

# HOME MADE

Pfeiffergasse, Vienna XV

**5 MIN**  
**50 €**

is the average  
cost of this project  
for each person  
needing protection

**ACTIVITY**  
**INTIMACY**  
**PARTICIPATION**  
**IDENTITY**  
**INDIVIDUALITY**

**PRIVACY**  
**COMMUNITY**  
**OPENNESS**  
**A VILLAGE WITHIN THE CITY**

**EMOTIONAL SECURITY**  
**INTEGRATION**  
**A VILLAGE WITHIN THE HOUSE**

In every project, the answer to the question is and remains people. Always. Here we have come full circle because at the end of the day it is always about Places for People. Protecting privacy and opening up to a community can take different forms. The decisive thing is that one has a choice.

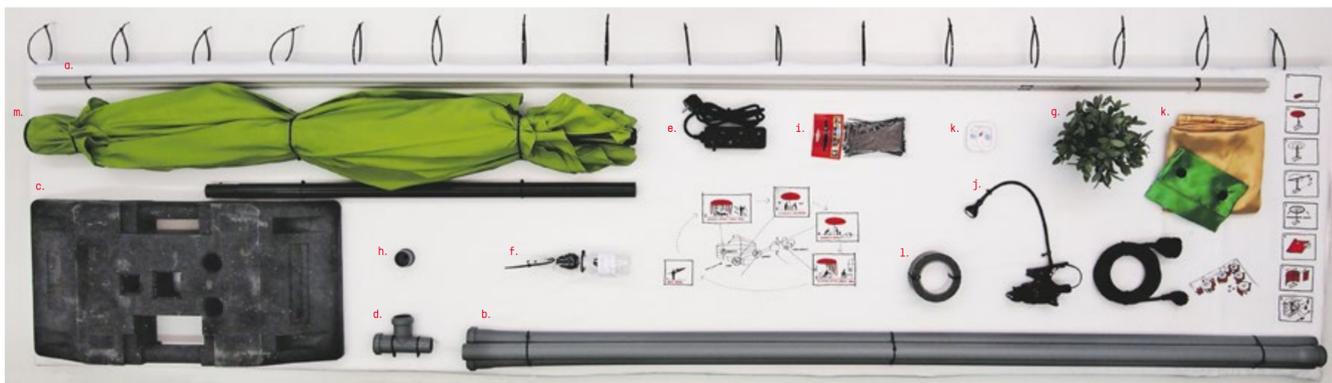


Site - refugee camp in a vacant office building in Vienna - Pfeiffergasse  
below: former shared office room functioned as a sleeping area for up to 15 refugees



Concept sketch of a simple but efficient "tool" to meet the most basic needs

“Shouldn't every individual have the basic human right to choose the location where they want to be and then to occupy it themselves?”



a. bent pipe b. straight pipe c. base d. t-connection e. multiple socket f. plastic bottle g. plant pot h. pipe end i. cable ties j. lamp k. curtain l. adhesive tape m. parasol

# TRACES OF IMPROVISATION

Text: Gabriele Kaiser

## A Vacant Office Building in Vienna

A huge advertising banner hanging on the traffic-facing facade of an insignificant 1990s building promotes the property: “3,700 m<sup>2</sup> of office space to rent”. Below this, the logo and telephone number of the agent, the traffic rattles by. Who knows how long this building - which is certainly no object of desire - has stood empty. It looks like one of those many properties in the city which are hard to let, the actual number of which is very hard to determine. The official vacancy rate for office real estate in Vienna is currently around 6.6 per cent. Buildings like this - dated infrastructure, average location - have a difficult time on a saturated real estate market. But is it really empty? Some windows are tilted, some wide open, washing hanging over the parapet and a glimpse of material through the fourth floor pane - a golden curtain?



## Stopover residences / Temporary use as an emergency shelter

For days, weeks, months around 280 refugees have been living in the former offices. These are mostly families from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, who are waiting in this Caritas emergency shelter for their asylum decisions and for their allocation to long-term accommodation. Most of the residents are not yet receiving primary care; they have left their previous life behind them and have no idea what lies ahead. This building is yet another stopover for an uncertain period of time, a “camp” as they call it. It was originally envisaged that the spatial configuration of the building made it suitable for accommodating 150 people - “but what should we do when another bus full of people is waiting outside?” - is how Caritas rightly describes the need for action in a situation in which homelessness would have been the alternative. Like a transit camp or initial reception centre, an emergency shelter offers destitute people who are seeking protection a place to sleep and other essentials - food, clothing and medical care. However, all the precautionary measures also took the factor of time into account from the very start.

