

Mobile Furniture for Public Space



Handbook

placecity
Floridsdorf
vienna

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Mobile Furniture for Public Space

Background

This tool was developed in the framework of the [PlaceCity Vienna project](#) which aims to activate and strengthen the central area of Floridsdorf, a peripheral district in Vienna, through placemaking interventions and, thus, to show the potentials of public space within this area. During the analysis and co-creation process, the local public library "Weisselbad" has emerged as one of the most active local actors which functions as a multiplier to the local community. As the library shows interest in interacting more with the neighborhood and being more visible in public space, the idea of constructing a mobile furniture that can be used for small events, such as readings or workshops in the public park next to the library came up. As through an Open Call for Ideas many more ideas from the neighborhood to use the public space were generated, the idea evolved to a mobile and flexible furniture for the entire neighborhood. Being the owner of the furniture, the library functions not only as a user of the furniture, but also as a platform to lend it to neighbors and help them organize their events. Thus, the library takes an active role in revitalizing the neighborhood and acts as a platform for a lively neighborhood.

Main Goals and Purpose

The mobile furniture functions as a catalyst to enable community-led activities in public space, and, thus, has potential to revitalize and strengthen a neighborhood. The application of this tool does not only include the construction of the furniture itself ("hardware"), but also its use for various activities by a range of actors ("software") as well as the organization of a program over a longer period of time ("orgware").

In order to allow different kinds of activities, the furniture should be as flexible and mobile as possible, however, still remain easy to use. Ideally, it should also contain technical equipment for different kinds of events, such as speakers, microphones, a (battery-powered) electricity supply, as well as materials that can be used for workshops, such as a moderation kit. Depending on the specific needs of the neighborhood, for example, discussions and readings, workshops (such as painting or craft workshops with children), movie nights, music performances or outdoor exhibitions could be organized. Also, the furniture can be suitable as a kind of open bookcase that encourages outdoor reading.

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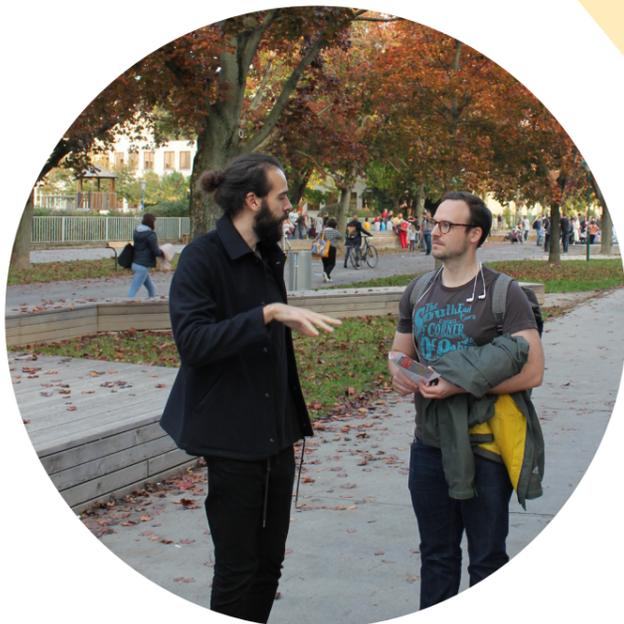
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I. Preparation Phase

1 Find a local cooperation partner

First of all, a local cooperation partner should be identified that shows interest not only in using the mobile furniture for own purposes, but also in acting as an interface with the local residents. A cooperation contract should be made with this institution regulating the ownership structure and conditions of use. It could be determined, e.g., that the cooperation partner is the owner of the furniture but also is responsible for the programming, including lending it to the local community for free and coordinating the different uses.

Different workshop formats can be used to involve the local community in the planning phase of the mobile furniture.



