

paradise 2 go

make your way to paradise

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author: iris altfahrt

professor: tim richardson

landscape design at the university of applied arts vienna

background and research

As a landscape designer who studied in Vienna, I have always looked at the city as a field of activity for our art form. Landscape however is not commonly associated with the city. If it is it is reduced to the green areas such as parks. During my studies under professor Terzic however I learned to look at the landscape differently and figured every open space in the city to be my workspace. These spaces consist mainly of streets. The traffic infrastructure in Vienna takes up more than a third of the area that is used for buildings. The streets and the different kinds of traffic in them could therefore be a major part of landscape related work in the city.

But looking at the streets in Vienna one can find a shocking but simple truth: most of them are designed not for mankind but our beloved automobile. The space devoted to the great machine takes up 65 to 80 % of the street depending on the parking situation, while the humans are forced off the road onto the sidewalks that every planner tries to keep as small as possible and therefore only consume 20 to 35 % of the street area. But the space for cars is primarily not used for travelling but 30 to 60 % of the streets are used just for parking.

The streets should be public spaces but currently they are mainly used for the personal convenience of car drivers – a fact that has already found its way into national law. The section 7 §82 of the StraßenVerkehrsOrdnung clearly states that any other form of parking like parking boxes and other stuff is not allowed on these spaces.

Following up on this strange situation I did some research on the current situation in Vienna, theories on traffic and parking and the ‚right to the city‘ movement.

parking situation in vienna

In the entire city of Vienna parking spaces take up an area that equals the whole 3rd and 8th district of Vienna (in total 8,4 km²), an area that is larger than all the land Vienna donates to its future generation (playgrounds only consume about 6,5 km²). Looking at Ottakring the 16th district of Vienna the situation is even more extreme. The district (approximately 865 ha) has a total of 30 parks that take up an area of 4,5 ha and 37 playgrounds that need as little space as 1,7 ha. The space devoted to parking consumes about 30 ha of the district's area.

The city of Vienna has however already set the reduction of car traffic as one of the goals in the city's traffic concept (1994), the traffic master plan (2003) and the climate protection plan (1999). And because whether someone is driving by car depends very much on whether the driver expects to find a parking space at the destination and what this will cost the city has launched the parking management program, which can affect car traffic specifically and accurately at its birth.

The parking management includes short term parking with a very small fee. Only residents can purchase a permanent parking permission. The parking management is active in all districts of Vienna except for Favoriten (10), Simmering (11), Hitzing (13), Währing (18), Döbling (19), Floridsdorf (21), Donaustadt (22) and Liesing (23). Since their inclusion to this list in 2012 there are no more commuters parking in the districts 12 and 14 to 17. So momentarily there are lots of unused parking spaces in these districts. Less than 50% or at the maximum 70 % of the parking spaces are used. In comparison before 2012 there were areas with more than 100 % usage of parking spaces (counting falsely parked cars). A fact that can also be seen at the statistics of commuters. Only 21 % of them use the public transportation system to reach the city, whereas only 32,4 % of the citizens of Vienna own a car. But still 29 % of all trips made in the city are done so by choosing the car.

Conclusion

The current parking situation of Vienna is very controversial. On one hand lots of public space (as all the parking spaces in garages are not included in the statistics) is devoted to parking cars, whilst on the other hand the government tries to reduce the number of people using them. At the same time any other use of these spaces other than parking is prohibited by law. Furthermore the need for green spaces in densely built districts, especially in Ottakring, is apparent. The project „paradise 2 go“ not only provides the needed gardens and parks in the districts, but also allows the two thirds of Vienna citizens who do not own a car to also use the parking space for their own benefit, as well as everyone else's. The „paradises 2 go“ will also take over the newly found empty spaces, where no more commuters park and prevent them and the entire city from being taken over by even more cars.

traffic problems or concerning parking

The traffic problems and traffic itself have been thoroughly researched by Hermann Knoflachner, who is a professor at the Vienna University of Technology. In his research he states the three main dogmata of the belief in the car being the assumed benefit of freedom, the growth of personal mobility and that increased speed of cars saves time. But then he renounces all these points through research and gives very figurative examples:

1: Cars reduce the freedom of human kind as can be illustrated by playgrounds next to the public road. Here the children need to be kept in cages so that the drivers can roam freely. Furthermore it produces noise, dust and air pollution and hazardous environments. Driving a car for one hour costs at least 40min of a person's lifetime, when one takes into account the lifetime lost through premature death by victims of accidents and air pollution.

