

Transformative city-making

Urban interventions // Rewilding Tallinn

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Participants: Heleen Moss, Ieva Lange, Iryna Horpynenko, Janne Vasarainen, Kāti Romandi, Liisi Raidna, Margarete Trumm, Philip Filimonov, Ruslan Mustafaev

Project aim:

We wanted our project to be part of starting a social movement.

In our cities, we want to be surrounded by plants when we exit our houses. We also want to share our urban habitats with non-human animals. We wish to stop making urban green spaces into parking lots and address the city government's car centered policies. More wildlife and safe spaces to rest and play near residential areas is good for all residents' health and wellbeing. We aim towards an improved urban environment in Tallinn and increased well being of humans and animals as a result of it.

With our project, we aimed to encourage Tallinn residents to come together and be proactive in designing and co-creating their surrounding landscapes. We wanted to promote a view of cities as part of nature, with their own specific characteristics, and share direct, tangible information on how to plant, take care of places and make them more ecologically just.

We wished to motivate and inspire people to come together to improve their immediate living spaces and public spaces, as well as make Tallinners more demanding about their outdoor surroundings to the municipality.

Our role has been to inspire to take action, to ignite broader public conversation and also provide efficient and practical tips on where to start and how to proceed – e.g. to promote the idea that it is ok to take matters in your own hands and plant a tree near your house; to start persuading city government to take seriously Tallinners' wish for more trees and nature in Tallinn; to introduce simple and doable ways to prevent heat islands that generate heat in the summer.

Target audience: adults of Tallinn – people who live in apartment blocks; people who would like to improve public/common spaces; people who live with pets and wish to have more safe spaces for animals.

We wanted to promote our cause on social media – sharing our observations, bits of research and tips for Tallinn residents, as well as steps to take in order to participate more directly in the making of their environment so that Tallinn is more naturally diverse and animal friendly.

Project activities:

- promoting thematic content on social media – an Instagram account @linnalootus;
- creating videos on guerilla gardening to raise peoples' awareness and get them engaged;
- a DIY meadow sign making workshop in collaboration with Feministeerium an independent feminist publication (e.g. inviting people to let the grass grow without manicuring it) and placing the signs in public environment;
- guerilla gardening on a piece of streetside land in Veerenni.

Research:

To prepare the project, we researched rewilding examples in different cities, various initiatives fostering citizen engagement with greening, as well as broader discussions among researchers and practitioners regarding these questions (e.g. the roundtable discussions in thenatureofcities.com). Papers emphasized that urban sustainability requires strong community participation and justice and thus sustainability should be framed as a political movement to transform human relationships with the environment (Broto 2018).

Rewilding – leaving allotted (and perhaps previously heavily “manicured”) spaces mostly uncultivated and self-regulated – in cities fosters biodiversity, as native grasses, shrubs, and wildflowers over time attract more diverse animals. Research has shown that when self-regulating meadows and areas of biodiversity replace maintenance-heavy monoculture, these urban wilds also become more drought resistant and sequester more CO₂ (Broto 2018).

We looked at research on stewardship activities that engage residents in maintaining, planting, and managing unconventional green spaces as a strategy for increasing engagement with these spaces, as well as allowing a greater understanding of how to value nature as part of a sustainable, livable city – not separate from it (Danford et al. 2018, Lehmann 2021). Danford et al. (2018) argue that when green spaces are designed and built by local residents, they are more malleable and open to the changing needs of the specific community they service and even help in building collective efficacy.

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action plan/roles/tasks:

Tasks	Deadline	Student(s) responsible
research and preparation period	11.04.	all
media campaign goes public	13.04	Heleen and Käti
leaflet workshop (switched to DIY street sign workshop)	16-24.04	Liisi
printing leaflets, stickers, poster (eventually we decided not to do it)	25-30.04	all
video shoot	april	all
content creation, photos, post etc	18.03- end of project	all
leaflet content	16.04	Margarete
translations to Russian	13.04-end of project	Rina

