

TELOS Intensive Study Programme Working Group Report: Wörth Community Park

Authors

Dr. Romina D'Ascanio, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy
Dr. Beata Dreksler, American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanon
Dr. Ellen Fetzer, Nürtingen-Geislingen University (HfWU), Germany
Prof. Dr. Dirk Funck, Nürtingen-Geislingen University (HfWU), Germany
Dr. Salma Samaha, President of the Lebanese Landscape Association (LELA), Lebanon

Students involved: Sıla Balta, Emilija Stojcheva, Selamawit Getahun Eshetu, Marta Hrycyna, Nagham El Hayek, Odai Thamer, Elif Parlak, Marta Kloch, Kathryn Novkov, Liudmila Matsisovich, Huriye Dilara Üna

Goals and objectives

Our group addressed a very relevant local landscape economy conflict that gained a lot of attention in the period of the landscape forum and continues to be a local debate. The so-called 'Wörth' area is a centrally located brownfield in Nürtingen. The area itself has about 1,5 hectares facing the shore of the river Neckar. All of this is part of the river floodplain. The field name Wörth (= piece of land covered by water), which can also be found elsewhere, explains why the river bank of the Neckar was not previously built on. Historical maps show the area as a river meadow with orchards, which was typical for the pre-industrial period. The area north of today's "Wörthstraße" was first built in 1862, when the timber merchant Schoch built a warehouse here. From this emerged a steam-powered sawmill and the timber trade. The last family to own the mill, Feßmann, ceased operations in 1954. Some of the factory buildings were demolished. Some of them, renovated or newly built, mostly served trading companies as accommodation until the beginning of the 21st century when these enterprises closed down. In sum, access to the river was not possible from the mid-19th century until 2008 when the city of Nürtingen bought the entire space and cleared it. Since then, it has been used as a temporary parking place.

After many years of discussion about the future of the Wörth district, on October 2, 2012, a constitutional resolution for a housing development plan for the area was passed by a narrow majority. Numerous petitions were submitted against the development plan in 2014, asking for more local recreational space and suggested a single-row of houses, instead. Due to the new flood protection regulations, no construction has been carried out. In August 2019, there was a political change with newly elected mayor Dr. Johannes Fridrich. In September 2019, the local Fridays for Future movement stood up for more local climate action.

Within the framework of this new political environment, it became possible to establish a new interim use on the Wörth District, an urban gardening project. This interim use was established in the middle of the pandemic period and became highly successful. It started with a two-year contract, but has been extended on an annual basis since then. Knowing that the old development plan was no longer possible because of more severe flood protection regulations, the town council decided eventually to turn down the original plan. All of a sudden, the development perspective for this very valuable territory is open again for public debate. In the beginning of 2023 though, the town council suddenly moved ahead asking for a fast public participation process on the future of the area. In the beginning of May, the council decided on the conditions to be set for this participation process. Housing development in the Wörth district was decided as a framework condition. All of this brought

the public debate back into play leading to a movement for a public park to be developed not only on the Wörth district itself, but also including all the other open spaces further upstream which are all publicly owned land. The idea of a public river park was out of question before as all civil society initiatives were focused on preventing the housing-oriented development plan. Since 2012, the public awareness for the role of public space, the need for natural flood protection, climate adaptation, spatial justice and biodiversity conservation has substantially increased. It is much more likely that the vision of a public park on the river would be accepted by a majority of the local population.

In this context, the motivation of the TELOS workshop during the landscape forum was to better understand how a public park on the river Neckar including the Wörth area could work.

This included two key questions:

1. From a spatial perspective: How might we develop this area into a relevant urban green blue infrastructure? Which design would be suitable? Which benefits could be derived and quantified?
2. From a social innovation and organisational perspective: How would a community park work? How will they be organized? What are the financing mechanisms? Which innovative forms of collaboration do we need?

The concepts developed should support the local discourse on the future of the territory that has been missing out on the vision of a park so far. A profound awareness of this possibility, the benefits it implies and the opportunity costs generated by not realising a park are essential elements for the local decision making.

