

The Farandole of One Thousand Saplings

Narrative as project

Our project combines the pragmatic principles of placemaking with a poetic narrative.

It is grounded in an urban acupuncture strategy that operates at two spatial levels – nodes and networks – and addresses both short-term, transitory actions and the prefiguration of a long-term, sustainable future.

Drawing on local resources, we seek to create spaces and moments that foster urban vitality and well-being, with particular attention to climate resilience. Beyond physical transformation, we engage with environmental challenges by facilitating commoning and collective action.

Accordingly, each intervention is supported by activation strategies designed to mobilize and sensitize local communities – quite literally – towards sustainable ways of moving through and inhabiting the city.

The idea of a moving forest inspired a folkloric and fantastical iconography, bringing to life a farandole of allegorical figures drawn from the cultural and landscape mosaic that shapes the consolidated city.

A mosaic of bioperimeters

The neighborhoods of Geneva largely correspond to cultural and landscape formations with deep historical roots. In this sense, they can be seen as bioneighborhoods.

We've grouped them into four biosectors, following the boundaries of the watersheds: **RHÔNE – ARVE**, – **LEFT BANK OF LAKE GENEVA – RIGHT BANK OF LAKE GENEVA**.

Our project connects one emerging urban centrality from each watershed to the Plaine de Plainpalais. This selection – made with an eye toward morphological and geographical diversity – serves as a demonstrator of our approach.

In order to celebrate the diversity of the canton's tangible and intangible heritage, each bioneighborhood is associated with distinctive elements such as a guardian tree or a woodland figure featuring vernacular attributes.

Eaux-Vives figure

cedar adornment and totem poles of nants



Carouge figure

cuirass and helmet made of carob pods



Set to dusky music and illuminated by lanterns, sylvan figures move through the night in a chiaroscuro atmosphere.



Festival as a placemaking tool

We envisioned *the Farandole of One Thousand Saplings* as a festival bringing together all the bioneighborhoods. Within each of the four watersheds, one public space is selected to morph into a welcoming, enchanted forest. After eight days, most of the saplings make their transhumance toward the Plaine de Plainpalais – the recurring central gathering point – but some remain in the initial square to make the activation last and allow both spaces to remain alive simultaneously. The places are activated in turn, while the Plaine de Plainpalais gradually fills with life. The successive pairings highlight peripheral areas and their local specificities, for both Genevans and visitors alike.

Beyond celebration, the festival also functions as a platform for active consultation – strengthening dialogue and amplifying existing community initiatives. The development of each square follows a five-step participatory process. Should a summer 2026 event be the goal, this is how the timeline could unfold :

STEP 1: TERRITORIAL DIAGNOSIS (January-February, 2026)

We begin by meeting with everyone who sees their future intertwined with the project, in order to understand local dynamics and identify unmet needs. It is also an opportunity to present ourselves and our approach.

STEP 2: CO-PROGRAMMING (March-June, 2026)

After collecting everyone’s stories, we enter the preliminary creative phase. We help residents picture their ideal spaces — and, most importantly, shape the artistic direction of the festival (costumes, decorations, performances)

STEP 3: ACTIVATION [FARANDOLE TIME !] (Saturday, June, 20th - Sunday, August, 9th, 2026)

Residents bring their imaginations to life at a 1:1 scale. Routes and areas are sketched directly onto the ground using chalk and fabric, while the space is furnished with lightweight urban furniture and plants. The transformations are living – every element can be shifted, adjusted, or moved – and enriched by a festive and artistic programme.

STEP 4: HARVEST (September-December, 2026)

Feedback is gathered throughout the activation phase. At its conclusion, a convivial gathering offers the chance to summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the temporary installations and to develop recommendations for their lasting future.

STEP 5: TOWARDS INTEGRATION (2027-2035)

When urban developments are widely supported, it can spark a shift toward long-term integration.

Festival Schedule – Summer 2026

Saturday, June 20 – Sunday, August 09



Activation by forestation

The forestation aims to kindle various hearths of biodiversity and social interaction poised to ignite a broader urban transformation.