Engagement statistics

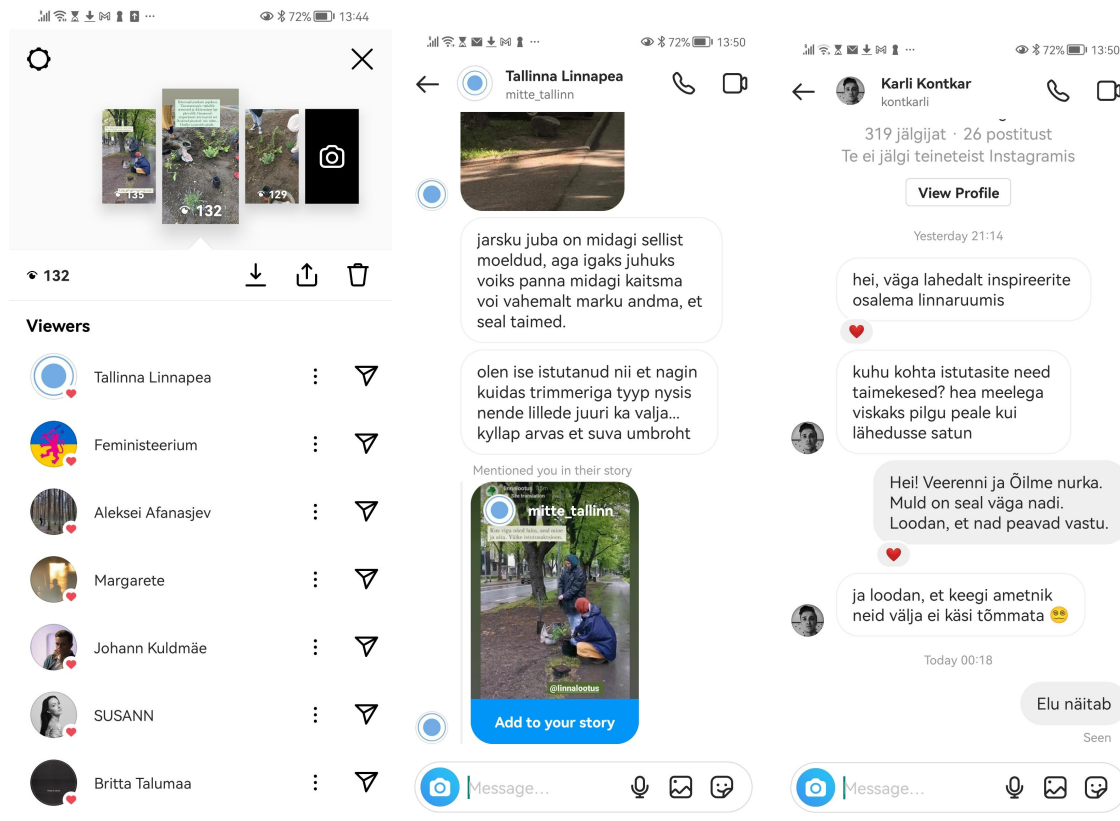


In a short time we have gathered 193 followers. People have engaged with our stories with 14 people messaging to us, reacting or sharing our stories. There have been 5 comments on our posts. It seems that people like to consume Instagram stories and thus engage more with them. The most likes we have gotten is 54 while stories get even more views.

@mittetallinn with 13 000 followers, one of the most important influencers in regard to the urban environment, shared our post or story at least 5 times and also engaged in messages and reactions.

Also Feministeerium (3094 followers), Elavtänav (1648 followers) and Pärtel-Peter Pere also known as the “Rattalinnapea” (1154 followers) shared our content.

Most popular have been the stories about immediate interventions to the urban space. The signs and our planting experiment videos got a lot of attention and positive reactions.



INSTAGRAM FILMS

As a part of our social media content plan, we have decided to get as many followers as we can by making small fiction films for instagram reels. Originally, our media department came up with 3 different ideas from tik-tok format videos to fiction short films. Eventually, the project team voted for a mockumentary style series of videos.



Our aim was to create stylistically unique videos with a certain story inside. Short films follow two young characters who decide to change the city and start a guerrilla gardening movement. Story consists of interviews with action in mockumentary style. (A

mockumentary or docucomedy is a type of film or television show depicting fictional events but presented as a documentary)

So far we have managed to film 2 short mini-films.

