Chapter 15: Tactical urbanism, urban acupuncture and small-scale projects

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Introduction

In each of the previous four chapters, we have mainly focused on projects of a significant scale – long river banks and coastline redevelopment projects, wetland parks and extensive projects on ports and former docklands sites. While there has been some variation in scale in those examples, what has characterised them in general is that they are complete designs of the spaces they occupy, planned and designed to change almost the entire area. The budgetary demands on both capital funding to construct them and revenue funding to maintain them are also generally rather large. As projects, they take a lot of effort to achieve final success – from initial organisation of architectural competitions (where these are used), developing plans and design ideas, to final design, construction and on into post-completion management and maintenance. Do improvements made to places with the aim of promoting health and well-being always have to occupy extensive areas and be expensive projects? In this chapter, we explore other ways of approaching such problems, through designs that apply much more minimal solutions. These solutions can easily be tested and modified, can be flexible and even temporary and can cost a mere fraction of the sums spent on some of the projects reviewed in Chapters 11–14. We have demonstrated in the cases presented in the previous chapters that formal open public spaces near water can offer benefits for health and well-being. This chapter illustrates to what extent informal, possibly underused, urban blue spaces can be used by people for recreational purposes without any significant infrastructure and little or no management.

Many cities today contain significant areas of post-industrial or waste land near water (Unt and Bell, 2014; Pearsall and Lucas, 2014), often former abandoned industrial or harbour areas which, despite the safety and other risks involved, may be popular with local people for various types of activities. This land may be reserved in urban plans for development at some time in the future as a new public space or a residential, commercial or industrial area, but what of the potential between now and that often distant time in the future?

As well as these vacant, “unused” spaces, there are also many existing public spaces which lack up-to-date infrastructure to satisfy local demands. There are numerous examples of such situations: a river promenade designed some decades ago and still waiting for funds or ideas before it can be revitalised; a historical city core where the existing urban context must be protected and where major redesign or adding a new function could be difficult or impossible because of heritage conservation regulations; the run-down park where there are no resources for revitalisation and where vandalism or anti-social activities deter some types of users, such as women, parents with children or older people. There may also be various natural areas which have never been developed or made officially accessible to the public, although they also may provide health benefits to people who use them. In these cases, visitors may spontaneously use the site or existing elements on the site for recreation (Unt and Bell, 2014; Mathey et al., 2018), such as old concrete blocks for sitting, or they provide their own informal infrastructure, such as self-made seating

around a fireplace, thus manifesting their attachment to and appropriation of the space (Lara-Hernandez and Melis, 2018). Such places allow people, often from deprived areas, to escape from their stresses (Rupprecht et al., 2015). These places are often used in a number of different ways, such as walking, sport activities, being alone, contemplation, sunbathing and swimming (Unt and Bell, 2014). These are places waiting for change, for the future, which is still undefined, yet in need of some degree of improvement to uncover their potential for promoting different activities and health and well-being.

In order to provide an up-to-date function for such places, different approaches may be used. These include concepts based on bottom-up, sometimes “guerrilla”, methods (Marletto and Sillig, 2019); they may involve very temporary solutions aimed at providing space for activities over a weekend (“pop-up landscapes”). Both may be considered unofficial or even illegal, and authorities may respond by either demolishing or subsequently adopting them. In this chapter, we consider several approaches which have become popular practices in recent years as means of creating places on a small budget, often for specific purposes. In this chapter, we identify and describe three such approaches that are superficially similar and which sometimes overlap: *tactical urbanism*, *urban acupuncture* and *small-scale projects*.

Tactical urbanism

Tactical urbanism unites a range of planning and design approaches to address a problem of a lack of infrastructure with low-cost, often small-size, sometimes even temporary or non-spatial means. Tactical urbanism is often also referred to as guerrilla urbanism, pop-up urbanism, city repair or DIY (do-it-yourself) urbanism. The term was coined in 1984 in a translation of a book by Michel Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, where he used the term to distinguish the scale of practices he was describing from “strategic urbanism”. Its current usage was broadly popularised by Mike Lydon, an American urban planner, who has written the seminal book on the subject together with Tony Garcia (2015). Another set of actions which helped to establish the credibility of the approach and application came through the activities of the New Urbanist “CNU NextGen” group, who adopted it at a meeting in New Orleans in the United States in 2010 as one means to help to deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which saw many sections of the city still abandoned several years later. The method was also used in Christchurch in New Zealand following the earthquake there.

Tactical urbanism includes interventions or actions ranging from temporary appropriation (Lara-Hernandez and Melis, 2018), including the use of spaces for street food or events, to the construction of small-scale, low-cost or temporary interventions. These types of interventions can also be placed on a scale of bottom-up to top-down planning approaches. The bottom-up or guerrilla types of interventions typically originate in urban environments with no or little planning interest and lack of control: archetypical bottom-up examples where tactical urbanism has been a powerful agent in urban renewal can be found in cities like Detroit in the United States and Berlin in Germany.

One of the projects described in this chapter is the Paris Plages – a widely known European example of a long-running tactical urbanism intervention. A similar summer project was initiated in Saint-Quentin in the Aisne region of France some years earlier, in 1996, before the actual term ‘tactical urbanism’ was widely adopted. This intervention made Saint-Quentin the pioneer European city for organising what has become a popular practice: the seasonal beach in the “normal” public space. The demands placed on public spaces in parts of the city of 60,000 people encouraged the municipality to transform the Place de l’Hotel de Ville (Town Hall Square) into a sandy beach, with an orchestrated programme of, for example, sports competitions, cultural events and temporary pools (Figure 15.1). This event has continued every year since 1996, and many cities and communities in France and Europe have also taken up this idea. For more than a decade, these approaches, once they demonstrated their success as catalysts for urban renewal, have also been appropriated by city authorities and applied in an official way as top-down planning instruments.