2: As the number of trips by car increases, the number of trips on foot, by cycle and public transport decreases. There is therefore no gain in mobility, just a shift in the means to an end.

3: There is also no time saved through the usage of cars, as many studies show, because the distance of trips has increased instead, not to mention the traffic jams, that cost travelling time. But every solution to these so-called traffic problems, like the construction of broader highways and by-passes only increased the jams, because more space will only increase the traffic on these roads as well as the traffic on other roads, as many studies have proven.

As a conclusion to all his research he states that because driving a car compared to walking only needs a fraction of body energy in the same period of time, the result is the following attitude: Is a car in the immediate proximity of human activity, then no rational person can escape this incentive. If there is ample parking available, then people already take the car for distances of 100m in 50% of the cases and avoid walking. The cause (and solution) of today's traffic problems therefore lies with the parking spaces nearby. 'There, the freedom must be recaptured – then we will recover it in the public space as well.' (Knoflach: Stehzeuge – Fahrzeuge, 2009)

Conclusion

Even though some of this research dates back over twenty years, politicians and traffic planners continue on the road towards a better environment for cars. Even the simple suggestion of banning the parked car from the public space into centralized garages is denied by them. At this point the project 'paradise 2 go' takes over. Because of the organization form of the design it has the power to slowly take over the public space. But it will be done by the involvement of the citizens and done so by choice and not by dictation from above, which will prove very helpful in the urban reawakening to come.

public space or the right to the city

Some of the artists and theorists mentioned above use Lefèbvres slogan 'right to the city' as their theoretical background. His theories on public spaces, can be described as follows: There is not one public sphere as Jürgen Habermas suggests, but a number of different spheres (called by different names in different studies, but I will simply use the plural form to avoid confusion), which can be different from each other and interact, overlap and imply each other. Each sphere resembles an observer with his or her experiences and contexts of origin. These different activities different people pursue in the public sphere and the masses of people that step on each other's toes, together with the agglomeration of diverse gathered objects, either side by side or overlying, are the essence of the city. The industrial rationality has worked against these individualities and every kind of naturalness and did its best to level them out. The outcome is a monotonous city structure in most parts of the city, where the only objects that can be found are parked cars. The activities of the human race are limited to the necessities. But there can also be two other kinds of activities done in the public space (the physical realm): optional and social activities.

The necessary activities don't leave a choice. They include going to school or work (walking to the car) and running an errand or waiting for the bus. The optional activities are pursued when the conditions of the public space and time allow it. They include taking a walk (not just with a dog), sitting, standing, sunbathing, playing, and so on. These activities are dependent on the exterior conditions, such as weather and the design of the public space. The social activities can only occur if people are present, because they include all the activities that result of people meeting each other. They include greetings, conversations, children playing together and so on. Simply put they occur everytime two people meet, because even if they are strangers some sort of contact is happening. These activities describe the moment of overlapping public spheres and therefore the essence of the city.

These social activities were greatly demised by the automobile. Not only are the streets nowadays monotonous but the elevated speed and isolation from the outside of the car do not allow for this kind of communication. Furthermore the presence of the cars decreases the safety on the streets immensely and by doing so the remaining pedestrians only perform necessary activities as I already stated above. The context of the activities done in the public is of course far more complex, but needless to say the domination of the car is the main culprit for the decline of public spheres, as anyone can see if comparing a car street and a pedestrian zone.

To overcome these monotonous city structures full of parked cars, Lefèbvre demands to oppose it with different spheres that design the public space with reason (logos, as Lefèbvre calls it). Human and nature must find the way back into unity. This can only work through the means of artistic spheres, because the creative moment precedes the logic of planning. This artistic act however does not necessarily mean a fixed intervention but rather has to be seen as another public sphere, which is in contact with the rest of the public spheres and can thereby create change.

