Water Territories: From Resistance to Resilience

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For too long, water has been approached in a singular way in our territories treating it as either a static 'postcard' aesthetic or a hidden, utilitarian backside of the city. This binary approach severed our understanding of water as a fundamental landscape system. To design in the face of contemporary climate instability, we must resource our relationship with the hydrological cycle, acknowledging it not as a decorative element, but as the primary geomorphological scaffolding of our territories. Re-centring water as a developmental driver moves us beyond mere mitigation. Here, valleys act as systemic backbones, watersheds define territorial cohesion, and rising sea levels shift from external threats to internal design parameters. Dealing with water through project-processes unfolds across three dimensions, which are 1) the landscape foundations, 2) the territorial solidarities, and 3) the living metabolisms. By unravelling these layers, we can move toward an urban design that does not merely manage water, but actively inhabits its logic.

1. LANDSCAPE FOUNDATIONS

To truly deal with water, a project must first engage with the site's structural essence: its soil, topography, and geomorphology. By acting directly upon these landscape foundations, we can restructure the territory to accommodate new hydrological logics, such as increased infiltration or flood resilience. The landscape is not a passive stage, but an active guide. These reclaimed foundations become the primary framework for new development – housing, infrastructure, and recreation – effectively redrawing the territorial logic from the ground up. This shift from 'site-as-surface' to 'site-as-system' is vividly illustrated in several of the E18 projects.

Enhancing Exceptional Geographical Positions

Several E18 sites occupy singular landscape positions, inviting nuanced, integrated strategies for their evolution. Runner-up project *De la Mare à la Manche* in Jullouville (FR) (fig. 1) exemplifies this through a refined scalar shift. Tasked with rethinking a former vacation colony at the urban fringe, the team intentionally 'steps back' to re-situate the site within its broader hydrological context – reweaving

Fig. 1 – Jullouville (FR)
Runner-up
De la Mare à la Manche
→ See more p.38

Fig. 2 – Lisboa (PT)
Winner
As Memórias da Água
→ See more p.54

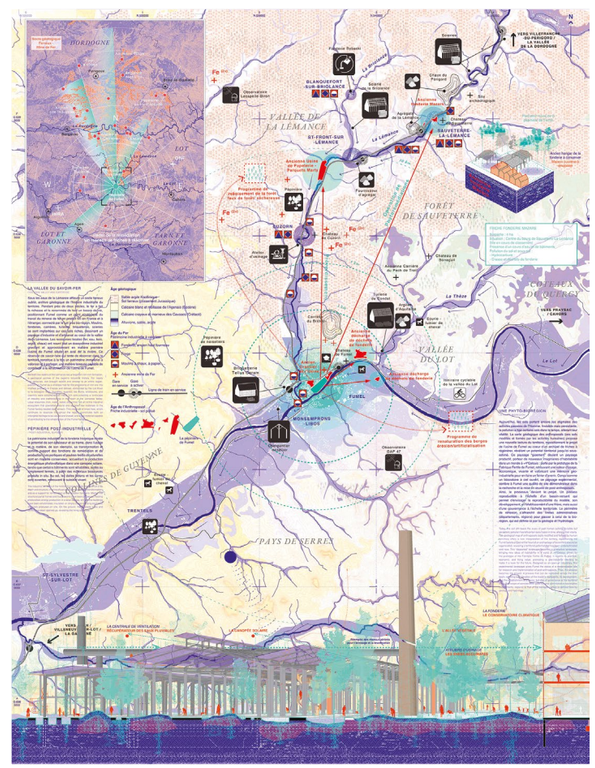

Fig. 3 – Fumel (FR)
Special mention
F3 La Fabrique Fertile de Fumel
→ See more p.34