Because the time limit which makes life uncertain for the residents on their arrival is also holding the space in suspense.

Caritas agreed a temporary use contract with the owner of the building which ran out at the end of April 2016 and was initially only extended for another month. As the office building is remaining on the market throughout this temporary use phase, the existing interior had to be largely untouched, with the exception of the shower units created on the ground floor. One result of this was that the former office spaces were firstly filled with tightly packed rows of beds.

## A village within the house

From the point of view of the operator who is keen to avoid problems with neighbours the location of the building close to the urban periphery is a good one for refugee accommodation - “here, nobody feels disturbed.” It is an open building, anybody can enter and leave - an informal check-in or check-out is enough, no one turns the light on at night to ensure themselves that everyone is sleeping. None of the doors can be locked, not even the doors to the lockers that used to be in the offices and are now partly being used as partitions. In the entrance with the Caritas “porter’s lodge” residents, new arrivals, volunteers and visitors are met by posters in Arabic, English and German as well as articles 1, 3 and 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Everywhere there are traces of a life full of improvisation, topical matters, house rules. A pictogram explaining that alcohol is not permitted anywhere in the building and, below this, a request to eat all meals in the dining room on the ground floor and not in the bedrooms. Children must come down to eat. Next to this, announcements of courses and other events as well as the Cleaning List which shares out kitchen duties on a room-by-room basis. The village-sized residential community of the triangular building is spread across four and a half floors of 70 people per floor. The WC blocks arranged

around the circulation core at each level are adequate and the ground-floor showers allow everyone to keep clean if they respect the shift system. The former tea kitchens in the corridors have been disconnected for legal reasons and are occupied by laundry hanging on slatted bed bases. What is most lacking is privacy. Here, no one has a place for themselves.

## Basic needs

Safeguarding privacy - marking a place where someone can be alone, undisturbed by external influences - was, for Caramel Architekten, the first and most important subject of their intervention and they saw the time limit as a condition of - rather than a limitation on - their thought process. And while such ideas as mixing groups of residents, which were developed by the Biennale Team during the preparatory work for another building that was available for the medium term, are temporarily overtaken by practical considerations in the case of an emergency shelter, they remain central to future scenarios in which further incentives are required to positively support communal life in the building. In order to improve temporary living together in a residential community of this size as quickly as possible the architects initially concentrated on a clearly defined immediate measure based on two key questions:

1. How can one create privacy at minimum cost and in a very short time without intervening in the substance of the building?
2. How can one increase the permeability of the building to the outside as a way of countering the isolation of the residential community and generating openness? Safeguarding privacy through the creation of suitable separating elements and opening the community through the creation of connections to the outside were seen not as isolated subjects but as two sides of the same question. Caramel Architekten have already met similarly complex requirements with fleet-footed pragmatism in such projects as the visitor platforms at VOEST, the City of Culture office on Linz’ main square, the Science Park Linz and several design and art objects as well as a number of residential projects with modest budgets.

“Time pressure and scarce resources can be seen as an opportunity,” they say.

“In many cases it is simply not appropriate to develop complicated design details.” Caramel Architekten enjoy working with modular structures and ready-made artefacts as they seek to translate a set of requirements into a handy conceptual tool. This was another project in which it was logical to use off-the-shelf elements to develop a system which is cheap, simple and flexible and remains focussed on the key objective.

## Ready made

The architects’ shopping list is full of everyday things that are normally used in other situations and contexts: *Polo-Kal* pipes with T-junctions and site supports for the basic spatial structure, three-metre-diameter parasols as a “load-bearing structure”, thick white fleece as a spatial divider and certified non-flammable material of every colour as a spatial envelope, power distributors, LED lights, cable ties, sticky tape, coat hangers, headphones, plant pots and a doorbell made from a plastic bottle. The basic structure of each unit is easily slotted together or taken apart in a matter of minutes regardless of the spatial conditions. The module made from simple plastic pipes defines the basic spatial limits and the visual and atmospheric enclosure is provided by textile separating walls which combine intimacy with a sense of security. The unit for a family of four consists of a parasol with two sleeping places and two secondary spaces divided by partitions in which there are two extra beds. The vertical elements act as service runs with each having a light and a multiple socket. The basic structure which can be expanded at will only touches the building at its extremities and most work is involved in sewing closable pockets onto the “walls” which can be used for the storage of personal belongings.

