

Rooftop of Eden

Slovakia

College of the Atlantic

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<http://courtyardbratislava.tumblr.com/> <http://www.nastreche.sk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/nastreche>

The goal of the project was to build a publicly accessible rooftop community garden and use it to facilitate societal conversations on food security and urban agriculture, civic engagement with youth and minorities, and the architectural sustainability and quality of public spaces.

Apart from the generous Davis Projects for Peace award, the project has been sponsored by Intenda foundation (USD3880), money that allowed us to involve high-school students during summer; a Tatra Banka Foundation grant (USD1550), which sponsored the implementation of the participatory design process; and the Johnsons Controls' Blue Sky Fund (USD1000), which provided corporate volunteers and funding. As of the date of submitting the report, expenses within the additional grants are running as their eligibility dates range up to November. Additional expenses were paid out-of-pocket by the program leaders or by public contributions and volunteer hours.

We encountered two great challenges at the beginning of the project, but overall we believe that overcoming them made our project more successful and resilient. At the beginning of the project, the Tesco company unexpectedly cancelled our mutual agreement to use the rooftop of the Tesco building for the garden. The other unanticipated incident was that our project partner, Zuri Camille de Souza, left the project after the first few weeks. We recognize that the failure of the Tesco agreement and the departure of our partner did not help the project to start off smoothly. However, those challenges were beyond our control. The determination of the rest of the working group to continue with the project despite those challenges pushed us forward. Our daily meetings produced more (and more diverse!) activities than we planned for at the beginning of the project, effectively spinning off new ways to communicate the general objectives of the project; for example, installing hydroponic vertical gardens in popular youth cafes and briefing the emerging communities in support of social entrepreneurship.

We created a "garden hub of herbs and vegetables" in one of the Courtyards of the Primate's palace with a group of young enthusiasts where we organized public debates and regular community meetings. Each debate had its own topic pertaining to civic and local identity, including the crises of capitalism, the fall of the communist regime, the European Union and European nationalism, the demise of both colonialism and neocolonialism, feminism and gender stereotypes, neofascism, and religion. The location of the garden hub was as important as the student activities; our central placement within the Municipal Office allowed us to challenge the existing stereotypes about urban gardening and student engagement held by policymakers.

We also facilitated public workshops every weekend at the local farmers market. Some of our programs included creating recycled modular planters, building a hydroponic window garden, talking about the ethnobotanical background of the most common vegetables, raising awareness about urban microclimate and the importance of plants in cities, measuring the food miles of tropical fruits, and creating an interactive food map.

Communication with the stakeholders in this project was very successful and included both personal interactions and material such as flyers, posters, brochures. In late June, we received permission to build our community garden on the terrace of the iconic inverse pyramid building of the Slovak National Radio. While it has long been the interest of the urbanist community in Bratislava to revitalize these premises, the task has been thought of as unfeasible due to the rigid nature of the public broadcast institutions. However, thanks to the cooperation of a new generation of leaders in Slovak television and radio, we have been able to use more than 20,000 square feet of the terrace to create our multifunctional rooftop garden.

So far, our project has directly benefitted the young families who attended our workshops, the approximately 50 high school students who participated in the debates and work parties, and the approximately 20 neighbors who have been laying the grounds for the community garden with us. The creation of the garden has benefited from an interdisciplinary support. Architects, urban activists, social workers, youth parliaments and neighborhood organizations came together for the common cause of the revitalization of the community space: the rooftop. Contributions such as donated goods, services and barter were integral parts of the project and allowed us to build a positive relationship with the neighborhood.

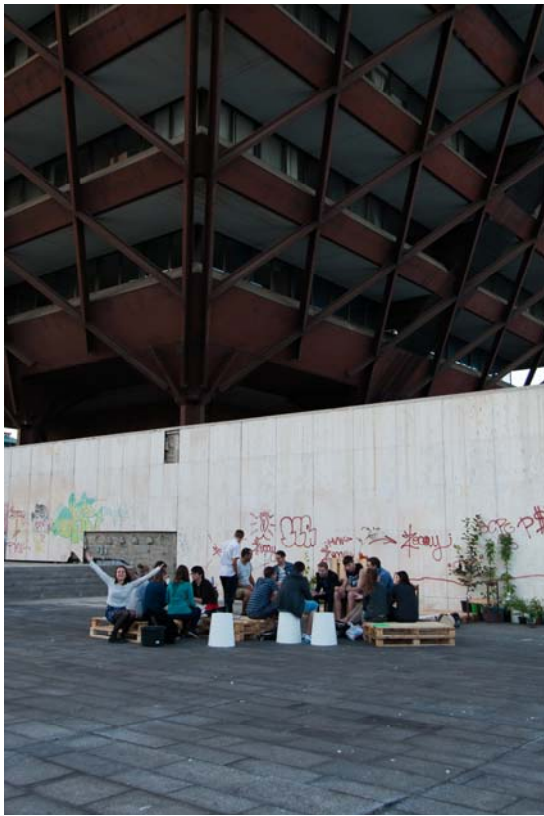
Thanks to our connection with the Slovak National TV and Radio, we anticipate that the project will receive widespread public attention and that our efforts will bring benefits to a much larger audience. There are approximately 500 employees in the building of the radio who will have access to the garden. The garden will also be accessible by the primary school, three secondary schools, and the entire Slovak Technical University campus. We have been offered a long-term contract with the Slovak Television and Radio and are now planning to continue to use the space in the winter for Christmas markets.

A.J. Muste said that "There is no way to peace, peace is the way." Peace realizes itself in the moments when people communicate with the highest regard of the other's vulnerability and when they work together to try to improve each other's well-being. A daily commitment to thoughtful and intentional communication among team members was what defined peace in these three months of work. Peaceful communication was integral in our outreach to the public: we gave our best for the process of preparing the garden to be as inclusive and as participatory as possible. Although our initial proposal envisioned community peacebuilding through organized discussions and World Cafe events in the garden, due to the project's timeline, those programs will stay a long-term part of this newly designed space. The garden on the roof of the Radio building is already coming together through a method of participatory design, another tool for peacebuilding.

One of the most valuable results of this project was that it opened a physical space for the public to use as "commons." Our work on the project brought us not only new skills in public event organization, graphic design, botany, gardening, negotiation and contract-writing, facilitation, and place-based education, but it has also helped us to define each of our roles as individuals in the path toward 'professional' activism.

Ana Puháč - This project created a public space where everyone can cultivate their right to the city. It's hopeful to see people willing to be stewards of their future commons. Through engaging with shared space, people will build trust and peace among each other.

Boglarka Ivanegova - I feel that The Rooftop of Eden project laid the foundation for an inclusive public space, a garden, where people will be able to cooperate, enjoy a cup of coffee, or dance together, and cultivate understanding regardless of their social, economic or ethnic background.



Student volunteer gathering under the Pyramid.
Photo by Dominika Belanská.



Enjoying the first wooden planters that we have built.
Photo by David Vereš.



The Courtyard garden space used as a debate ground,
in a motion on capitalism. Photo by Slavo Uhrin.