

VIEWPOINT

**The urban lounge and a green view.  
A temporary art installation in Bologna during the  
Art City White Night**

Luisa Bravo  
City Space Architecture, Italy  
[luisa.bravo@cityspacearchitecture.org](mailto:luisa.bravo@cityspacearchitecture.org)

**Abstract**

'The urban lounge and a green view' was a temporary art installation promoted by City Space Architecture in collaboration with bAQ, Bottega Azioni Quotidiane, a young group of Architecture students from the University of Florence. It was part of the 'Arte Fiera. International Fair of Modern and Contemporary Art' in Bologna, Italy, and took place during the 'Art City White Night' on January 25, 2014. It was intended to transform two parking spots in the core of the historic city of Bologna into places of social interaction. It was inspired by the worldwide famous Park(ing) Day, started in 2005 by Rebar in San Francisco.

**Keywords:** Bologna, Art City White Night, parking space, City Space Architecture, bAQ

**To cite this article:**

Bravo, L. (2018). The urban lounge and a green view. A temporary art installation in Bologna during the Art City White Night. *The Journal of Public Space*, 3(2), 173-178, DOI 10.32891/jps.v3i2.1115

This article has been accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*. Please see the Editorial Policies under the 'About' section of the journal website for further information.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution - Non Commercial 4.0

*The initial PARK(ing) intervention occurred on November 16, 2005 from noon until 2 p.m., without incident or interference from any level of institutional authority. Sort of makes you wonder what else you can do in a parking space . . .*

Rebar, San Francisco, 2005

### **Who said that parking spaces are just for cars?**

When you need to park your car in the city centre of Bologna, if you are not a resident you most probably have to pay in order to rent the parking space for a given time. You pay money, so the space is yours for as long as you need to park your car. So why not using it for other activities instead of parking?

This is what I thought when with my organization City Space Architecture, in collaboration with bAQ, Bottega Azioni Quotidiane, I applied for an art installation to be included in the 'Art City White Night' in 2014, as part of 'Arte Fiera. International Fair of Modern and Contemporary Art' in Bologna, Italy's longest running art fair and the leading national event in terms of sales<sup>1</sup>. We were inspired by the work of the design studio Rebar in San Francisco in 2005, which transformed a single metered parking space into a temporary mini public park in the SOMA district, that was known to be underserved by public open space. Just by rolling out living grass, putting up a bench and placing a potted tree, they created an opportunity for social interaction: as Rebar described 'within minutes, a man sat down on the bench, took off his shoes, and began to eat lunch, another person joined soon after, and the two began having a conversation'.

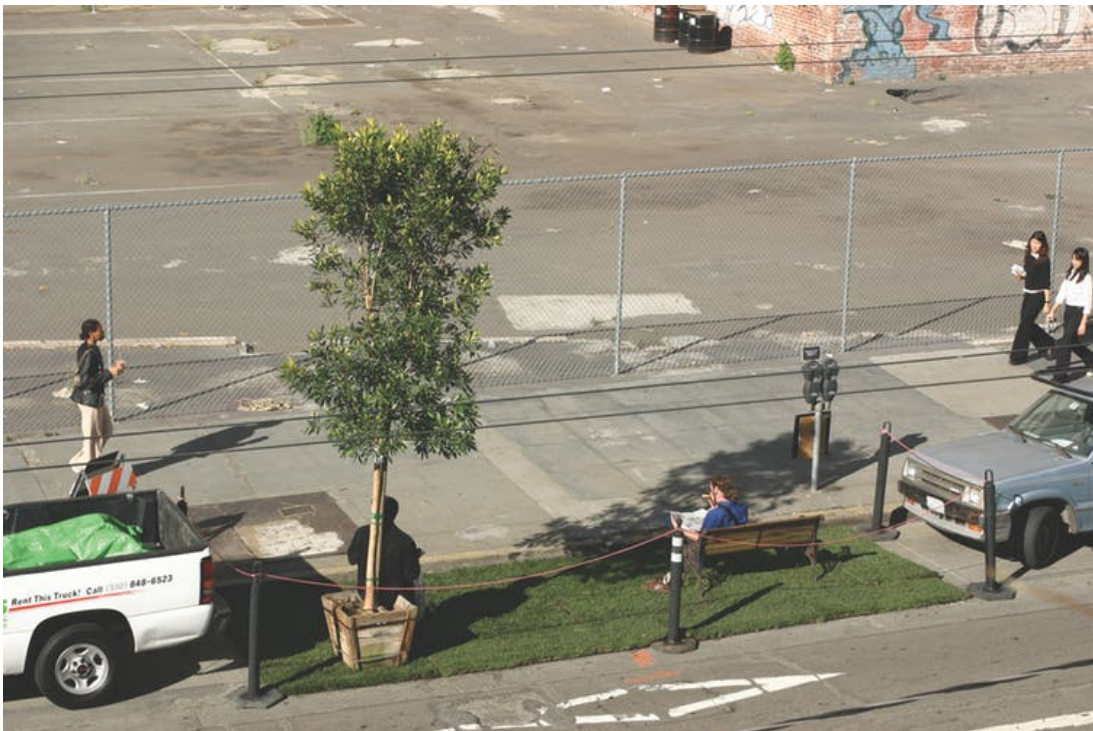


Figure 1. The original Park(ing) installation on 1st and Mission Streets in San Francisco (Rebar Group).