For Caramel it was important from the very start that the self-supporting cell with its parasol and secondary spaces was (and already has been) used not only in the context of an emergency shelter but also as an informal way of limiting spaces in all sorts of situations such as ateliers, open plan offices,

children’s playrooms and, indeed, anywhere, where a place of retreat is wanted or needed within a larger spatial structure.

The dimensions and functional possibilities of the units were first tried out in the shape of test structures in the architects’ office. Which proportions are most pleasant and how well does a textile barrier work as a wall which will be respected as such?



Which additional features are needed if the object is to work as a room within a room? Even if the “parasol” is principally read as a positive symbol on the semantic level, this was, if anything, a happy coincidence. “The parasol is a chance element that just happens to also work symbolically,” say the architects. In this concrete case it fulfils, amongst other

things, the not insignificant role of shielding the unpleasant neon lighting of the office spaces and transforming the white light into warm light.

## Participation

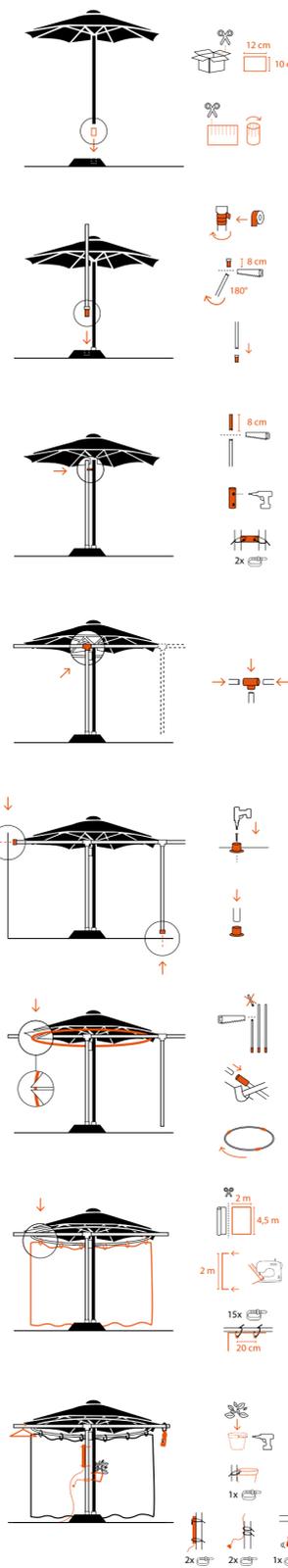
The process is the product and the product is not finished when it has been built. “We don’t want to create something which someone is allowed to - or must - use later. Rather, we work in a cooperative process involving all participants as a result of which we have become our own research project.”



In this open-ended process of addressing an existing building and its social structure the constructive exchange with the residents and their constant involvement in the process is almost as important as the effect of the spatial intervention itself. Ideally, once the process is started it will trigger a chain reaction and lead to further measures which improve everyday life in the shelter.



Instruction manual / open source to do list  
www.placesforpeople.at/qc2



Instruction manual, details

The testing and experimental phase in the office was soon replaced by action in situ: Carmel Architekten put up a prototype in a not-yet occupied room in the building and this sample unit was then shown to the entire community. The model was immediately met with enthusiasm and it was possible to start sharing out voluntary responsibilities tasks in a more-or-less ad hoc manner. Many hands got involved in the "building work". Specialist "piper men" demonstrated their manual expertise in erecting the basic structure while seamstresses threw themselves enthusiastically into cutting the material. "In no time at all the test room had become a sewing room and the sewing room had become a hive of activity."



Music could suddenly be heard in the building, children took over the sewing room as a playroom.

It was up to each family or room-group to design their own sleeping and living area and then modify this as required. The needs-based procedural transformation of the location tool worked across every linguistic barrier and, even in the men's room on the fourth floor, the initial difficulties were soon replaced by a striking level of creative energy; the communal area in this room which is shared by 12 single men from a range of countries of origin is now one of the most comfortable in the entire building.

Activity

People who are waiting for their interviews or asylum decisions are forced to spend most of their time in the shelter. The daily routine is largely dictated by the serving of food in the morning, at midday and in the evening and there is a lack of activities and



leisure options. Unlike in "normal" accommodation, asylum-seekers in emergency shelters are not allowed to cook for themselves and the food is delivered by the army or charitable organisations. This standby mode and this constant coming and going of fellow-residents and Caritas staff generate a sense of both restlessness and standstill, everything is constantly changing despite the fact that every day is like the next. However, as shown by the example of the sewing room, meaningful work can trigger a momentum which significantly brightens everyday life in the "camp".