Workshop

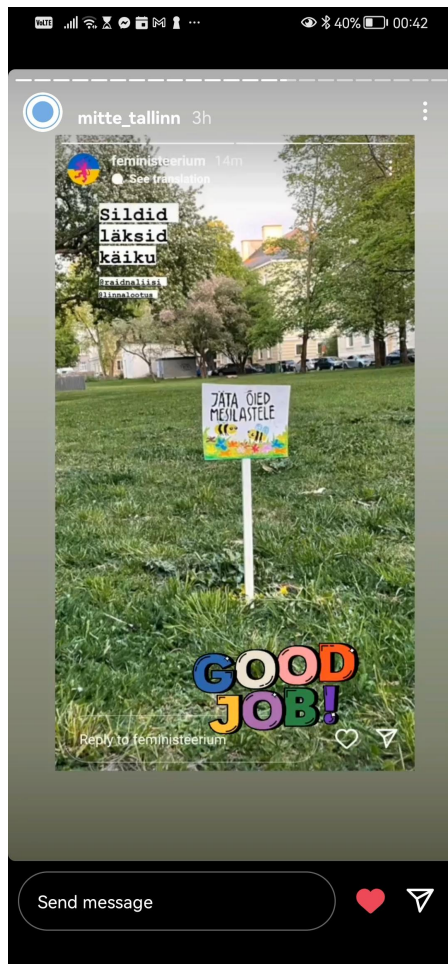
On 26th of May we organised a feminist reading group gathering and workshop: *“Lugemisgrupp x töötuba: aktivism avalikus ruumis.”* (Reading group plus workshop: activism in public space). The workshop was co hosted by Feministeerium an independent feminist publication. 6 people participated, among others an editor from Estonia's first green webportal Bioneer.ee. Participants had a very fruitful discussion and also made signs to engage in discussion in public space.

Feministeerium shared the video and info and also the results of the workshop in their channels.



Urban interventions: signs in public spaces

The signs made during the 26th of May workshop were made public in the city and also in Instagram.



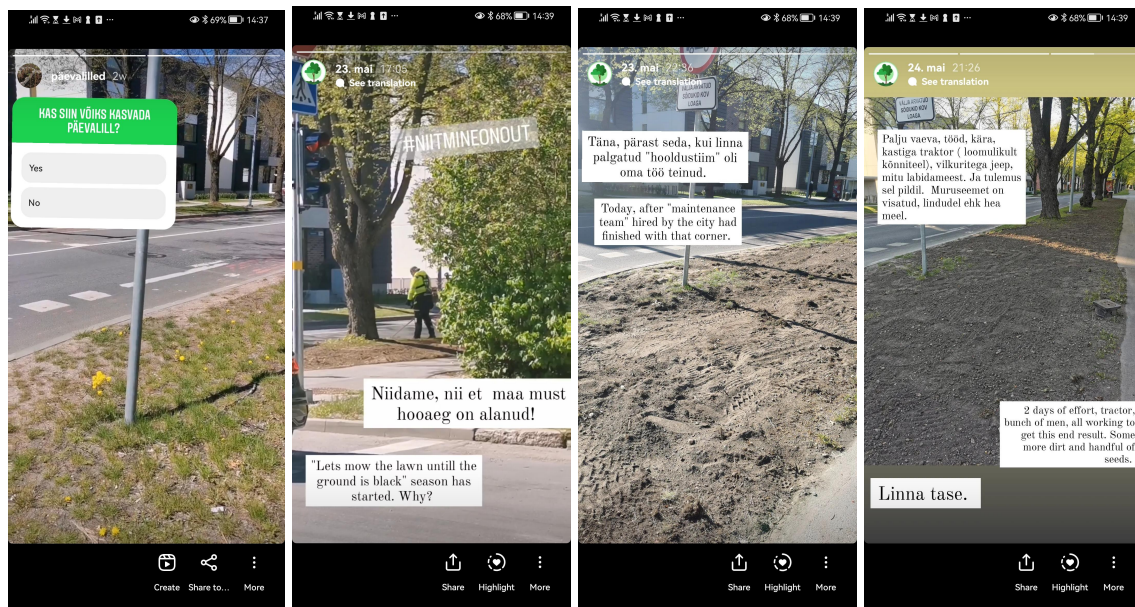
Petition:

