

The Optimism of Regenerating Landscapes

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In the last decade, well after the term ‘Anthropocene’ was coined, claiming that humankind is defining a new geological epoch, the notion of sustainability has enormously evolved. What was once a container term for the complexity of the task at hand – becoming sustainable – unfolded in a broad terminology that signalled a more concrete path towards true operationalisation, making specific sustainable objectives more precise: resilience, (climate) adaptation, circularity, just ecological transition and many more, amongst which ‘Re-Sourcing’, the European 18 theme, and its sub-theme ‘Re-Sourcing from Natural Elements. Regenerating Landscapes’. European typically foregrounds innovative themes that practice seeks to integrate through project proposals that explore these new frontiers.

From our exploitative behaviour in the search for natural resources and functionally comfortable habitats many landscapes have been left neglected or abandoned, disturbed, used and abused in their very core while we are highly dependent on them. ‘Regenerating Landscapes’ is more than a theme. It somehow lies at the core of global sustainability and forms the essence of our inhabiting planet Earth. What strategic concepts can we draw from the explorative proposals in the theme of ‘Regenerating Landscapes’?

MATERIALS AT THE CORE, A ‘VERNACULAR SYSTEM’?

Most proposals explore a material-central position of spatial practice. Large-scale visions result from reconsidering the processes of material flows needed to construct the territory. The landscape’s local (renewable) resources are positioned at the core of long-term transformation, discretely complemented by global market products, consciously applied where local materials need complementing.

In *Racines et Horizons* (fig. 1), winning proposal in Dembeni (FR), habitat construction incorporates a rationale of systemic integration in the mangrove ecosystem and in the system of material flows. The proposal’s shifting urbanization structures are in fact also re-circulations of Mayotte’s material flows. In Nome (NO), systemic material thinking as a generator of landscape is inherent to the project call. Special Mention *Green Mineral Park* (fig. 2) redefines the field of spatial design as a strategic device for piecemeal decision-making and transformation. The project consists of a framework – what the authors call ‘a method of attention’ – that proposes to engage with contextual knowledge through deep-mapping and interdisciplinary exploration. A spatial syntax of ‘acts of care’ defines the ‘spatial insertions’. The ultimate objective of this work is to set up a resilient spatial



Fig. 1 – Dembeni (FR)
Winner
Racines et Horizons
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Fig. 2 – Nome (NO)
Special mention
Green Mineral Park
→ See more p.165

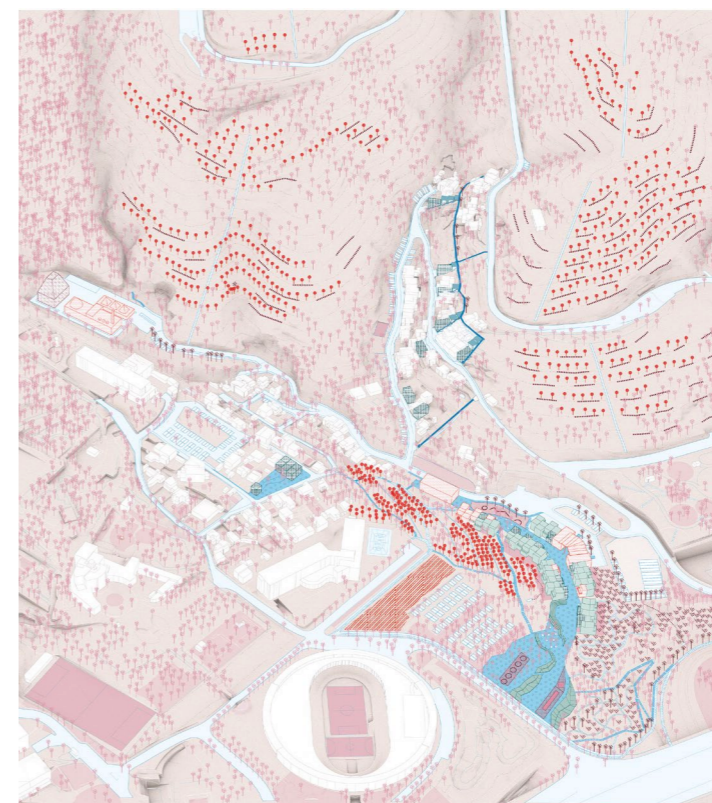


Fig. 3 – Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES)
Runner-up
Volver a la Frontera/Barrio
→ See more p.142