A summary of the working process

The didactic concept follows the idea of a community-based design thinking process for the development of social innovations or social business models. Ideally, this process goes through the seven steps shown in Figure 1:

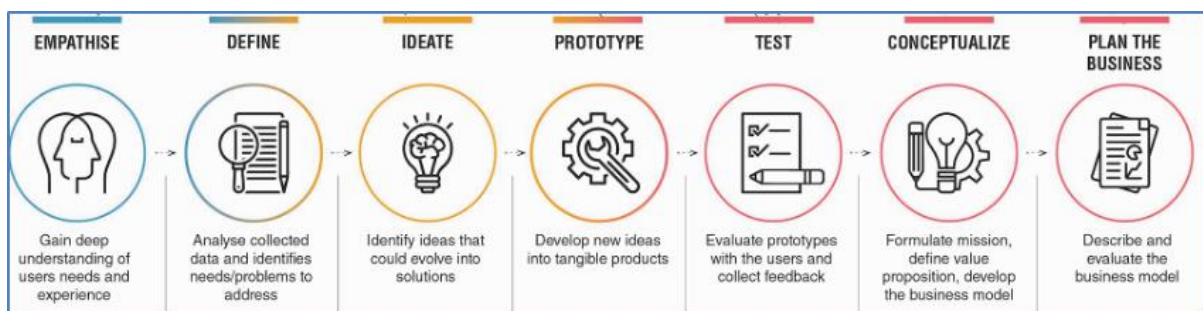


Figure 1: Seven Steps to Social Innovations or Enterprises (Funk et al., 2023, p. 36).

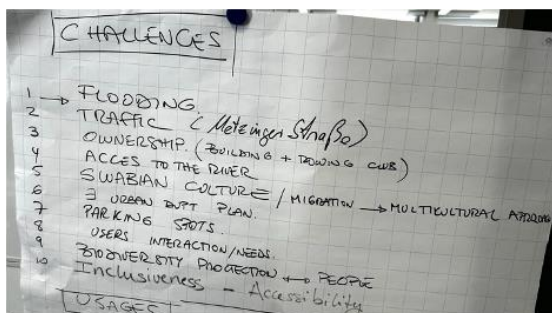
Empathise: For a better understanding of the place to be designed and the community involved, a meeting was organized at Wörth Park on Sunday, June 25, 2023, to start the project week. The history of the area was told, the current situation was explained, and different actors presented their wishes and visions for the further development of the area. These included participants in the community garden currently operating there, members of the "Wörth Park" initiative, but also residents and citizens of Nürtingen. The students then had

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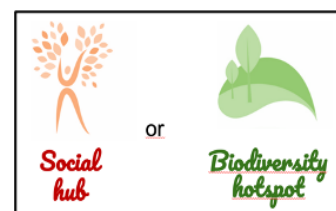
the opportunity to ask questions and discuss with the community. Finally, the entire area was walked around together, and an impression of the current uses and users was given.



Define: Based on the information gathered, the group then created a community map that depicted in context the values of the area that had been identified or that still needed to be activated, as well as all current and potential actors and stakeholders. This was also supplemented by identifying the specific challenges in designing this multifunctional area with very diverse target groups and stakeholders.



Ideate: The students were divided up in two groups for further work. The goal was to develop two different design concepts for the future park. One group was therefore given the task of addressing ecological values more strongly in its concept, while the other group concentrated more on social values. In order to focus the joint work in the two groups on a common goal, a vision was formulated in each case and a mission for the "social hub" and the "biodiversity hotspot" was derived from it. This was the basis for an in-depth brainstorming on the possible design elements and offers - enriched by feedback from the coaches but also peer feedback from the groups among themselves.



Prototype: In both groups, the ideas and elements that were found to be good were synthesized into a master plan. The group with the more social orientation focused on the participatory and co-creative process of developing the park over a five-year period, while the other group was more concerned with conveying the image of a future eco-paradise. This was very clearly illustrated by "before and after" pictures.



