



Dear reader,

People attract people! A city worth living in is characterised by the high quality, safety and attractiveness of its public space. And this space can be seen as the 'living room' of the city and hence one of the most important meeting points and places for communication for citizens of different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Therefore, the focus of this EPOMM e-update is on initiatives, projects and strategies that consider good planning, careful design and the active involvement of citizens to maintain and develop public space in the urban area.

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Urban /'ə:b(ə)n/ In, relating to, or characteristic of a town or city.
Space /speɪs/ A continuous area or expanse which is free, available, or unoccupied.



Source: Freepik

Cities offer opportunities, connect people and often make everyday life more convenient. However, in order to fully exploit the great potential of our urban areas, it is important to actively design them for the benefit of citizens.

"There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans. This does not mean accepting the present; downtown does need an overhaul, it is dirty, it is congested. But there are things that are right about it too, and by simple old-fashioned observation we can see what they are. We can see what people like," said Jane Jacobs already in 1958.

For many of us, the COVID-19 pandemic has given us a greater sense of appreciation for our homes. The way we used to live in our public spaces now seems completely impossible. Overcrowding, lack of space and the spread of germs occupy architects and urban planners all over the world when they rethink their approach. **A city must therefore be planned in relation to the daily life that takes place there.**

These challenging times are an opportunity for cities to use their public spaces differently. The summer arrived, and car traffic was down. Wide city streets are the perfect place for larger numbers of people to gather while maintaining a safe social distance. And outdoor environments are the safest place for beneficial human exchange to happen. Hence, **there is a unique chance to turn urban space into our second living rooms.**

From historic city centres to newly developed areas in Austria



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There are various possibilities for increasing the quality of time spent in public areas. **Reducing traffic is one of the most effective ways.** Municipalities can implement pedestrian areas or shared spaces, reduce speed limit or access for motorised vehicles.

The city of **Gmunden** (Upper Austria), following a **general transport plan**, offers its inhabitants and tourists an attractive public space in the heart of the historic city centre: the square is seasonally restricted for cars (except taxis), which creates a lively atmosphere with cafés, shops and a weekly farmers' market. In the summer, there are benches, swings and tables – partly in the shade of trees – which are well appreciated by kids, people on their lunch break, elderly people and tourists. Regarding public transport, Gmunden is served by Austria's shortest and oldest **tram system**, one of the world's steepest surviving **adhesion-only** tram lines.

In **many European capitals**, **temporary cycle lanes** are being built to meet the increased demand for safe cycling infrastructure resulting from the Covid-induced avoidance of public

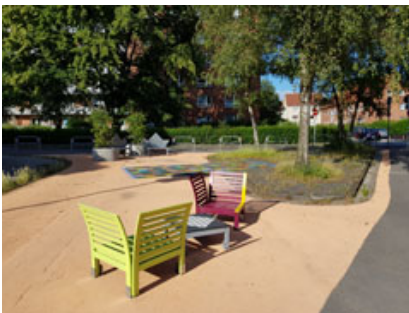


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transport. In Vienna, four **temporary pop-up bike lanes** were installed as of mid-June 2020 on lanes previously reserved for cars. Additionally, more than ten **temporary shared space zones** were opened. To increase the quality of public life even more, especially during summer, 22 **'cool streets'** offer **refreshing air** through green spaces, shading devices, swings, a continuous flow of water via fountains and spray showers and, more permanently, through light-coloured asphalt.

High quality public space is also a strong focus of new development areas such as **Seestadt Aspern** in Vienna, one of Europe's largest urban development projects. One of its main objectives is to **establish a living environment with a high feel-good factor** achieved by following various **principles and strategies**. As a result, public space accounts for 50 percent of the total site area, offering urban gardening, community clubs and other neighbourhood initiatives.

Active mobility improves the public realm in Germany



© Melanie Schade

The federal research programme **Experimental Housing and Urban Development (ExWoSt)**, supervised by the **BBSR**, supports innovative planning and measures regarding important civic and housing topics. In the project **Active Mobility in urban quarters**, project teams in four cities (Aachen, Kiel, Cologne and Leipzig) are developing mobility measures and changes to the public realm to support active travel modes such as walking and cycling.

