

URBACT



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Interreg

GreenPlace

INSPIRING PRACTICES on CIRCULAR CITIES

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INTRODUCTION

The GreenPlace network

GreenPlace is an URBACT network consisting of ten partners who aim at developing a set of activities for "recycling" unused urban areas, using social participation tools. The project takes into account not only the regional specificities and conditions of each of the partners but also introduces greenery as a key factor in limiting climate change in urban areas. It is running from July 2023 to December 2025.

It is led by the City of Wroclaw (Poland) and is composed of 9 project partners:

- Boulogne-sur-mer Développement Côte d'Opale - France
- Bucharest Metropolitan Area Intercommunity Development Association - Romania
- Cehegín - Spain
- Limerick - Ireland
- Löbau - Germany
- Nitra - Slovakia
- Onda - Spain
- Quarto d'Altino - Italy
- Vila Nova de Poiares - Portugal

More information and contacts : <https://urbact.eu/networks/greenplace>.

Overview of the Inspiring practices on Community Engagement

The practices presented here were exchanged during the Core Network Meeting of the GreenPlace Network which took place on 18-19 June 2024 in Bucharest, Romania.

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DRAINING PAVEMENT USING SCALLOP SHELL WASTE

Identity

- Wimereux, France
- 6 039 inhabitants,
7.71 km²
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJMA6LnjK7M>



Initial challenge

Wimereux is a seaside resort located North of Boulogne-sur-mer. It had been affected by heavy rains which overwhelmed the sewage system which consequently led to a poor bathing water quality. At the same time, the city was in need of a renovated an old car park in its centre, square Foch.

Proposed solution

As part of the Interreg Water Resilient Cities (WRC), in 2019, the car park has been refurbished/created in an innovative way: it was paved with permeable pavement partly made of scallop waste, largely available, due to the nearby sea. The pavement is a « normal draining pavement », yet, composed of 30% of shells, the rest being quartz, which saves the need for new material.

In addition, a system of tunnels was installed under the car park to buffer heavy rains: is easy to clean through an innovative underground basin, where water is stored and filtered. Inside the basin, 1.90-metre-high arches enable to maintain the basin and clear it of sand. It offers 1000m³ of new buffering capacity.

The overall cost of the car park accounted for 3.5 millions euros, financed by ERDF at 60% (interreg2seas project).

Changes it brought

The new car park, with its 50 places, is a success: it contributes to the public realm quality, heavy rains are buffered and no longer overwhelm the sewage system, therefore bathing water quality has been improved.

At the same time, it promotes short supply chain and reuse of local material.

Users are also happy with the esthetical aspect of the pavement which make the shells visible from the inside.

As part of the WRC project, Wimereux demonstrated one of the ways sustainable urban drainage can be retrofitted in public areas normally constrained by existing uses and infrastructure (above or below ground), or 'historic environment' protection. As a result, circular economy sector was developed at the scale of the Hauts de France Region.

Transfer potential

More expensive than ordinary draining pavement, because of its small scale, so you need high political commitment and/or specific grant to do it.

It is also more complex than usual pavement because of treatment and storage of shell waste.

Main takeaways

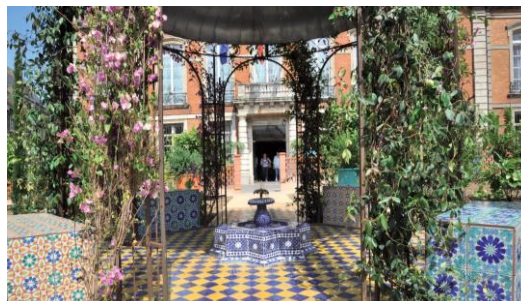
It is important to use any refurbishment to make your soil more permeable; as soon as new investment projects are planned, think ahead about any opportunity you will have to buffer the water on site instead of sending it to sewage systems.