Test: The final test of these prototypes took place with the participation of members of the community on Saturday, July 1, in the context of the presentation of the concepts and a subsequent discussion. The groups succeeded very well in combining the results into a joint presentation. The community could also be involved in the presentation in an empathetic way in the context of a creative story-telling, in which they communicated their feelings about the future "Wörth-Park" in the role of a "river" or a "tree".

Conceptualize and Plan the Business: Both groups drafted a first proposal for a Social Business Model Canvas and developed initial ideas for the governance of the future park within the framework of a "public-private-partnership". With the support of an expert and from the team of lecturers, initial considerations for the business plan were also made, taking into account the investments, subsidies and costs of ongoing operation. The documents are available to the community in their entirety so that they can be further developed and elaborated in greater detail.

Outcomes and findings

Group 1: Nürtingen Heaven - A Social Hub for all

Students: Marta Hrycyna, Marta Kloch, Kathryn Novkov, Liudmila Matsisovich

The group that focused on the social dimension of the park, visualized the project as a process rather than an intervention itself. The proposal entitled Nürtingen Heaven focused on creating a Social Hub, the park „by the people, for the people“. It is based on the leadership of the community in shaping the park's future functions and identity.

The inspiration was the model of ecological succession - the long-term progression of biological communities that occurs in a given area. The students adapted this term and defined the intervention as a social succession, the process by which the structure of a social community of the park evolves, gradually involving new stakeholders.

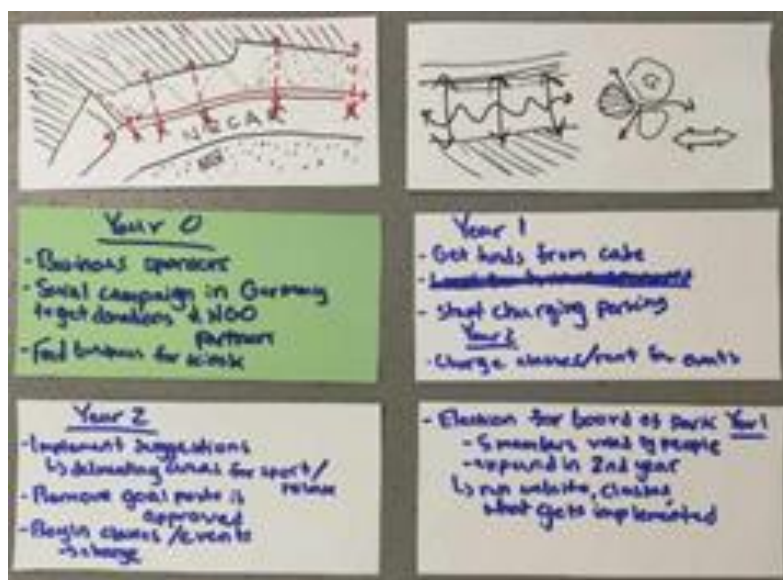


The group developed Vision, Mission, and Objectives as follows:

VISION: A harmonious and sustainable park that promotes social integration, the appreciation of nature and enriches the lives of visitors of all ages and all backgrounds.

MISSION: Our mission is to create an environmentally sustainable and inclusive space through thoughtfully designed infrastructure. By offering a variety of opportunities for both active sports and relaxation, we aim to bring people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests together to promote meaningful connections within the community.

OBJECTIVES: promote community engagement: create an interactive space where events can be organized that encourage active participation, social interaction, and dialogue among individuals from various backgrounds and enhance infrastructure: develop well-designed infrastructure to accommodate diverse activities including areas designated for sports and relaxation.