The approach of tactical urbanism is now applied widely in practice (Lydon and Garcia, 2015). Reason for such success might include the complexity of urban space and urban processes. The development of an urban place is,

Figure 15.1

The temporary beach in the Place de l'Hotel de Ville, St Quentin, France

(Source: Sandra Cohen-Rose, Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0))

nowadays, no longer a simple linear and top-down process controlled solely by the city authority and its planning department. There are usually many different stakeholders, often with competing views and diverse demands in urban development processes, and the pathway to a common vision and agreement can be long and difficult. Land-owners, users, city government elected and appointed officials, planners and businesses might not have the same goals, interests or ideas about what a good urban public space is. Therefore, there is a growing need for careful, low-cost and experimental planning instruments, which might convince other sectors by demonstrating effective results or raise a discussion among the involved parties.

Research into how a tactical intervention might affect the use of a space and the short-term health and well-being of users has been carried out to a limited extent; one such research example is an experiment which was conducted in an urban blue space (Roe et al., 2019) by a group from the University of Virginia in the United States. They tested a temporary intervention in the context of a waterfront in West Palm Beach in Florida. A small day-long intervention was installed, and users were tested on the state of their mental well-being (using well-established instruments)

before, during and after the installation, over three days. The results showed reduced stress levels among users during the intervention as opposed to the control (pre- and post-intervention) times, although the levels of statistical significance were low.

Urban acupuncture

Urban acupuncture is a term applied to a socioenvironmental theory that combines contemporary urban design approaches, which are not dissimilar to tactical urbanism, with the concept behind the traditional Chinese medicine practice of acupuncture. Like tactical urbanism, urban acupuncture applies small-scale or even point design interventions to affect or catalyse the transformation of the larger-scale urban fabric.

First coined by Spanish architect Manuel De Solà-Morales (1999, 2004), the concept encompasses projects with a high degree of reversibility, allowing for corrective measures and improvements (a problem with large projects, where correcting mistakes is very costly). The tactic has the advantage of being a fast-tracked planning method and thus being implemented swiftly and often with modest means. With fewer bureaucratic requirements, these localised gestures are aimed to trigger a chain reaction of improvement in the quality of the adjacent urban environment, ranging from an increase in social cohesion to an improvement in public safety. The architect and urban planner Jaime Lerner, who was also three times mayor of the city of Curitiba in Brazil, is one of the leading advocates of urban acupuncture, seeing it as a means to bring immediate improvements to the urban environment, bypassing long decision-making processes and surpassing economic impediments. As Lerner says: “the lack of resources is no longer an excuse not to act. The idea that action should only be taken after all the answers and the resources have been found is a sure recipe for paralysis” (2014), and this helps to explain the idea of urban acupuncture as an experimental urban planning tool.

Another key advocate of the approach is the Finnish Architect Marco Casagrande (2015), who describes urban acupuncture as a “cross-over architectural manipulation of the collective sensuous intellect of a city”. He views the city as a “multi-dimensional sensitive energy-organism, a living environment”. According to Casagrande, sensitivity is needed to understand the energy which flows beneath the visual city, and then it is possible to react to the hot spots revealed by this analysis as target locations for an intervention. Casagrande thus applies the tenets of acupuncture by identifying and treating the points of blockage (or stress) in the urban fabric and claims that by releasing this, relief can ripple throughout the urban body. The idea is also that the approach is more immediate and sensitive to community needs than the more traditional and institutionalised forms of large-scale urban renewal planning. This means that interventions not only respond to localised needs but do so from a deep knowledge base of how urban systems operate and why they converge at that specific point. This, according to Casagrande, releases pressure at strategic points and subsequently releases pressure for the whole city.

Intervention target sites are not selected randomly or opportunistically, as may be the case in tactical urbanism, but involve the analysis of a range of spatial, social, economic and ecological factors (similarly to conventional design methods), and designs are developed through dialogue between designers and the community in a co-design process. So, conceptually, as the Chinese practice of acupuncture claims to relieve stress in the complete human body by acting at specific pressure points, urban acupuncture aims to relieve equivalent stresses in the built environment. As noted, urban acupuncture is not a synonym for tactical urbanism but implies a similar range of practices, and the two terms may be confused.

Small-scale interventions

Small-scale projects are not always specifically built as an urban acupuncture or tactical urbanism exercise. However, small projects may sometimes achieve a high degree of success in terms of design or social or environmental impacts. A number of these may be temporary, which can mean that they are designed and constructed for a few days, weeks or months, during a festival, for example, or for a longer duration until a site is developed, in which

case the term “temporary” may be of long duration (several years). In addition, small-scale interventions can be easily built, dismantled, stored and moved according to the seasons. For example, wintertime in northern climates may mean temporary shelters or structures for winter sports, while in summer, seasonal swimming places might be established. Waterside structures may be damaged in winter storms or by ice, which also argues for their being easily moved and only used when safe to do so.