During the workshop the participants discussed how frustrating it is that mowing the lawn, or just the grass growing in random places in the city is still the standard in Tallinn. It is Especially painful to see grass in full bloom being cut down to minimal height. All agreed that letting plants grow is not really a question of taste, but a question of biodiversity and environment. Municipalities should support biodiversity and lush growth of grass. Seeing a lot of different mechanized ways of grass cutting funded by the municipality during May is in stark contrast with lax attitude Tallinn municipality has about keeping the pavements icefree during winter. There seems to be an organized plan for mowing all grass, but no real coherent strategy to keep pavements ice and snow free during winter. Tallinn expects property owners to do that job, but in reality it doesn't work and every winter there is the same discussion about lack of funding and lack of workforce to keep pavements walkable and bykelanes snow free during the winter.

So, we decided to start a petition to urge people to demand that Tallinn should skip grass cutting in most of the public areas and refer that funding to keeping the pavements and bike lanes snow free. That petition text is now in the making. To convince people good homework and also some calculations need to be made. Feministeerium and Bioneer.ee are also interested in getting that petition going as the frustration with senseless grass cutting seems to be growing as people are getting more conscious of biodiversity etc.

Urban interventions: planting in a municipal land left derelict by grass cutting.

prologue:



In two days from the first photo to the last one. First these little plants were treated with a lawn trimmer then the soil was left like in the third photo. Next day after @linnalootus had posted it and @mittetallinn had shared it (a coincidence or not?) was the team back and left the street corner as seen on the 4th photo. Liisi Raidna approached the team and asked what

happened on that street corner and if there was some extra digging that needed to be done? The men working there were kind enough to explain that they were instructed to make the soil layer thinner, but as the men working noticed that it would injure the roots of the trees they aborted the mission. They came back the next day to correct the mistake, and threw some soil and grass seeds on the patch.

This case shows vibrantly how wasteful is the maintenance of the city greenery provided by the municipality.

There were 4 men mowing the grass on either side of the street with fuel operated machinery, the 4x4 jeep parked on the pavement the whole time and to no improvement of the city environment.

So we decided to make our own case:

We gathered some plants and made a little flower bed on that same street corner. No 4x4 jeep, no fuel operating machinery, just 4 people planting. It took us less than half an hour and cost under 10 euros

That became our most popular story so far.



Sustainability of the project

Cooperation with Feministeerium will continue as we are preparing the petition mentioned above.

There is some good material not yet published on Instagram and also some good ideas under development. We aim to keep the Linnalootus Instagram page alive.

Summary of the results

We implemented all we planned only with one little adjustment in changing leaflets to DIY signs. All aspects and phases of the project were successful, we made immediate little changes in the urban environment and reached quite a lot of people to inspire others.

Self-reflection report about the learning experience of each team member

RUSLAN MUSTAFAEV (FILMMAKER)

During this project, I have tried to apply all my skills and knowledge in the field of media in order to develop and gain a wider audience for our social media page. We had a small film team inside a bigger project team consisting of 4 people and our main task was developing certain content for instagram.

First of all, we set up what kind of social media platform we go for and what kind of content we are planning to use. Then, I started working on our mini-films plan. My main task was preparing locations, camerawork and logistics. Considering our small film crew, I have managed to film with style and approach, we have planned in advance.

I was happy to be a part of this project. The environmental movement is also about doing good things with likeminded people from different fields.

JANNE VASARAINEN (FILMMAKER)

Along with 3 other persons, I worked in the film team producing two short films for the larger campaign. From the beginning we worked together to formulate a script which was then showcased to the larger group and finished by Philip after feedback. My main responsibilities during our shoots were recording sound, overall production duties and prop logistics. As the theme was small, we tried to help each other as often as possible to conduct the tasks efficiently. From the project I received a new experience in working as a part of a video creation team, trying to get a wider vision into reality. A definite context given by the rewildening team released our creativity to be aimed at something more concrete - and I see that we succeeded in doing so.

I myself am happy about the outcomes of the films and pleased with the execution of the whole project. I felt like everyone had an intensely busy spring period, and many of us were also on the edge of graduation, but everyone chipped in to the extent of their capabilities. The

project idea itself was inspiring and certainly left me thinking of doing something similar in my hometown Helsinki.