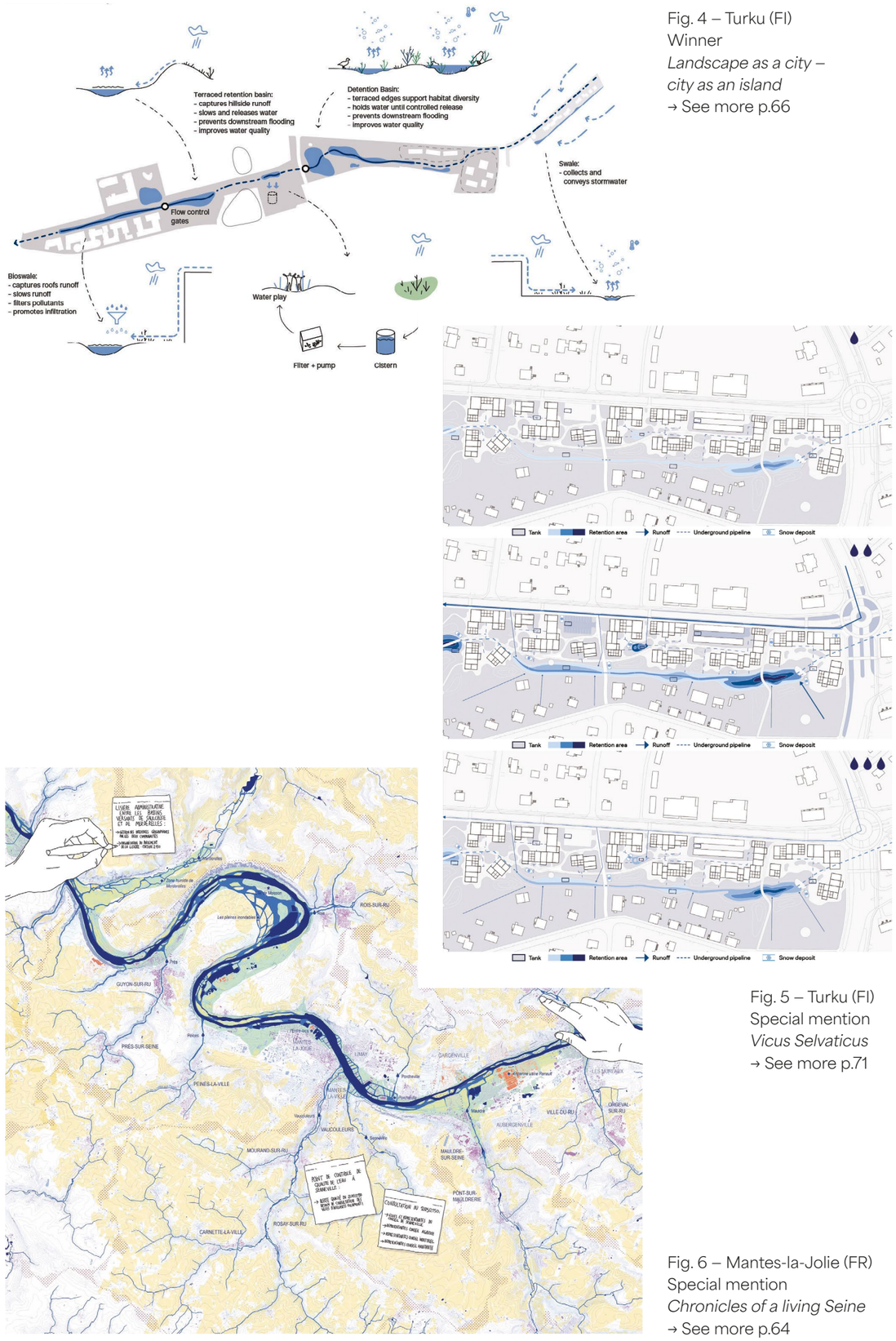

Fig. 4 – Turku (FI)
Winner
Landscape as a city – city as an island
→ See more p.66

Fig. 5 – Turku (FI)
Special mention
Vicus Selvaticus
→ See more p.71

Fig. 6 – Mantes-la-Jolie (FR)
Special mention
Chronicles of a living Seine
→ See more p.64

connections between the valley, lake, wetlands, and urban fabric. By treating water systems as a primary design driver, the project generates a large-scale strategy where productive programming is dictated by the landscape. Here, the distribution of reed beds, forests, and public spaces is governed by soil permeability and specific phytotechnologies, ultimately restoring a coherent identity to the site.