While urban acupuncture is rather theory driven, there is some research evidence for the impact of what may be counted by some as urban acupuncture or otherwise just as small scale. Small projects also offer the potential to test design ideas before implementation using modelling techniques. One such project was undertaken within the BlueHealth project based on the intervention site in Tallinn described in Chapter 3 (Vassiljev et al., 2020). A series of virtual small-scale interventions were designed using a combination of the evidence gained from observations of the site (see the demonstration of the BlueHealth Behaviour Assessment Tool in Chapter 6), site analysis and inspirations from various projects – some of which feature in this chapter. Three-dimensional models were constructed for each using a virtual landscape setting and experiential videos created to present the designs (Figure 15.2). An extensive questionnaire survey was carried out to determine people’s preferences and the potential for enhancing the health and well-being of each design option.

One approach that is key to all designs – but which is especially useful in the case of small-scale interventions, whether following the principles of tactical urbanism or urban acupuncture – is to respond to the potential to provide

Figure 15.2
Temporary, small-scale interventions in Kalarand, Tallinn, constructed in 2011 during the Cultural Capital year, supported the existing use of an informal public space. Decks built along the shore and on old concrete blocks enabled recreation near water

(Source: Anna-Liisa Unt and Reio Avaste)

affordances which may be lacking in a particular space. Affordances are the properties of the environment which offer various opportunities to people (Gibson, 1979). At the very smallest scale, an intervention can be a bench to afford resting by, for example, older people; this affordance then makes it possible for someone who cannot walk without resting to visit and experience the waterside and so obtain other benefits. Close observation of a space may reveal missing opportunities which can be tested using the method described in the previous section and in Chapter 6.

All the planning approaches described previously aim either to support already existing uses or to uncover the potential of the area. Affordances may be needed to make the existing use of space more comfortable, such as sitting on a bench instead of on a rock, or enabling uses of the area in new ways, such as by providing access to the water where there was none before or other small-scale and relatively low-cost infrastructure for relaxation, bathing or swimming.

Another typical feature of such a design and planning approach is the careful and respectful way in which the intervention is fitted into the existing landscape, therefore highlighting its character – its *genius loci*. The small-scale and often temporary nature of the intervention enables or even demands more careful construction methods. The existing built or urban nature surrounding the intervention therefore stays untouched.

Finally, interventions of this type usually signify that care is now being taken of the place, particularly where some of these areas were previously neglected. This is where such interventions may be temporary and serve as a first step in the development cycle of the area in need of change. As already noted, such places are often considered marginal or are associated with decay and might have perceived or real safety and vandalism problems (Nassauer and Raskin, 2014; Pearsall and Lucas, 2014; Newman et al., 2018). Gentrification is an issue which can also result from larger developments, leading to a change of user profile and often leading to the exclusion of “marginal” groups who formerly used the site. This may be less the case when tactical urbanism or urban acupuncture is the approach adopted. Public space redevelopment also has scale effects which need to be considered carefully and which may be positive if the tactical urbanism or urban acupuncture models are applied, so that such small-scale construction may serve as a cure to “environmental decay” (Branas et al., 2011), which has negative effects on the perception of the area by people and the well-being of the community living in proximity to the site.

In Chapter 3, we introduced readers to the experimental interventions undertaken in the BlueHealth project which were used to test the impact of design on attracting people to use blue spaces. Each of these was small scale and inexpensive relative to the budgets needed on the larger projects, yet it seemed that they had in many cases an impact far larger than the scale might suggest. Two projects – Can Moritz in Rubi near Barcelona and Teats Hill at Plymouth – were incorporated into schemes already underway and funded, although the budgets were still modest; they were still small-scale new or refurbished elements inserted into a run-down setting. Others, such as those in Tallinn, Tartu and Guimarães, were even more modest, with small budgets (in the 20–30,000 Euros range), and represented small elements in larger spaces, where they acted as new focal points added into the landscape, intended to support the existing use of the space, to stimulate new types of use or to invite users to discover fresh areas as well as to give signals about welcome or safety. All of these interventions were designed with great respect for each existing urban environment. Moreover, the sites were in some cases rather neglected or unmanaged, while, according to the comments during the public involvement process, this wild character would allow users to enjoy urban nature in solitude. The design fit into the place, supporting its particular values. The development process of these designs was driven by the rich knowledge gained during the BlueHealth project: evidence of blue space health and well-being benefits, the results of on-site enquiries, the public involvement process and, finally, the theories and design approaches described in this chapter.

Why the cases were chosen

This chapter presents a selection of different small-scale/urban acupuncture/tactical urbanism projects representing different scales, purposes and design approaches. While some small-scale projects were built to be temporary,

others are a permanent type of construction. All the intervention examples described in this chapter provide and strengthen the connection to the water: physically, visually, mentally, socially or educationally. The selected examples represent a variety of the most creative and versatile approaches to such types of design, and since they do not demand large investments, they provide an opportunity for an experimental and playful approach, much in keeping with tactical urbanism and urban acupuncture. Small-scale/temporary projects are interesting not just from the point of view of exemplifying appealing and effective urban planning phenomena but also because they can be used to experiment, to analyse their impact, to learn from and to transfer the experiences gained to planning and design principles at a bigger scale.

Contrary to the other chapters in this part of the book, owing to their small size and local impact, the project review and critique of the various factors affecting project success as presented in Chapter 10 is not appropriate. In addition, since the photographs often show all there is to know about a project, we only use sketches in particular cases.

Temporary interventions

The following projects have been selected to represent temporary interventions. They were built and taken away, and the photographs and reviews help to reconstruct the impact of these projects which otherwise only exist in memory.