A SEASONAL ATTRACTIVE GARDEN AT THE HEART OF THE OLD TOWN

Identity

- Boulogne-sur-mer, France
- 40 900 inhabitants, 8.42 km²
- <https://jardins.boulogne-sur-mer.fr/jardins-ephemeres/>
- <https://jardins.boulogne-sur-mer.fr/infos-pratiques/>



Initial challenge

The old town of Boulogne-sur-mer is overwhelmed with cars for the benefits of the local inhabitants as well as tourists.

Proposed solution

The initial idea was to remove cars from the square in front of the town hall: every year since 2007, a new garden has been created. The idea was launched by the city of Boulogne, created each year by the parks and garden director.

The first garden only remained over the summer 2007: it was 540 square metres wide and was just a lawn with different flowers in pots. Then every year more and more innovative gardens have been created on a wider space - now developed over 1000 square metres – and wider timeframe – now from June to November. The rest of the year, it remains a simple garden, while being decorated for Christmas.

A new theme is designed for each season (e.g. Egyptology, “green” - with a play of words with homonyms).

Plants are produced by the parks and gardens municipal staff, benches are owned and customised every year, any purchased tree/ bush is then replanted elsewhere in town. The additional furniture is either made by the staff or rented.

The yearly cost of the garden is 50 000€ with additional staff cost, taken from local budget.

Changes it brought

The transformation of the square creates a new dynamics to the city centre favourable to recreation activities, making it a nicer place to live as well as attractive, via renewed activities. Accessibility to commercial activities and public services for less mobile people is granted by mineral path (this year made with glass).

People expect the new garden every year, tourists also come to Boulogne to see the garden, nobody would ever think of parking in front of the town hall!

It is also a biodiversity support

Transfer potential

It is rather easy to transfer anywhere

A strong political commitment is important

Main takeaways

- When you remove parking space, you have to offer an added value to the inhabitants
- New idea every year, people expect something new



A GREEN PARK FOR ALL REPLACING RUINS IN THE CITY CENTRE

Identity

- Cehegín, Spain
- 14,710 inhabitants , 292.7 km²
- More details [here](#) and [here](#)
- Contact for this project [here](#)



Initial challenge

The abandonment of the houses in the old town has caused the area of this Ejido to be slowly abandoned in the 1950s and to become totally derelict in the 1980s. This has led to a lack of safety and security in the area, not to mention the visual impact. This gap in the urban space caused a lack of communication between the lower and upper parts of the historic centre. In addition, there were hardly any green areas in the old town, which was dominated by housing, making it a heat island. Last but not least, the city was lacking a public facility capable of attracting talent to the municipality.

Proposed solution

In 2015, "El Coso" garden project sought to address these challenges while contributing to mitigating climate change and using natural resources. The project was the result of a public competition won by young architects. In addition, this work was awarded 8 times for its architectural quality. It is composed of green space around a central square, with a series of platforms and ramps to connect the lower and upper areas, improving accessibility to the site, as well as the creation of parking spaces and a municipal office building. The garden has a series of ponds, which are used to purify wastewater from the adjoining dwellings. This water, together with rainwater, is used to irrigate the green areas, which in turn attract fauna, forming an ecosystem of its own within the urban fabric. "El Coso" is both a public space and a business incubator for the municipality consisting of offices, meeting rooms, communal coworking spaces and municipal services..

Changes it brought

"El Coso" is one of the few green areas in the municipality. This garden is now a safe meeting place for the people of the neighbourhood. The project sought to reconnect this area with the city center, while providing a compact solution in an area with strong height differences . There are currently three entrepreneurial companies working inside the building.

Transfer potential

It is difficult to prepare a design ideas competition for the design of the projects in order to obtain innovative ideas for the regeneration of areas while reducing their climate impact.

Main takeaways

Using rainwater to irrigate green areas reduces municipal water consumption.

More shade should have been provided and other cooler materials than concrete should have been used. More shade is needed on the site



MEANWHILE USE

Identity

- Limerick, Ireland
- Population 102,287, 61.3km²
- <https://www.live95fm.ie/news/buzz/first-look-at-transformation-of-limerick-city-eyesore-released/>



Initial challenge

There are a number of locations in Limerick city centre where buildings have been abandoned and which appear derelict and not visually pleasing. One of these buildings is located in a highly visible location on the waterfront in the city, where there is very little footfall or activity in the area.