Our interventions do not alter infrastructure or the ground's materiality, yet their effects ripple through the urban system as they open a fresh perspective on the space and its potential.

Using Big Bags – industrial containers made of flexible fabric – and related handling equipment reflects a commitment to resource-conscious logistics and the reuse of materials already present onsite.

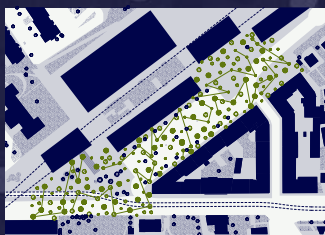
Tree species are chosen in harmony with the surrounding vegetation and the unique qualities of each site. Ribbons and nets evoke the gentle undulation of forests and the rustling of leaves.

Additional placemaking elements may be added, such as: chalk & paint; seating made from cut or laid tree trunks; planters of various shapes and sizes; lightweight structures for shade and comfort; lanterns and string lights; mobile kiosks; drinking water tanks; and signage.

Beyond material elements, activation also includes a cultural and festive program—outdoor dinners, dances, flea markets, performances, and guggenmusik—organized in collaboration with local artists and street performers as an homage to Geneva's counterculture.

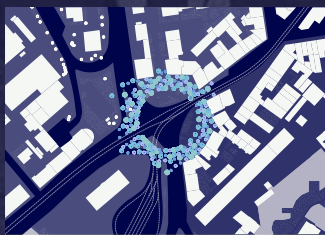
The morphology and geography of each square inspired a scenography evoking a distinctive architectural motif.

The activation toolkit always includes the same core elements:



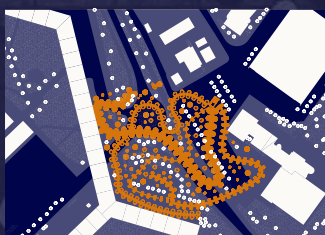
AVENUE DE LA GARE DES EAUX-VIVES – THE MAZE

Our intervention accompanies the transformation of the station surroundings into welcoming, refreshed spaces. The saplings stand scattered across the forecourt, while nets stretched between them form a shifting maze that redirects the flow of travelers. As the activation lasts, the nets become adorned with ribbons that gradually obscure the paths. By concealing the faces of passersby, the installation heightens the sensation of being immersed in a crowd of strangers while fostering playful encounters.



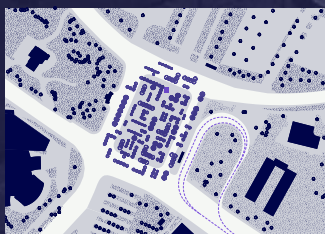
PLACE DU RONDEAU – THE AMPHITHEATRE

The circular arrangement of saplings accentuates the roundness of the space, shaping an intimate amphitheatre destined to host many forms of gatherings and events. At its heart, one feels sealed off from the city — nothing but an endless forest remains in sight. Each Big Bag is draped with netted baldachins. During the festival, residents are invited to tie ribbons to them, making the base of the trees as leafy as their crowns. As night falls, lanterns light up the space like fireflies in the bosk, casting an eerie yet glowing atmosphere.



SECTEUR DE LA PISCINE DU LIGNON – THE BELVEDERE

The Secteur de la Piscine du Lignon is overshadowed by a 1,000-metre-long housing complex that snakes through the landscape. The space, once dominated by cars and road infrastructure, has been returned to pedestrians. Nets are stretched from treetop to treetop, forming a continuous canopy beneath which one can stroll or unwind in the shade. A belvedere made of scaffolding poles is erected, offering a fresh vantage point over Georges Addor's building as it emerges from a sea of foliage.

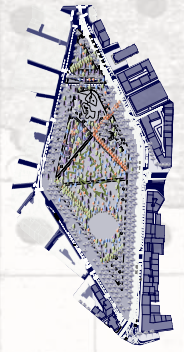


PLACE DES NATIONS – THE RETREAT

The saplings follow an orthonormal layout that echoes the neoclassical landscape and extends it across the traffic lanes. Their arrangement creates a variety of spaces — small squares, alleys, and pathways — while their low density encourages a gentle, flowing stroll. The trees are paired, allowing nets to be stretched between the Big Bags to serve as seats or hammocks. During the festival, the nets are customized through arts and crafts workshops and, at its conclusion, may be hung throughout the city as leisurely ornaments and lasting reminders.