Winning project *As Memórias da Água* in Lisbon (PT) (fig. 2) uses topography as a generative guide. By leveraging the site's steep gradient, the proposal associates agricultural, urban, and recreational programs with specific altimetric levels and hydrological conditions. Linked by a recreational spine, these programs function as a contemporary reimagining of Patrick Geddes' *Valley Section*, unravelling the site's terraced heritage to restore the intrinsic synergy between geography and human use.

Revaluing the Soil as a Key Towards Resilience

In Fumel (FR), the legacy of an industrial iron factory has left behind a landscape defined by heavy-metal contamination and a fractured relationship with the River Lot. Special mention project *F3 La Fabrique Fertile de Fumel* (fig. 3) reclaims this site by treating the soil not as a liability, but as a resource. By deploying differentiated phytoremediation strategies, the project transforms the site into a reservoir of biodiversity that re-establishes a lost connection to the river. Viewing the soil as a palimpsest, the design adds a transformative new layer to an already dense underground history. These strategies for pedological renewal offer a scalable model for the entire territory, where numerous post-industrial sites along the Lémance and Lot rivers await a more resilient future.

In Turku (FI), the infiltration and storage capacity of the soil are the primary drivers for reimagining the banks of the Aura River. Winning project *Landscape as a city - city as an island* (fig. 4) criticises the rigid urban history that systematically erased the site's natural landscape structures. Today, the proposal reorients the urban tissue toward the water, using the Aura's hydrological figure as both a coherent spatial image and a catalyst for public life. This water landscape is designed as an adaptive metabolism that slows, stores, and filters runoff. Complementing this approach, special mention project *Vicus Selvaticus* (fig. 5) focuses on temporal flexibility, designing a stormwater system that fluctuates with the seasons. This infrastructure of infiltration becomes the neighbourhood's new backbone, allowing diverse urban programs to dock onto a living, breathing hydrological system.

2. TERRITORIAL SOLIDARITY

Engaging with landscape foundations necessitates a reimagining of territorial solidarity. The E18 projects simultaneously challenge our traditional relationship with water, moving away from water as a mere resource to exploit toward a mindset of shared responsibility and regional interdependence.

Introducing Watershed-Scale Governance

Restructuring geo-morphology inevitably reshapes territorial management. In Mantes-la-Jolie (FR), special mention project *Chronicles of a living Seine* (fig. 6) uses speculative fiction to project an urban future where water is the primary protagonist. Its most radical proposal replaces rigid administrative borders with watershed-scale governance. By aligning political structures with hydrological realities, the project transforms participation from a localised checkbox into a systemic necessity. Ultimately, returning to landscape foundations establishes a new, resilient societal bedrock.

Reclaiming Alternative Relations with Water

Taking even further the need for a new mindset to deal with water, some E18 projects build on a strong, radical statement. In La Nive (FR), the special mention project proposes a new moral frame to rethink the rules of inhabiting the river. *Le contrat moral de la Nive* is based on a necessary restored balance between the services that the ecological

milieu of the river offers to human collectives and the ones that they should give in return. The project calls for a new kind of legal and civic framework, a contract binding together the living conditions of the river and its inhabitants. From this perspective, the project offers dialogue spaces between multiple actors and various interests, as well as to imagine new forms of solidarity between down- and up-stream areas of the watershed (fig. 7).

To reclaim alternative relations with water, some projects question moral frames when others invite to gather around a strong political standpoint. In Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES), special mention project *I AM THIRSTY* addresses the question of hydric justice calling for equal access to water as well as the restoration of water cycles. The water is then placed at the core of the project proposal, opening up a new hydrological perspective by deploying various low-tech systems (fig. 8). The project offers an open-ended approach which could translate citizens' engagement into collective urban regeneration. Even if such projects seem to offer more thinking materials than designing ones, they matter because they stress out, trouble, and enlarge what water can be as a re·source for inhabited milieus.

3. LIVING METABOLISMS

Water territories very often suffer from years and years of harmful human activities. The prevailing relations with natural milieus have long been that of extraction and over-consumption, leaving behind an overall exhaustion, both ecological and social. Such exhausted landscapes call for a renewal of the relations between water and human activities, which are new kinds of living metabolisms.