Proposed solution

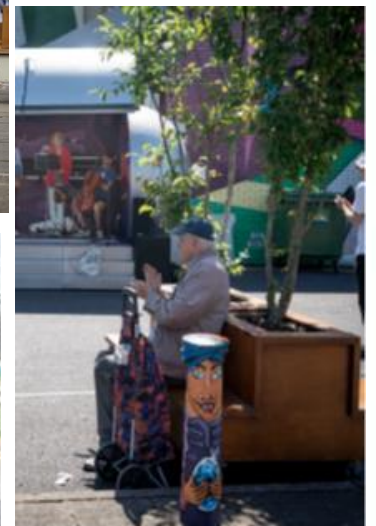
The building had been purchased by the University of Limerick to have a presence in the city and which would also bring footfall to the area. The building was very drab in its appearance and would benefit from interventions. It was considered that painting the building could be an option and the University in conjunction with the Council engaged an artist to prepare a bright and quirky design to enhance the visual of the building. It was also considered that the bollards in front of the buildings could also be painted, and an artist was also engaged for this. A number of other interventions were considered, such as placing table tennis tables and mobile tree planters with integrated seating in the vicinity, which would encourage people to dwell in the area and enjoy the views of the river.

Changes it brought

There was an instant visual improvement in the area. The public were very curious about the space, as it was highly visible from across the river and very eye catching and attractive to look at. This led to people wishing to visit the space and see the characters that had been painted on the bollards. It resulted in the public playing table tennis and people hanging about enjoying the space. There is constant footfall in the area and small events are now being held in the space.

Transfer potential

This can be replicated for any unsightly building in an area and is easily transferable. Similarly, artists can be invited in any city to transform everyday city items like bollards or service cabinets into bright colourful attractions.



Main takeaways

- How a simple intervention can transform an area.
- How bright colours can lift an area.
- The need for seating to encourage dwell time.



NATURAL PLAY SITES

Identity

- Limerick , Ireland
- 102, 287 inhabitants , 61.3km²
- <https://www.limerick.ie/council/services/business-and-economy/eu-programmes/gogreenroutes>



Initial challenge

Limerick City and County Council manage extensive areas of green space, and many of the Council managed green areas particularly in residential developments are, small, fragmented , poorly linked and maintained , legacy of past development. The amenity, health and environmental potential of these green spaces is underdeveloped.

Areas lacked amenity value and have no nearby park. Limerick City and County Council believe that local authorities can significantly influence how people use green spaces, as well as how to improve their potential to deliver mental health benefits.

There is an increasing demand from the public and the elected members for additional and improved play spaces for communities. With previous plastic playground designs there was no opportunity to engage children in nature. Also, with the increasing costs of material there is limited budgets/funding available for additional playgrounds.

Proposed solution

To enhance urban greenspaces in Limerick and to maximise the positive use of these spaces. Facilities for children's play do not always have to consist solely of traditional playground equipment, they can be an interesting and natural environment with features such as sensory gardens, bushes, and an interestingly placed tree trunk. Trees that were felled as part of other Council projects were repurposed as natural play sites, and used as climbing frames, stepping stones, seating. Living Willow structures were included in some designs.

Changes it brought

The natural play sites have been warmly welcomed and the Council has been requested for additional sites in the city area. For example, the Castletroy Greenway, a natural play site, funded by the [Go Green Routes Horizon 2020](#) project, is very successful and has revived the concept of natural play in Limerick.

It is clear that the public sees the benefits of natural play and the importance of engaging with nature. An increase in recreational activities and outdoor play. One of the key advantages of natural playgrounds is their minimal impact on natural resources. Unlike traditional playgrounds, which are often made from synthetic materials. The creation of new mini parks will have a long-term positive impact for local communities, providing access to amenity green space.

Transfer potential

Easily transferable, can be implemented on any green space. All materials are readily available.