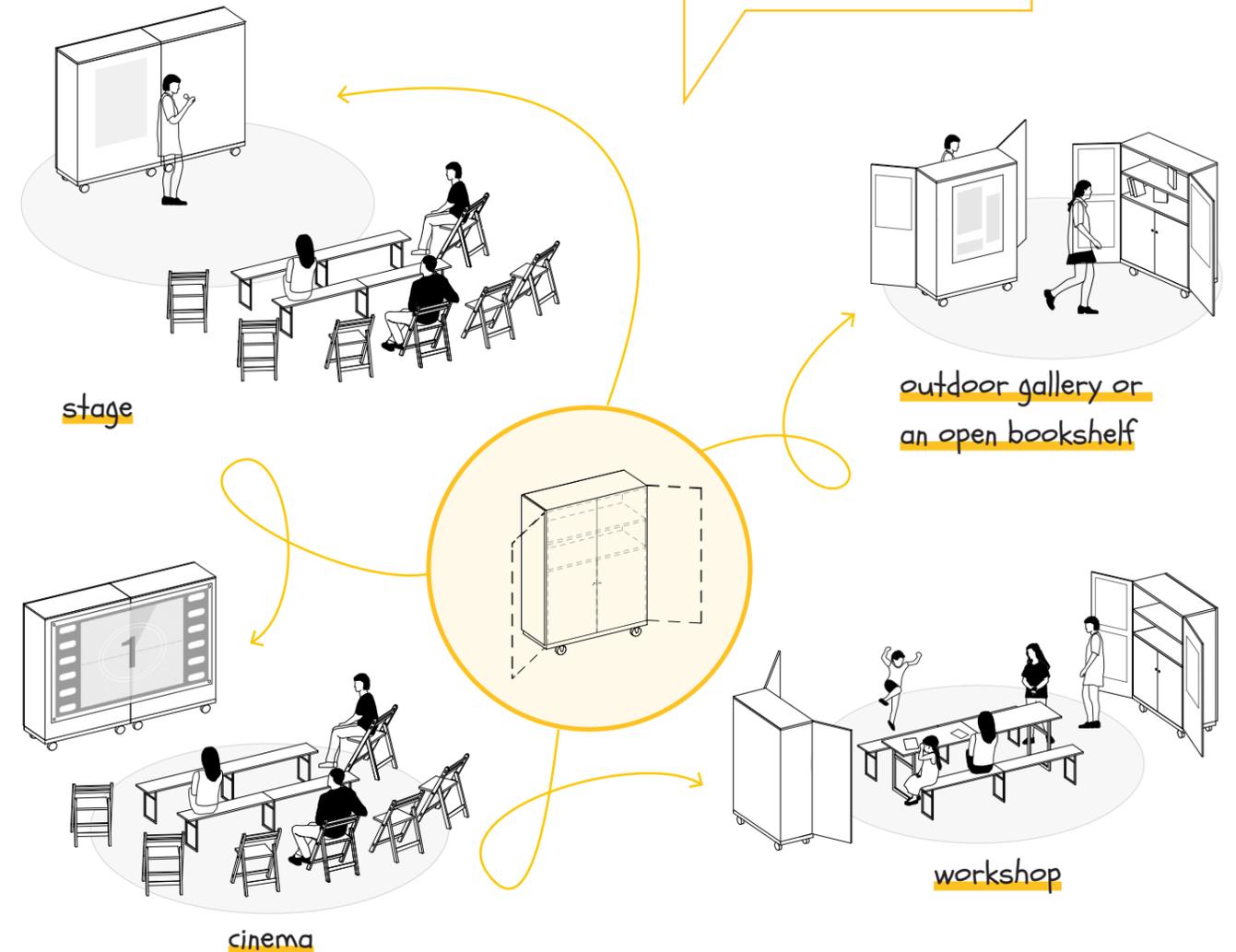
2 Include the demands of future users

As a starting point for designing the furniture, it should be clear what kind of uses should be possible on it. In order to include the demands of future users, the local community should be actively involved at an early stage of the process. By organizing small workshops on site, or conducting a survey (online and offline), different ideas for its use can be identified. Also, the wishes and ideas of the cooperation partner should be considered as much as possible in terms of the design and equipment of the furniture.



3 Design and construct the furniture

Depending on your own resources, a designer or architect should be involved in the planning of the furniture in order to guarantee a high quality. The construction could be combined with a co-creation workshop on site where local residents can participate in, e.g. constructing some seats by themselves.



4 **Work out a rental system and utilization concept**

Before the first activities can take place on the furniture an organization system (usage concept) should be worked out together with the cooperation partner. A platform should be developed on which local residents can register and rent the furniture. It is recommended to create an online and offline renting system, so that there are not any limitations of access. Furthermore, it is suggested to advertise the possibility of lending the furniture through already established neighborhood networks such as a neighborhood management.