Revisiting the Timeframe of Future Waterscapes

Many E18 projects sites question the possible alternative, desirable future for industrial remains along water infrastructure. What remains from the industrial past though is not only the exceptional spatial resources, but also deeply polluted soils and toxic materials. The experimentation of new timeframes appears as a key to envisioning the regeneration of such polluted places, as proposed by winning project *From Rust to Roots* in Fumel (FR). To regenerate Fumel's relationship with its landscape and industrial heritage, the winning team puts forward a process-oriented design: starting with a phase for collective recognition of the site latent resources, including first actions to restore its natural functions, and progressively leading to a socio-ecological landscape by the introduction of new programs and activities (fig. 9). Such a processual timeframe responds to the specific constraints of industrial remains: it allows time for ecological ecosystems to recover from pollution, for local dynamics to balance economic supports, and for inhabiting communities to apprehend the change into their daily environments. Rethinking the project timeframes can be engaged with a long-term perspective but also through a collective reassessment of the very short-term actions.

The design project appears then to thicken the presentness of the sites. In Mantes-la-Jolie (FR), the winning team *Ce(ux) qui reste(nt)* sees the industrial wasteland not only as a striking isolated built frame, but also as belonging to a larger history of the Seine productive territory (fig. 10). The design strategy, following an approach that is both sensible and technical, is to reveal and enhance the site's spatial and material resources. The project interweaves different intervention strategies on the existing built frame but lets the question of its own starting point open. While three possible trigger operations are presented, the one that could be privileged still needs to be discussed, because of the technical and financial issues raised by the conversion of polluted brownfield sites. To reconsider industrial remains as resources for new living metabolisms, the E18 projects call for working with multiple timescales, oscillating between desirable futures and tactical presents. And both interweaving, for the best.

The Playing Part of Unexpected Allies

Many E18 projects seek for new kinds of allies to reframe the relationship with water and its metabolisms. But those new allies

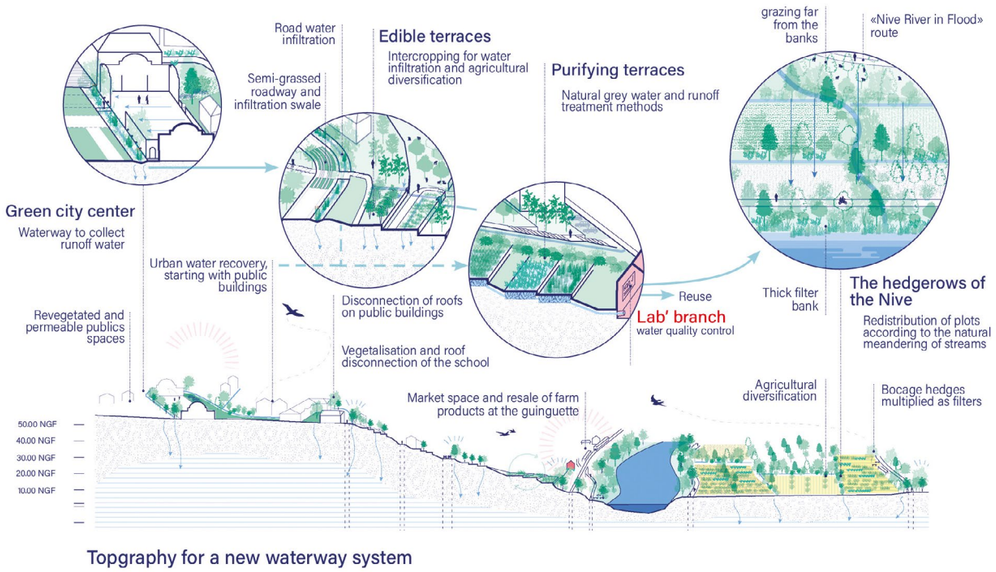

Fig. 7 – La Nive (FR)
Special mention
Le contrat moral de la Nive
→ See more p.52