Conclusion

Just as Lefèbvre suggests my vision of „paradise 2 go“ is an artistic sphere that allows different and individual statements and tries to bring human kind and the city again closer to nature. Not so however by turning back, but by leading the way to a new and better future, with cars reduced in numbers and activities induced streets. Because if everyday life is not changed the world won't change either.

international park(ing) day

The artistic response to these parking problems and the ideas of Lefèbvre is of course already out there in the world. In Vienna there is one project called 'Krongarten' which transforms a parking lane into a garden every summer. Looking worldwide there are of course more projects that are converting parking spaces into something else. They are organized under the name 'international park(ing) day'. Following an intervention of the Rebar group which took place in San Francisco in 2005 people around the world use parking spaces in their cities as small parks on the second to last Friday in September. But these projects only exist for a few hours at most.

In their manifesto the Rebar group also calls upon the creative acts to re-value the public parking space, just like Lefèbvre suggests. They redefine it as a fertile terrain for creative social, political and artistic experimentation.

But for this new value system to take over they state four core strands of their practice: tactical, generous, authentic and absurd urbanism. The tactical urbanism is manifested in actions that temporarily project new values on a space. The generous urbanism is every act that is stripped of commercial agendas, with the goal to relate public situations between strangers, that produce a new cultural value. The authentic urbanism is an action with no ulterior motive, but must provide an honest, generous public service. The absurd urbanism is created by reorganizing familiar objects in an unfamiliar way, such as creating a park in a metered parking space. With this in mind they hope to propose lightly that change is required.

At the end of their manifesto they conclude, that, the central question behind the parking day is, if this experiment can become a tactical turning point in urban structure itself.

Conclusion

After participating myself on the Vienna platform of the parking day ,park!platz!play!' I can honestly say that it will never become such a turning point at least not in Vienna. The Rebar group thinks of the parking day as a great success, but I found it to be a waste of resources. Maybe the situation is different in certain parts of North America where the people really were no longer able to remember a life on the streets, but in Europe and especially in Vienna the temporary intervention cannot hope to accomplish anything in the long run. I therefore decided to create a design that can lead the city of Vienna into an urban reawakening. A design which doesn't change everything at once or disrupts the ordinary on a huge scale but gradually frees the city's public space from cars. The design ,paradise2go' is thought of as a process that will take full effect in due time.

design

idea of paradise 2 go

After this research I reached the conclusion that temporary installations and interventions are not the ideal way to create a city wide urban reawakening. A lasting solution is needed to address these problems and start the process of change. One time actionism is a great way to start a discussion that can lead to a permanent change, but the subject of traffic and parking in Vienna has proven to be invincible against these artistic demonstrations. Therefore I created a design that can take over the city in the long run.

„Paradise 2 go“ is a longterm social intervention in the streets of Vienna featuring a small piece of green on top of trailers that remain functional. Therefore the trailers can be moved about the streets at all times. As an additional bonus a trailer can be parked on a public street legally without even paying a fee. The deployment is based on the concepts of „car 2 go“ and „zip cars“. These concepts consist of a fleet of cars, that can be used by everyone if needed provided that they are registered with the company providing the cars. There are more than 700 cars in the entire city of Vienna. But why should the need of a car outweigh the need of a garden. As I stated before the wish for a garden does exist in cities but is always neglected. For these people the concept of „paradise 2 go“ is the perfect solution. But not only those who wish for their own piece of green are the target group, but all those people who do not want to put up with the cars as the dominant appearance of the public space or with the disappearance of people into their homes or offices, but who want to recapture the life in the city, where walking in the street is no longer a dangerous adventure but a pleasant communicative experience.

components of paradise 2 go

The design of the 'paradise 2 go' is that of a modular system. Different predefined components allow for a personalised design of each individual trailer. These components include benches, tables, beds, stairs, playground equipment and raising lifts for wheelchairs or perambulators, as well as pergolas, fences and different types of flooring. These components are easily attached to the trailer by existing screw holes. The customisation of this trailer can be done using an online platform or by a designer from the providing company. The design of the components also allows an easy reorganization on top of the trailer.

The trailer can either stand on its own as a whole garden or different trailers can easily be put together thereby creating an entire park. Because the trailers remain movable the entire park can easily be relocated throughout the district or neighbourhood, following for example festivities („from Grätzelfest to Grätzelfest“). The trailers can also be rearranged and exchanged at any time to adapt the park as needed or to create a different appearance from time to time.