Main takeaways

- Play spaces do not need to cost a lot of money.
- Play can be very simple with simple materials



GREEN COLOUR FOR RECYCLED MATERIAL FOR INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUNDS

Identity

- Nitra, Slovakia
- 77 000 inhabitants, 100.48 km²
- <https://www.kompan.com/en/int/greener-playgrounds/the-footprint-of-a-playground>



Initial challenge

The largest part of waste is generated in the construction industry. In particular, the lion's share of a playground's climate footprint is caused by the extraction and processing of virgin resources to produce materials such as steel, aluminium and plastic.

Therefore, even when building elements of green infrastructure, it is necessary to choose solutions that reduce the carbon footprint. It is also important to communicate about it and make it visible

Proposed solution

When choosing a greener playground solution, it is important to know the climate impact of the playground equipment. The information should be available in the standard product sheets of the companies producing the playground elements, they should indicate the total CO₂ consumption. The calculation method must be verified by a third party. Transparency through quantifiable data is key to making more sustainable choices.

During the reconstruction of a park, the City of Nitra built two new playgrounds. The selection of elements was subject not only to the idea of playgrounds, but also to the emphasis on the ecological footprint of the products. Some playground products from special green editions are made from up to 95% recycled materials: ocean waste, used textiles, used plastic bags, etc. These specific recycled elements are showcased with the use of a green colour.

Changes it brought

Green products in the playgrounds have approx. 50% reduction in carbon emissions compared to traditional products made from original sources. The criterion of using ecological materials has become an advantageous criterion for quality companies in public procurement. Recycled material is visible in public space and its use.

Transfer potential

The idea of reducing the carbon footprint of the products that the city uses in its public spaces is easily applicable to any municipality, but you need the political will, adequate Public procurement and an existing market offer.

Main takeaways

Criteria for reducing the carbon footprint must be part of the office's process and project management and also a criterion in transparent public procurement.



RECYCLING HEARTS FOR URBAN FURNITURE

Identity

- Onda (Spain)
- 25 547 (2023), 108.42 km²
- More information [here](#)
- proyectoeseuropeos@onda.es



Initial challenge

In recent years, Onda City Council has become more involved than ever in European policies, especially those related to the European Green Deal and adaptation to climate change, with the aim of making the city of Onda a greener and more sustainable place. To this end, in addition to the commitment and initiative of local public administrations, it is essential to promote the participation and involvement of citizens in this regard. An example of citizens commitment is their attitude to recycling practices.

Proposed solution

The Onda City Council decided to install, with municipal funds (a total of around €8,500), attractive (heart-shaped) containers for recycling bottle caps at various locations in the city. These recycled caps will later be transformed into street furniture (benches, litter bins, planters).

Changes it brought

The city of Onda now has new, more attractive and durable street furniture as the plastic used is very durable compared to other materials such as wood. To date, 12 pieces of furniture have been built. There has also been a significant increase in public awareness of recycling practices. In fact, the containers have been so successful recently that the City Council no longer knows where to place the new furniture.

Transfer potential

The practice is easily replicable, as the containers can be placed in any town or village and their installation is not excessively expensive. However, it is important to bear in mind that the subsequent transformation of the corks into furniture can be less economical.



Main takeaways

- Small actions can have big results
- It is essential to encourage the involvement of citizens in order to get a good response from them



A SMART CITY FOR A SMART USE OF RESOURCES

Identity

- Onda (Spain)
- 25 547 (2023), 108.42 km²
- More information [here](#)
- proyectoeseuropeos@onda.es



Initial challenge

To improve the city and the quality of life of its citizens, Onda City Council needed to respond more effectively and sustainably to the challenges facing the city of Onda as well as improve the efficiency of its urban management.

Proposed solution

The Onda City Council decided to develop a Smart City plan with the aim of starting the transformation of the municipality into a Smart City. It contains measures divided into 5 action areas: energy, environment, tourism and mobility. It begins with an analysis of the municipality's initial situation through data collection and continues with an analysis to identify and select actions (divided into 4 themes: Mobility, Energy, Tourism and Environment), defining the criteria for their selection, proposing actions and coordinating them with other municipal plans. Data collection will be at the service of citizens.

