

Experiences with the idea of a piece of nature in front of the door

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The desire for a tree, right outside the door of my own studio, prompted me to look for solutions for green infrastructures in public spaces. The idea of planting a tree to cool down overheated urban spaces and using parking lots for socio-cultural means to foster community resilience and improve the qualities of urban life in public spaces is not new.

However, the greening of public spaces by city residents themselves associated with bureaucratic and technical hurdles. Firstly, planting trees in the street is not only associated with high costs and effort (approval procedure, construction site), but is often just not possible due to underground installations (sewers, pipes, etc.). This is also the case in front of my studio *T/abor*, which is located in one of Vienna's urban heat islands (in the Viennese heat map) and is therefore all the more suitable as a location for greening and microclimate-improving measures. The City of Vienna's *Grätzloase* support center guided through the municipal departments responsible for public space to give permission and allow for the use of two parking lots in front of the studio as a non-commercial temporary place. In 2019, the early march set already heat records, and it proved productive to seek creative exchange in the interdisciplinary team in my studio *T/abor*. The *T/abor* association submitted the idea as part of *Vienna Design Week 2019*, as a transdisciplinary art project called *treecycle*. That opened up a green experimental laboratory in the middle of the street during pandemic and summertime. In the camouflage of an art project, we elaborated a circular design-model for a temporary blue-green public infrastructure. In collaboration of a team based in the fields of ecology, circular design and social and public art we came up with the idea of a combination of a mobile ecosystem, modular seating elements and a rainwater reservoir. We proofed that with a water reservoir and irrigation the resilience of designed plant-communities can be strengthened in periods of strong heat and droughts. Only recycling materials were used as plant- and water-containers, the wooden seating, soil, plants and even tools were only from local providers. The open form and aesthetics of the experiment allowed within the

design-build-process for interpretation and questioning, which led to interest and engagement not only by the *Vienna Design Week* audience but also passers-by in the public space. The tree's natural presence made an impact in the seemingly alien laboratory setting, and aware to the need to supply trees with water in a changing climate. In contrast to the recycled industrial containers of globalized mass industry, the tree generated broad acceptance, even among car drivers seeking the tree's shade instead of a parking lot.

Learning from the temporary transdisciplinary public art project, creating an impulse and social impact in the public community around *T/abor*, we sought for a permanent implementation of *treecycle*. And thus a sustainable change to the public space required an urban planning approach and technical skills. With the support of the district council, the seasonal installation permit for the *Grätzloase* was approved for the winter and extended for a year. However, this required submission planning, a technical description of the structures and ultimately direct contact with the City of Vienna. Meantime I launched a youth cultural education project in 2020: *treecycle* - cool urban hot-spots. The co-creation of open spaces in a changing climate became a playful, experimental research trip into a greener future - albeit during the pandemic - and was therefore only possible on specific occasions in the *T/abor* space. Starting from the concrete parking lot of their educational institution, young people, together with ecologists, artists and urban researchers, asked themselves how their building can be thought of as an ecosystem, what heat sounds like in the city, took city tours to their favorite places in the city summer and bundled their experiences to return to the parking lot in a co-create to build a green learning environment.

As much as physical spaces, laws, institutional frameworks and other infrastructures hinder us from bringing our ideas 1:1 into reality, they also make us inventive. When looking for detours, we begin to take a different path, the path becomes the goal, the goal becomes the compass. Resistance forces us to improvise. I would argue that the creative energy at *treecycle* lay precisely in collective improvisation, which also motivated young people in particular to learn something about rather abstract topics of climate change and public space and allowed to take something with them for their own everyday lives.