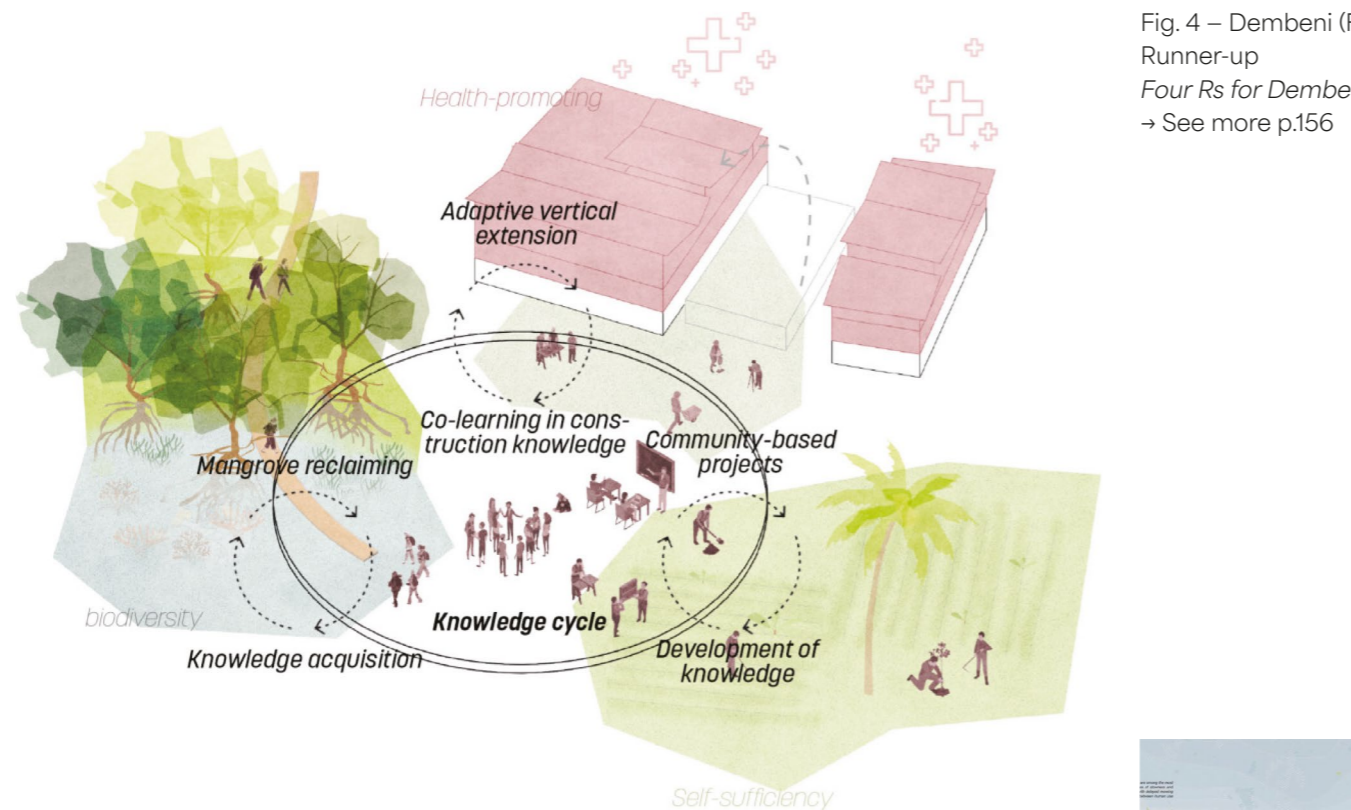
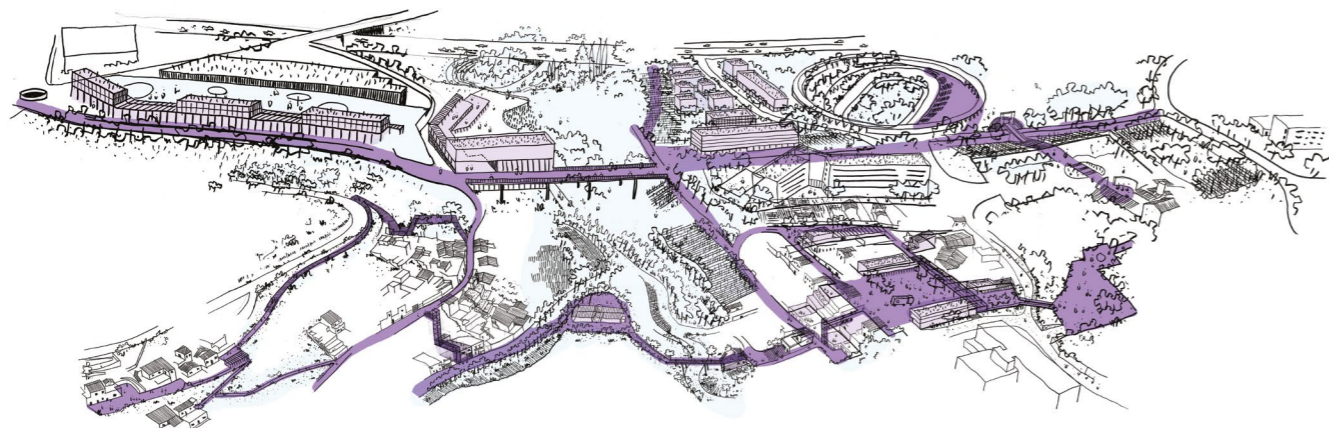


