AZ AWARDS
2017

DESCRIPTION

The People's Canopy is architecture for events and architecture as event. A retractable two-storey roof structure, the People's Canopy is set on bicycle wheels and seats up to 10 cyclists. Pedaled by citizens, paraded through the city and expanded over the length of entire streets, the Canopy is a concertina structure that links disconnected public space.

The People's Canopy is designed to collapse to the size of a double-decker bus so that it can be easily cycled from one location to another. When parked, a Canopy opens like an accordion to 12 meters in length at a span of 10 meters to cover entire streets. Spaces for automobiles are turned into spaces for pedestrians and events. The mobile project brings people together in a highly collaborative way, as individuals must synchronize their pedaling in order to move the Canopy.

Urban informality inspires the People's Canopy, its form referencing expandable canopies commonly used by street vendors in Southern China to temporarily appropriate public space. These are typically employed by small businesses such as restaurants and bars to enlarge their areas into parking lots and public sidewalks in an informal way. In our version, the Canopy is altered and customized for different locations and functions, transforming banal spaces into public ones and promoting public interaction under a large, simple covered space.

The design was first commissioned by the city of Preston in the UK and In Certain Places, an arts program for urban interventions and events. The aim of the program is to connect underused public spaces and re-energize Preston's grand but declining historic center. Urban sprawl and air-conditioned shopping malls have driven residents away from the open streets and public spaces of the rainy city. Over a dozen canopies were designed and fabricated in Beijing and assembled in Preston. A series of events were organized around the People's Canopies, which were paraded through the city and cycled by residents. The canopies were also installed in various locations around the city, linking public squares and markets.

Following their debut in Preston, the People's Canopies were featured in the 2015 Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture in Hong Kong. Installed in Kowloon Park they were continually relocated, expanded and contracted to support various public activities. In Shenzhen, the People's Canopies are used as a long-term option for extending the resources of the V&A's Shekou Design Museum to communities that are normally out of reach. In Leuven, the Canopies housed the public festival Youtopia. Plans are underway in Leuven to use the Canopies for workshops or performances in areas that allow users to determine program. The Canopy is an inexpensive and low risk social intervention that can be quickly put to use. It is flexible infrastructure that allows the testing of programs in different locations for more permanent architecture in the city.

PROJECT SPECS

Dimensions: Canopy Type A - Closed: 5m x 2.5m Open: 5m x 12m; Canopy Type B - Closed: 10m x 12m Open: 10m x 12m // Materials: PVC Fabric and Steel // Fabrication techniques: Mass production // Manufacturing process: Prefabrication