Changes it brought

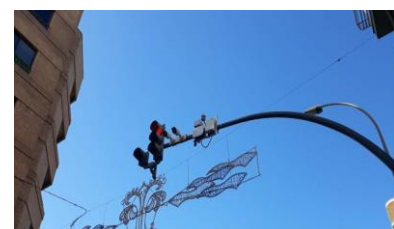
The information provided by the various devices and technologies that form part of the strategy has improved the quality of life for citizens, optimised public services, improved environmental sustainability and enabled the City Council to make better decisions. Examples of the tools used are the sensors installed in traffic lights to better monitor and manage traffic; the sensors installed in different parts of the city, such as industrial areas, to monitor air quality and noise or the digital and visible signalization and information for citizens in public spaces.

Transfer potential

The plan is easily replicable in other communities. However, it requires infrastructure, policies and citizen and political involvement.

Main takeaways

- The importance of a comprehensive approach: it is not just about technology but also about social, economic and environmental aspects
- The importance of involving citizens
- The importance of data management in municipal decision-making



CHANGING AN OLD TRAM DEPOT INTO A CIRCULAR, CULTURAL AND LOCAL INITIATIVES CENTER

Identity

- Wrocław, Poland
- [893 506 inhabitants](#), 292.81 km²
- [More about Czasoprzestrzeń](#)
- [Czasoprzestrzeń promotional video](#)
- [Czasoprzestrzeń manager contact](#)

Initial challenge

The Dabie depot, once a facility for parking and repairing streetcars and buses, was abandoned by the municipal transportation company in 2015 due to technical issues. For the next two years, the historic building stood empty and deteriorated. Various plans for its sale and commercialization were proposed. The depot was situated in a post-industrial area hugely underutilized and lacking both identity and a sense of connection to the local residents.



Proposed solution

The Civic Participation Division of Wrocław's Municipality opted to lease the old depot to a non-governmental organization – Tratwa Association in collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts and Wrocław University of Technology. The organization has been transforming the former depot into a hub for cultural and social activities since 2017. To fund these efforts, the association hosts various commercial events, such as plant and fashion fairs, local product markets, and concerts. The revenue generated from these events is used for the upkeep and renovation of the facility, as well as for organizing their own initiatives. Additionally, the city provides a grant to support the renovation work. In 2023 the organization received 2,2mln PLN through a call for proposals based on Article 4, Section 1, Points 13, 14, 15, 16, 27, and Article 12 of the Act of April 24, 2003, on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work.

Changes it brought

The former Dabie Depot changed into a The Center for Young Culture and Local Initiatives – CZASOPRZESTRZEŃ. The center hosts a wide variety of events organized by local leaders, art collectives and volunteers. It gathers people from all walks of life: families with children, young people, elders, foreigners living and visiting the city. In 2022, more than 68 thousand people visited the place. Apart from usual initiatives, the venue was turned into a warehouse for pandemic control supplies during Covid - 19 outbreak and two years later into a hub for humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees. Czasoprzestrzeń welcomes artists, musicians, performers, and creatives to share their talents through exhibitions and shows. Among many initiatives that emerged there are for example garage sales, photography lessons, groups discussions about art, cinema and architecture and wide variety of workshops. The Czasoprzestrzeń community actively engages in greening the post-industrial spaces, taking care of the permaculture garden and hosting free workshops (several times a year) for everyone interested in urban gardening. Another series of workshops focuses on transforming the superfluous and unwanted wooden pallets into „neighbourhood benches” which fits into the circular approaches of reuse.

Transfer potential

Identifying similar spaces for cultural and local initiatives, Engaging and working with local stakeholders (governmental, NGO, academic, local communities), developing a sustainable business model as well as securing available funding.

Tailoring the project to align with the distinctive features of the new community while fostering engagement through their active participation in planning and decision-making.

Main takeaways

The former tram depots can offer the richness of the possibilities and be embraced by circular approaches of reuse of the buildings and materials, as well as greening available space for the implementation of a cultural and local initiatives centre.