Initial results from this project show that **neighbourhoods are changing**. In Cologne, for example, transforming a street into a cycling street and introducing a multifunctional lane replaced 50 car parking spaces with 120 bicycle parking spaces, benches and street furniture. One of the measures in the city of Kiel was creating an urban living room on a traffic island. Other measures to improve the public realm are dedicating lanes for cycling and walking, creating space for shared mobility, calming traffic and introducing crossing aids.

The neighbourhood is where everyday life unfolds



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Neighbourhoods are the areas where people live, where ideally you would like to have a nice area in the street with many services, shops, cafés, no crime and hassles. At the neighbourhood level you also often find local initiatives and groups engaged in improving certain aspects of the neighbourhood.

CIVITAS' sustainable neighbourhood mobility planning projects **Metamorphosis**, **MUV**, **Sunrise** and **Cities-4-People** provide an excellent **source of inspiration on how to transform neighbourhoods into more liveable urban spaces**. This is because cities are no longer planned just by planners, but also by residents (see also EPOMM e-update: **Neighbourhood-level transport innovations**).

An oasis of tranquility in the hustle and bustle of everyday city life



© Fred Dotter

In summer, but also in autumn the Schanigärten are in season. With their **special flair they are an important part of Austrian cities since the 18th century**.

Apart from various attempts to find out the history of the origins of Schanigärten there is also an objective definition: "A collection of tables and chairs on public ground (e.g. pavement or pedestrian zone) in front of a catering establishment for the consumption of food and drink outdoors, which has to be approved by the authorities and is subject to a fee, and is sometimes greened and decorated with flowers."

For the city dweller, Schanigärten are **a welcome opportunity to spend some time in the fresh air, while at the same time having their physical well-being taken care of**.

Up to the present day, nothing has changed in the practice that café or restaurant owners must apply to the authorities for a permit. After all, it is a question of using public space for private purposes in an economic way. Once the permit has been granted, they are asked to pay only moderately: The annual fee is from EUR 4.00/m² to up to EUR 28.00/m² in pedestrian areas and low-traffic zones.

There are also some other criteria that apply to a Schanigärten:

- The location and size must be in accordance with the surroundings
- Easy assembly and disassembly is mandatory
- Advertising is only allowed for the offer of the restaurant or café
- Plants and flowers are appreciated
- The width of the remaining pavement must be at least 2 metres
- They have to be closed at 23:00 to avoid noise nuisance

A city on a human scale, a place to live and linger



© Cesar Rubio

The concept of **Parklets promotes the aspect of human interaction**. And it fosters the debate on the re-interpretation of public space on a human scale. This idea has its roots in San Francisco, when the city's residents transformed such areas into a green living space for a day by placing picnic blankets on a rolled out lawn and allowing children to play on them.

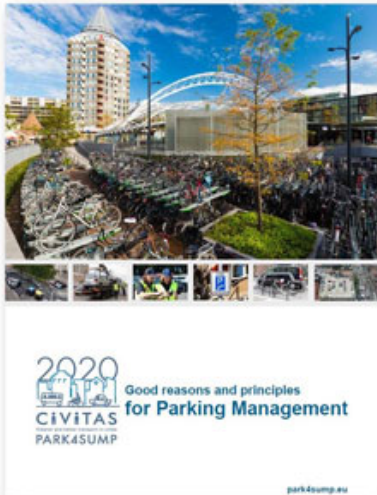
Parklets redefine the original purpose of a square: a place where interaction is central, where there is room for art, creativity and life.

Similar projects are now being implemented all over the world. Also European cities are experimenting with the alternative use of parking spaces. In the Flemish **city of Ghent**, this idea has also met with broad approval. This idea of rethinking public space has also been accepted on a political level and several initiatives have been launched.

