLab Toolbox can be adapted to the specific needs of city regions, districts, and municipalities, and yet is able to address metropolitan wide urbanization and sustainable development challenges such as jointly designing and managing urban growth, coordinating land use and transportation projects. By recognising the need for tailored solutions and applying it in a targeted way, we can succeed in qualifying the periphery of urban regions as new urban landscapes contributing to an overall territorial balance and sustainable futures for all places and their inhabitants.

## 4 REFERENCES

- ANDEXLINGER, Wolfgang; KRONBERGER, Pia; MAYR, Stefan; NABIELEK, Kersten; RAMIÈRE, Cédric; STAUBMANN, Claudia: *TirolCITY. New urbanity in the Alps / Neue Urbanität in den Alpen*. Folio Verlag Bozen und Wien, 2005.
- KREBS, Roland; TOMASELLI, Markus: *Urban Design Lab Handbook - Dialogue-Oriented Urban Transformation Processes and Practical Approaches from Latin America and the Caribbean*. Jovis Berlin, 2019.
- MAYR, Stefan; RAMIÈRE, Cédric: *SUPERWIEN METROPOLE. A New Capital for Europe*. Folio Publisher Bolzano and Vienna, 2018.