- Micro-installations on stairs near Piaskowy bridge in Wrocław, Poland
- Two canal installations for the Bruges Triennial, Bruges, Belgium
 - Canal Swimmer's Club
 - The floating island
- "Between waters" art installation and community garden in Emscher Park, Germany
- Skaters' shelters, Winnipeg, Canada

Seasonal interventions

The next projects are seasonal installations: projects constructed for the summer. They are dismantled at the end of the season and constructed again the following year.

- Paris Plages, Paris, France
- Olive Beach, Moscow, Russia

Permanent interventions

The final set of projects are permanent installations of different scales and with different design foci:

- Kastrup sea-bath, Copenhagen, Denmark
- Steveraue platform, Steveraue, Germany
- Public space and sauna, Gothenburg, Sweden
- River Ljubljana platform, Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Vinaròs microcistas, Vinaròs, Spain

Temporary interventions

Micro-installations on stairs near Piaskowy bridge in Wrocław

This temporary installation was designed and constructed to provide a recreational function to a run-down space near the river. The stairs to the water, built some decades ago, provide a potential to a view and proximity of the

Figure 15.3
The seating on the steps near Piaskowy bridge viewed from the river
 (Source: Studio NO)

water but none of the infrastructure needed for a longer stay: no seats or benches. The intervention was designed and constructed by No studio based in Wrocław in 2016 as a part of DOFA, the Lower Silesian Festival of Architecture, as part of activities organised in Wrocław as European Capital of Culture 2016; after the festival, these seating installations were expanded to other places as well. With very little investment and minimal design (almost no design, according to the authors), the previously neglected and underused space near the river became functional. The installations were constructed from simple plywood and were easy to build on site.

The design provided simple seating and sunbathing places for one or two persons built into the existing concrete steps; therefore, these simple constructions provided a function which was only potentially possible beforehand due to the lack of functional infrastructure. Seen from the other river side, the colourful benches attract attention and invite the users explore the stairs near the river. This installation was site specific and revealed the hidden potential (affordances) of a place. The design offered a possibility to stay, relax and socialise near the water while enjoying the view of the river.

Canal installations for the Bruges Triennial

The Bruges Triennial provides a place for contemporary art and architecture in the urban space of Bruges historical centre. For this chapter, we selected two temporary installations designed for the Bruges Triennial in 2015 and 2018, which provided better access and connection to water.

Figure 15.4
The Bruges canal swimmers' club installation, showing its immense popularity
(Source: Dertien12, photographer Stef Declerck)

Canal Swimmer's Club

This installation was designed and constructed by Japanese Atelier Bow-Bow together with local architects Dertien 12 for Bruges Triennial 2015 at the confluence of the Spinolarei-Potterierei and Sint-Annarei canals in Bruges. The installation consisted of a wooden deck leading to a floating lounge with a sun shelter. Access from the embankment was enabled with a ramp from both ends. The intervention provided numerous opportunities of recreation by the water and in the water, such as relaxation, visiting the events and swimming. The design offered a different perspective of Bruges' canals. Usually, getting on-the-water experience is possible only from a boat, and swimming in the canal is not a usual practice in the centre of Bruges. According to the authors, the installation extended the public space, which was usually crowded during the high tourist season in the city. It also drew attention to the fact that the water quality has been improved in recent years, and nowadays the canals are swimmable. This temporary intervention also communicated that the direct connection to the water in Bruges, although is a city permeated by canals and known for it worldwide, is still a missed opportunity.

The Floating Island

This temporary intervention was also created for Bruges Triennial in 2018 by the Korean architecture office OBBA together with Dertien12. The wave-formed platform was constructed near the Snaggaardbrug in the historical centre of Bruges. Access from the canal embankment was enabled with stairs and a ramp at each end of the structure. The

Figure 15.5

The Bruges Floating Island as viewed from across the canal, seen in its setting with the city behind

(Source: OBBA, photo Matthias Desmedt. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license)

wooden platform floated just above the water level. A long screen made of cloth ropes in the middle of the platform created a visual border and enhanced the closeness to the water on the one hand, on the other hand providing a playful and creative way to use the installation, such as through ropes attached vertically, offering hammock-like places; a net stretched over the water, providing a resting place; and hanging textile balls for swinging. This intervention is an example of providing a playful environment for recreation and interaction with water where a permanent installation is not possible; it also creates various affordances and offers the visitors various options of interaction with the space.

“Between the Waters” art installation and community garden

“Between the Waters” was an art installation and at the same time functional infrastructure, constructed for the art festival EMSCHERKUNST in 2010. The project was located on a narrow strip of land between the Rhine-Herne Canal and the Emscher River, near Karnap north of Essen in Germany. It was a temporary art installation which addressed the problem of water quality, one of the key issues in the region, due to its industrial past. The project was created by the artist Marjetica Potrč and OOZE studio and was a functional water purification system, a community garden and an art installation all at the same time.

The construction cut across the narrow unused strip of land and united the two waters of the river and the canal through a nature-based water purification system. One part of the construction consisted of two toilets, symbolically

Figure 15.6

A view of the complete Between the Waters project capturing all project elements, allowing water purification and a view as well as symbolic transformation of the water

(Source: OOZE. Photographer: hans@blossey.eu)

Figure 15.7

The Winnipeg skaters' shelters forming a group like a herd of bison – note the curving plywood construction giving them the unique form

(Source: Patkau Architects)

elevated over the waters of Emscher River, which is very polluted. The water from the river was pumped into the septic tank of the toilets, then ran down and flowed through a series of purification systems: a constructed wetland, a rainwater-harvesting roof and a water storage bag. Finally, the purified water had the same quality as rainwater and could be used for irrigating the community garden or even for drinking and could be enjoyed from the drinking fountain, symbolically located on the platform over the Rhine-Herne Canal waters.

