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Traffic Island Edible Landscape

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TRAFFIC ISLAND EDIBLE LANDSCAPE

Increasingly the consequences of modern life force us to develop new approaches to the function and shaping of public space. Problems manifest themselves in a variety of ways depending on economic, geographic and social circumstances. An urgent issue is how transport and transportation facilities increasingly override ecological considerations, i.e. the circulation of enormous quantities of food between different parts of the world.

Nørreport is a 3-lane road with heavy traffic in the middle of the city of Aarhus, Denmark. This road area is a junction for several traffic lights and for soft and heavy traffic: each day thousands of road users pass through the area. This means that Nørreport is an important and highly visible public space for pedestrians, cyclists, cars and trucks. On a traffic island in the middle of the road, flowering plants form a long strip of approx. 100 square meters. The landscape does not consist of beautiful ornamental flowerbeds, but of edible plants that we know from our kitchen garden, such as berries, herbs and vegetables.

An Edible Landscape is a physical manifestation that raises questions on how we can solve contemporary challenges of modern life in the western world, i.e. ecological, economical and social challenges. Local actors and/or passers-by are invited to participate in the maintenance of the landscape and in different public events. But to the large daily number of passers-by, An Edible Landscape is first and foremost an image, a mirage - it, in other words, insists on visually engaging the passers-by on the level of ideas.

The familiar plants grown in an unusual context create an unfamiliar aesthetic. The nutritious plants and their edibility is a paradox in this junction of heavy traffic. Specific questions such as the amount of pollution in our environment, and whether we can actually eat vegetables grown in between heavy traffic merge with the purely visual aspect of the landscape. The paradox created by An Edible Landscape contributes to discussions that are increasingly concerned with the shaping of the public space, of seeing spaces of possibilities where edible plants - perhaps grown locally - could also play a much more central role. By its purely visual appearance, An Edible Landscape raises the question: could this be an actual solution to the lack of fresh food or to the invasion of roads and traffic in urban spaces due to the extensive circulation of food?

Based on the experiences gained by the establishment and maintenance of An Edible Landscape (April – November 2012) this paper discusses how temporary landscapes by the use of simple means, such as An Edible Landscape, can stimulate transformation and contribute to the elucidation of complex problems related to global issues, among others, the infrastructure of our food systems. It emphasises that within this conceptual approach there is an ability to create 'images' that give us new ways to relate to subjects and/or places, which are foreign and fairly abstract to us.

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