Our real hope is that the residents take possession of our offer and use it for their own ends" say the architects. "We are just the accompanying hand that is here to make that possible."



Soon afterwards, a small range of un-bureaucratic services has also become established in the building. The sewing room is now a tailor's shop which adjusts donated clothes, one can get a haircut, there is a band rehearsal and table tennis room in the basement (and plans for an in-house

cinema). On the second floor there is a communal and children's play room, the uses of which are already being defined by a self-regulating test phase.

Privacy

Communal spaces function when people also have areas into which they can retreat and intermediate spaces between the two. And the smaller this space "for oneself" is, the more important these intermediate spaces become. This is demonstrated very clearly in the living areas: a room number is stuck to each former office door. Before Carmel's intervention, as soon as one opened the door one found oneself in the sleeping space shared by a number of families. Now, although there are still no walls to provide solid boundaries between the beds, the space is zoned in a completely new way based on layers of intimacy. These degrees of privacy are astonishingly stable and binding and immediately respected by both residents and guests. Upon opening one of the former office doors one now enters a sort of vestibule

in which one might not see anybody but one still feels immediately obliged to place one's shoes next to those of the residents. In reality, one has been in a room for a while but only now does one feel as if one is entering an apartment. The same old carpet is found throughout the offices but here in this implied

vestibule it is clear that one stands on the threshold between outside (the corridor) and inside (the living space on the other side of the textile partition). This semi-open transition space is even more important because although the doors can be closed they cannot be locked. The private unit for a family of four with two sleeping places under the parasol and two beds in the secondary spaces separated by a partition can be used in various ways. During the day this secondary space is a living space with blankets spread out on the floor as carpets while the bed is easily transformed into a couch. Although the spaces are only separated by strips of fabric the integrity of the sleeping area behind the closed curtains is retained. Disregarding acoustic limitations, these degrees of privacy mean that non-synchronised daily routines can take place alongside each other (sleeping, reading, playing, sitting together). One always has the option of retreating into a sheltered area certain that one is safe from the stare of anyone entering the former office. The provisional doorbell with its nameplate symbolises the inviolability of this private space.

Individuality

This private space also allows people to individually design their daily surroundings.

"Shouldn't each individual have the basic human right to not only choose their location but also to occupy it themselves?"

The common form of the basic structure that establishes the boundaries both between individual groups and within families strengthens the need to personalise this newly created space and adapt it in line with individual requirements. An Afghan family of five which moved into the shelter on the first day of construction of the parasols and has since moved into permanent accommodation fitted out and decorated its unit with spontaneity and a lot of love. The soft walls were not only hung with the closable pockets but also personalised with such objects as photographs and toys. A set of instructions may be useful for slotting together the basic structure but the most important things need no such directions. The personal marking of private space - this improvised occupation of a place "with oneself" - is the first symptom of functional success.



Community

The modular structure with the parasol which, in the sleeping areas, protects privacy and offers a sense of security fulfils a completely different function as an element of integration in the communal areas. The ground floor serving area and dining room are separated from each other in a logical way. After the wooden tables and benches in the dining room which had been left behind by previous users had been replaced by uninviting plastic furniture, parasols stuck in the table tops and decorated by plant pots full of herbs swiftly improved the atmosphere. A bar which was newly installed by Carmel - a stable

structure covered with stretched fabric and an illuminated parasol (also with plant pots full of herbs) - then transformed the serving area into a meeting space where people are happy to hang out. Shortly after this structural improvement, a cooking initiative started up as a way of complementing the delivered food. Now, a kitchen chef and his crew work every day in an improvised kitchen preparing not only extra rice, salad and side dishes but also, increasingly, entire menus from their homelands using their own truly limited resources.

Openness

While an overfull emergency shelter lacks privacy it also lacks spaces where residents can come into contact with the city and the neighbourhood.



In order to open the building to the outside despite its own lack of free space, Carmel used a further variation on the theme of framework and parasol to create a pavement café as an extension of the entrance area on Pfeiffergasse. This is a place where one can sit in the shade on warm days but is also an element of connection on the edge of the building which is intended to signalise the presence and the visibility of the residential community. Right next to the building on the busy Wienzeile there is also an area of public green space which was previously unused. Following discussions with the district authorities this area was transformed into a neighbourhood garden through the addition of a children's playground, plant beds and seating benches and is now a place where children and adults can linger close to the house and - at least theoretically - come into contact with neighbours and passers-by.