The project was primarily an environmental art intervention, located in an unused area without any public function, and was well visited by the attendees of the Festival. All the facilities provided by the installation were fully functional. The projects offered a new function and addressed the topics of water quality and inaccessible unused urban areas, doing so ironically and playfully.

Skaters' shelters, Winnipeg, Canada

Winter in Winnipeg, a city in Canada with a population of around 600,000 and a continental climate, is harsh, with extremely cold temperatures, regularly dropping below minus 20–30°C. Over time, local inhabitants developed cultural practices to embrace the winter; thus, skating on the frozen Red and Assiniboine Rivers has been a popular winter sport, providing a different perspective of the city. Skating along the frozen river enjoyed a resurgence due to the establishment of modern river trails. To enhance the use of the ploughed skating trails, each year, the municipality holds a competition to encourage the design of shelters suitable to the exposed wintry trails and providing places of respite from the wind. In the winter season of 2011, Patkau architects designed these cone-shaped shelters. The shelters were huddled together, each providing wind shelter to the other, each with their backs to the wind, like a herd of buffalo that roamed the Canadian prairies of the area in the past. The apparently random arrangement of shelters was designed precisely so that each shelter shielded the entrance of another and created a further protected interior space between the shelters. The shelters were also in a dynamic relationship to the sun position and the wind that altered as the sun moved across the sky during the day. Each shelter varied in the degree of shelter it could provide according to its relationship to the sun and the wind at any one time. Each shelter was constructed from two layers of thin plywood that could bend and deform in response to the wind. A triangular base and wedge-structure provided the rigidity needed to withstand the pressure from the snow, whilst the lightness of the construction allowed the movement generated by the wind to loosen any accumulated snow. The structures swayed and creaked like boats stuck on the frozen surface of the river, yet their warm colour and wooden interiors enveloped the skaters, providing protection from the elements. Seating was also provided inside for the comfort of the skaters.

Seasonal interventions

Paris Plages, Paris, France

Paris Plages is a pop-up summer intervention carried out by the municipality of Paris since 2002 on the banks of the Seine as a public-private partnership in different stages. Each year, between mid-July and the beginning of September, the path on the right bank of the Seine and connected areas host different leisure and sporting activities with sandy beaches, mobile palm trees and resting possibilities on a length of what is now more than 3 kilometres of riverbank, with more than 1 kilometre of fine sandy beach and additional connections to other parts of the city centre, thus changing the morphology of the river banks. Vehicle traffic is interrupted at this segment of the expressway running parallel to the river for the duration of the whole event, from its installation until its final dismantling, to make the riverbank accessible to pedestrians and cyclists. As a capital and a major economic centre, Paris has always had huge parts of its inner city circulation routes connected along the Seine since the decline of harbour activities and the river and city became disconnected. In recent years, discussions about a long-term traffic reduction in Paris have started.

Figure 15.8
A view of a section of the Paris Plages, showing the sandy beach and also the many shade umbrellas provided
(Source: Peter Haas/CC BY-SA 3.0 Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported)

Figure 15.9
A sketch of the Paris Plages project interventions showing how it has developed over the years and in different rivershore sections
(Source: Anna Wilczyńska)

Before the Paris Plages event was initiated, a closure of the expressway to traffic took place every Sunday from 1995. Based on these experiences, the municipality decided to extend this operation to the whole summer, because during this period of lower economic activity, the centre of Paris usually experienced less traffic. The main objective was for Paris inhabitants to enjoy an inner-city vacation with all of the activities which are normally practiced on coastal beaches. Since Paris Plages appears during the official summer holidays, the scenography of the event is staged each year by different artists on the theme of, for example, French Polynesia or Brazil for the activities and spaces. In this sense, Paris Plages can be understood as part of the tactical urbanism movement by employing temporary events to raise awareness towards urban problems connected to traffic, pollution or social congestion in cities which would finally materialise into long-lasting infrastructure and elements.

In 2006, together with the opening of the left bank of the Seine, floating basins were also installed on the river, as well as introducing a shuttle to connect the different sections of Paris Plages. As an extension of activities further from the river, a new site at the basin de la Villette was opened in 2007, including nautical activities, children's play, outdoor gyms and large picnic areas. Opening the pools was considered one of the measures to mitigate heat waves, which Paris has experienced several times over the last decades. Furthermore, the entrances were transformed and highlighted to create better visibility of the access to the beaches from the road, as part of a new relationship between city and river. Thus we can see here how a small and temporary project has actually grown and developed – it is still tactical urbanism, but it has outgrown its original small scale.

Olive Beach, Moscow, Russia

Olive Beach is situated next to the Pushkin (Andreevsky) Bridge on the River Moskva and close to Gorky Park. The project was developed by the architectural office Wowhaus in 2011.

