

"We plant trees, and trees plant us, since we belong to each other and must coexist. [...] Trees, therefore, are conscious of us, just as we are conscious of trees."

Joseph Beuys, *The Defense of Nature*, Bolognano (Pescara), May 13, 1984

Historically, urban planning has been centered around the arrangement of buildings and the structuring of space, with architecture taking precedence and public areas often relegated to mere backdrops. However, this perspective has shifted. Today, public space is recognized as a vital component of urban planning. The focus is no longer solely on static buildings but on dynamic spaces that foster life, encourage social interaction, and enhance the ecological resilience of cities.

Trees play a crucial role in modern urban design, no longer seen just as ornamental features or sources of shade, but as active contributors to the urban ecosystem. They help stabilize the urban climate, improve air quality, and enhance overall livability. In densely built areas, where temperatures often soar, trees offer relief by providing shade and promoting cooling through evaporation.

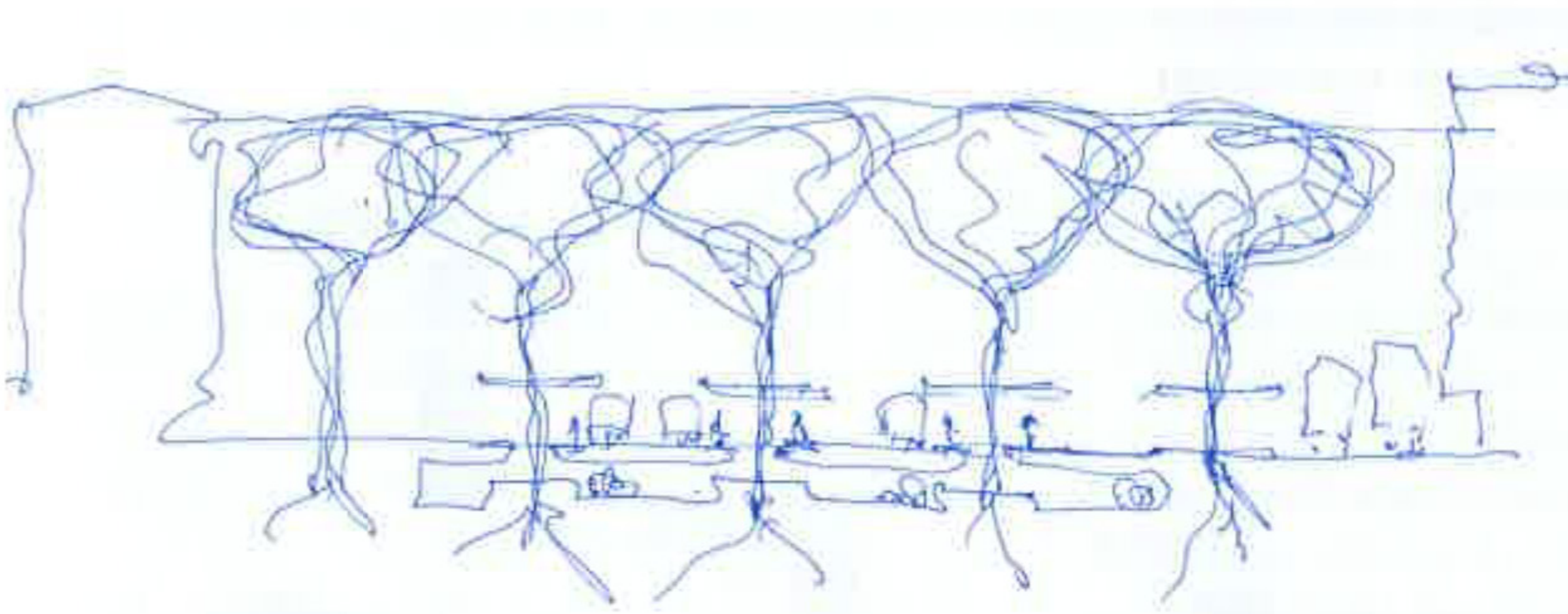
As climate change intensifies, trees are becoming even more essential. They function as natural air conditioners, absorbing carbon dioxide and mitigating the heat island effect that plagues many cities. In addition, trees are vital for water management; their roots absorb rainwater, reducing flood risk and managing stormwater runoff. Trees are not merely decorative—they are integral to strengthening urban resilience and combating the impacts of climate change.

Joseph Beuys's *7000 Oaks* project, created for the Documenta in Kassel in 1982, was more than an art installation—it was a radical urban intervention. By planting 7000 oaks, Beuys not only made a powerful environmental statement but also symbolized a shift toward more sustainable, nature-integrated urban design. Planting a tree, however, is more than a simple act of greening the city; it is a symbolic gesture of regeneration and resistance. Beuys saw *7000 Oaks* as a "return to the old organizational structure" of cities, where nature was an essential part of urban life. At a time when tree-lined streets were being replaced by roads

and sidewalks, Beuys made a powerful statement advocating for the reintegration of nature into public spaces.

Unlike buildings, which are often perceived as fixed and permanent, trees embody a different kind of architecture—one that is alive. They grow, evolve, and undergo the cycles of life and death. This “living architecture” fosters a deeper connection between urban spaces and the natural world, transcending the boundaries of traditional urban planning. Trees are not passive fixtures; they are co-creators of the urban landscape, shaping and reshaping the environment over time.

Trees are indispensable for the design of sustainable cities. They are central figures in urban ecology and a symbolic expression of our return to nature. The architecture of trees offers a meaningful response to the climate crisis and an opportunity to regenerate urban life. Trees create a living bridge between architecture, society, and nature, making them essential actors of modern urban planning.



*L'uomo che piantava gli alberi* (The man who planted trees), Competition drawing by studio we architecture, 2024