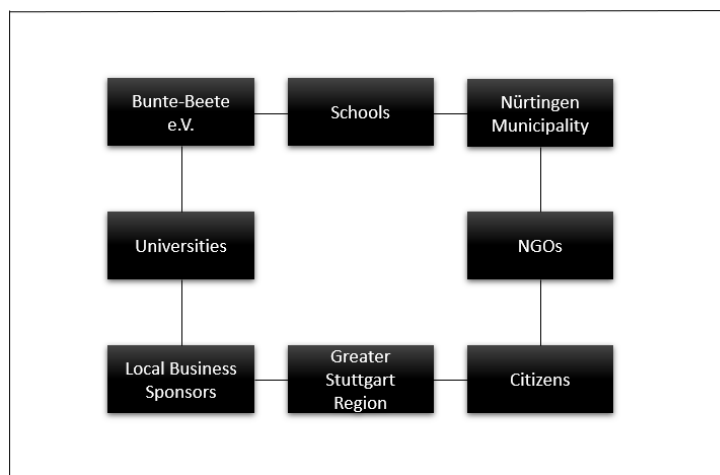


Students proposed that the park will be run by Nürtingen citizens including all social groups (elderly people, children, teenagers, families, students, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, etc.) and will capitalize on the actions already taken in the area. The time dimension becomes crucial since the process is based on small interventions over several years.

During the brainstorming sessions students discussed different scenarios of the process, relevant stakeholders as well as ideas for the future program of the site (fig below).



The proposed interventions were based on the social inclusion principles and the ideas that are already present and working well in the park such as farming and gardening. With time the park will be equipped also with nature-based infrastructure including playgrounds and multifunctional spaces which can host social gatherings and thematic events.



The governance model will change gradually, starting from the existing leaders of the ongoing initiatives (Bunte-Beete a.V. - already working on the community garden, and Nürtingen Municipality), finally ending with a multi-stakeholders governance model (fig).

As a final step, students developed a Social Business Model Canvas, where they reflect on stakeholders, the process, its sustainability, and feasibility.

The key partners of the transformation process were identified (NGOs, local government, small businesses). The key processes included integration of the citizens, education, marketing, funding for providing the new outdoor space. The value proposition was defined for:

- customers (citizens, residents of the area, visitors) - the only park within Nürtingen designed to support a plethora of diverse activities that cater to a variety of needs and allow for easily accessible socialization,

- diverse beneficiaries (local business owners, farmers, municipality, local workers, scientists, volunteers) - knowledge, income, experience, an attractive point for the people.

To measure the success of the project, KPI (Key Performance Indicators) were defined as follows: attendance, diversity of people, number and diversity of events and overall citizens' satisfaction (measured with surveys).

Students identified impacts of the proposed project:

- social: growth of the level of integration and inclusion, improvement of the mental and physical health, improvement of the community life;
- environmental: biodiversity growth, decrease of CO₂, decrease of the Heat Island effect.

Group 2: Eco Paradise as a biodiversity hotspot

Students: Dilara Ünal, Elif Parlak, Emilija Stojcheva, Nagham El Hayek, Odai Thamer, Selamawit Getahun, Sila Balta

The group has entitled its project "Eco Paradise" starting from the assumption of making the area a biodiversity hotspot and therefore focusing the project on strengthening the ecological networks of the river and the protection of natural resources.

They set the following vision: 'Eco Paradise' is an environmentally sound interactive space where people can be a part of nature at the Neckar in Nürtingen.

Their mission is: with 'Eco Paradise' we provide intermediate and inclusive spaces where people and nature interact by way of sport, educational, recreational and agricultural activities. With respect to the ecological necessities intergenerational people can be a part of the whole system for the revitalization of Nürtingen.

The group set the following objectives:

1. Improve ecological value of Nürtingen by protecting the biodiversity
2. Foster social inclusion
3. Reduce the flood risk
4. Contribute on social education about nature
5. Create positive impact on the environment
6. Improve connection to the river

According to this framework, their concept was based on the idea to consider the river as a complex system made of physical and morphological features and animated by various stakeholders. The second step was, in order to enhance the river environment, to define a network among strengths and weaknesses and the different stakeholders in charge or interested in the enhancement of the river park and (Fig. 1).