Figure 15.10

A view of Olive Beach from the Pushkin Bridge showing the wooden decking structure. In this photo, the site is not fully open, so the decking is clear to see, together with the bases of the parasols and showers projecting over the river
(Source: Wowhaus)

The aim of the project, besides providing a recreational area near water, was to create a side entrance to the park that would look “cozier” and less imposing than the austere granite and marble of the official entrance. The timber-decked area provides a welcoming entrance site with a warm and playful atmosphere. This embankment area is close to central Moscow and squeezed in between the wide river and the road running past Gorky Park and turns a dull space into a leisure zone. The facilities include a spacious multi-functional lounge and sunbathing deck, called the “Solarium”; showers; and a bar. The Solarium area is constructed from different angled wooden decking that slopes down towards the river edge. This surface provides a space-saving multiplicity of comfortable options for lounging in the sun and has proved a popular spot in summer. Owing to the poor water quality, swimming in the river is not an option, so instead, visitors can use showers to cool themselves throughout the summer months. The showers are located on piers jutting out over the river linked to the solarium. The water from the showers is collected on trays beneath the piers and is drained into the sewage system. Shade is offered by a pergola constructed from a complex wooden frame that is also designed as a space for music. In front of the canopy are olive trees in tubs that give their name to the area and offer some shade. Bars and wooden terraces are located under the bridge to provide additional facilities. After the summer season, the whole structure is dismantled and removed, stored and then reassembled the following summer. This intervention provides comfortable and playful recreation near the river, where a use of this type wasn’t imaginable before.

Permanent installations

Kastrup Sea Bath, Copenhagen, Denmark

This structure, which provides sheltered access to the sea at Kastrup Beach, Copenhagen, was completed in 2005 from the designs of White Arketektor of Sweden. It has become affectionately known as ‘The Snail’ and consists of a circular raised enclosed platform and a pier leading out to it, a new beach and a service building containing toilets and accessible changing facilities set into the circular structure. All functions provided are therefore incorporated into

Figure 15.11

A view of the Kastrup Sea Baths from the shore showing the curving structure with sheltering walls at the end of the deck

(Source: Mads Farsö)

Figure 15.12

A sketch of the Kastrup Sea Baths which reveals the form and function of the sea bath – which is not visible from a ground-level view

(Source: Anna Wilczyńska)

the one structure. The idea of the form was a response to the exposed north-facing beach where shelter is needed; the wooden pier meets the bathing structure and continues into the south-facing circular enclosure, gradually rising above sea level and ending in a 5-m-high diving platform. The circular shape creates a focused interior that provides shelter from the wind and the perfect protected retreat for swimming and sunbathing. A continuous bench runs along the inner pier wall, providing lots of seating for resting and relaxation. It was designed to be fully accessible and inclusive, open at all times (it is illuminated at night and free of charge). It is constructed of an extremely durable African hardwood called azobé. For disabled users, it is possible to make use of special wheelchairs to go into the water for a swim. The site was a former brownfield and lies close to the Amager Beach park described in Chapter 14.

The main approach to the design of this intervention was to “bring the land into the sea”, and the intervention does this by providing access to deeper water away from shallow beaches. It therefore enables many ways to enjoy water in a controlled and overlooked site and at the same time creating an environment fully surrounded by the sea.

Steveraue Platform, Germany

Steveraue is a nature reserve sited in a former coal mining area near the town of Olfen in the North Rhine-Westphalia region of Germany. The aim of this project, developed by Bureau Baubotanik in 2010 and still continuing in its development, was to build an observation platform for viewing the wildlife of the reserve without entering and disturbing

Figure 15.13

The Steveraue platform set within the living structure of the *Salix* trees and the view to the meadow and the river
(Source: Jonas Büchel)

it, since it is a protected area. From the platform, it is possible to see a stork's nest and the semi-wild herds of Heck cattle and Konik ponies. The observation platform and the recreational areas around it are separated from the nature reserve but made to observe the wildlife in Steveraue, are connected to local hiking and provide access to the river.

The platform is built on a natural floodplain area next to the River Stever, so it is also possible to view the wildlife within this natural riparian environment. One of the most interesting aspects of the project is that it uses an innovative construction method. The platform is constructed around an internal metal structure, and live willow trees (*Salix viminalis*), which commonly grow in this wet area, have been planted around it. This botanical structure will develop over time as the trees grow around and through the metalwork, creating a self-sustaining living structure. Landscape changes are slow and not often perceptible to the human eye, so the aim of the structure is to make the long-term growing processes of the renaturation of the Steveraue reserve visible and tangible. The ingrowing structure has also an educational purpose to showcase the actual construction method – a growing botanical structure. As well as being able to observe nature, it is possible to enjoy the river environment, as there is an opportunity for picnics on the benches provided, and there is a floating pontoon that allows access to the river itself.

Public space and sauna in Gothenburg Harbour, Sweden

The creation of the sauna in Gothenburg Harbour in Sweden is part of the Bathing Culture Project. The project was developed by Raumlabor Berlin in 2014 with a substantial amount of public involvement. The aim was to develop a public space as part of a step-by-step urban regeneration process for the redevelopment of the old derelict harbour.

Figure 15.14
The approach decking and glimpsed view of the elevated sauna in Gothenburg
(Source: Raumlabor)

Figure 15.15

A sketch showing the Gothenburg intervention complex: the sauna building built on the deck above water, changing rooms and showers, beach with wooden decks, boardwalks and part of the lido

(Source Jekaterina Balicka, Anna Wilczyńska)

The project demonstrates a process initiated by the city in subsequent developments of design and construction of a site-specific recreational area that would lead to a cultural transformation of the site. The public space regeneration involved an agglomeration of small-scale interventions to foster a long-term creative development vision. In this case, the plans for the area and the aim of this intervention were to spur an exploration of what constitutes a park in the 21st century. The project investigated relevant criteria through community involvement.

