PLATANEN

The trees whose bark is more than a cool texture.

The trees lining the Gedempte Zuiderdiep are London planetrees. They are specifically selected, because they can survive in tough, high-traffic urban environments.

To the touch, the bark is a mix of textures. The older, dark gray or brown patches feel rough, brittle, and dry, while the freshly exposed creamy-white, olive-green, or tan patches underneath feel smooth, firm, and waxy.

The tree grows in diameter exceptionally fast. As the trunk expands, the outer layer of bark cracks and snaps off in large flakes.

This shedding process acts as a biological cleaning cycle. It actively sloughs off damaging fungi, soot, and parasites that would otherwise suffocate the tree.

The Gedempte Zuiderdiep has traditionally been a busy bus and traffic route. By shedding their bark annually, plane trees filter and shake off the pollution. They trap a year's worth of vehicle pollution in their bark, and then drop it safely onto the ground, starting over with a clean skin layer every spring.

Groups like Stichting Urgenda run the "Plataan-check" where people collect this fallen bark from busy city streets to measure exactly how much traffic-related metal pollution is in the air.

Project Écorc'Air invited city residents to collect plane tree bark from their city and send samples for analysis of the fine metallic particle content inside them.

The measurements quantified the particles deposited over a year at the tree's location. This allowed for a cumulative measurement of metallic pollutants, primarily emitted by road traffic, over the course of one whole year.

Samples taken from Groningen generally indicated low pollution. However, ones taken near the Zuiderdiep were higher on the scale. When a data point hits or exceeds the 10^{-6} threshold, it means the plant sample has collected a massive amount of toxic metallic dust, roughly 100 times more than a clean, natural baseline. The readings near Zuiderdiep, though not as high, confirm severe, human-caused air pollution.