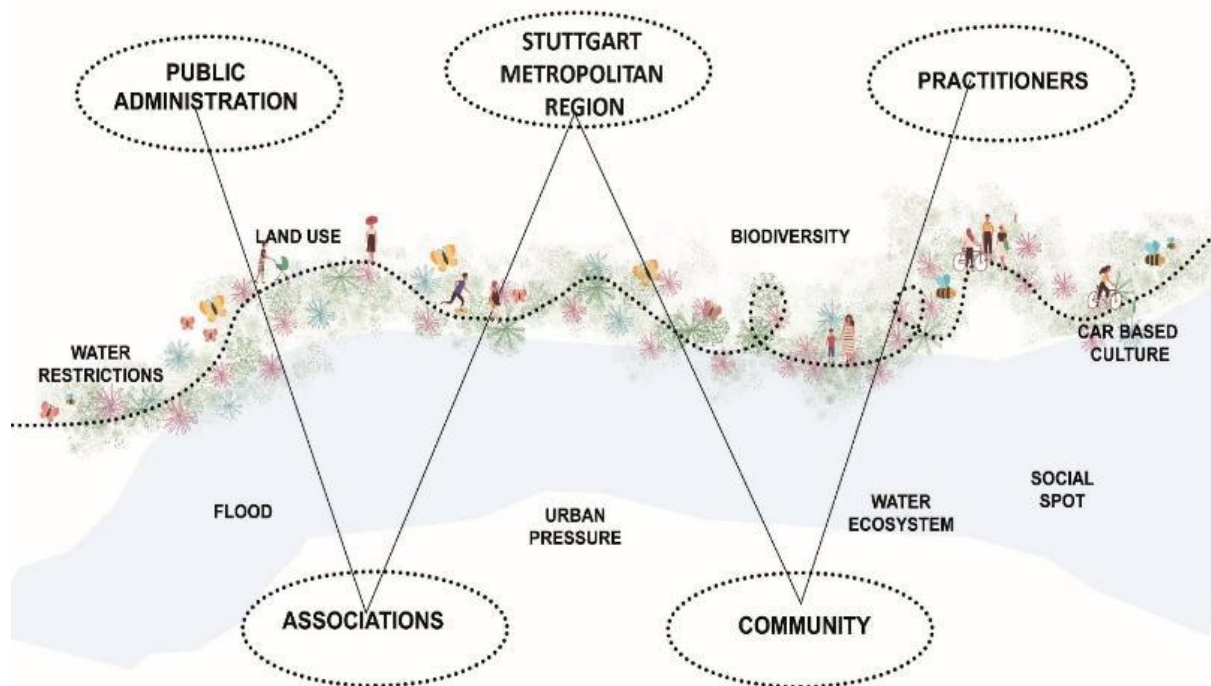


Fig. 1 – concept of the project

The students then developed a masterplan in which the central point was the prioritization of nature as vital for the continuation of human life, through the arrangement of the river banks (protective embankment) and the creation of wetlands to mitigate floods, the improvement of the ecological habitats and the protection the biodiversity by the creation of multifunctional spaces such as urban forest, sensory garden, flower garden, rainwater harvesting areas, and the enhancement of the community garden by creating an inclusive and liveable environment for the community, also making the park an educational platform (Fig. 2).

They then designed this park to combine benefits both to nature and to the inhabitants and visitors, and to give strength to the project they proposed some visualizations to show the landscape improvements on three key areas: the creation of the wetland to mitigate river floods (Fig.3), the improvement of the current path along the river with the placement of flowering areas to favour pollinators and also make the public space more attractive and colourful for the users (Fig. 4), and the improvement of the community garden through the positioning of small market areas of the vegetables produced or other local products (Fig. 5)