The project contains several interventions, with a focus on recreation, leisure and education and community needs. In this section, we mostly concentrate on the sauna building, constructed above the harbour waters together with functional buildings (dressing rooms and showers), and the outdoor space with decks and paths for bathing and recreation near the water. The sauna and the functional buildings were built from reclaimed building materials found on-site – relics from its industrial heritage. The unusual structure, crafted with care with the aid of the local community, has imbued new life and a vision for the future, which spills over into the town and stretches the conventions of park design, giving it a new aesthetic expression. The site also meets the social needs of the people of Gothenburg

and provides a site for swimming, sauna, bathing, relaxing and walking, strongly supporting both the existing cultural practices in Sweden and the needs of the local community.

River Ljubljanica platform, Slovenia

Ljubljana is a city renowned for its bridges, beautiful tree-lined riverside pathways and embankments, largely designed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The city, however, lost its connections to the river, and the old city fell into decline. In an effort to revitalise the once-thriving riverside area and bring the city back into harmony with the parallel riverside streets, the city authorities decided to revitalise the public space along the river. A series of small interventions were planned by BB arhitekti 2009–2011. The new interventions sought to bring a different perspective to the city by integrating the river back into the fabric of the townscape. The interventions made the river more present to the community and visible in the everyday functioning of the city. The pier featured here, located near the new Zitni Bridge, or Grain Bridge, is one of 20 interventions planned for the river that flows through the heart of Ljubljana. Each intervention is unique. The Zitni Bridge intervention is constructed of several elements. A prefabricated concrete stairway and seating area leads to a platform built over the water. The pier itself is built on a steel pontoon and paved with wood. The pontoon moves up and down in response to the changing level of the water in the river. The pier is connected to the concrete platform by an adjustable wooden and steel stairway. The intervention provides a connection from the city to the water level, enabling visitors to perceive the townscape from an unusual perspective and providing a space to view the river or a platform for fishing. The

Figure 15.16

The Ljubljanica platform showing its relationship to the retained riverside wall and the steps leading down to the deck

(Source: Breda Bizjak, BB arhitekti; photographer Jani Peternelj)

concrete seating area on the embankment allows for sitting and contemplating the life of the river, including the boats that frequent it.

Microcostas Vinaròs decks, Spain

Vinaròs is situated on the east coast of Spain, approximately halfway between Valencia to the south and Barcelona to the north. This Castellón seaside town has undergone rapid development, with a proliferation of single-family dwellings that dominate the landscape, particularly near the seafront, sometimes obscuring the view of the sea. The aim of the project, developed by Guallart Architects, was to provide public access to the sea from this fragile and rocky landscape. The installations had a demanding brief to withstand the rough sea waters and reduce erosion whilst maintaining the integrity of the habitat and the sea views. The size of the installations reflects the small size of the coves and peninsulas that form these miniature jagged coastlines squeezed between the sea and the urban infrastructure. Modular hexagonal platforms constructed from steel and wood were assembled using dry construction techniques in order to leave as little impact as possible on the rocks below. These geometric shapes in combination create little islands of variable sizes with micro-topographical details forming various convex and concave profiles that echo the angular geometry of rock. They provide a more comfortable surface than the jagged rocks below, as well as providing protection to the fragile rocks from human activities. The varying sizes make them suitable for different-sized groups, ranging from single people to couples and families. The

Figure 15.17

A view along the Vinaròs rocky shore showing a selection of the different platform designs

(Source: Guallart Architects)

multifunctional outdoor furniture elements offer various affordances: visitors can relax, sit or lie down close to the sea edge. The interventions allow people access to the wild places at the urban edge while making little impact on the landscape. They provide space to view the sea, to contemplate, sunbathe or just lounge. They also allow space for picnicking or a place to put things in a dry place while swimming. A previously overlooked landscape has now become now accessible.

Comparison of projects in terms of different aspects

General design aspects

In all the projects, we can see a lot of imagination and creativity – ranging from the very simplest, like the seats in Wrocław, to the ingenious solution at Vineròs (which responds to a very challenging location). There are also interesting and unique forms which have considerable artistic content, such as the sauna in Gothenburg, the skating shelters in Winnipeg or the sea-bath at Kastrup, an expression enabled in part due to the small scale and use of materials in an almost craftsmanlike way.

Potential for enhancing health and well-being

The projects chosen in this chapter have a specific focus, and the health and well-being opportunities may not be obvious at first. However, they all encourage and permit people to spend time close to water more safely or more easily (as at Vineròs), and they add special qualities attracting people to them or addressing water-related topics (such as “Between Waters”). Clearly, they do not have the kind of potential offered by the larger projects explored in previous chapters, but when considered in relation to their scale, they do generally exhibit that key aspect of urban acupuncture in their impact on the wider surroundings.

Accessibility

Improved access to blue spaces is a key objective of all projects, although realised in different ways. For example, the Vineròs microcostas are clearly important for giving access across a rugged shore; the platform on the Ljubljanica River provides access down to the river itself; the Kastrup sea-bath provides excellent access for everyone out to the swimming structure where the water is deep enough; the canal swimmers’ club also provided excellent access to the canal, which was clearly used by many people during its existence, as did the floating island.

