

**ON THE CRISIS OF CITY
PLANNING: FRANKFURT'S
EUROPAVIERTEL AS A
PROTOTYPE**February 24, 2026 1/2
18:30-20:00**Carlos Becker
Benjamin Pfeifer
Sandra Doeller
(Frankfurt Babylon)**

Frankfurt Babylon situates itself within the tradition of critical urban studies exemplified by figures such as Jane Jacobs and Lucius Burkhardt. Our focus is on the anti-urban design and planning of the city, which we seek to make visible in its diverse manifestations – from architectural detail to the conception and shaping of public space, from questions of urban participation to urban policy and public discourse on the built environment.

We are particularly interested in the expressions of city-dissolving modes of planning and thinking within architecture, urban design, public space, transport and urban politics. This includes the consequences of neoliberal urban development, the renewed turn towards the car-oriented city, the structures of social stratification in cities or the spatial relationship between the public and the private, and the possibilities, limits and effects of contemporary planning. Ultimately, we ask: Who plans the planning – and why do the mistakes of the past so rarely appear to prompt genuine learning?

However, we look both at the effects that misguided planning processes have on social relations in cities and the socio-economic background of that planning and design. This applies in particular to urban areas that are outside the spotlight of classical architectural criticism – regular, residential buildings, common streets and squares, everyday objects such as benches, fences or bollards. They are less reflected in debates on urban living, even if their design and arrangement significantly determine the city's everyday life. It is often the unseen detail of a city, that reveals the structures of a city and, thereby, the serious problems of current urban development.

With Frankfurt Babylon, we precisely look at those details and put a focus on the ordinary elements of cities. In our lecture, we turn our attention to characteristic problems of planning and building over the past twenty years. Drawing on a continuous photographic documentation developed over more than fifteen years, we examine Frankfurt's Europaviertel from sociological, design-related and architectural perspectives.

In doing so, we address several central questions: Which fundamental misconceptions shaped the planning process? Which factors inhibit the development of a vibrant public space? What are the key socio-economic determinants and barriers of contemporary planning and urban development? And to what

DR. DES CARLOS BECKER is a social scientist with a focus on democratic theory, social philosophy and urban studies. At the University of Frankfurt, he worked on issues of radical democracy, civil disobedience, and the value of privacy in the age of mass surveillance. His current research focuses on local democracy promotion and the regional conditions of anti-democratic attitudes and movements. On these issues, he works, among others, for the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs and social welfare organisations.

BENJAMIN PFEIFER works at the intersection of architecture, design, politics, and society. Based in Frankfurt am Main, he develops cross-media concepts for communication and public discourse. As an author, his work focuses on democratic and socio-political questions in relation to the city, addressing urban housing, the crisis of the contemporary city, and the relationship between social conditions and urban form.

SANDRA DOELLER is a graphic designer specializing in book, poster, and exhibition design within the arts and culture sector. In 2013, she founded Bureau Sandra Doeller in Frankfurt am Main, working with a conceptual, context-driven approach. Alongside her design practice, she regularly teaches at art and design universities and is a co-initiator of platforms and formats dedicated to critical and interdisciplinary reflection on graphic design and its adjacent fields.

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extent a similar transformation unfolds in already established and still vibrant quarters? Finally, we contrast anti-urban planning and construction with alternative approaches and discuss the prospects for a more successful form of urban development.