Fig. 4 – Dembeni (FR)
Runner-up
Four Rs for Dembeni
→ See more p.156

Fig. 5 – Bregenz-Hard-
Fußach-Höchst (AT)
Winner
Recode the Road
→ See more p.146



Fig. 6 – Barcelona-
La Font del Gos (ES)
Runner-up
De Pedres, Pans!
→ See more p.138



system that secures territorial care during the extractive processes.

This 'vernacular system' approach uses the power of contextual knowledge systems – ancient and technological – to navigate human and more-than-human territorial necessities and seeks to primarily use local, renewable resources. Landscape regeneration is not achieved by one design act alone, but by the incessant act of making well-informed and well-contextualised spatial decisions. Such a long-term commitment is most durable when the knowledge, materials and people involved are from the context itself.

PIECEMEAL TERRITORIAL CARE

Landscape regeneration is anyways a long-term project and can therefore not be easily managed. In some of the rewarded proposals, urban interventions are tailored to better manage their ecological impact. The landscape is then intelligently used as the strategic device within which urban disruptions and ecological adaptation are aligned or at least managed in an incremental way.

Volver a la Frontera/Barrío (fig. 3), runner-up proposal for Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES), develops a series of replicable strategies. If consistently and insistently applied, the strategies can give rise to a coherent spatial outcome, framed by its geographic base: topography, soil type, vegetation and water. New urban typologies are grafted on the regenerating landscape and give a spatial and social cohesion to the village. The motor of the village's transformation is the regeneration of the landscape. By re-sourcing its capacity for a local economy, the village gains its 'raison d'être'. The valley structure accommodates the accumulation of water, the growth of agricultural products and the installation of the village's social structure around a new 'Rambla' (etymologically 'the sandy riverbed') that reinserts the village into Barcelona's natural territory.

In *Four Rs for Dembeni* (fig. 4), runner-up proposal in Dembeni (FR), local knowledge drives gradual transformation, exemplified by the system of social exchanges between local population, public entities and associations.

The motor of change works at the speed of endogenous processes. A series of operations are indicated and expected to lead to long-term adaptation and resilience with limited external intervention. This includes a step-by-step construction manual of housing refitting to densify and liberate the ground floor where needed through a replicable local materials building system.

Different projects demonstrate the ongoing shift – necessarily – from deterministic masterplanning to the integration of uncertainty. Embedded in a framework of deep territorial knowledge, a range of spatial interventions can respond to both a visionary direction and *ad hoc* decisions related to contextual site conditions. The driving mechanism behind gradual change is that the balance between ecological and development ambitions can be realised by insisting on maintaining this balance at any scale of intervention, insertion or strategy.

AN ECOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

Despite the diverse site conditions and project requirements, many proposals consider the necessity to look well beyond the project site's extension. Whether the assignment was a complex, iconic building like in Amersfoort-Koppelbrug (NL), the regeneration of a former railway site, in Polignano a Mare (IT), the masterplan for a village, in Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES), or the reintegration of a logistics corridor, in Bregenz-Hard-Fußach-Höchst (AT), ecological networks are proposed to carry the sites' transformations well beyond their perimeter. The networks penetrate dense urban tissue, restructure villages, or define the development frame within which complex urban programmes can be inserted.