Concerning the planting of the trailers two options are possible: One focuses on flowerbeds with perennials, shrubs and trees, while the other focuses on food production. The trailers with the latter option are not planted, but the appropriate preparations can be made.

process of paradise 2 go

The concept envisages initially 200 individual trailers, that are situated permanently in the district Ottakring. They will take up approximately 1 % of the districts parking spaces. Because there are currently 30 to 50 % unused parking spaces in the district due to the parking management they won't interfere with the search for parking spaces and will therefore be welcomed by the citizens who do not have the best supply of parks and gardens in the area. As soon as the trailers are accepted in Ottakring in a next step all the other districts will be provided with their 'paradise 2 go' trailers and over time their numbers will increase.

The trailers are already equipped with preconfigured gardens that allow different uses. The location of the gardens and their components can be found on a map on an online platform. People can rent a garden by day, weekend, week, month or growing season. The gardens can be used on every public parking space in Vienna and after use just left there. The process of doing so includes registering for the 'paradise 2 go' project and then to reserve the garden for a defined time period on the online platform. People can choose to collect the garden themselves or the garden is brought to the agreed place and time for an additional fee. After use the trailer can be left at any public parking space.

In addition to the 200 permanent 'paradises 2 go' the Gebietsbetreuung, an investor or other organization such as a school or kindergarten can purchase or rent a number of trailers to build larger gardens or parks. And of course a personalised garden on a trailer can also be built and bought at all times.

So soon small gardens on trailers and gardens on entire parking lanes will be added to the districts and soon after the entire cities façade.

design of paradise 2 go

The 200 kick off trailers will have four main designs aimed at different uses. But each design can differ thanks to different components like benches, raising lifts for wheelchairs available and of course different planting. In the course of time more more designs for new uses will be left around the city.

recreation

The first design of the trailer garden is especially made for recreation. Three sides of the trailer are sheltered by planting, while one side remains open for social communication with pedestrians on the walkway. One half of the trailer is designed for sitting and relaxing, and the other half is equipped with a small piece of lawn, allowing children to play, to bathe in the sun and so on...

party

The second design is the perfect garden for breaks and parties. The open space in the center of the trailer allows free movement for dancing or just standing together. Still benches on the sides invite the users to sit together or watch the others.

parking café

The third design targets small restaurant businesses such as bars, and cafés, because it is a sidewalk café built on a trailer. This design enables them to offer outdoor seating even in streets where it is otherwise not possible.

schrebergärtner

The forth design can only be rented for the whole growing season as it is designed for people to grow their own food. Therefore the planting material is not included in this design.

maintenance

The maintenance is done by the long term hirers themselves or a service team. The service team also manages the garden's maintenance for unrented or short term rented trailers. The trailers left on the streets are secured with a lock device to prevent unauthorised use.

investors

On the trailer's sides there is space for an organisation to be mentioned as honourable sponsor. So any business can sponsor a paradise 2 go for this honourable mentioning on the trailers' side. Because the trailers are moving around the city the advertisement can be seen at a lot of places, which should encourage businesses to sponsor the „paradises 2 go“.

future developement

Because the „paradise 2 go“ project is meant to create a long term change in the city of Vienna, the design and functionality will also change over time. Once the trailers are established in the city there will be special events to encourage new ideas and to promote the idea in other cities and countries with similar needs to Vienna. There will be workshops on how to improve the designs and how to create one oneself and an annual award for the best „paradise 2 go“ design as well as a caravan of all the participants in this event, and so on.

conclusion

The everyday scene of streets packed with parking cars has led me to the desire to create a garden on a trailer to stir up this monotonous sight. But after developing the project ,paradise 2 go', it is no longer the simple design idea that it started out as, but stands now as an urban tool that will lead the city of Vienna into a new era of urban traffic, urban planning and urban life altogether. The design remains simple as only a few components are used. But these components can transform a single parking space or a single parking lane in a single street as well as an entire grätzel into a blooming and productive landscape.

As all great revolutions in history the ,paradises 2 go' will have their problems and struggles as they have to deal with flower thieves and perhaps still scowling car drivers looking for a parking space, but because of all the positive features and side affects, such as reducing traffic and the pleasant climate change, I have no doubt it will prevail.

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