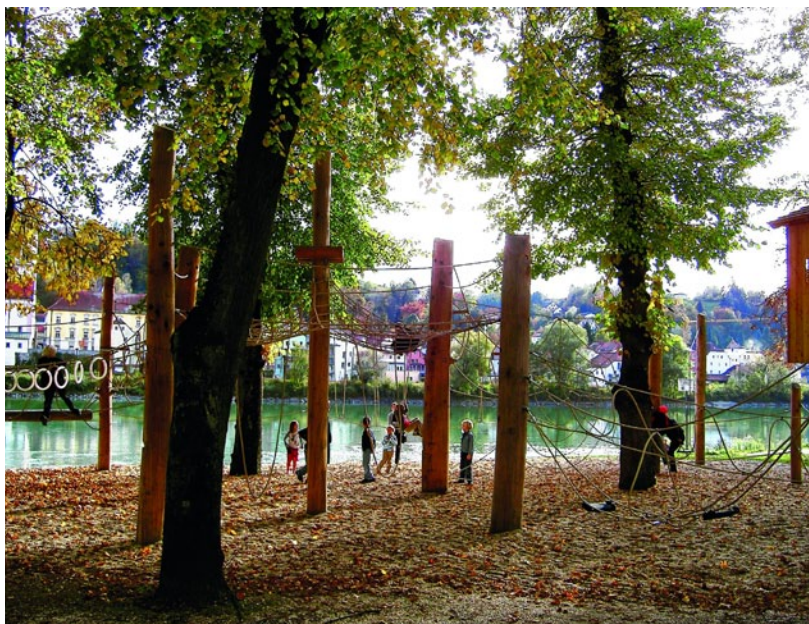


The Climbing Forest on the Inn promenade in Passau: swinging, climbing and sliding in a lime grove

The Inn promenade in Passau is one of the most popular meeting places for young and old alike: families stroll on a Sunday along the Inn, people sit with friends on the lawns and benches along the banks of the river, chat, watch the swans or take their kids to one of the largest public playgrounds in the old town. It is particularly the large treed areas along the Gottfried-Schäfer Street that offer enough space for such special activities. It is here, in a central location for the old part of town, that a children's playground was created with a play ship and a spacious sand pit for the little ones, the theme of which was based on the river landscape.

However, it quickly became clear that the play possibilities in this very prominent place were not sufficient. Families making excursions to the town, inhabitants of the old town who go to the playground with their children every day and classes of schoolchildren who use the playground for their PE lessons meant that there were children of all age groups visiting the play area. It lacked a respective offering for the eight to twelve-year olds.



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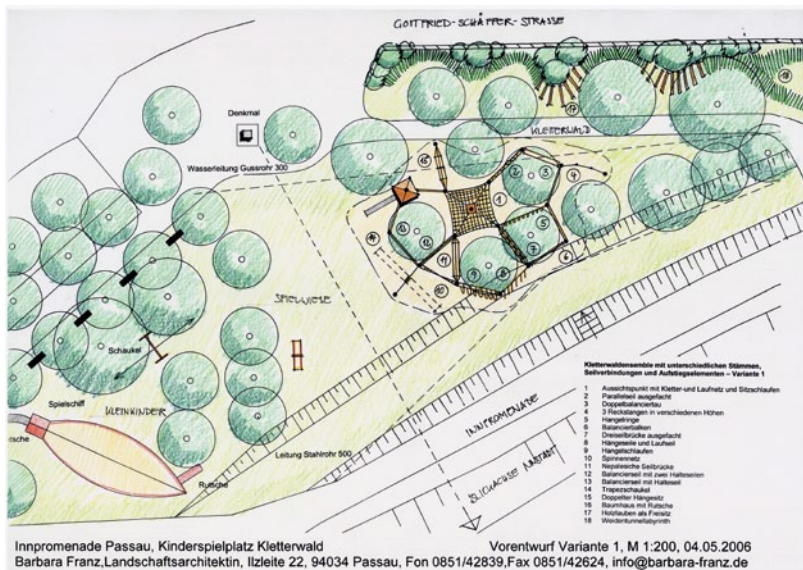


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For this reason the school and sports committee of the town of Passau reacted in 2006 and commissioned a local landscape architect to plan a children's playground to supplement the existing offering for the little ones with things for the older children to play with and on. At the same time the municipal youth welfare service suggested getting the children in the old town involved in the planning of the playground, to make sure it met their needs. Therefore, the youth welfare office conducted a survey of classes two to six and the respective age groups had their say. For this survey six project groups were formed at the school who then expressed their thoughts on a playground suitable for their ages with the respective equipment, each demonstrating their ideas using a model.