PLAINE DE PLAINPALAIS – THE CONFLUENCE

Plaine de Plainpalais lies at the very heart of the city. Seen from above, it is easily recognisable by its diamond shape and imposing scale. It sits at the confluence of the watersheds and hosts, throughout the year, a wide range of events. As a nod to these features, the site becomes the convergence point for the farandoles. Week after week, trees gradually flow in from the four squares, coming together into a patchwork that intertwines the identities of each bioneighbourhood. This steady accumulation gives rise to an urban forest at the centre of Geneva.



Network the territory to facilitate active mobility

The emergence of tree-filled and welcoming spaces also helps create an isotropic urban fabric, linking territories and beings. Due to its gentle slopes and high density, the consolidated city of Geneva provides fertile ground for walking. We aim to support this momentum and contribute to the adoption of sustainable mobility habits.

Building on reflections initiated by ATE Genève and data from the Inventaire des chemins piétons communaux, we created a pedestrian scheme around four radial corridors extending from the four vertices of the Plainpalais diamond to reach all layers of the urban fabric. The layout of these corridors follows a pragmatic approach: it prioritizes segments that are already pedestrian, currently undergoing pedestrianization, or easily convertible to pedestrian use.

During the festival, each corridor is closed to motor traffic for two weeks, nightly from 9 P.M. to 6 A.M and comes alive with poetic and artistic interventions.



CORRIDOR “LIGNON – PLAINPALAIS” (4,5 KM)

Avenue des Tilleuls serves as the backbone of the pedestrian corridor. To improve continuity across the covered CFF railway trench, new service lanes should be created. The final stretch of the route provides an opportunity, to implement new mobility practices in a peri-urban area. The pathway crosses Place Neuve and Parc Saint-Jean, and also runs near the Châtelaine cemetery.

CORRIDOR “NATIONS – PLAINPALAIS” (3 KM)

The path corridor crosses several parks and existing pedestrian areas. Our interventions aim to mend current disconnections, allowing the parks to percolate into the roadway. The corridor passes through Parc de Vermont, Parc Beaulieu, Parc des Croupettes, as well as Place des Grottes, the forecourt of Cornavin train station, and Place Neuve.

CORRIDOR “EAUX-VIVES – PLAINPALAIS” (2,5 KM)

In continuity with the pedestrian streets and alleys of the city center, Rue de la Terrassière strengthens the link to the Eaux-Vives train station. The corridor leads through Bastions Park, Place du Bourg-de-Four, and the Rive roundabout.

CORRIDOR “CAROUGE – PLAINPALAIS” (2,5 KM)

The path follows the idea of a green corridor running through the heart of the “consolidated city”. The backbone of the itinerary, Route de Carouge, is currently undergoing pedestrianisation. The corridor notably passes through Place des Augustins, Place d’Armes, and Place de Sardaigne.

Re-Sourcing Metrics

The festival’s ability to re-source the Geneva territory can be measure through a set of metrics :

air quality – concentration of fine particles and carbon dioxide

biodiversity – observation and tracking to local flora and fauna

cohesion – attachment to one’s neighborhood, sense of community

cooling capacity – local air temperature

chronotope – time spent in public space

cultural reach – number of people engaged through the cultural programming

economic impact – sales figures from local businesses

emotional well-being – stress levels, measured through surveys or biometric data

inclusivity – diversity of people (children, elderly, persons with disabilities)

marketing & attractiveness – number of photos taken, social media shares, visits by people from other neighborhoods or countries

mobility practices – modal share of different means of transport

noise – sound level measurements

physical activity – distance walked or traveled by foot

road safety – number of accidents, perceived sense of safety

sociability – number and nature of social encounters and interactions

urbanity gradient – intensity and diversity of activities in each space