<sup>1</sup> Arte Fiera: <http://www.artefiera.it/en/home/776.html>. Accessed August 15, 2018.

At that time, 70% of San Francisco's downtown outdoor space was dedicated to the private vehicle, while only a fraction of that space was allocated to the public realm. But after the Rebar's Park(ing) installation, the idea to reuse the parking space for public use soon became the expression of an alternative thinking, reclaiming public space as a fundamental value for urban life. After that, Rebar prepared an how-to manual, addressing the technical aspects of Park(ing) installations, intended to share what they called 'an act of generosity' with anyone was interested to create his/her own park. Later Rebar received support from the Trust for Public Land and the Park(ing) Day went global: in 2006 it was celebrated with 47 'parks' in 13 cities across three countries and then expanded to more than 200 parks in 2007 and featuring in the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2008. By 2011 PARK(ing) Day included almost 1,000 parks in 35 countries. In 2008 the City of San Francisco approached Rebar to prototype 'parklets', as more permanent Park(ing) style installations, sponsored by local businesses, and later to start the Pavement to Parks program (<https://groundplaysf.org/parklets/>).

The Park(ing) Day was a huge success and inspired new ways to improve public space, from 'lighter, quicker, cheaper interventions', as defined by place-making experts working at Project for Public Spaces in New York City, to tactical urbanism, intended as short-term actions for long-term change<sup>2</sup>.

### Re-imagining the use of the urban parking space

In the 60's Piazza Maggiore in Bologna was full of cars.



Figure. 2. Bologna, Piazza Maggiore, 1960's.

<sup>2</sup> Lydon, M. (2012), *Tactical Urbanism. Short-term action, long-term change*, The Street Plans Collaborative, Miami-New York, available on line: <http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/guides/>

In 1968 the Municipality implemented a pedestrian use of the piazza, so all cars were removed. But the city centre remained congested by car traffic and still today it is almost impossible to find a parking spot during the rush hours. As a consequence, the pedestrianization of a defined part of the city centre is still one of the crucial and largely discussed urban issues. A recent programme 'Di nuovo in centro', promoted by the Municipality and adopted in 2011, was intended to define a pedestrian-friendly use of the urban space in the city centre, by improving accessibility, by bus and by bicycle, and by redeveloping the public space and regulating its use<sup>3</sup>, by allocating new parking areas and by reorganizing the traffic flows entering the city centre.

The art installation 'The urban lounge and a green view' took place along one of the main streets in the urban core of the city of Bologna, Via Santo Stefano, a street leading to Piazza Santo Stefano, one of the most beautiful piazzas in the historic centre of Bologna, close to the Leaning Towers.



Figure. 3, 4. Via Santo Stefano and Piazza Santo Stefano.

The installation was placed within the footprint of two parking spots, so 2.5 by 10 meters wide. We applied for formal authorization to the Municipality for the use of the space and we asked residents to be patient and leave the two parking spaces empty for our installation. Surprisingly, nobody complained.

The parking spots were transformed, from 6:00 pm to midnight, into a urban living room and its garden, so we put outdoor a domestic environment. Staging the intimacy of daily indoor activities, our question was: if you care about your home why don't you care enough about the public space, which is your home in the city? With this provocation, we intended to open a discussion about the potential of the urban spaces of the city core: how many urban living rooms for social interaction could replace parking spots? And how many urban living rooms do we need to make a livable city?

We printed a pamphlet called 'La Res Publica', which means 'The public good' - evoking the Italian newspaper 'La Repubblica' – that we distributed to all those who came and sat on our sofa or in the garden.

---

<sup>3</sup> Municipality of Bologna, *Di nuovo in centro* (2014), [http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/di\\_nuovo\\_in\\_centroucb\\_deff.pdf](http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/di_nuovo_in_centroucb_deff.pdf). Accessed August 15, 2018.



Figure. 5, 6 and 8 (next page). The urban lounge and a green view, Art City White Night, Bologna, 2014.  
Photos by Fabio Mantovani.

The urban lounge and a green view



Figure. 7. Our pamphlet 'La Res Publica'. How many urban living rooms do we need to make a livable city?



**Acknowledgment**

A special thanks to the team of City Space Architecture, Simone Garagnani, Valerio Francia, Camilla Carmagnini and Francesco Ciampolini, and to bAQ, Antonio Salvi, Francesco Polci, Filippo Pecorai, Giovanni Manzoni, Alessio Piomboni, Francesco Onorati, Giacomo Razzolini, Giacomo Fondelli. Thanks also to Spazio & Forme for the interiors of our lounge and to Tresanti wine bar for the good wine and the friendly hospitality.