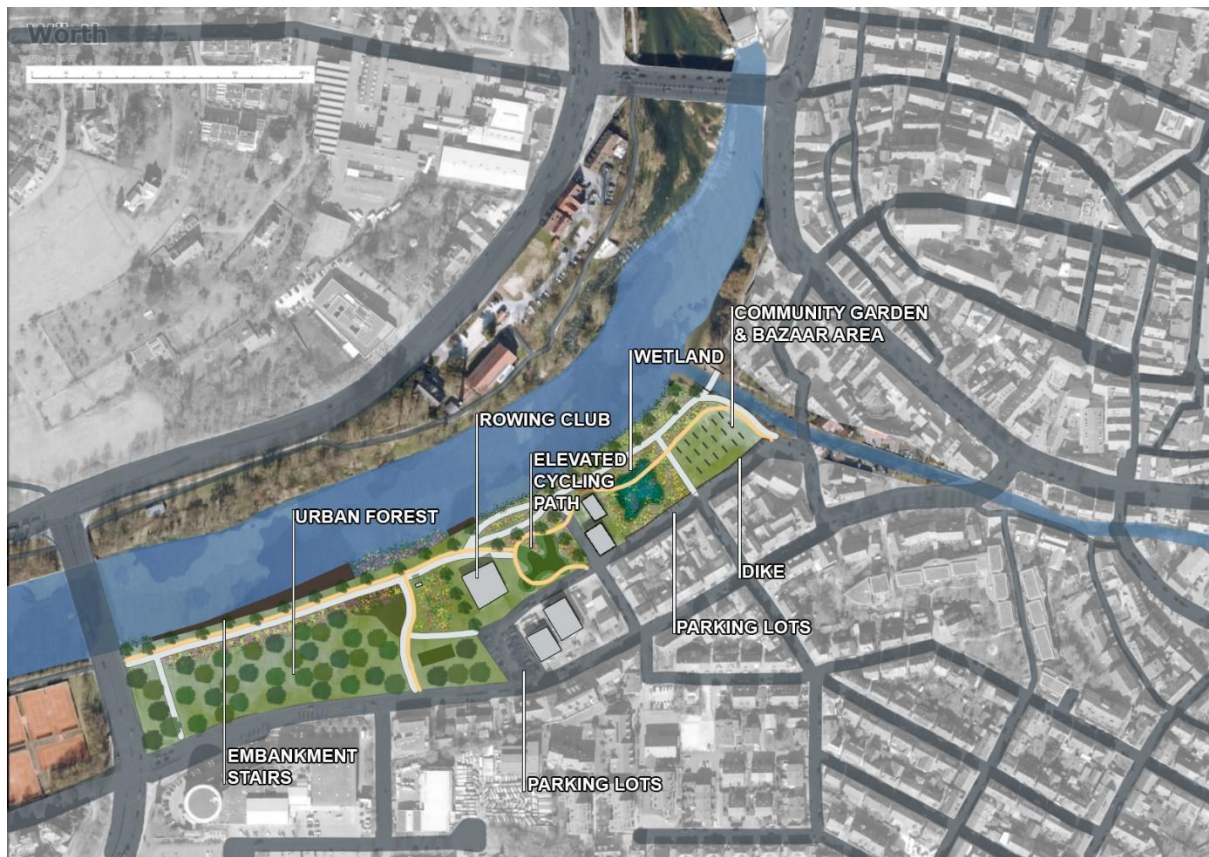


Fig. 2 – masterplan



Fig. 3 – before and after the creation of the wetland



Fig. 4 – before and after the enhancement of the cycle path through the creation of a flower road



Fig. 5 – before and after the enhancement of the community garden

The students, then, developed a collaborative governance model where they highlighted the different groups of stakeholders involved in the process, grouping them according to the role they play to run the park and the relation they can build in the partnership (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 – collaborative governance model

The students developed a Social Business Model Canvas, where they reflect on stakeholders to be involved, the customers to attract, the process to follow and the project sustainability and feasibility. They identified the key partners involved, differentiating them, for example, according to their responsibility and social or financial interests, and they defined a possible processes to run the park consisting in the (i) creation of awareness, (ii) site amendment (planting flower, planting trees, construction river embankment, placing multifunctional space, furnishing), (iii) implementation of educational workshop, (iv) framing of advertising campaigns and (v) rent of the spaces of the community garden.