5 **Prepare a communication kit**

As preparation of the promotion of the activities on the furniture, a communication kit should be prepared that includes, among others, templates for posters and flyers. This should also be provided to users of the furniture to share their planned activities in the neighborhood and on Social Media.

6 **Reduction of the bureaucratic effort**

In order to ensure a long-term and uncomplicated use of the furniture, the bureaucratic effort should be reduced as much as possible. A general permit for certain time slots and locations makes flexible and short-term use possible. To bring this about, one could organise a round table with the responsible administrative bodies, for example.

II. Programming Phase

This phase starts as soon as the furniture is constructed and first activities are prepared. It should be initiated by a kick-off event that introduces the furniture as well as the (preliminary) program to the neighborhood. At this event it is important to explain how the renting system works and to communicate that everyone is invited to use the furniture for their own needs. The cooperation partner should be visible as the owner of the furniture and responsible contact point.

The following steps need to be considered during the application phase. Please note that they should take place in parallel.

6 **Coordinate the uses**

In order to coordinate the different users with each other, ongoing organizational and communication work is required. Among others, the times and places of the activities must be harmonized. Moreover, some activities of different users can be combined, such as an exhibition that only uses the outside walls of the furniture and a workshop that uses the tables and seats. A good preparation of the utilization concept and renting system (see above) pays off here.

7 **Support the implementation**

As also non-professionals are invited to use the furniture for their own purposes, they should be supported in the organization, preparation as well as implementation of their ideas. Among others, contacts to the respective departments should be created in order to get the necessary permits for organizing small events. Also the assembly and disassembly of the furniture and modification to the specific usage requirements should be supported.

8 **Promote the program**

In addition, the planned activities should be incorporated in a program that is promoted online and offline regularly (e.g. once or twice a month). Flyers and posters should be prepared, as well as articles for the local newspaper or facebook events.

Do you have to collaborate with others?

The answer is definitely yes! The following partners should be involved to guarantee a successful process and enable sustainability:

- » You should collaborate with a local partner, such as the library, a neighborhood association, educational institution, etc. that, on the one hand, is interested in using the furniture for their own needs, and, on the other hand, also takes over the responsibility of the furniture in the long term. Clearly, this cooperation partner needs to be involved in the process from the beginning, and should have a say in the design and equipment of the module. Its role should be defined before the implementation starts. A cooperation contract between you and the local institution should determine the conditions.
- » Another important cooperation partner that should be at least informed about the planned activities on the furniture is the respective district or the city administration. You should get in contact with the departments responsible for the use of public spaces and / or public parks (depending on the locations of your furniture) early enough to get the necessary permits to organize events in public space.
- » Depending on your own resources, you should also involve a team of designers or architects to plan the furniture, as well as a carpenter or craftsman for its construction.

Which communication channels should be used?

- Facebook and Instagram platforms of the district, local associations, social institutions, neighborhood groups, etc.
- Online newsletters of local associations
- District newspaper
- Posters (you should ask local shops, service providers, schools, etc. if they can stick a poster in their shop window)



III. Evaluation Phase

9 Evaluate the process

After the first implementation phase - according to the time frame agreed with the cooperation partner - has passed, the hardware, software and orgware should be evaluated and, if necessary, adjusted. Users of the furniture as well as participants of the activities should be involved in this step, e.g., by conducting a survey or interviews.

10 Consider the feedback in the further development

The results of the evaluation should be considered in the preparation of the next implementation phase. Based on the feedback, a new, improved furniture could be built that better meets the requirements, or the existing one could be adapted in terms of its design or equipment.

Depending on the available resources and interest of the local cooperation partner, its contract could be extended, or, additional local partners could be identified and involved who take over responsibility on the organization of the program and utilization concept.

How to evaluate??

The following questions can serve as basis for evaluation:

- **HARDWARE:** was the modification of the furniture easy? was it possible for a single person to modify and move it? Was the (technical) equipment ok? Was anything missing?
- **SOFTWARE:** Who rented the furniture? Were any stakeholder groups excluded and why? How to reach a wider variety of people?
- **ORGWARE:** how to save resources (financial, personnel, material)? Which cooperation partners should / could be involved in addition?

