

Urban summer heat as an opportunity. Insights from the Living Lab “O’Frais au Schönberg”

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In the context of climate change, urban populations are increasingly exposed to abrupt and intense heatwaves, exacerbating the urban heat island effect. While cities worldwide are developing and implementing heat mitigation strategies such as green infrastructure and large-scale planning frameworks, these approaches require significant time, resources, and coordination, limiting their ability to respond to urgent conditions. Temporary urban interventions have therefore emerged in recent years as an effective tool for rapid, localized action, suggesting a potential paradigm shift in addressing urban heat.

In this context an applied research project developed in Fribourg, Switzerland, investigates temporary heat-mitigating urban interventions designed and implemented with local actors within the Living Lab (LL) “O’Frais au Schönberg”.

The LL experimenting site, a central and strategic place for the neighborhood, is a rather unwelcoming space for its users. Entirely mineral and enclosed, with dark colors on the ground and walls and no shading, some surfaces can exceed 70°C during periods of intense heat. This condition results from a built outcome that diverges from its original, more open and vegetated design. Yet, this problematic “misfit” became a ground for experimentation and summer heat, an opportunity to improve urban quality for and with the local actors. The square was transformed with the remarkable energy and dedication of a group of migrant women who found in this project a way to improve their neighborhood and gain legitimacy in their community.

Addressing the relation between form and context, this contribution presents insights from a case study where architectural form generates the problem, while the context constitutes a source of opportunities for elaborating solutions. We argue that under conditions of urgency and constraint, solutions may emerge less from formal coherence than from the capacity to mobilize and reinterpret the inherent potential embedded within a challenging context.