Unscripted Living

The collective appropriation of a building which was actually created for another purpose requires both improvisation and the ability to adapt - qualities which are by no means exclusive to emergency situations. The processes triggered by these temporary interventions show that a building like this which was originally an office building and then stood empty and is currently occupied by 280 people could be a future building block of the Arrival City that Doug Saunders has described on the basis of twenty busy improvised places. Even if the physical appearance of these places of arrival which are scattered across the globe varies, the way in which the basic functions and networks emerge from human relationships is similar.

The global movement of migrants underlines the need to pay more attention to such informal places in the future. In view of the swiftly rising demand for living space it also makes sense in the medium and long term to regard vacant office buildings as adaptable spatial reserves and to transform these into permanent living and working places in which different user groups (locals and newcomers) are treated equally and whose architecture emphasises the dynamic character of the physical and social space. Collective improvisation which, at a small scale and with minimum input, can deliver a positive momentum which is capable of transforming a space in an unforeseen way can also be activated at a larger scale and in all social situations, whether a minimal intervention in a refugee shelter or the design of a corporate headquarters. For Carmel Architekten, the aim of every project, regardless of its size, is to concretise a general problem in a tangible use context. "In every project the answer is and remains the answer to the human question. Always. This is where we have come full circle because, at the end of the day, it is always about places for people." The protection of privacy and the opening to a community can take different forms, the decisive thing is that one has a choice.



PRIVACY



ACTIVITY



EMOTIONAL SECURITY

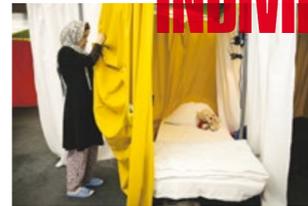


PARTICIPATION



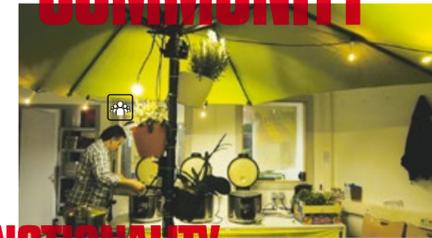
INTIMACY

INDIVIDUALITY



COMMUNITY

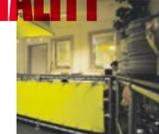
INTEGRATION



FUNCTIONALITY



EXPORT





## I n t e r v e n t i o n / F a c t s h e e t

The three initiatives launched as part of "Places for People" form the focus of the overall project and, correspondingly, of the presentation in the Austrian Pavilion and in this publication.

The preceding pages, which were conceived and composed by Caramel architects themselves, contain not only the guiding themes, central ideas and inspirations behind their intervention but also their

working processes and results so far as well as an outlook on future developments. The term "intervention" was chosen because it appears to come closest to covering both the character of the various strategies and the breadth of their areas of action.

The text contribution is from Gabriele Kaiser, a well-known Austrian architecture expert, who is particularly familiar with the work and the approaches of Caramel ar-

chitects and with the issues which they are addressing here.

This final page presents a summary of the most important facts and figures from the intervention in order to offer the reader both a quick overview and some means of comparison.

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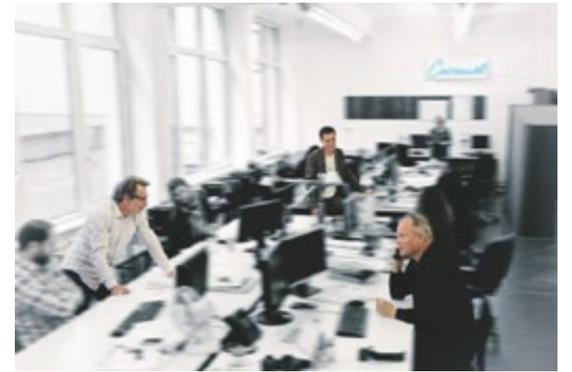


Photo: Andreea Cebuc

Breaking new ground with every project is one of the objectives of the office founded in 2001 by Günter Katherl, Martin Haller and Ulrich Aspetsberger.

In the event, the trio and their currently twelve employees have spent the intervening years realising an impressive number of buildings – from self-built projects to university buildings – and have never ceased to surprise with their unorthodox approaches and clever concepts, powerful forms and unusual materials. A lack of respect for convention coupled with an absolute respect for the needs of users, a distinct eagerness to experiment and deep personal and political commitment are further characteristics of an active and sometimes actionist architectural understanding that the team also convincingly shares in their publications, lectures and teaching.

