

COOL STREETS

CITY OF VIENNA
VIENNA, AUSTRIA



CATEGORIES

S Community spaces where diverse people meet

PRESENTER

Birgit Hebein, Deputy Mayor and Deputy Governor,
Executive Councillor for Urban Planning, Traffic & Transport,
Climate Protection, Energy Planning and Public Participation

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DESCRIPTION

A practice for heat adaptation and for people: in three of Vienna's hottest areas, urban streets became "Cool Streets" for four weeks. Instead of (parked) cars, the "Cool Streets" offered water mist sprayers, seating, and neighbourhood-fostering features – these streets became attractive places for spending free time, cooling off, playing, and meeting with other locals.

MOTIVATION

"Cool Streets" create spaces where city dwellers can pass time outside their stuffy flats – an open-air living room. Moreover, additional urban furniture and occasional organised events motivate people to spend time in a "Cool Street", e.g. animation to engage in games or neighbourhood-fostering activities organised by local initiatives and organisations. People are encouraged to use this public space more. The intensified use and vibrancy of public space facilitates encounters between local residents; neighbours – people of all age groups and many different nationalities – get to know each other.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

As a result of heated concrete surfaces, the city is no longer able to cool off to a sufficient degree, resulting in heat islands, which prove to be particularly troublesome for residents of densely built-up districts. "Cool Streets" are a practice for heat adaptation: the creation of shaded/cool places where people can cool off and spend quality time in. Across the globe, cities are confronted with isolated and lonely citizens. In particular, older persons – who suffer more from heat – tend to leave their flats less and less. "Cool Streets" offer places of encounter around the corner.

MORE DETAILS

The heat map of Vienna shows that the Fasanviertel neighbourhood (3rd municipal district), the area around Columbusgasse (10th municipal district) and the area around Hasnerstrasse (16th municipal district) are particularly affected by very high temperatures. Moreover, these neighbourhoods are home to many children and seniors who are especially sensitive to heat.

To make hot days more bearable for the Viennese, the City of Vienna – acting on an initiative of Deputy Mayor Birgit Hebein, who is also in charge of matters pertaining to climate protection – launched the “Cool Streets” project in August 2019 in co-operation with the municipal districts Landstrasse, Favoriten and Ottakring.

On the one hand, “Cool Streets” are a practice to adjust to urban heat. In neighbourhoods particularly affected, one well-shaded street is declared car-free and transformed into a recreation zone for local residents for a limited period. Water mist sprayers or other water features as well as shaded spots for sitting and resting are installed.

On the other hand, “Cool Streets” are places of encounter where highly diverse individuals from the neighbourhood can meet. People of all generations and from many nationalities live in Vienna and its streets. “Cool Streets” offer them a place to sit together, talk, and get to know each other.

OUTCOMES

With three “Cool Streets” in the 3rd, 10th and 16th municipal districts, Birgit Hebein, Deputy Mayor and Executive City Councillor in charge of climate protection, initiated a project for cooling urban streets in August 2019. This project was evaluated from the perspectives of climate research and social sciences.

The socio-scientific evaluation conducted by “tbw research” highlights the reactions of local residents to the pilot project. 518 local residents were interviewed. 87% of them viewed “Cool Streets” as a positive measure to combat summer heat; 66% stated that the “Cool Street” efficiently balances the heat inside their flats, and 92% hoped for a repeat of this project. The loss of parking spaces was no problem for 92%.

The project also entailed a cooling effect, as between 1.3 and 5 degrees Celsius less were recorded. More than half of the 518 respondents remarked that the urban heat became more bearable for them due to “Cool Streets”. This was evidenced by the outcome of the climate-specific evaluation conducted by GreenPass®.

Due to the success of the 2019 pilot project, the practice will be continued in 2020. The creation of more “Cool Streets” is in planning, establishment in additional locations for a longer period is being considered. In Kleistgasse – one of the “Cool Streets” of 2019 – the project met with such a positive response that part of the street was permanently closed to traffic; more seating features now ensure that this area will be a year-round place of encounter.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1) Local residents took to the idea of playing children instead of parked cars – local residents like this: another example of how people are reclaiming public space.
- 2) Not all neighbourhoods are alike: The requirements to be met by a “Cool Street” are closely related to local residents. It is therefore necessary to meet and react individually to local needs. Here, too, success is contingent on the human factor.
- 3) The combination of water mist sprayers and many children can pose a challenge: therefore, all equipment used in public space must be very robust.

LINK

www.wien.gv.at/verkehr-stadtentwicklung/coolestrasse.html