In *Recode the Road* (fig. 5), the winning proposal for the logistics corridor in Bregenz-Hard-Fußach-Höchst (AT), the refitting of the corridor can only appear when inserted in the broad ecological network. The (important) mono-focussed motorised corridor unfolds into its landscape and evolves into a multifaceted structure of water management, active mobility, ecology, production, tourism...

The territory is 'recoded' (regenerated) to make the systemic landscape qualities more evident and coherent as a vision.

De Pedres, Pans! (fig. 6), runner-up proposal for Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES), is based on the same principles. The transformation of the village follows the ecological regeneration of the torrent valley. The binary drawing code makes the collaboration evident between development axis and the valley's ecological functioning, producing a range of urban figures that produce a new civic quality. Grey infrastructures become active mobility structures, water is reused for 'horts' (community gardens), torrents are brought to the foreground and replace parkings...

Winning proposal for Polignano a Mare (IT), *The Rewilding Grounds* (fig. 7), equally breaks through the scales of all sites to make them hotspots of an extended rewilding network that penetrates the dense urban tissue. The ecological networks re-orient the city towards its latent landscape qualities. The railway, the streets, urban waterfronts and the sites create a permeability of trees and water in search of a continuous sensorial landscape of orchards, bug, aromatic or wildflower gardens, herbs or mediterranean woods.

Runner-up proposal for Amersfoort-Koppelbrug (NL), *Assembly City* (fig. 8), takes this approach inside the multifunctional building complex. Assuming that a regenerated landscape around the canal structure is the site's main legacy, it proposes an open building structure that can be disassembled. Leisure and living go hand in hand with a landscape that penetrates the open structure. Is this what architecture looks like when we give precedent to the landscape as the dominant feature in the site's transformation? The proposal revisits how to organise the integration architecture-landscape not only from a direct designer perspective, but also as a long-term curator of the landscape.

SOIL, WATER AND VEGETATION

Topography and soil, water as an acting agent and the vegetation that mediates both while creating a habitat, form the constituting elements of this long-term curatorship towards regenerating landscapes. In *Racines et Horizons* (fig. 9), winning proposal in Dembeni (FR), topography is directly referred to as the solution. From the lagoon, mangrove to the slopes and plateau, a range of habitats can be re-enforced as an ecological basis for different ways of inhabiting. It leads to an approach somehow different from the notion of a (more hierarchical) ecological structure of the previous proposals. The topographic base is a guiding principle that can steer gradual adaptation towards a stable inhabited ecosystem (more isotropic) at any place in the territory. Soil, water and vegetation in dialogue with road structures, houses or productive spaces, appear in endless variations based on the topographic condition.

Winning proposal for Santa Pola (ES), *Water's journey* (fig. 10), puts the interplay between earthworks (soil), water management and 'plantings to enhance habitat' at the core of a flow of experiences between the quarry and the waterfront. The proposal pivots technocratic approaches (yellow, blue and green mixtures) towards real spaces of experience. As soil, water and plants are the base ingredients to the landscape regeneration, it is easily upscaled as a strategy to deal with the system of torrents between high- and lowland that structures the territory at a much larger scale.

The Mineral Network (fig. 11), winning proposal in Nome (NO), uses these base ingredients to steer 'environmental disturbance towards environmental progress'. The amount of matter (soil) that will become available is used to insert the operating pieces of the mineral network in the landscape, organising water management and articulating new landscapes. The mineral network is in fact also a system of landscape experiences that emerge from disturbance, a key concept in nature that stimulates ecological reconfiguration.