The latest example of Caramel's cleverness when dealing with limitations is the

Cj-5 House in Vienna which was completed in 2014 and in which the ingenious spatial programme and subtle detailing enabled them to obtain five times as much usable space as the surrounding residential buildings despite the minimal area of the site. The team readily uses convincing counter examples as a means of criticising existing relationships. Caramel's energy and clear social agenda together with the consistently innovative character of their work led to the invitation to participate in "Places for People" and the 2016 Architecture Biennale.

[www.caramel.at](http://www.caramel.at)



1 Adidas World Of Sports, Herzogenaurach 2015

2 Infopoint European Capital of Culture – Linz 09

3 House CJ-5, Vienna 2014

Type of shelter

Emergency shelter 2015-2016

Title of Intervention

**HOME MADE**

Starting point

vacant 1970s office building

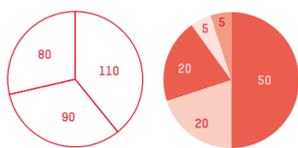
Usable space 2,000 m<sup>2</sup>

Room types family rooms 20-40 m<sup>2</sup>

open-plan rooms 100 m<sup>2</sup>

External areas forecourt,

200 m<sup>2</sup> garden



User groups

04 / 2016 280 people (110 men, 90 women, 80 children) from 50% Afghanistan, 20% Syria, 20% Iraq, 5% Iran and 5% other nationalities

Short description

Creation of privacy, improvement of living quality, atmosphere and functionality in communal and external areas

Objectives

Privacy for 280 people by implementing 50 parasols set up in 5 minutes and for 50 euros per person

Central features

Communal realisation, individual appropriation by residents

Envisioned result

Scalable for expansion in the urban realm

TIMELINE :

PROJECTED USE  
2015 - 2016

Project start: Mid-January 2016

Construction first room prototype:

January 25<sup>th</sup> 2016

Construction final room: February

26<sup>th</sup> 2016

Fitting out bar/café: Feb. 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> 2016

Start of construction work in garden:

April 4<sup>th</sup> 2016

Construction: 1st set for private use

(atelier & garden): April 6<sup>th</sup> 2016

Completion of garden including

noise barrier: May 11<sup>th</sup>

Forecourt design: ---

Investment

Total gross budget on

April 30<sup>th</sup> 2016: € 14,000!

Cost per person/room:

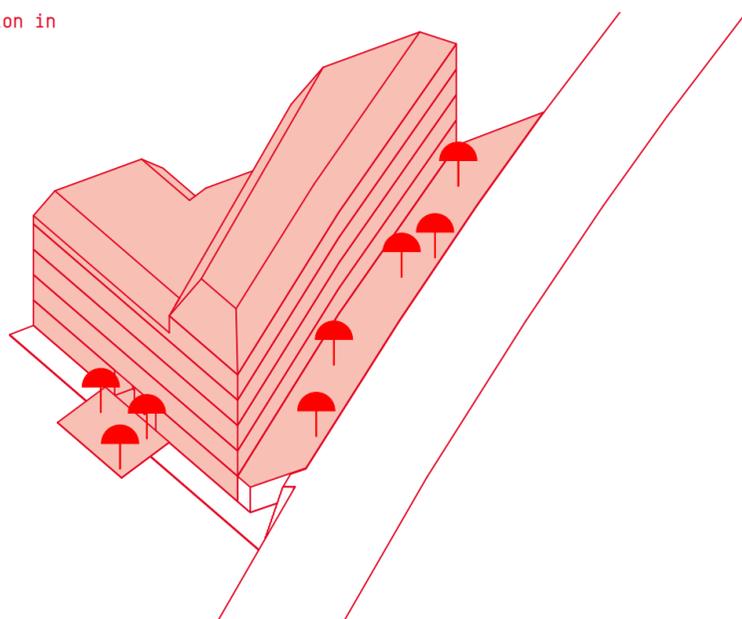
€ 50

Exemplary cost of one mattress:

€ 30

Cost of care/person and day:

€ 21

**ACCESSIBILITY**

Pfeiffergasse  
Vienna XV



2015 | 2016

German version available at  
[www.placesforpeople.at/qr1](http://www.placesforpeople.at/qr1)

Alle Inhalte auf Deutsch abrufbar unter  
[www.ortefuermenschen.at/qr1](http://www.ortefuermenschen.at/qr1)

**PLACES  
FOR  
PEOPLE**

