

# Catalyzing the Commons - Inverting the Participatory Process in the Production of Public Space

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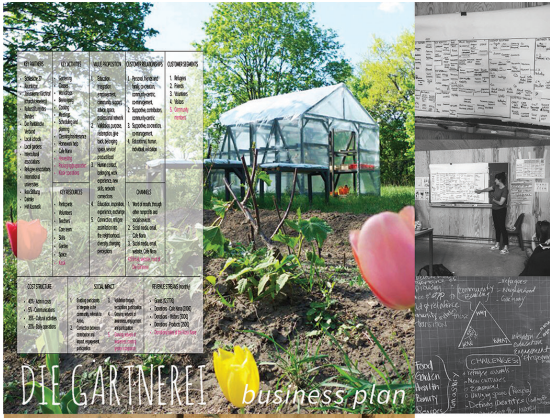
California College of the Arts

The role, form, and locus of public space in urban environments has changed. Indoor entertainment spaces often replace the urban exterior as places of collectivity and chance encounter; austerity measures and rapid densification alike are factors in the proliferation of Privately Owned Public Open Spaces (POPOS); and in cities across the globe, the public itself has changed as a consequence of multifaceted migration patterns. At the same time, there has been a widespread resurgence of interest in the 'urban commons', understood as collectively appropriating and regulating urban resources. This trend has altered the relationship of citizens to architects in the production of urban collective space. The diversity of stakeholders in traditional public space design has led to complex design and planning processes for architects that offer only intermittent citizen participation in the process of constructing a final outcome. Urban commons projects, in contrast, are based on local citizen initiation, direct negotiation between stakeholders, long-term involvement of citizens, and the evolution of public space over time. In commons projects, the involvement of architects takes on the form of intermittent participation, using acupunctural interventions to catalyze the next steps in the commons' evolution, thus inverting the role of citizens and architects in the production of public space.

This project serves as a case study to examine the specific role of architects as participants in urban commons projects. It outlines a cross-disciplinary and interconnected set of tasks that enable short-term interventions to act as catalysts that set in motion longer-term processes for improvement of urban commons needs. Specifically, the project documents a 3-week summer intensive studio with a design-build component. Led by two architecture professors, it brought together an interdisciplinary group of students, an architecture collective, and an educational nonprofit in Berlin, to shape critical next steps for an urban garden - cum - refugee school whose grant-based funding was running out. The collaborating team rejected final, form-oriented outcomes in favor of the design of a process and a set of 'devices' that enable future development of the commons. It focused on interconnected proposals for the physical site ('hardware'), their use and programming ('software'), a business plan that leveraged these physical interventions towards the economic sustenance of the garden/school going forward ('orgware'), and a set of garden products ('brandware') whose sale supported the maintenance of the commons. The outcomes of this short-term intervention constitute an integrated set of forces whose social and economic impact will support the continued survival of the garden and refugee school,

and will strengthen the visibility and connection this commons has to the surrounding community.

Beyond the specific circumstances of the case study, this project highlights the need for considering the four interrelated platforms of 'hardware', 'software', 'orgware', and 'brandware' as critical components of catalytic interventions: formal design projects in close connection with opportunities for future use, an integrated plan that organizes stakeholder interaction and resources in a process towards a shared goal, and a visual identity that informs and strengthens the commons' visibility and perception.

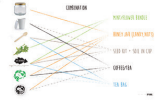


**site description.**  
 Located on the former Tempelhof Airfield in Berlin, the architecture collective *u+u* collaborated with a local educational non-profit on an urban commons project focused on Berlin's recent stream of refugees. Located on the grounds of a former elementary and stone mason workshop, the urban commons project takes the shape of a community garden and refugee school, offering gardening instruction as well as language lessons and training for navigating the German bureaucracy. All of these activities take place in a jointly-produced environment that understands itself as a hybrid of public space activation, art installation, and urban respite.

