



A symbol comes to life: ERSTE Foundation moves bees from the Alpine foothills to the roof of the Vienna Secession

A hive of 15,000 bees of the Lower Austrian Mostviertel with a queen bee “Carnica-Singer” from the Ötscher area was today relocated to Vienna’s Karlsplatz. ERSTE Foundation has joined the growing community of urban beekeepers. The bees’ new home is the roof of the Secession building, an exhibition hall in Vienna’s city centre.

Environmental issues are not in fact part of ERSTE Foundation’s programme, so owning its own bee hive is something special for the non-profit foundation, which develops social and cultural initiatives in Austria and Eastern Europe and promotes democratic development in Europe. The foundation has, however, been using the bee in its logo since its inception.

“We evolved from the association of the Erste österreichische Spar-Casse of 1819 and when we established the foundation in 2003 we wanted to find a logo with profound symbolic significance. And then we rediscovered the bee in the archives,” says Boris Marte, board member of ERSTE Foundation. The bee has been the symbol of the savings banks and represented its philosophy of serving the common good for many decades and in many countries. “The collector of honey signifies more than financial savings: it has developed into a culturally significant symbol. It embodies a fantastic idea: that we humans are social creatures and should be there for each other.” The bee logo aimed to give power and energy to the young foundation, which independently developed or supported almost 550 charitable projects in 24 countries during the first few years up to 2010, allocating around 40 million euros.

Today, however, it is not the logo’s symbolism that is being brought to life, but the emblematic insect itself. The city is a good habitat for the bees. “In the parks and green areas they find enough nourishment in the flowers,” explain the beekeepers Friedrich Haselsteiner and Heidrun Singer, who supported ERSTE Foundation in its ambition to join the community of apiculturists. “The quality of honey produced by urban bees is in no way inferior to the honey of their rural counterparts.” These diligent insects are usually less at risk from pesticides and lethal toxins in urban areas than in the countryside where monocultures are often heavily treated with chemicals. Bees are efficient collectors, able to filter out the particulate matter and heavy metals found in urban environments. The colony is expected to grow to 60,000 bees by the end of July.

The foundation bees have settled into their new home in the immediate vicinity of the ERSTE Foundation offices in the Akademiehof Building. They are residing directly beneath the Secession’s golden cupola. The foundation’s idea was given a warm welcome by Secession staff. They offered what is probably the city’s most beautiful landing place. The bees fly through the golden leaves and find food sources within a radius of one kilometre. “We expect to make 50 kg of honey each year,” says Boris Marte happily. “In summer we will start to extract and taste the first samples.”



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Media Information

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ERSTE Foundation

In 2003, ERSTE Foundation evolved out of the Erste Oesterreichische Spar-Casse, the first Austrian savings bank. Currently, ERSTE Foundation is the main shareholder of Erste Group. The foundation invests part of its dividends in the development of societies in Austria and Central and South Eastern Europe. It supports social participation and civil-society engagement; it aims to bring people together and disseminate knowledge of the recent history of a region that has been undergoing dramatic changes since 1989. As an active foundation, it develops its own projects within the framework of three programmes: Social Development, Culture and Europe. www.erstestiftung.org

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