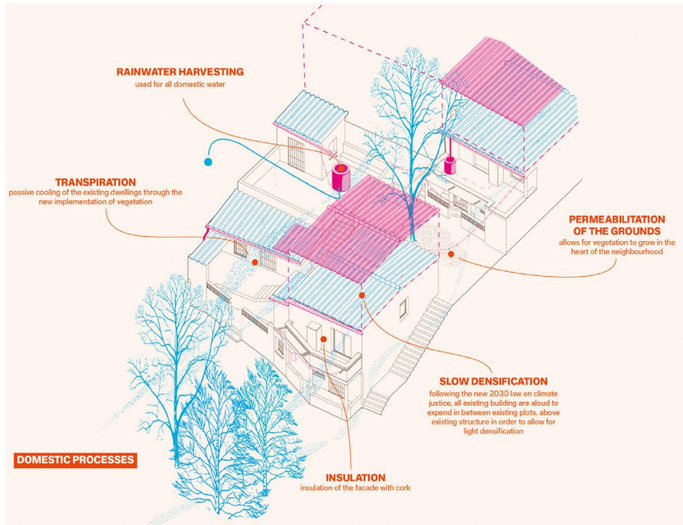

Fig. 8 – Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES)
Special mention
I AM THIRSTY
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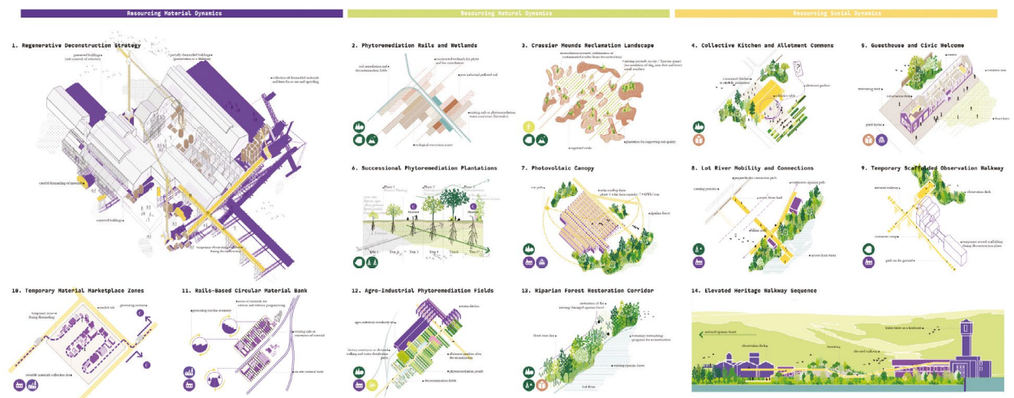
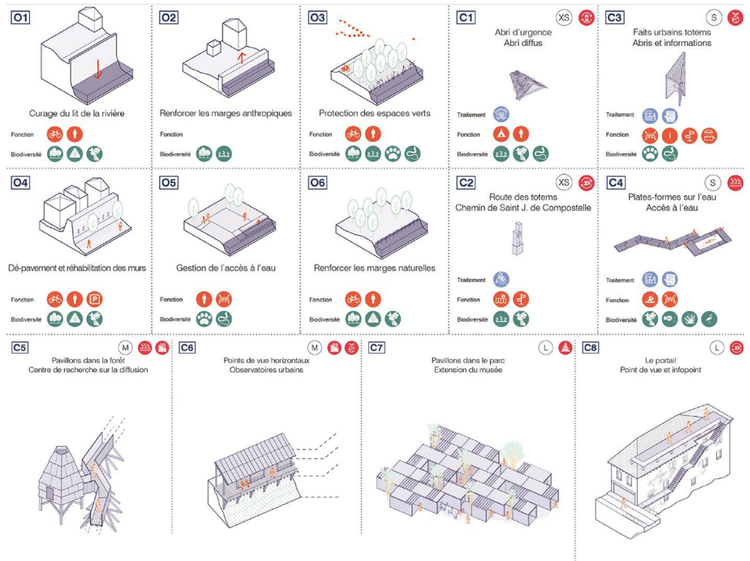
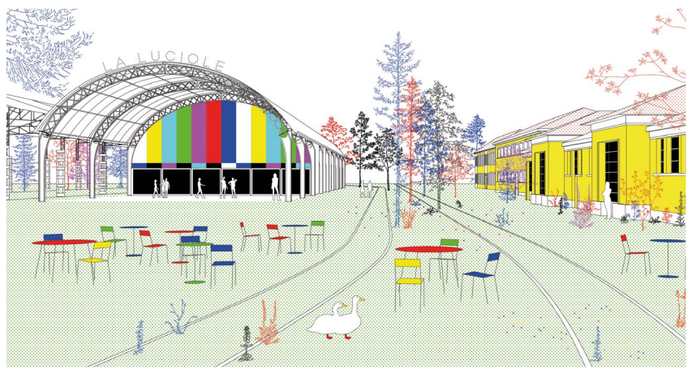