These models were then exhibited in the foyer of the town hall and assessed by the landscape architect. The result: climbing, swinging, swinging from hand to hand and sliding were at the top of the wish list. Moreover, each draft had towers and tree houses, and once again, the motto seemed to be "the higher the better!"



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This clearly defined the framework for the design. A theme now had to be found that fitted with the character of the area and was suitable for fulfilling the desires of the children. The location is characterised by the water of the river Inn and by the wonderful old trees between the Inn promenade and town theatre that are typical for the style of the town – an open lime grove that reveals charming views, highlighting the interesting contrast between the old town and the town centre on the opposite bank of the river. The playground should fit into this small area of woods with things to climb on, swings, slides and a tree house without impacting on the appearance of the lime grove.

The idea of the Climbing Forest was thus born. Additional stripped tree trunks, left as they grew naturally, were placed in the grove clearing to support the wood's character as they also spring up from the ground. Various ropes and nets offer varied possibilities for climbing, swinging, swinging from hand to hand, balancing, sitting and hanging around. With the natural colours chosen they are hardly noticeable, meaning that the equipment fits harmoniously into the existing small woodland. Climbing in the woods, sometimes at the height of the treetops, becomes particularly appealing. A natural playground was created in which climbing is interesting and fun.



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Building a Climbing Forest for 8 to 12 year-olds presupposes a system which allows for large distances and heights. Treating with care the existing trees, that have been designated as a natural monument, requires a great degree of flexibility with the distances so as to prevent affecting the root areas of the trees. Even during the construction phase the builders had to react on site to individual trees. This, in turn, required a system in which the rope elements could be customised later after the tree trunks had been erected.

At the end of the day, the Climbing Forest system from the company Richter Spielgeräte was chosen; Richter had been marketing the system developed by the company Graubner for many years. This system uses large-dimension oak trunks that enable great heights and distances and can carry large weight. Moreover, it had to be ensured that the rope elements, nets and bridges could be made with the necessary flexibility.

The Climbing Forest has been designed so that each section follows on from the previous one. Children, adolescents and adults can start the course at a place that is suitable for them and use the various ropes, rope bridges and nets to balance, climb and swing from hand to hand to explore the whole course in line with their individual abilities. The elements that are easy to cope with are located low down, the difficulty increases with height, meaning that children playing here can,



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according to their abilities, either climb to great heights or are halted further down, preventing them from getting into situations that can be dangerous for them. Climbing, swinging from hand to hand and balancing together requires skill and prudence, as encounters on a rocking rope mean that you have to coordinate what you are doing with the other person. This system enables every child to easily recognise their ability and realise what they can do.



The whole course consists of elements for balancing, swinging from hand to hand and climbing. The balancing elements include balancing ropes with one or two holding ropes and a double balancing rope consisting of two thick coconut ropes as well as a balancing beam (with grip ropes) hung between two tree trunks; moreover, there is a parallel rope, a three-rope bridge and a Nepalese bridge. The elements for swinging from hand to hand include grip loops and a grip rope with rings. The tree trunks, each of which has been provided with steps, the spider's web and the large horizontal net with an outlook post at a dizzy height serve for climbing. Moreover, the spider's web is particularly suitable for group play and the horizontal net serves, in addition, for resting and "hanging around" high up between the treetops. As well as climbing and balancing, exercise without touching the ground offers numerous possibilities for role-playing games.



In addition to the course there is also a trapeze swing, a double hammock seat, horizontal bars, a tree house with Indian ladder and slide. To ensure fall protection the whole area has been provided with a 40 cm thick layer of loose material that requires less looking after than bark mulch, for example, and allows the surface water to flow away well, providing additional durability to the complete setup.



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