The value proposition was defined as follow:

- Prioritizing nature is vital for the continuation of human life
- Multifunctionality and usability of the river banks
- Improvement of the ecological habitats & protecting the biodiversity
- Inclusive community space
- Vegetable production space
- Flood risk adaptation
- Educational platform

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They also identified the customers, visitors and beneficiaries of the project, the key product and services delivered (educational, ecological, social and economical activities), including the cost-drivers. and the income-drivers.

To measure the success of the project, KPI (Key Performance Indicators) were defined as follows: the amount of collected water, number of birds, quality of air, number of visitors, size of income collected from 2 businesses, size of income collected from 4 classes / workshops, 6 types of gardens of the researchers reports and 4 social activities

Finally, they developed a storytelling manifesto where all the different elements of the environment act as characters in harmony with each other in the future park. This choice of using a story to "give voice" to the various elements that come into play in a landscape project was very useful for the whole understanding of the networks among natural features and human activities (Fig. 7).

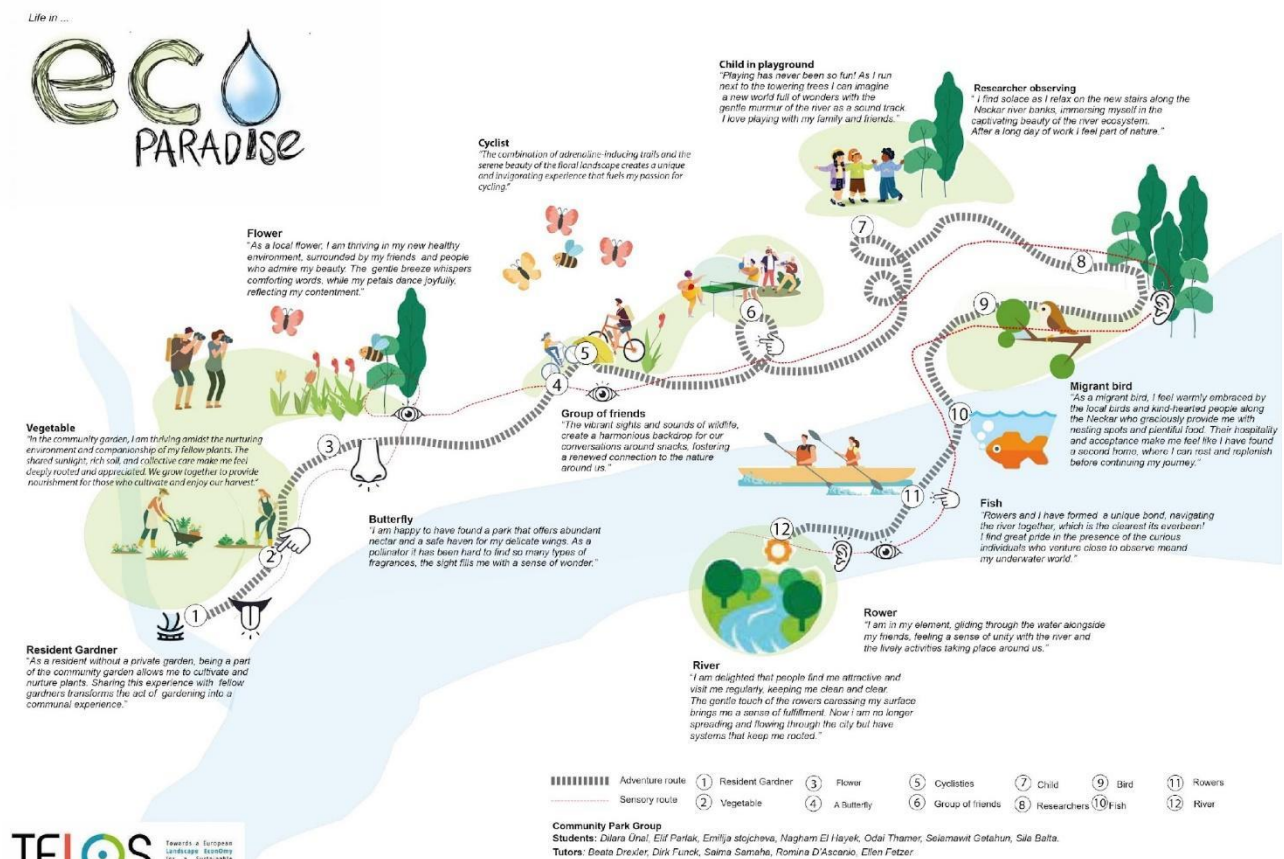


Fig. 7 – storytelling manifesto

Reflection and Outlook

(I) Further work in the community

The coaches involved from Nürtingen-Geislingen University are in contact with the citizens' initiative "Wörth Park" and also with the political parties in the municipal council and the city administration. Due to other municipal priorities and given budgetary restrictions in the municipality, it has also become apparent in the meantime that the planned citizen participation for the design of the Wörth area will be postponed. This leaves enough time to further develop the students' elaborations together with the community to create a viable image of the future that can be contrasted with the current idea of residential development on the site. In particular, the alternative concepts need to be further specified with regard to business planning and corporate governance. The design of the public-private partnership for Wörth Park is just as appealing a challenge as negotiating the given social as well as economic and ecological conflicts of use in this urban park. For this purpose, corresponding co-creative formats must be developed and implemented in the decision-making-process in the sense of the 3rd mission of Nürtingen-Geislingen University.

(II) Balancing conflicts between nature conservation & citizens leisure

The projects developed are particularly interesting because both try to define multifunctional spaces to balance the protection of nature and river ecosystems with the design of public spaces for citizens' leisure and local development.