Fig. 7 – Polignano a Mare (IT)
Winner
The Rewilding Grounds
→ See more p.168



Fig. 8 – Amersfoort-Koppelbrug (NL)
Runner-up
Assembly City
→ See more p.134



Fig. 9 – Dembeni (FR)
Winner
Racines et Horizons
→ See more p.154

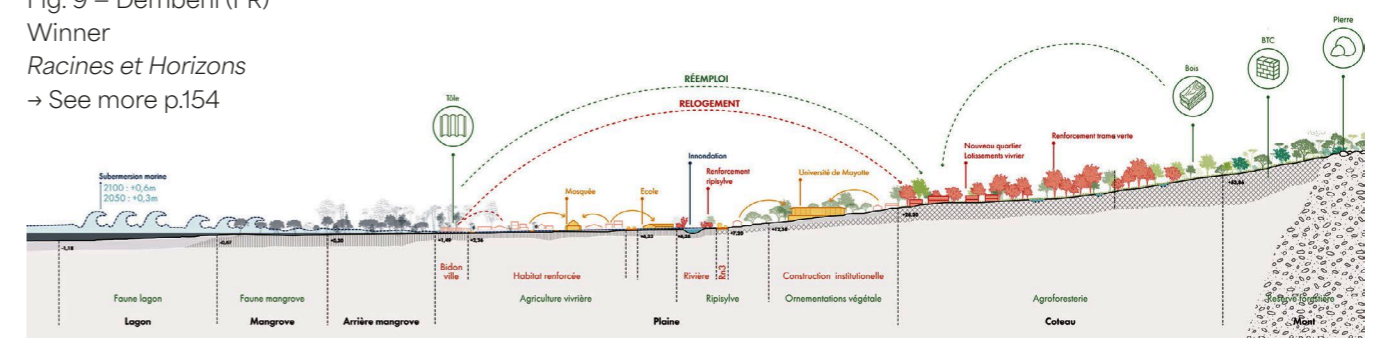




Fig. 10 – Santa Pola (ES)
Winner
Water's journey
→ See more p.176



Fig. 11 – Nome (NO)
Winner
The Mineral Network
→ See more p.162

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The range of rewarded proposals demonstrate that 'Regenerating Landscapes' can serve as the development paradigm able to incorporate architecture, infrastructure, urbanism, and even mining. The territory's ecological base is the foundation for any spatial intervention in the search to be 'sustainable'. As stated in the beginning, this container term has evolved into an expanding terminology to enrich the discourse on how to reach this generic objective. The proposals casually introduce a varied new use of language to describe how regenerating landscapes generate new typologies of spaces and ways of thinking.

'Re-Knowledge' (*Racines et Horizons*, in Dembeni (FR) – see fig. 1) suggests environmental regeneration by 'recycling' local vernacular knowledge and expanding it beyond its current, romantic meaning. It operationalises local knowledge and seems key to many future transformations. 'Rambla' (*Volver a la Frontera/Barrío*, in Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES) - see fig. 3), what we all know as an urban esplanade in the dense urban city, filled with life, was in fact originally a 'sandy waterbed', alluding to its original ecological base. Demystifying (natural) origins to tap into historic depth might carve paths towards future regeneration. The proposal *De Pedres, Pans!* (see fig. 6) in Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES) does not use common urban language, but intelligently appropriates a popular saying – 'to make bread out of stones' – to communicate the essence of change: that a rich identity can be found by making the local context, however poor it might look, excel in being itself. Regenerating landscapes is thus about creating a continuous field of unique identities.

Architecture and urban design then also become the vehicle of ecological restoration. The proposal *Green Mineral Park* (see fig. 2) in Nome (NO) suggests that 'architecture is not a tool of control: it is a way of witnessing'. Indeed, a spatial intervention – a disturbance – imposes a reaction from its surroundings. Natural processes are often revealed by explicit interventions. If we can

better understand them, then maybe our 'architectural witnesses' can be more than passive bystanders and produce meaningful progress. The proposal taps into this potential and is consequently full of stimulating terminology: 'salt licks', 'earth shells', 'pollination stations', 'seed-bank shelters', '(re)-production hubs', 'fog catchers', 'photosynthetic lenses', 'dust-suppression misters', and so on.

Finally, 'Regenerating Landscape' is also a social project where new participants are invited to overcome the ancient urban/rural dichotomy. In a regenerating landscape, a citizen can be a farmer, or a forester can spend part of his time as a local librarian. In the proposal *Volver a la Frontera/Barrío* (see fig. 3) in Barcelona-La Font del Gos (ES), such people might be reminded of 'Prosumers', who both produce and consume local products. Although this directly alludes to the known concept of short-chain food networks, we might extrapolate its pragmatic meaning towards the potential of regenerating landscapes that stimulate a wide amplitude of fluid and hybrid lifestyles.

'Regenerating Landscapes' is therefore not just a continuous field of unique identities. It is also an optimistic look to an ecologically sane and socially resilient future existence.