

COMMONS COME TO LIEZEN

transparadiso [Barbara Holub & Paul Rajakovics]



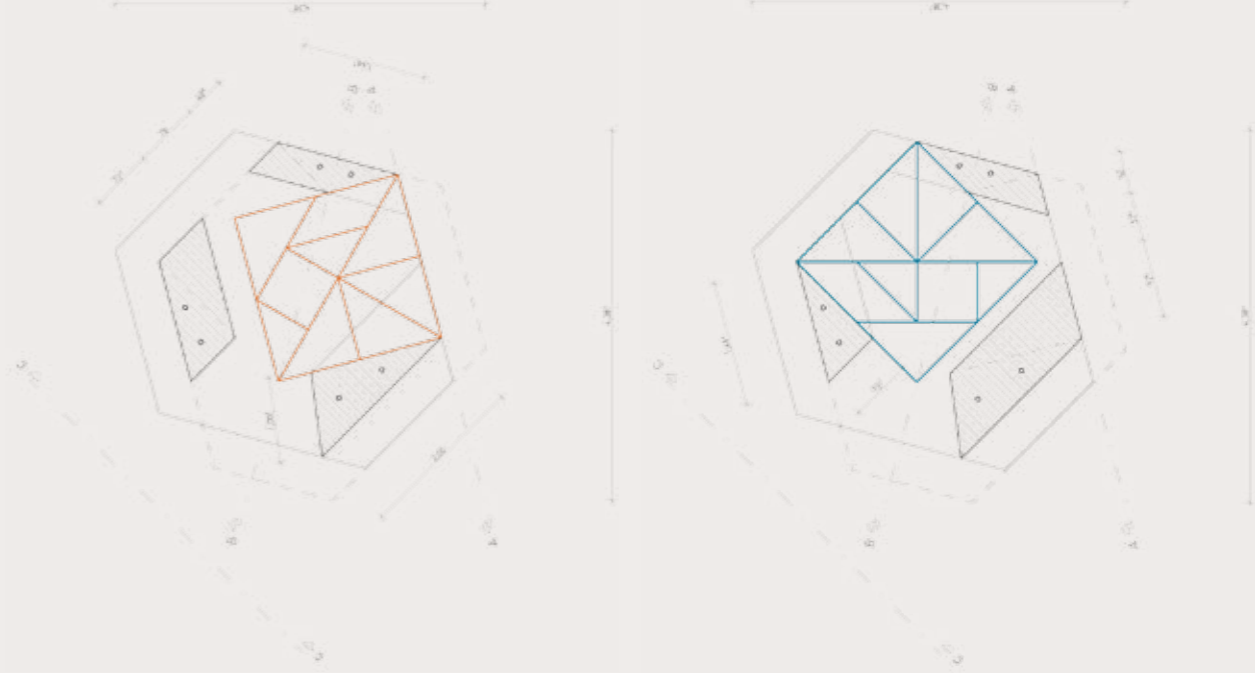
“With this concept, art becomes a space for thought and action, leaving behind the classical notion of art as sculpture, painting or drawing, and intervenes directly in people’s living environments via a series of dialogues.”
(Werner Fenz) {01}

Commons Come to Liezen began in the autumn of 2010, when a group of shopkeepers approached the Institut für Kunst im öffentlichen Raum (Institute for Art in the Public Sphere) Styria with the idea of an art project to provide new impulses for the decaying city center. Characterized by the metalworking industry, the town is located far from other agglomerations, but at a traffic crossroads in Austria’s geographical center. Liezen saw marked growth after World War II, but today it suffers from its strategic positioning as shopping hub on the major road through the Enns Valley. As a result, many stores in the town center are now empty.