Both groups, while having specific focus one on mainly ecological and the other social aspects, have applied a green infrastructure approach, which has allowed them to imagine multifunctional spaces respectful of nature and its biological processes but which also allow inclusive social interactions. Human activities, even recreational ones, could have a negative impact on the protection of nature if not properly planned. However, the presence of communities can be very useful for the care of natural and semi-natural areas, through sustainable public space maintenance and planning activities. Therefore, it is essential to balance these two aspects and explore more in depth how they conflict and how they can be mediated, not only in spatial terms but also in relation to the different actors involved.

The green infrastructure approach proposes a systematic and strategic process that promotes land and nature conservation at different scales, encouraging planning and practices that are good for nature and for people (Benedict and McMahon, 2006).

At the basis of the green infrastructure approach it is necessary to take into consideration the aspect of timeframe in order to define a precise and progressive time schedule about the implementation phases of the project in the short, medium and long term; the aspect of the scale in order to place the intervention at the local scale within a wider network of green infrastructures at the regional scale, guaranteeing connectivity and interscalarity, and finally the governance aspect in order to be sure to involve the different stakeholders and communities' voices in implementation process within a collaborative framework.

(III) Perspective of co-creative social organic process

The proposed approach to the park design is a process rather than a final product creation. In the proposed social succession concept, a process grows organically based on gradual community involvement. It is inspired by ecological succession - the study of how biological communities re-assemble following natural or anthropogenic disturbance, which is the foundation of ecology (Chang & Turner, 2019). Ecological succession includes different

phases (nutation, migration, ecesis, competition, reaction, stabilization) to finally reach the climax community.

If we use it as a model for the social succession concept we should also identify and understand its phases, especially in the context of „organic growth“. We should answer the questions of how we can reach a climax park community, where the vision of the “park for all” becomes a reality. One of the examples can be a competition between different social groups and their – eventually - contradictory objectives. We should set detailed mechanisms of control or facilitation of the process to ensure the achievement of the objectives as well as secure the participation of the unprivileged groups. This approach calls for including the Living Lab concept, understood as co-creating innovation through the involvement of aware users in real-life settings (Dell’Era & Landoni, 2014). It means that all stakeholders - including the future users to the possible extent - should be involved actively throughout the development process (Sanders, 2006). Adding methods of tactical urbanism to promote positive change would be also very beneficial.

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