

THE UNTHINKABLE EXPERIMENT – an experience shared by anna lusser

At the beginning of July, I took the train to Vienna Airport to catch my flight. Destination: Brussels, with a connection to Genk. When I booked the ticket and packed my bag, I didn't really think about what was about to happen. Truthfully, I didn't imagine how the next two weeks could look. I was tired—exhausted from the semester—and all I wanted was some quiet time in Vienna. But there I was, on a train in rainy Belgium, on my way to the unknown."

At the train station in Genk, a small place in the middle of Belgium, I met Emilio, one of the facilitators, and 5 strangers: Joao, Beatriz, Daniel, Rita, YuQi, and another Joao. This group was chosen to spend the next three days together intensively; getting to know each other, organizing themselves, camping among chickens and flamingos, cooking and sitting together in a box, thinking about what our future garden could look like. Obviously, those strangers soon became friends, mainly shaped by Rita reading *Tao* to us.

But why was I here? I had been invited under the scope of the Applied Human Rights Master's Program to participate in something bold: the Unthinkable Experiment.

So here I found myself, literally in a box – asked to think outside of that box, as Koen himself likes to phrase it. This was no ordinary workshop. It was an experiment in creativity, daring us to dream about a world that doesn't yet exist and to ask unthinkable questions.

The first three days were intense. We spent hours discussing the concept of a garden—deconstructing it, reconstructing it, having ideas, immediately throwing them out, and finding ways back together. It felt chaotic at times, but that chaos was necessary for us to see the garden in new ways. Eventually, we came up with an idea that felt like it could hold everything we were imagining: a time capsule.

A time capsule is traditionally a cache of goods or information, a deliberate message to future people. In our case, the time capsule became less about objects and more about THE EXPERIENCE. I clearly remember that Manfred gave us feedback on our idea and commented my 'not so beautiful' drawing of the capsule, they looked like coffins and I somehow understand his critique. However, these symbols were meant to be symbolic – so over the 10 following days, we captured emotions, conversations, and friendships – not in actual coffins but within us. We captured these moments and preserved them during the vernissage, photographs, conversations, and memories, became our own living time capsule. One that each of us took home in our hearts.

So let's go back: After our intense ideation phase, the next 10 days took on a new dynamic as we joined a larger group. It all began with a two-day stay in Brussels, where we participated in an intense yet fascinating program that expanded our perspectives. We visited communal residency, garden projects, art spaces, had great food and learnt about initiatives that dare to think alternatively. On our way back to Genk, we stopped at another place, a beautiful house where we spent the night and shared our small projects within the whole group and started brainstorming how we could combine the different approaches. Then we returned to Genk and met the transdisciplinary team—a diverse group of experts who critically examined our ideas and concepts. Their insights and challenges pushed us further, sparking fruitful conversations that helped refine our vision and connect it to broader contexts.

Throughout that experience we spend pretty much 24/7 together, working, thinking, brainstorming, creating and discussing. We laughed, played games, danced, ate, drank and camped. We were a group of around 25 people who had to somehow figure out vibing and functioning as a group and I must say, it worked out.

Standing here in Vienna, I realize this experience was more than just thinking the unthinkable—it was a lesson in openness. I learned that to imagine something new, we must step outside our comfort zones, talk to others, and question the structures around us. Sharing ideas and daring to dream is only possible when we connect with people—when we sow the seeds of conversation and collaboration.

And that's what I want to do today. I want to sow a seed. I want my experiences, my questions, and my thoughts to provoke you, to inspire you to think. To dream. What we started in Genk and Brussels, and was presented two days ago in Lisbon, is now created here in Vienna. A new time capsule, with you being asked to think about the same – what would your future garden look like?

Interactive: Handing out a piece of paper and a pen – everyone is invited to share a thought connected to that question and project and the answers will be collected and collected in a jar. That is where we created our collective time capsule.