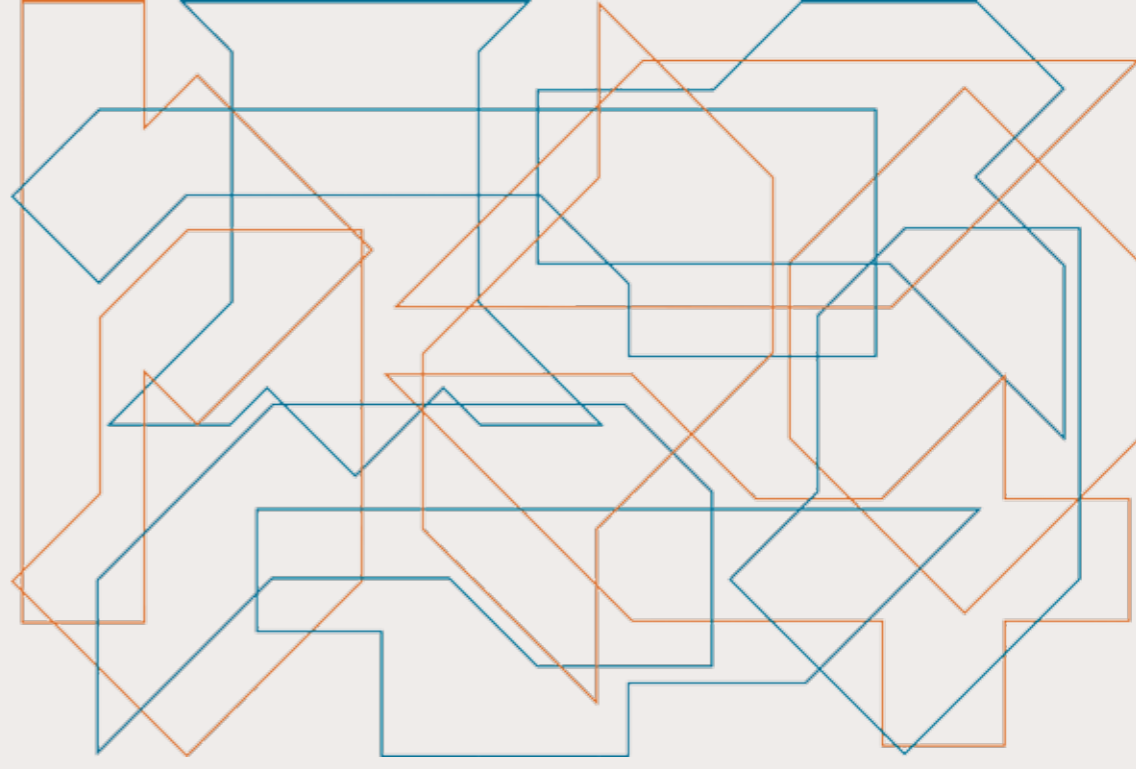


Playing the tangram game (scale 1:10) in the project space, 2011

O1 Quotation from a press text by Werner Fenz (Director of the Institute for Art in the Public Sphere Styria). transparadiso’s project was conceived as the beginning of a longer-term cooperation of the town of Liezen in the framework of “Platzwahl!” (“Choosing one’s place”), a new project series of the Institute for Art in the Public Sphere Styria. It came into being at the initiative of the Kirchenviertel Liezen.



Floor plan of sculpture/pavilion



Graphic design of overlapping tangram figures

WORKING TOGETHER AS A PRODUCTIVE FORCE— AN ART PROJECT AS AN OPEN PROCESS

Liezen's town park was previously an orchard and still serves as a commons (the people of Liezen harvest the fruit jointly). A pavilion was erected there that functions first of all as a storage space for large-scale tangram pieces {02}. The pieces are sold as a limited edition of art objects and as part of a collective work of art. As they are sold, the pavilion empties out. The proceeds go directly back to Liezen and to the local population, and they are earmarked for the events that are to take place in the pavilion. Months before the pavilion was built, transparadiso invited the public to play tangram. While people were playing, they could discuss vital topics concerning the city and its future as well as the fact that not many residents identify strongly with the city.

Commons Come to Liezen questions the belief in current-day processes marked by neoliberal economics. The project initiates and realizes new forms of communal action, referring above all to the political dimension of new forms of commons as described by Michael Hardt: as production and reproduction of social relationships and ways of life. {03} Finally, the issue is about more than the classical question of distribution.

02 Tangram is a Chinese puzzle game. It was very popular in Austria and Germany in the late 19th century, where it was made of pottery and marketed under names such as "Qualgeist" ("Tormentor").

03 Michael Hardt, "Production and Distribution of the Common," *A Few Questions for the Artist*, in *open*, 2009/16: "Politics involve the production of the commons (not only the distribution), i.e. the production and reproduction of social relations and forms of life", p. 26.

04 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

05 Pierre Bourdieu makes a fundamental distinction between economic, cultural and social capital; the term "social capital" was used before him, for example by Adorno and Jacobs. See: Pierre Bourdieu, "Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital". In: *Soziale Ungleichheit*. Reinhard Kreckel (ed.), Göttingen: Schwartz, 1983, pp. 183–198.

06 Quotation from the press text by Werner Fenz.

SHARING AND PARTICIPATING

Philosopher Jacques Rancière considers the relationship between politics and aesthetics a conceptual problem: artistic practices are opportunities for doing things and acting. The process of sharing (French: "le partage") includes sharing in two senses: dividing up as well as taking part in what is common to people. Both contribute to *common wealth* {04}.

In consequence, "taking part" in a collective work of art such as *Commons Come to Liezen* also means taking responsibility in order to continue the "participating" process of sharing. By purchasing a tangram piece, a person becomes part of a community that owns an art piece individually and collectively. In other words, collectors buy both cultural and social capital {05}—which can, in turn, be reintroduced into circulation (the value of the art piece on the art market will rise as demand increases)—and the potential of further communal use of the pavilion will grow in this way as well.

The project called the town park to the attention of many local people of Liezen for the first time—and thereby also made them aware of the quality of an outside perspective that opens up a new view of (supposed) urban problems and unloved places. The people of Liezen played tangram enthusiastically. Even if the societal effects of artistic strategies in Liezen still need time to unfold, the "thorn has been placed" {06} (in form of the pavilion). The game will continue ...



Playing tangram with objects (1:1) in the town park, 2011



Half-empty pavilion during the course of the project, 2011