PHILIP FILIMONAU (FILMMAKER)

It was a great experience, just as it always is when a project is based on a transformative idea. We worked in a small, but great team and managed to efficiently film what we needed despite having limited resources. As mentioned above I was responsible for scriptwriting and editing. Our intention was to make videos that would evoke positive emotions and make a major audience interested in guerilla gardening after watching them. That is why I wrote a comic character whom I later played.

During video shooting we also became part of urban interventions and guerilla gardening since we needed to plant a flower. Janne and Ruslan got us very well equipped for that purpose.

I am happy we added to the content of the social network the rest of Urban Interventions team members developed and hope that the new people inspired by the videos will give an inflow of fresh creative energy, so that Tallinn would be transforming into a green city much faster.

IEVA LANGE (ANTHROPOLOGY)

I actively participated in all phases of the project – development of the idea, planning of activities, implementation and evaluation. One of the most rewarding experiences during the project was doing actual collective streetside guerilla gardening for the first time – both the activity itself as a direct engagement with the materiality of the city – getting the plants, digging and planting, spreading the seeds, observing the reactions of passers-by, as well as the organization of it, as we just met for collective action we wanted to do together, had wanted to try out, for a stance which we find meaningful, using the resources we had at hand and that we brought together. Our social media posts showing this had good engagement – generally, during the implementation of the project we felt public interest and the need to bring up related issues in public attention and discussion.

HELEEN MOSS (LIBERAL ARTS)

I took part in coming up with ideas for our project and the making of our Instagram page and posts. By taking part in this project I also tried new things for example digital art and guerilla gardening. Both were really fun experiences and I hope that this will not be the last time doing them. Not only could I try new things, but I learned a lot and my own mindset changed into wanting a greener and more ecologically just city. It was great seeing that there are many people who feel the same way, those who engage with our Instagram posts. Our aim was to motivate people to want a greener city and I hope we really did motivate people to look more around them and plant more in places that lack greenery.

KÄTI ROMANDI (CULTURAL STUDIES)

I feel like we had a nice group dynamic. I had never designed anything before and even though we didn't use my version, it was still an experience. I helped the film crew by looking for an actress and also translated the text to Estonian for her. I loved watching our following grow. In the future I want to learn how to see problems on the streets, and how to notice them better. Coming up together with the first idea was interesting - deciding what would have an impact. I personally had a little hard time knowing what I'm supposed to do and that's why I also see my contribution as less than others, but I did learn a lot about different subjects I didn't know much about (city municipality, guerilla gardening). I would recommend this course to anyone who is really active and knows how to come up with things themselves. Overall, I'm really happy how the project came out.

MARGARETE TRUMM (ASIAN STUDIES)

Besides just being informative I find that this project has taught me a lot especially in terms of collective action and starting something even if it means just trying. My favorite part was realizing how easy it actually is to gather a few people and make a practical change that in turn will hopefully influence or encourage other people to do the same, especially if paired with social media as ours was. This together with the experience I had when communicating with the city municipality has inspired me to rather approach things with the idea of "what could I do at this moment to help this situation". The communication aspect in general also taught me how to better handle people and organizations as well, which I find especially useful.

LIISI RAIDNA (ANTHROPOLOGY)

I also actively participated in all phases of the project. I was positively surprised how easily we reached consensus on what to do and how to implement our plans. I learned that sticking with the initial idea and plan works best. After the first project presentation we were strongly advised to downscale and maybe just create one guerilla gardening event where we could get the press present or continue only with the films. I felt, and so did all other team members, that we do not want to create one sensationalist event, but take several small steps that would in the end have a stronger impact.

I am happy with the results of the project.

IRYNA HORPYNENKO (EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP)

It has been a great experience for me and all other members of the project to do a big thing together – making Tallinn greener and healthier for all the residents of the city. Nowadays it is vital to protect our planet and the environment around us. I have received a very interesting and useful experience on how to do gardening (sowing seeds, planting flowers, and taking care of them), and educating other people by sharing your own experience and providing

helpful pieces of advice on our Instagram page. The whole mindset of living a sustainable and meaningful life is quite fascinating to me, and I am very happy that I have had a chance to share it with our team!