**business model.**  
 Under the mentorship of the professors and members of the architecture college, a team of business strategy students developed a business model for the growth and sustainability of the urban commons project. To understand and assess the potential of the project, students worked collaboratively with project players and conducted interviews surveys with local residents. They developed and delivered a business plan with both an assessment of current conditions and needs, and a set of goals and strategic interventions for the project as a whole. They communicated and collaborated with the project players and physical and spatial opportunities to translate their findings.

Category	Item	Value
Revenue	...	...
Expenses	...	...
Profit	...	...

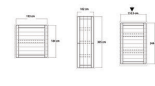
**branding.**  
 Another team of students, from architecture and industrial design, developed a branding campaign for products produced by the project. Products like honey jar labeling, seedling packages, and soil bags for carrying fresh vegetables were identified as being useful for spreading an understanding of the project's community goals. A logo and brand identity were developed and discussed with community sponsors and participants for how it reflected the spirit of the project.



**mobile kiosk.**  
 A team of architecture students developed a small piece of branded architecture, a mobile kiosk for Die Gärtnerei. Incorporating armatures to display goods, and a table/counter area to have tea, the kiosk promotes the products of the garden to the community and fosters dialogue between refugees and local residents. Transforming modest materials, from bicycle wheels to recycled wood, the kiosk extends the project by literally taking Die Gärtnerei to the street or to a nearby park, defining an instant urban space of exchange wherever it goes.



**garden constructs.**  
 A team of architecture and interior design students added to the design/build development within the project garden. The development of small site architectures has been intensifying social interaction and community use while facilitating the process of urban gardening. Students designed and built additions to the garden, to assist in the working of the garden, to provide respite in the shade, and form additional gathering spaces. They also learned techniques in timber construction, by assisting in the construction of a "bunker," a small seating area for outdoor performance. These garden constructs enhance the presence and use of space as one of public and social interaction.



**credits.**  
 collaboration:  
 Antje Steinemüller / Chris Fallers, California College of the Arts  
 Christof Mayer, Anne-Laure Gaestner, Sebastian Lutz, and Michael Fuchs, Raumlabor Berlin.  
 student team:  
 Di An, Anyi Chen, Maria Cherolles, Rachel Hammond, Sarah Herluggson, Gloria Kabba Kissa, Eva Lai, Li Lind, say McComb, Jingyan Meng, Mirnalini Mello, Raghavan Shrin, Mounibourou Shunta Moriyuchi, Betty Njo, David Roselle, Shah Shahfar, Timothy Supto, and Jagan Willie Wu, representing Architecture, Design MBA, Industrial Design, and Interior Design.

# Catalyzing the Commons

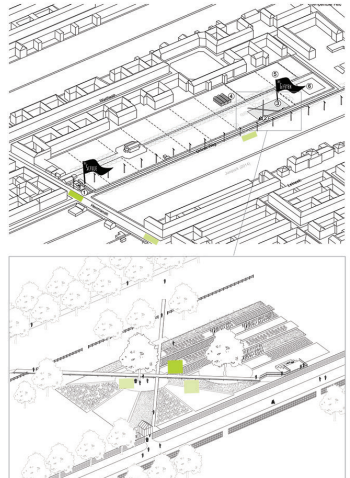
## Inverting the Participatory Process in the Production of Public Space

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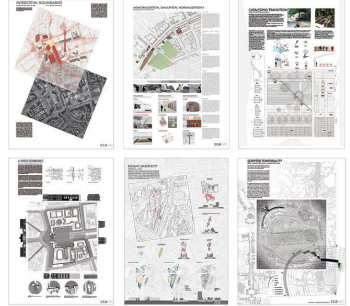
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1) Mario Gandelsonas, Ralf Siegel, Eli Verbeke, "Introduction" in Search for the Public: Notes on the Contemporary American City (Princeton: Center for Architecture, Urbanism + Infrastructure, 2012), 007.  
 2) Verbeke et al., "Using the Playful: Welcome to the Urban Commons" in Urban Commons: Moving Beyond State and Market, eds. Mary Delenbaugh et al. (Basing: Birkbecker, 2015), 10.



project site, the space of the urban commons project; above: kiosk deployment around Die Gärtnerei; school and garden location; below: garden construct locations



analysis, students explorations of the mechanisms informing public space in the city.