Interaction with water

All of the projects, in their own way, provide or provided (in the case of the temporary structures) access to water, be it visual or physical. Several projects promote bathing and swimming; decks provide access to the water surface and opportunities to touch it. In places where swimming and bathing are not options, such as at Olive Beach, the public sauna in Gothenburg or the “Between Waters” project, water is still made accessible but in different ways: there are showers at Olive Beach, the possibility to use water as part of a sauna routine and outdoor pool in Gothenburg and drinking and irrigating purified water in Essen, Germany.

In places where the water is completely inaccessible, such as the Seine in Paris, beaches at least give as close a connection as possible, in attractive surroundings encouraging people to stay and spend time there.

It is noteworthy how different designers approached the objective of connecting people and water using such small devices. In some cases, people were brought closer to water just in order to enjoy its proximity (e.g. Vinaròs, Ljubljanica river platforms, Wrocław steps). In cases where direct access to natural water is or was not possible, the water was still available, albeit in a different form (Olive Beach showers, Gothenburg sauna). A more powerful approach is to bring the “land” into the water in order to provide swimming facilities where it was not possible before

(Kastrup sea bath, “swimming club” in Bruges and la Villette pools as part of the Paris Plages project). Also worth mentioning are the designs supporting winter use near water and traditional cultural practices (Gothenburg sauna, Winnipeg shelters).

Seating and opportunities for socialising

Some projects, such as the steps in Wrocław, focus (or focused) on providing seating – a basic affordance in that specific case which was perhaps not so obvious without the seats on the steps. Welcoming people to use the steps for sitting, as signalled in this way, encourages people to linger and so to socialise. Seating is also crucial to allow some user groups, for example, older or less able people, to walk along the river, providing possibilities to rest. The Kastrup sea bath has many terraces and relaxing areas for socialising during swimming, and the decking or beach structures such as at Paris Plages, Olive Beach and Vinaròs also provide excellent affordances for staying (“hanging out”) and socialising. The installation on the Ljubljana River provides more of both, a solitary and social style of seating, where people sitting at the river are divided from the passing people on the promenade. This type of seating is also suitable for small-scale outdoor performances with a small audience.

Microclimate amelioration

Owing to the fact that these are small interventions, their location in an existing landscape as well as some aspects of design have been taken into account with respect to the microclimate in several examples. Shade structures at Olive Beach and Paris Plages are important in hot weather, and sheltering structures such as the planking walls at the Kastrup sea bath protect swimmers from the cold wind, while, uniquely, the skaters’ shelters at Winnipeg, where the temperature can be very cold indeed, enabled skaters to stay out and exercise for longer.

Use of materials

From a design perspective, there are some very interesting uses of materials and associated craftsmanship in several structures – such as the plywood curved to form the skaters’ shelters, the timber structures of the Kastrup sea bath or the decking at Vinaròs and Olive Beach. The sauna structure at Gothenburg is the only permanent project to use recycled materials. All are very careful in the attention to detail in the construction. The use of materials – their selection for the purpose, durability, recycling or upcycling – is an aspect which is very relevant in terms of sustainability and material justice and for showcasing construction. This aspect is more prominent in the design of a single small object than over a larger site and where sculptural qualities are an integral part of the design.

Use of vegetation and ecological aspects

With the exception of the temporary garden at Emscher, few of the projects include any planting or ecological aspects. One interesting example is the Severaue platform, which incorporates *Salix* trees as a part of its actual construction. The sauna project in Gothenburg is built around and highlights the existing ruderal vegetation on the site. The Severaue project, as well as the platforms at Vinaròs, are located in natural places, where the impact on the natural environment was considered in their design.

Site management and maintenance

The site management of the projects depends a lot on their character; for example, if they are temporary, this is not usually an issue. If they are seasonal, then they need to be erected, maintained and dismantled, with the disassembled sections moved, stored, repaired and modified as necessary. Permanent structures are managed as part of the overall sites and locations, such as the river banks in Ljubljana, the nature park at Severaue and the Vinaròs coastline.

Maintenance of seasonal structures can be carried out in the off season wherever they are stored, while others which are exposed to the elements need more regular and careful maintenance.

Conclusions and implications for practice

This chapter has provided a contrast from the other chapters in this part of the book, highlighting the positive benefits of less being more and small being more impactful. The lessons we can learn are also connected to the extensive discussion of theory which we set out at the beginning of the chapter.

There are several aspects we draw attention to:

- Temporary interventions can have a very valuable role, whether for very short-term animation of spaces within, for example, a festival, or in places where the signals of welcome and safety help to catalyse the blue space improvement process.
- In specific cases and contexts, modest, cheap and community-led interventions can provide space and time for experimentation and testing, for creativity and flexibility. This can help to ensure that the end product is not only functional but also socially acceptable to the local community and more sustainable. It is particularly easy to ensure this in this context as opposed to larger projects.
- Just because projects are small in scale and less costly than average landscape design or architectural projects does not mean that they cannot reach high standards in construction. Attention to detail and robust construction are very important, especially if the intervention is located in an exposed place – exposed to the elements or to potential damage or vandalism. In several cases, the construction goes hand in hand with artistic creativity in the generation of the forms and the way materials are used.
- Seasonal structures can also have a major role to play – activating spaces to provide different affordances according to the seasons, since winter and mid-season use is often overlooked in terms of human-water interaction. This approach is worthy of greater consideration more generally in design projects at the land-water interface.

Finally, we can note that the range of projects presented here, although not extensive, represent a diversity of approaches and solutions within the scope of tactical urbanism, urban acupuncture or just small in scale because that is appropriate. They show the range of creativity and the potential for real experimentation with few of the risks associated with much larger capital-intensive projects.

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