Fig. 9 – Fumel (FR)
Winner
From Rust to Roots
→ See more p.32

Fig. 10 – Mantes-la-Jolie (FR)
Winner
Ce(ux) qui reste(nt)
→ See more p.60





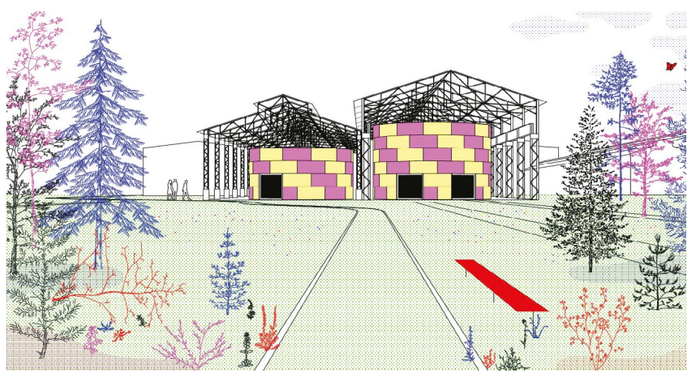


Fig. 12 – Fumel (FR)
Special mention
La confédération des hexapodes
→ See more p.35

Fig. 11 – La Nive (FR)
Runner-up
Entraide
→ See more p.48

can be surprising... It is to the small ones, the usually disqualified parts, the dirty ones that a leading role is here assigned to regenerate large waterscapes.

Runner-up project *Entraide* in La Nive (FR) invites us to reconsider our wastes as allies to regenerate the socio-ecological metabolism of the river Nive. The Nive's Territory is exposed to both severe floods and growing risks of drought. Facing such challenges, *Entraide* proposes a new Territorial River Park to adapt human settlements and activities with water fluctuations (fig. 11). But the proposal is not based on a technical approach of risk management. Instead it seeks to foster awareness-raising experiences of co-living with unpredictable water. A set of micro-architectures – each made of local waste reuse – punctually structures the territorial intervention. Wastes from industry and construction, discards of agricultural activities, garbage from soils and rivers maintenance, become bridges, natural paths, pavilions, observatories, or even research centres. Wastes can act as an unexpected ally to care for exhausted milieus, such as many other entities long seen as undesirable in our living environments.

In Fumel (FR), special mention project *La confédération des hexapodes* reconsiders the local population of insects as a strategic ally to lead the site's regeneration (fig. 12). The project proposes to restore the riparian conditions of the milieus surrounding the industrial complex: it expands the landscape continuities (woodlands, grasslands) around the valley's hydrographic network in order to enhance the living environments of different insect species. It also matters to develop intermodal mobility tracks (rail-cycle) inasmuch as the more car use is limited, the better coexistence with insects is ensured. Such attention given to the entomofauna of Fumel into the project also serves socio-economic purposes. The reuse of the existing buildings is framed by the introduction of a new insect food chain, linking with the actual agri-food production of the territory.

CONCLUSION

The E18 projects signal a departure from managing water toward inhabiting its logic. These proposals demonstrate that landscape foundations offer more than technical mitigation; they provide a framework to reorganise cities from the soil upward. By centering water in the 're-sourcing' process, we bridge the gap between geomorphology and society. Ultimately, water is our most vital connective tissue – moving us beyond survival toward a resilient, shared urbanism.