This 'Copernican revolution' may not always take place smoothly, but it has opened up the debate on the function of public space. At the same time, the obvious character of the one-sided allocation of central locations for cars and parking spaces has definitely become the subject of this debate.

This last element is closely linked to the fact that such parks, and the ideas associated with them, have flourished in the last decade, in the truest sense of the word.

Giving urban space back to citizens instead of parked cars



The Horizon 2020 project **CIVITAS Park4SUMP** (see also EPOMM e-update: **Parking Management and SUMP: CIVITAS Park4SUMP in the focus**) recently published the brochure '**Good Reasons for Parking Space Management**'. It outlines 34 arguments for parking management, along with the basic principles of parking space management.

Related to the topic of this e-update, argument 5 is of special interest: **Providing parking is providing for immobility**. The authors state that on average, private cars are parked 80 percent of the time at their owner's home, 16 percent somewhere else and are only actually travelling around 4 percent of the time – and of course parking is provided at almost every destination. Thus, **parking supports a remarkably inefficient use of resources**. Reducing parking availability gives an incentive to people to use shared mobility (public transport, ridesharing) where vehicles are in use a much greater proportion of the time, or to walk or cycle, all of which are much more efficient uses of urban space.

The re-interpretation of public space

D.I.N.G. is an attempt to explore a **new method for democracy and active citizenship** that focuses on imagination and the transformation of public space on a human scale. All this with a focus on better and more environmentally friendly mobility in cities, and according to the 'bottom up' principle. The abbreviation D.I.N.G. has two meanings. On the one hand '**Direct Intervention with No Goal**', and on the other hand '**Direct Intervention with Natural Good**'. Central to this experiment is a work of art called **Rope**. Its inventor, the Belgian artist **lef Spincemaille**, who also holds the copyright to this work of art, calls it an open design instrument. This is a rope of 65 meters length, a diameter of 30 cm, and a weight of 196 kg.



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Rope is used as a design tool for the re-interpretation of public space. The message of Rope is clear and unmistakable: "Do something with me!"

D.I.N.G. describes four implicit functions and strengths of Rope, which form the framework for the methodology:

1. **Agora:** Rope is a sitting and playing device for citizens. Rope wants to revive this function in our modern (intelligent) cities.
2. **Democracy:** Rope is a non-judgemental personality and collects different voices. It is a living being that senses, hears and sees. Because a rope is a rope, it is not part of any party, value system or view.
3. **Imagination:** Where Rope appears, it causes a poetic disturbance of public space and leaves room for ideas to be imagined in these places.
4. **Instrument:** Rope is a tool to create something new. It is a 'rapid prototype tool' for testing ideas. Connections are made, or temporary paths are marked out. The different possibilities, forms and functions of the rope are only limited by the imagination.

Conclusion

Holistic urban planning approaches enables us to promote sustainable travel modes, facilitate interactions and improve the quality of life in urban areas. A holistic approach is also important for the residents and visitors, because attractive urban spaces, which have been designed with the greatest care and from a human perspective, **improve people's well-being** and facilitate the selection of sustainable modes of transport.

Busy urban centres are very important spaces and **require special attention** to make it easier for people to make sustainable decisions.

Holistic urban planning also requires the **participation of citizens** and the **involvement of other disciplines and interest groups**. Proven methods can help planners to achieve sustainable urban development goals. For example, placemaking is an urban planning approach that aims to strengthen the connections between people and places by emphasising the participation of the population and the responsibility of the interest groups in the process and in the results.

And last, but not least, a key to success is the **continuous development of the knowledge and ability of city planners to use new methods** and to prioritise the broad participation of citizens and disciplines in their daily planning work.

Upcoming (online) events:

- **Autonomy Paris 2020 - The International Exhibition For Sustainable Mobility Solutions**
4.- 5. November 2020
<https://www.autonomy.paris/en/>
- **IT-Trans – International Cond Exhibition 2020**
1.- 3. December 2020
<https://www.it-trans.org/en/>
- **POLIS Annual Conference**
30th November – 3rd December 2020
<https://www.polisnetwork.eu/2020-annual-polis-conference/>

